

**YOU MUST WORK HARDER TO WRITE POETRY OF  
EXCELLENCE: IDEOLECT AND IDEOLOGY IN CANADIAN  
POETRY REVIEWING SINCE 1961**

by

Donato Mancini  
B.A., History in Art  
University of Victoria, 1999

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

Simon Fraser University  
Department of English

© Donato Mancini, 2008

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
Summer 2008

All rights reserved. This work may not be reproduced in whole or in part  
without express permission from the author.

**APPROVAL**

Name: Donato Mancini  
Degree: Master of Arts  
Title of Thesis: You Must Work Harder To Write Poetry Of  
Excellence: Ideolect And Ideology In Canadian  
Poetry Reviewing Since 1961

Examining Committee:

Chair: **Dr. Colette Colligan**  
Assistant Professor, English (SFU)

---

**Dr. Jeff Derksen**  
Senior Supervisor  
Associate Professor, English (SFU)

---

**Dr. Clint Burnham**  
Second Reader  
Assistant Professor, English (SFU)

---

**Dr. Andrew Klobucar**  
External Examiner  
English Department, Capilano College

---

**Date Defended/Approved:**

---

## **ABSTRACT**

This research examines poetry reviewing in Canada since 1961 when, arguably, the cultural shift into postmodernity begins to affect poetry production in Canada. Based on the primary observation that the textual forms produced under the sign of poetry have pluralised exponentially since 1961 while the concepts, tropes, metaphors of poetry reviewing have remained very stable, this thesis treats the language of poetry reviews as a relatively constant idelect, and sets out to map and interpret some of its most structurally crucial constitutive threads. Its theoretical points of departure include Louis Althusser, Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek's treatment of language and ideology, Frederic Jameson's reading of postmodernity, and contemporary North American poetics.

### **Subject Terms:**

poetry; criticism; reviews; Canada; postmodernism; ideology

call number: BH 39 S4794

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to many for providing the personal and material support necessary to see this process through, not least of all to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Simon Fraser University Department of English for their generous financial support.

Personal thanks goes primarily to Dr. Jeff Derksen, friend and mentor, who worked closely with me on this project for over a year. Without his constant supportive critiques, unflagging attention, and sustained interest I'm not entirely sure I would have been capable of finishing a thesis on such a difficult topic.

Thanks also to the members of my examining committee, Dr. Andrew Klobucar, and Dr. Clint Burnham whose engaged, conditional enthusiasm made the defence process as challenging as it had to be, but much more of a pleasure than I had a right to expect.

I also thank Dr. Tom Grieve. His survey course in literary theory, which I took during my qualifying undergraduate term, provided the stimulus and context for this project in its genesis.

Warmest thanks are extended also to Dr. Steve Collis, again for friendship and mentorship. His *Poetics of Response* course in particular provided me with the best opportunity I have had to work out the terms of my own poetics. It was both a necessary foundational step in a project as large in scope as my thesis, and something that will continue to shape my writing and thinking for years in the future.

Thanks no less to all of the other teachers I worked with directly during my time at Simon Fraser: Dr. Susan Brook, Dr. Julie Crawford, Dr. Torsten Kehler, Dr. Michelle Levy, Dr. Sophie McCall, and Dr. John Whatley. All of them contributed directly to my development and therefore directly to this thesis.

And thanks to the graduate Chairs during my studies: Dr. Margaret Linley and Dr. Colette Colligan, and to Christa Gruninger and the rest of the English Department support staff.

Thanks finally, as always, to Guinevere Pencarrick for her patience through a (long) time of excessive busyness. Thanks to her for loving me, for being so loveable.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
Table of Contents .....	v
<b>1. PART 1: INTRODUCTION: HERE COME THE COMMON SENSE POLICE</b>	
The Postmodern Turn .....	1
As Jameson Reads Perelman .....	15
Periodizing Canadian Periodical Criticism .....	20
A Conservative Drift .....	30
Ideology .....	33
<b>2. PART 2: "A RETIRED ENGINEER WHO READS HOUSEMAN AND LISTENS TO RECORDINGS OF DYLAN THOMAS": THE TROPES OF FANTASY</b>	
Preamble: Fantasy And Ideology .....	42
A Retired Engineer .....	49
The Common Reader .....	53
Accessibility .....	59
The Human .....	62
The Postmodern .....	64
Academia and Black Mountain .....	66
The Tradition .....	68
Poetry .....	73
<b>3. PART 3: "ONE OF THE FEW GENUINE REMAINING HARDWARE STORES" : THE DISCOURSE OF CRAFT</b>	
Preamble: Metaphor And Ideology .....	78
The Crafts Discourse .....	80
Class Positions .....	82
A Genuine Hardware Store .....	85
Troubles with Craft .....	88
Poet as Craftsman .....	94
The Work Ethic .....	99
7 Hours 7 Days 7 Years .....	105
<b>4. CONCLUSION: AESTHETIC CONSCIENCE .....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>5. WORKS CITED</b>	
Articles, Books and Other .....	115
Reviews and Review-Essays .....	120

## **PART 1:**

### **INTRODUCTION: HERE COME THE COMMON SENSE POLICE**

#### **THE POSTMODERN TURN**

Reviewing the poetry titles nominated for the Governor General's award in 2007, Steven Laird, author of two books of poetry of his own, casts a knowing glance across the field of Canadian poetry:

The books that made the short list for the Governor General's Award for poetry indicate that Canadian poetry is in the same place. Let's call the prize a litmus test of what our writers have perfected: if so, then these books demonstrate that the lyric is king, all the difficult knots have been mastered, and the "I" that loves to speak the poems is alive, alert, and secure in its place. I've read each of these books with varying degrees of pleasure. Yet, in the end, there's something either missing or very tired in the ideas - not the skill - that drives them. (21)

His observation that there's something "either missing or very tired in the ideas" echoes an observation made by a group of UBC undergraduate students in 1961, those same who founded the seminal Canadian poetry magazine *TISH*. Along with other factors, such as lyric poetry's nearly uncontested dominance of literary prize lists, this repetition generates a nexus of questions about the state of Canadian poetry and poetry-reviewing today. Has Canadian poetry culture been circling in a blizzard, to return, as it does here, to exactly where it was 40 years ago? Will the literary canon of the future be a bleak recitation of prize lists, awards jackpots and sales figures? Is the poetry world a culture of selective amnesia and consumer intent? Is it possible to still be a traditionalist reactionary over 100 years after the origins of modernism? Still reactionary after all these years? Has poetry been abandoned by the intelligentsia? What if the best minds of my

generation have not "gone mad starving hysterical naked" (Ginsberg), but into MBA programs or graphic design studios?

Specific sectors of Canadian poetry culture do seem to be stuck in a moment somewhere in the 1950s, before what has often been marked as the *postmodern turn*, stuck both in terms of their criticality about the current social moment, the available modes of critique or complacency and in their chosen position in a historically bound aesthetic discourse. It is painful that I do not need to look outside of poetry, to another discourse such as contemporary visual art, to recognise a cultural lag. Yet the misadventure of Laird's affectation is both sign and symptom of how Canadian poetry criticism is over 40 years behind *itself*. He elides the fact that in the entire period since the early 1960s, Canadian poets have been energetically pursuing alternatives to the lyric "king"; busily constructing a body of poetry not premised, formally or spiritually, in the self-assured Romantic subject.

But why should I point to the year 1961 as a marker of a shift in Canadian poetics? Nineteen sixty-one is the year that the *postmodern* broke in English Canadian poetry, borne in, to surprisingly scandalous effect, on the mimeographed pages of the student magazine *TISH*. In 1961, this magazine "deftly held together with a single staple", and only available directly from the publishers, was reviewed in *The Canadian Forum*, a prominent, nationally distributed magazine founded in 1920. John R. Colombo (who went on to publish a remarkable anthology of Canadian visual and concrete poetry for high-school students, and to dabble in these modes himself) produces a lively specimen of literary ideology when articulating *TISH's* position in Canadian publishing:

Of course good poets occasionally publish in little magazines, but invariably their best work never appears in the barely legible mimeo mag pages: it is reserved for the quality or mass magazines. (202)

This lone sentence swarms with assumptions about the political economy of poetry and cultural capital (Pierre Bourdieu) that remain alive today, over 40 years onward. With this response, Colombo inadvertently demonstrates that, however lacklustre the writing in those early *TISH* issues seems in retrospect, they clearly signalled that cultural change was imminent. UBC was not the only place where challenges were being made to the publishing institutions of *official Canadian verse culture* (Charles Bernstein). In downtown Vancouver, numerous poets of a postmodern drift, many unconnected with the university system, were mimeographing and distributing their own writings, including Judith Copithorne, bill bissett, Maxine Gadd, and Roy Kiyooka. *TISH* was a really symptom of broader changes, for which it became a convenient (and dominant) token. Frank Davey, a co-founder of *TISH*, characterised this shift from the mimetic horsepower of late modernism into the discursive light-speed of postmodernity in his influential *Surviving the Paraphrase*: "unlike much earlier Canadian work, recent writing has been engaged for the most part at the level of form and language rather than theme" (1988; 3). Davey's deceptively straightforward formulation hides the fact of a profound mutation: the new poetry was a meta-poetry that foregrounded its own rhetorical, representational, and formal processes.

Like elsewhere, poetic postmodernism was in Canada a transnational and cosmopolitan movement, with aesthetic grounding in certain manifestations of modernism and the historical avant-garde, especially Dada, collage and absurdism. Its social roots were in the shift into the post-WWII global economy, and the commodity



boom of the 1950s. As poetic practice in several sites was observably mutating from modern to post, Charles Olson breaks from a Poundian modernist paradigm, and is credited with launching the term *postmodern* for US poets in his 1950 essay "Projective Verse". Nine years later, Warren Tallman, a U.S. critic working in Vancouver, shepherded a group of precocious students away from the mimetic-representational blank verse that still constituted most of the poetry published in Canada. Soon, the meta-poetic arrived - like a cultural invader, critics claimed - sending a cold wind through the garrison of official Canadian verse culture.

Since the early 1960s, the tendency Davey described has continued to develop. Postmodern poetry's material means of self-reproduction - presses, magazines, institutional affiliations, grants, distribution networks, sales figures, transnational poetic communities - have been strong, remain strong, even as official verse culture excludes most of this activity from its poetic map. We can take a moment here to note Bernstein's definition of the term:

The problem with official verse culture, what makes it official, is its unreflected assertion of centrality. Official verse culture's appropriation of an imaginary center operates through its a series of exclusions of the bulk of what is for me the most active and engaging work being done. This ends up giving poetry a bad name, makes it seem a dull art for genteel readers. ("Interview")

The poetry that has arisen in the 60s is actually now diverse and copious enough that critics and practitioners can think in terms of competing histories, and competing canons, within that culture. This diversity I take as a sign of its health. In writing about postmodern Canadian poetry, then, I am not writing about a completely marginalised, invisible set of practices. George Bowering won his first Governor General's award for poetry in 1969 with *Gangs of Kosmos* and *Rocky Mountain Foot*; the following year the

prize went to bpNichol. This year, 2008, Robin Blaser won a Griffin Prize for the second time; in 2006 in the form of a Lifetime Recognition Award, this year as a prize for his collected poems *The Holy Forest*. Two of Canada's best selling poets write language-centred work - Lisa Robertson and Christian Bök. Bök's *Eunoia* in fact has sold more copies than any other book of Canadian poetry not written by a pop music star. The postmodern has indelibly marked and transformed the practice of poetry in Canada. Here opens, in part from resistance to change itself, the materially lived split in Canadian poetry. The topography of Canadian poetry has become increasingly uneven from the early 1960s until now. Notably, two broad camps are established, with divergent interpretations of history and contemporaneity, each with its own internal tensions, discordances and contradictions. The difference is still spreading.

Yet in periodical criticism, in the reviews that have publicly evaluated Canadian literature before and since the postmodern turn, poetry has been written about using a surprisingly consistent set of tropes, metaphors and concepts. This critical lexicon springs from what Davey identifies as an "Arnoldian humanist criticism", and which Imre Szeman characterises as "Leavisite " in reference to F.R. Leavis' institutional extension of an Arnoldian critical paradigm. Here the mimetic verifiability of a poetic text, its immediate emotional legibility, and its capacity to communicate clear (often moral) messages are taken as naturalised, concrete markers of quality. In the Arnoldian view, "[l]anguage ... is a tool employed not for its own intrinsic qualities but for the expression of ideas and visions" (1988;2). Two crucial Canadian voices of this paradigm were poet-critics Robin Skelton (1925-1997) and George Woodcock (1912-1995), whose publishing careers began in the 1950s and 1940s respectively. The problem Davey identifies in

*Surviving the Paraphrase* is that postmodern poetry is predicated on rejecting Arnoldian imperatives. To Davey, thematic criticism, the criticism of paraphrase and the search for the essential characteristics of a truly Canadian literature, inadequate to start with, can say nothing about the new poetry. Another critical language is therefore needed to address poetry after the postmodern turn. Davey's critique, and his basic insight can be extended to include review criticism, which, although not overly concerned with articulating the paraphrase as such, is of the same ideological provenance. For Davey, the new language would be founded in post-structuralist thought. He envisioned a textual criticism informed by transnational creative and critical influences, that addresses poetry at the site of its composition. Davey envisioned a criticism of writerly concerns, a *poetics*.

If Canadian poetry is lost in the snow, compasses thrown off by the magnetism of the postmodern, it is substantially because, as a community, Canadian poet-reviewers have failed to any great degree develop a post-Arnoldian, post-Leavisite critical language. Reviews evince the dew-line of literary criticism, and they are the main (increasingly, the only) public forum for discussion of poetics in Canada. Yet they are written in a critical idiolect freighted with outmoded concepts. The question is: why has there been such resistance to the development and/or adoption of a language that can better chart the textual sites of contemporary poetry? If postmodern poetry is less often reviewed than what I call *perma-modern* (in contrast to post-modern) poetry, it is not because of a readership gap. (As far as sales figures are a reliable indicator, the readerships of both are equally small.) It is a question of conceptual compatibility. Perma-modernist poetry and neo-Arnoldian reviewing are, literally, made for (and by)

each other. It is not a matter of reviewers' education, either. Most reviewers are university-educated poets, often with published collections on their curriculum vitae. Neither is it a question, as many reviewers allege, of an academic vs a popular dissemination of ideas. Vernacular forms of poststructuralist ideas are frequently found in the media contexts of entertainment reporting and in advertisements. As Stanley Fish recently reminisced in his *New York Times* blog:

It was in sometime in the '80s when I heard someone on the radio talking about Clint Eastwood's 1980 movie "Bronco Billy." It is, he said, a "nice little film in which Eastwood deconstructs his 'Dirty Harry' image... [The term] had also been used with some precision ... If deconstruction was something that an American male icon performed, there was no reason to fear it; truth, reason and the American way were safe. ("French Theory")

Another question could be: if Derrida is good enough for writing about the NHL, why not for writing about poetry? It appears sometimes to be a resistance to change, a reluctance to confront the unsettling ramifications of postmodern poetics. The widespread circulation of the concepts in popular media shows that it is not a belatedness. But if it is resistance, is it an active or passive resistance?

One of the characteristics of postmodern poetry is that it extends modernist poetry's project of linguistic rupture, fragmentation and formal renewal, but steers it away from the promise of mythical/utopic renewal (let's-tear-down-the-old-hegemonic-order-so-we-can-build-a-new-one) implied in the model of the historical avant-garde. Also encoded in the resistance to postmodern developments in art cultures is a disdainful trivialisation of art (and art critiques) in the twentieth century as fundamentally unimportant. Art takes a "wrong turn" in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, somehow into both triviality and élitism. Over a century of cultural production is virtually forgotten. Without undergoing a comprehensive series of mutations, an Arnoldian-Leavisite ideology simply

cannot accommodate the arts that stem from the avant-garde modernisms, so its agents refuse to even consider the questions they raise.

To situate myself in this debate unambiguously, I think that instead of trying to fully take up the multiple questions posed by postmodern poetry, Canadian poetry reviewers by and large write instead in a mode of facile evaluation or evaluative description, one that reduces reviewing (public criticism) to a banal, misguided mercantilism of posture, pronouncement and consumer intent. This is just as true of hostile reactions to postmodern poetry as it is of lauding expressions of enthusiasm for new works. In both cases, reviewers wear Good Taste, or Elect Personhood - however they conceive these qualities - as an arbiter's license, and exercise the enforcement of those tastes through the review.

Given that almost all reviewers of poetry are also published poets - I will demonstrate this repeatedly throughout the essay with digests of reviewers' bibliographies - one of the most functions that reviews serve are as positional signalling devices. What many reviewers mainly communicate through reviews - the functional content of many reviews - is their own relative position in the cultural field of poetry. Part of the reason the reviewing idelect has stagnated is that reviews can perform their primary function quite well without breaking the ideological circle: the reasoning can unfold with a smooth logic within the terms of the idelect. In a sense, the division of Canadian poetry into two broad camps within the field actually relieves reviewers of the task of textual critique; it makes "evaluation" available as a ready (and often easy) way to signal relative position. It is useful here to introduce Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production. In

characterising the French scene, Bourdieu provides an analogue to contrast with the Canadian scene:

... schemes, which reproduce in their own logic the fundamental divisions of the field of positions - 'pure art' / 'commercial art,' 'bohemian'/'bourgeois', 'left bank'/'right bank', etc. - are one of the mediations through which dispositions are adjusted to positions. Writers and artists, particularly newcomers, do not react to an 'objective reality' functioning as a sort of stimulus valid for every possible subject, but to a 'problem-raising situation'. (1993; 64)

The "problem-raising situation" in many contexts is often the implicit or explicit question: "Where do you stand?". In Parisian theatre circles it may have been enough to say such and such playwright is "left bank" to indicate his/her position. In Canadian poetry it is most often encoded in judgements of taste. The question implicit here is "Do you like the poetry of \_\_\_\_\_?"; the answer tells other actors in the field most of what they think they need to know.

So, as Barbara Hernstein-Smith writes, reviewers work to simplify the task with an almost bureaucratic "model of standards-and-deviations" (1564) that banalises even F.R. Leavis' eccentrically subjectivist (but ultimately normative) sprawl. In the most extreme cases, evaluation and arbitration entirely substitute for reading. In 1966, Roland Barthes was already able to write in *S/Z* that:

The reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness - he is intransitive; he is, in short, serious: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a referendum. (1974; 4)

Strictly evaluative reviewing replaces the dynamic experience of reading to the experience of the polling booth (or box office). In Canada, a referendum model of reviewing has become naturalised in this Arnoldian-Leavisite ideological framework as

the "proper business of criticism". As reviewer James Wood writes in an interview with Lorna Jackson:

I think the more meaningful distinction, nowadays, is between critic and academic. The critic, in my sense of the word, lives by the pen, prosecutes arguments, devotes his life to the examination of literature, works in the public realm (i.e. magazines and newspapers), writes for the common reader (that frail, tenacious plant), and is above all intensely interested in value judgement, in deciding whether something is good or bad (110).

Consumer intent is articulated in the false-passive mode of "audience expectations", a move that smothers dialogic potential of postmodern poetry. As the restaurant client says to the server, "that's not what I asked for..." In the course of rehearsing the evaluative review over-and-over, the Arnoldian language that informs it has come to seem like a demanding, specialised language of poetry criticism and, therefore, the *correct* language (read: timeless, universal, ordained) in which to address poetry. Although most Canadian poetry reviews are putatively descriptive rather than evaluative, functioning a bit like plot summaries of poetic devices, and charting the curve of the rise and fall of quality in the book, the premises of the ideolect are evaluative. The most aggressively evaluative reviewers since the 1960s have taken an ideolect and ideology that is somewhat more nebulous with other reviewers and distilled it into heavy tincture.

What most postmodern poetry shares, from the vastly different projects of, say Artie Gold, Jon Paul Fiorentino, Max Middle, Stephen Brockwell, Margaret Christakos, Rachel Zolf, Andy Suknaski, Rob Read, Maxine Gadd, Dorothy Trujillo Lusk, Dan Farrell - to take a number of samples from different generations and places - is that in every case it foregrounds the operations of representation and/or readerly subject-formation in and through poetry *as it happens*. Gertrude Stein's "continuous present" can be interpreted in terms of a form of textuality that emphasises the site of writing: the act

of composition itself, the time and memory-bound contingencies of textual verisimilitude, writing's productive and reproductive mechanisms (typewriter, page, voice, codex), the relations in and through community from which poetry arises. At once time hidden, or scrubbed away by the individualist heroic craftsman's toil, these principles become overt concerns. With all the differences in mode, manner and means, postmodern poetry consistently calls attention to the contingency of meaning, the processual constructedness of representation, aporetic leakages in language, and to writing itself as "alphabetic and combinatory [in] nature" (McCaffery "Economy" 206) in which there "will always be a superfluity of signifiers and a degree of waste and unrecuperability of meaning." ("Economy" 207).

However, why should I choose the vexed term *postmodern* rather than one of its alternatives to indicate this phase of poetry? As Fredric Jameson writes, the whole case for the existence of a postmodernity "depends on the hypothesis of some radical break or *coupure*, generally traced back to the end of the 1950s or the early 1960s." ("Postmodernism" 1) Although the many continuities between modernist and postmodernist art lead me to describe the change as a *shift* or a *turn* rather than a *coupure*, Jameson's chronology looks correct. The 1950s emerge as a decade of postmodern genesis, the 1960s as a decade of diaspora and popularisation (consider the Governor General's awards noted above), the 1970s as the decade when postmodernism in poetry begins to exert its own limited hegemony. The effects of the postmodern shift indeed become visible in poetics after about 1950 (U.S.A.), and 1960 (Canada). By the mid 1970s, Canadian poetry reviewers are derisively using terms like "the postmodern style".



For me, the problem is: what term is both general enough to indicate the diverse set of poetic practices that arise after modernism passes the "post-", and is yet specific enough that the term is not just a stretchy catch-all? Options exist. Many critics still use *avant-garde*, but that incendiary term is (literally) entrenched in its modernist point of origin, implying a military metaphor of intergenerational cultural struggle that applies at best imperfectly to postmodern poetry. Pierre Bourdieu's model of the field of poetry fails at this point to account for the new modes of sociality that have emerged with postmodernity. His model is of a modernist avant-garde: "Poetry ... lives in the hectic rhythm of the aesthetic revolutions which divide the continuum into extremely brief literary *generations*" (1993; 52). Even the *TISH* group articulated its relationship to Olson at the time in terms of an apprenticeship rather than a coup, and this model of *permanent revolution* is less and less applicable. Ron Silliman's *post-avant* marks the post-avant-garde phase. That term might be better, except that Silliman thinks this phase starts comparatively late, in the 1980s, and Silliman himself retains *avant-garde* as an honorific descriptor for the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets of his own generation (1970s). Charles Bernstein's *inventive poetry* at least improves on the teleology of progress implied in another popular term, *innovative*, but the metaphorical implication is that the poet is a harmless tinkerer. *Experimental*, as artists of all sorts have always complained, is the worst of the worst. It is both too scientific, and implicitly demeaning. *Experimental* implies that the works are not, in fact, finished works, but mere laboratory reports. Plus, in much postmodern poetry, the openness of a text, its unfinished, speculative paradigm of knowledge, is reinscribed as a positive value. It also suggests a basic misreading of intent, a confusion that the poet is trying to get the old Arnoldian effects by new

postmodern means. Here new poetry is a wrong-headed (and failed) attempt to sustain old-garde values in weird new-garde garb. This last example raises a significant issue. As Jameson wrote: "it seems to me essential to grasp postmodernism not as a style but as a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and the coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate, features" ("Postmodernism" 4). By using the term *postmodern*, contested as it is, I hope to raise the spectre of a profound change that has irrevocably altered how poetry is conceived and written, and to emphasise that the period (and project) marked by the term *postmodernity* remains unfinished.

Unfinished, or in the terms of art critic Hal Foster, ongoing in a "condition of aftermath," or a quasi undead "living on". The spectre of change that Jameson inadvertently raised was, as Foster points out, like Adorno's - that the postmodern boded "the end of art" (124). In "This Funeral is for the Wrong Corpse", Foster returns to Adorno and repositions his argument about the history of philosophy. He writes

Adorno [']s] riddle about the relevance of philosophy opens his *Negative Dialectics* (1966): 'Philosophy, which once seemed absolute, lives on because the moment to realise it was missed.' ... I wonder if this parallel guided Adorno [in his analysis of avant-garde art], and, further, if we might substitute 'art' where he writes 'philosophy'. In this case, might art be granted the ambiguous stay of sentence that Adorno grants philosophy - the possibility of 'living on'? (123)

Writing of the postmodern now, I necessarily write entirely in "the condition of aftermath," (126), when the term *postmodern* can seem tired or attenuated. It is a moment of neo-neo, post-post, trans-trans, when the clarity of art and poetry's relationship to historical conditions is undermined by art's own sanctioned narratives.

Enumerated, then, my reasons for retaining *postmodern* are :

1) Because "post-" as a temporal marker, indicates an historical shift that was not a total liquidation of the previous modern period, but instead incorporates it. As Foster characterises of early articulations of the postmodern:

Implicit in this account is that postmodernist art was initially 'propped' on modernist categories, with all the ambiguity of (in) dependence implied by the word, but that it soon 'troped' these categories, in the sense that it treated them as so many completed practices or given terms to be manipulated as such. ("Funeral" 127)

2) Because *postmodern* suggests a change more comprehensive than (surface) stylistic. It implies a paradigm shift, a profound change in modes of production rather than a shift into an a-historical "paradigm-of-no-paradigm" (Foster 128). Jameson wrote of postmodernity as a question of "mutations in thinking or consciousness" itself. Such mutations did indeed take place, from the early 1960s on have deeply affected how poetry is made and read.

3) Because the alternatives above, and others not discussed here, carry metaphorical ramifications that are too specific. "Postmodern", emerging from a tropological account of history, is a sandwiched philosophical abstraction, far preferable to the more charismatic but metaphor-burdened alternatives.

4) Because it is imprecise enough to allow the coexistence of many contradictory tendencies. As Hal Foster aerates the concept of the postmodern, we see that it is far more than the schizophrenic condition Jameson describes - far more than a play of surfaces across other surfaces. Only a broad, speculative term like postmodern can capture the incredible diversity of the art and poetry since the 1960s.

5) Because the temporal conception the term implies is open-ended. It does not suggest a bounded period like, for example, the Renaissance, but merely "the time

after..." However, it does suggest historical contingency, and thus resituates discussion of poetry since 1960s in a broadly historical context. Returning to this term, then, can be a push against so-called *posthistorical* and *postpolitical* new culturisms that deny their situatedness.

6) For lack of a better term. As Hal Foster again writes:

[although] the recursive strategy of the 'neo' appears as attenuated today as the oppositional logic of the 'post' is tired: neither suffices as a strong paradigm for artistic or critical practice, and no other model stands in their stead. ("Funeral" 128)

In re-characterising this whole new, unfinished phase as postmodern, I ask Foster's question: "Maybe this living-on is not a repeating so much as a making-new or simply a making-do with what-comes-after, a beginning again and/or elsewhere" (129).

## **AS JAMESON READS PERELMAN**

For the reading subject, postmodern poetry is both experiential and meta-experiential; it both produces visceral experience, and overtly frames the experience *as experience*. Failure to recognise this, a failure encoded in the Arnoldian-Leavisite idelect, makes the work appear illegible, an effect of position-takings that Bourdieu asserts is structurally predictable: "by endeavouring to impose new modes of thought and expression, out of key with the prevailing modes of thought and with the doxa, and therefore bound to disconcert the orthodox by their 'obscurity' and 'pointlessness'" (1993; 58). Recall Jameson's specific readings of postmodern texts and artworks in "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism". Although his intent is to identify contemporary writing with a schizophrenic condition of late capitalism (as per Lacan), "when the links in the signifying chain snap" (26), Jameson stoops for a moment

to attempt to read Perelman's poem "China" sympathetically. Jameson's account of "China" tells much more about the reading conventions violated by postmodern poetry than does his oddly literal thesis:

Many things could be said about this interesting exercise in discontinuities; not the least paradoxical is the re-emergence here across these disjointed sentences of some more unified global meaning. Indeed, insofar as this is in some curious and secret way a political poem, it does seem to capture something of the excitement of the immense, unfinished social experiment of the New China ... the freshness of a whole new object world produced by human beings in control of their collective destiny .. the collectivity ... after the long subjugation of feudalism and imperialism, again speaks its own voice, for itself, as though for the first time. (29)

Jameson's kindly interpretation is nevertheless short circuited by his need to read Perelman's poem mimetically, and this is where which Bourdieu's structural prediction, and my analysis of reviewing idelect meet. Contrast Perelman's explication of the poem:

I should remark here that the rhetorical tone of "China" [is] one of the basic features of the poem ... [T]he poem touches on matter-of-fact utopian feelings that early education can evoke. The opening line... combines rudimentary astronomy with an assertion of complete independence, as if learning about the solar system in second grade marks a liberation from older narratives of fate. ... The same tension appears in a line such as: "Everyone enjoyed the explosions." It means one thing if 'everyone' refers to a rural village celebrating the new year with firecrackers ... but if the context is the Vietnam War, the meaning changes: the explosions now are deadly, and 'everyone' loses its utopic-communal character, becoming a designation that embodies colonialist repression. ("New Sentence" 322-323)

As Michael Davidson critiques: "Whereas for modernists the defamiliarisation of words implies a desire for a realm of pure literariness, for Language-writers defamiliarisation involves the interrogation of discursive and ideological structures" (quoted in Derksen "Where"). This in contrast with recent humanist Arnoldian poetry of grand affect (in the tradition of what Ron Silliman hilariously, although too globally, calls the "School of

Quietude") that aligns trajectories of representation, rhetoric and intent towards identifiable ends of emotion, morality and representation. The poetry of unity, closure, and aesthetic rapture, in other words, that Jameson tries to excavate beneath Perelman's "heaps of fragments" (25) but cannot.

A core question at stake in the poetic *positions wars* (Pierre Bourdieu) ignited by the postmodern turn is the definition of poetry's social role. This is what Bourdieu indicates when he writes of the struggles of definition that take place in the field. "What is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer ... the *boundary* of the field is a stake of struggles" (42). Poetry "is the arena *par excellence* of struggles over job definition" (62). Given an Althusserian premise of linguistic ideology as both embedded and produced in material practice, the postmodern turn necessarily alters the sociality of poetry. So poetry reviewers remain ever fascinated with the question: What does poetry *do*? As E.D. Blodgett's study of literary histories in Canada *Five Part Invention* suggests in its effective de-naturalisation of any single literary history, the struggle to define (a) Canadian literary canon(s) - which Blodgett assumes is the entire aim or consequence of criticism - is a de facto struggle to define Canadian literature itself. "What does poetry *do*?" rests on a deeper question: "What *is* poetry?" "The Arnoldian Ideal", as Blodgett writes, orbits "a predominant obsession ... with the idea of unity" (280-81). In practice, this is how Jameson reads postmodern texts:

If, indeed, the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold and to organise its past and future into coherent experience, it becomes difficult enough to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but 'heaps of fragments' and in a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory. ("Postmodernism" 25)

For critics more invested in defining a concept of the literary as such, the valuation of unity is, in practice, a concern with veracity. As Blodgett continues:

In 'The Study of Poetry' Arnold cites *The Imitation of Christ* to argue that no matter how much one reads or knows, it is necessary to return '*ad unum ... principium*' which is 'the real' or 'the truly canonic'. (281)

A rags-to-riches (obscurity-to-centrality, outlaw-to-classic) teleology governs Arnoldian-Leavisite narratives of literary history, as well as the narratives of modernist vanguard from which Bourdieu draws his model of positionality. Reviewers' fixation on value-judgement reflects, among other things, an anxiety over veracity. The fixation implies that whatever does not make it into the canon of elected works is, in fact, not really poetry. Quality = verity in the restricted linguistic economies of particular evaluative communities, as the standards-and-deviations through which aesthetic objects are read become so naturalised that all other contingencies of value are made pathological. As Barbara Hernstein Smith argues in "The Contingency of Value":

Thus it will be assumed or maintained ... that the particular *functions* they expect and desire the class of objects in question (for example, "works of art" or "literature") to perform are their intrinsic or proper functions, all other expected, desired or emergent functions being inappropriate, irrelevant, extrinsic, abuses of the true nature of those objects or violations of their authorially intended or generically intrinsic purposes. (1566)

Thus what Roy Miki calls the "the customs house of canonical CanLit" (173) becomes, functionally, the zone of literary veracity.

To illustrate, I point to another confrontation in the ongoing positions war: Bruce Serafin's objection (in *Books in Canada*) to Steve McCaffery's critical practice, ostensibly on the grounds that McCaffery is writing about contemporary poets whose value is as-yet unproven by the cull of institutional history. Quality = veracity = canonicity is one of several ideological formulae behind Serafin's denunciation. Although Serafin in much of

his other writings reveals a complex, interesting sensibility - even a postmodern sensibility, if you will - given the task of reviewing he produces almost a foie gras of Arnoldian culturism, as incompatible with the counter-individualist, sub-institutional practices of postmodern poetry as possible. In his review entitled "Colonial Mentalities", he writes

the problem is that McCaffery is bringing a scholarly type of criticism to bear on writers whose interest lies chiefly in their eccentricity. By "scholarly" I mean the kind of work usually found in academic articles on Kafka or Blake or William Congreve -- i.e., articles that take the literary worth of their authors for granted and subject them to little or no evaluation, being interested instead in some aspect of what they have done. Now, by treating his writers this way McCaffery is making a claim about them: he is implying that their literary worth is in some sense indisputable. ("Colonial")

What Serafin objects to is exactly what Davey called for - criticism at the site of writing, or *poetics* - and what McCaffery performs. "Poetics" in this sense is an expression of the counter-institutional, communitarian sociality of postmodern poetry. For the Arnoldian Serafin, the honouring attention of a disinterested poetics is reserved only for authors who have already been sanctioned in academia. Yet his attitude on academia here is extremely ambivalent, even incoherent. At once Serafin reviles the "academic" language McCaffery uses as "corporate", yet grants academia all the power to sanction writers. Although Serafin rejects academicism, as Davey accused Robert Lecker: "[He] seems to know of only one constructor of literary canons - a unitary academy." In this ideological space, McCaffery's text is merely an illegible, alien script. But while Serafin's argument may not be coherent, the review does precisely what it is designed to do: it signals his relative position in the field "against" postmodern writers like McCaffery. Academia is a



recurrent fantasy trope in this ideolect - an alien place, and a determinate position in the field. It is often reviled with the kind of xenophobia Serafin displays:

So a paradox arises: seeking the largest language, the language that seems most international, most part of an over-arching intellectual project, the critic ends up writing for fewer and fewer people. Wanting to be significant, he first of all loses his "place," then his sense of proportion, his ease with his native speech, and finally his pleasure in the use of language. The loss of speech: one keeps coming back to that. ("Colonial")

The ugly nationalist implication here is that in working from French sources, McCaffery loses both his citizenship and his humanity; he becomes foreigner and alien. McCaffery's rebuttal to Serafin provides strong evidence that Serafin never actually read *North of Intention*. He didn't need to - just as he didn't need to make a coherent argument - because this kind of position-signalling requires no textual critique. As Bourdieu envisions the field:

Because position-takings arise quasi-mechanically - that is, almost independently of the agents' consciousness and wills - from the relationship between positions, they take relatively invariant forms, and being determined rationally, negatively, they may remain virtually empty, amounting to little more than a *parti pris* of refusal, difference, rupture. (61)

## **PERIODIZING CANADIAN PERIODICAL CRITICISM**

Why postmodern poetry caused a flashpoint in the national cultural project, both in terms of the types of books written, and how they were reviewed, can be gleaned from Blodgett's, Davey's and Linda Hutcheon's studies of the postmodern in Canadian literature.

1. The new writing was influenced from elsewhere (USA and France), aggravating in reviewers what Northrop Frye called Canadians' "garrison

mentality", and intensifying the fetish of a poetry that is demonstrably Canadian.

2. The new writing is antithetical to the Arnoldian-Leavisite ideology, core received notions and values in Canadian literature. Questions of cultural identity in the representation of society and landscape, and the valuation of unity, are problematised in postmodern poetry rather than affirmed;
3. The new writing (therefore) required reviewers to use new critical tools to address it competently.

Notable is the new emphasis on *writing*, foregrounded against either the figure of the writer, or the phantom of a national cultural project. Postmodern texts generally invert, as Barthes proposed, the emphasis of writer vs reader. Where thematic, mimetic, intentionalist modes of criticism made the critic a consumer of meanings, postmodern writing makes the critic an active participant in *creating* the text. Despite Barthes' characterisation of this shift in terms of play, *jouissance*, even of the critic as the "performing" the text like a musical score, the reversal of roles does create new responsibilities for the critic. Arguably, the responsibilities are now heavier. As the analogy of musical performance suggests, the critic must now be even more flexible, adaptable. Critical practice is a matter of finding the critical tools, in language, concept, and idelect, most appropriate to the given text. As Hernstein Smith writes:

the conceptual structures and methodological practices adopted ... would themselves be historically and otherwise contingent ... their specific value as descriptions and accounts would be a function of how well they made intelligible the phenomena within their domain to whoever, at whatever time and from whatever perspective, had an interest in them. (1560)

Through the lines of positional struggles produced in the increasingly uneven topography of Canadian poetry, it is possible to divide the recent history of poetry reviewing in Canada into three overlapping but distinct phases. Roughly: 1961 – 1978, 1974 – 1995, and 1994 onwards. As stated above, I mark the start of the first phase with John R. Columbo's review in *The Canadian Forum* (1961) of *TISH* and the Montreal 'zine *Cataract*. Here the poetics of *TISH* are dismissed as stale, imported goods: "all of Canada's cultural revolutions have been imported, abortive, and a bit late." Columbo thus opens the positions war in the cultural field that leads to the current divide in Canadian poetry. Beyond some poets' frustrations that the language of struggle and divide is itself divisive, this split remains a materially lived reality for all publishing poets. In the wake of George Grant's lachrymose diatribe *Lament for a Nation*, reviewers like Robin Mathews, George Woodcock and W.H. New resorted to a vehement cultural protectionism, with accusations of cultural treason, in such magazines as *Canadian Literature* (1959), *Canadian Notes & Queries* (1968) and *Books in Canada* (1972), which clearly signal nationalist bias in their very names. The phase culminated with the publication of two books: *Poetry and the Colonized Mind: Tish* (1976) by Keith Richardson, and Mathews' *Canadian Literature: Surrender or Revolution* (1978) which reiterated their opposition to "cultural imperialism" (Mathews) first published in reviews.

I mark the beginning of the second phase in 1974. In this year Robert Kroetsch declared (mistakenly, I think) that Canadian literature "evolved directly from Victorian to Postmodern", just as the first English translation of Roland Barthes' highly influential, and still pertinent, *S/Z* reached Canada. (Although the term *postmodern* had been circulating in academia since the 1960s, it was not until the mid 1970s that its use

became widespread in poetry circles generally. Kroetsch is correctly credited with bringing the term forward in 1975, but it was already in circulation among poets. Frank Davey used it in a 1974 interview that Robin Blaser quotes in the introduction to *Particular Accidents* (Blaser 29). *S/Z* was among the first in a wave of theoretical writings arriving from France, perhaps realising the fears of cultural protectionists like Mathews. Although poststructuralist concepts had been current in academia for a decade or more, soon after this point the powerful critical tools of French poststructuralist theory fall into the hot hands of postmodern Canadian poets. Other impulses being felt from the direction of cultural studies, forcing many poets into a re-evaluation of the cultural role, and importance, of their art. The multiple, complex pressures created a class of poet-critics, highly articulate in defence of their work (and that of others), who posed a deep threat to the mystical authority of the Leavisite poetry judge. These influential figures include: by year of first-book publication: George Bowering (1963), Fred Wah (1965), Frank Davey (1965), Daphne Marlatt (1968), Steve McCaffery (1974), Roy Miki (1976), Robert Kroetsch (1976; first book of poetry), Erin Mouré (1979), Gail Scott (1981), Margaret Christakos (1988), Jeff Derksen (1991), Lisa Robertson (1993), Nancy Shaw (1993), Christian Bök (1994), Stephen Cain (1999). With such adversaries, reviewers in journals like *Canadian Poetry* (1977), *Poetry Canada Review* (1979) and *The Vancouver Review* (1989) shifted the accent of cultural protectionism to aesthetic and humanist concerns. Typically, reviewers like Brian Fawcett, Bruce Serafin and Greg Gatenby attacked theory-savvy poetry with charges of being anti-social, or incomprehensible, and with pseudo-populist soothsaying. As Brian Fawcett wrote in a review of the anthology *East of Main*: “LCW [Language-Centred Writing] is another matter. It's interesting

enough as a theoretical principle, but its uncommunicativeness [sic] makes it of dubious value as a long-term practice.” (1991; 101). With hindsight we can now answer that this is contrary to lived experience, and the assertion was made even as this writing built up local and international audiences for Vancouver poetry. Although many such reviewers identified as leftist-liberal, their aim was often to discredit the strong political inclinations of postmodern poetry, to discredit theory as a discourse alien to poetry and to the political. In particular, there is a certain hysteria has surrounded investigations of the Marxian premise that "everything is political", such a crucial element of postmodern poetics, beyond the static surface of paraphraseable content.

The third, current phase I mark as starting in 1994. Although the first version of Microsoft Windows was released in 1985, it was not until the early nineties that internet and cheap desktop publishing became commonplace enough that they began to widely transform Canadian print culture. (In 1993, for example, Peter Mansbridge hosted a CBC special about "A computer network called internet" that declared "The internet is no longer just for nerds." No doubt!) Since then, along with repeated challenges to the possibility of a singular Canadian literary canon, or even counter-canon, the pluralisation of poetic practices has so increased that any reviewer's already tenuous claim to authoritative centrality has been dispersed. "Canadian poetry" now encompasses so many contradictory and complimentary practices that it has become, in practice, indefinable. If the writings of Ken Rivard (*Kiss Me Down to Size*), Wendy Morton (*Private Eye*), Darren Wershler-Henry (*The Tapeworm Foundry*) jwcurry (*That Fucking Line That*) and Gustave Morin (*The Etc Bbq*) all fit under the umbrella of Canadian poetry, then the only possible definition of poetry is in a sort of Duchampian tautology. Canadian poetry is

writing identified by readers of Canadian poetry as Canadian poetry. Any other form of definition must be, contra this pluralism, both proscriptive and normative. Reviewing practices are often a struggle over this definition, and works gain value by producing a definition that is precisely commensurate with the poetry at hand - again, by tautology. But with a predictable outbreak of paranoia, as if the now contingent status of the literary artefact bodes an apocalypse of values, what Charles Altieri calls "neo-pragmatism" has arisen. Arch-conservative reviewers like Carmine Starnino, Shane Neilson, Zachariah Wells, Robyn Sarah, Alex Good, David Ormsby and David Solway campaign in print, and in online venues, such as *The Danforth Review* (1999) and *Maisonneuve* (2002), to reduce the terms of review-criticism to a quantifiable set of values defining "real" Canadian poetry: clarity, unity, "poetic" content. Following predecessors like Greg Gatenby, J.K. Snyder, Bruce Serafin, Rosemary Aubert, and Patrick Lane, these Common Sense Police write reviews that come as close to ideological lockdown as possible. They do precisely what Barbara Hernstein Smith predicts, meet the awareness of contingency with violently blunt, defensive assertions of noncontingency:

Consequently, institutions of evaluative authority [are] called upon repeatedly to devise arguments and procedures that validate the community's established tastes and preferences, thereby warding off barbarism and the constant apparition of an imminent collapse of standards and also justifying their own normative authority. (1565)

That is, they apply a pseudo-empirical, raw positivism to the abstract matter of poems: words-on-the-page criticism. At its purest, Arnoldian-Leavisite ideology, reinvigorated by these ultra-literalist bean-counters, works to reimagine the quality of a poem as a quantity that can be tallied.

As these issues played out in a famous moment of the positions wars, readers saw a debate between a Leavisite culture-manager (Robert Lecker) and the postmodernist poet and theorist (Frank Davey) across the pages of the U.S. academic journal *Critical Inquiry*. Lecker himself had queried the notion of a unitary Canadian canon in his "The Canonisation of Canadian Literature: An Inquiry into Value", but as Davey demonstrates in his critical response to Lecker's article, Lecker in fact re-produced a normative vision of CanLit as "representational realism" under the very guise of questioning it. Further, Lecker's practices as publisher of ECW press were entirely in the service of a unitary canon, as mediated by academics like himself. Davey writes:

For Lecker the word "canon" exists only in the singular... [Lecker] offers no sense of competing canons, no sense that there may be social groups in Canada other than academic critics who propose and contest canons in order to enhance their own social standing, no notion that academic criticism itself may be a field of cultural contestation. Lecker seems to know only one constructor of literary canons - a unitary academy. (Davey 1990; 676)

As seen here in Davey's response, as well as the debate itself, the divide in Canadian poetry opened by the postmodern turn is not a critical phantasm: it is a materially lived reality. Which anthologies? Which conferences? Which poets will be taught in which schools? Which writers festivals? Which juries? Who will be interviewed by Evan Solomon? Which poets will be allowed to teach writing? In what terms is the question 'what is poetry' posed? Or, to quote John Hall, "What is the set of relationships implied by the act of writing?" (in Middleton 129)

Reviewing as it is practised in Canada, the whole foundation of our "practical criticism" (Edward Said), is fundamentally challenged by postmodern theory and practice. In distinction from the Arnoldian-Leavisite paradigm, reviewing now has to

start from the premise that *value* is contingent, that *quality* is not a material given but a complex social construction that arises only partly from reader's direct interaction with a particular sequence of words. The "words on the page" are little, perhaps even nothing, in-of-themselves. Poetry provides almost no empirical data. (As long as quality = veracity remains a structural equation, poetry provides frustratingly few guarantees of its existence.) As Peter Middleton establishes:

Almost all readers can perceive that these innovative poems immediately incite a question: Is this really a poem? A consequent dismissal of the alleged pretender often follows from a failure to recognise that this question cannot be limited to a reified set of linguistic marks on sheets of paper. A poem is complexly extended through history, and therefore in space, time and subjectivity, in ways that are an intrinsic part of its being as a poem. Its meaning takes place during a multiplicity of temporally and spatially organised occasions. (128-129)

But this is the nature of the forty-year cultural lag. It is not the cultural lag that has been evoked in the past, that Canada falls "behind" other nations. (Note that Billy Collins is the best-selling living poet in the U.S.A. If such things are taken as signs of provincialism, our southern neighbours are just as "behind"). Our cultural lag is internal. The critical language of reviewing has not caught up with the poetic practices initiated now over 40 years ago. As Middleton regrets:

Discourses of current poetics in the U.K. have foundered on these difficulties, which are made worse by what Jeff Derksen calls the lack of method for tracing connections between poetic forms and social praxis. Poetry has often been more inventive than the public discourses that have promulgated it. (136)

The issue I am raising here about critical language and literary ideology in reviews cuts across the CanLit demilitarised (dematerialised?) zone. Many of the poets working in the trajectory of the postmodern still write reviews from the Arnoldian conceptual framework



which necessarily demeans or damns their own work, providing the best evidence that what I am describing is an *ideological* condition.

When rob mclennan, for example, who has published at last count 14 books of postmodern poetry, praises his stylistic mentor Barry McKinnon, the Arnoldian-Leavisite tropes are all present:

Working in the poetic tradition of the procedural open-form, Barry McKinnon's poetry is finely tuned and honed, where the craft is there, but it is the movement that represents.... It's as though McKinnon works through a deliberate incompleteness, moving and moving further out in each piece until there is nowhere else for him to go, writing lines precisely cut to further a deliberate whole. (2004)

Writing about a poet he has studied meticulously, mclennan's sentence introduces at least 5 of the major tropes that have been the base ideological html of Canadian poetry reviewing since long before 1961: work, tradition, form, craftsmanship, poem-as-object, unity. The "procedural open-form" of McKinnon's writing (not to mention mclennan's own poetry) problematises, if not nulls, most of the concepts mclennan uses to praise it. Yet to validate for an imagined common reader the "deliberate incompleteness" of McKinnon's poetry, mclennan frames it as always projected towards a greater unity, which is what he means by the strange phrase "to further a deliberate whole". Like in Jameson's reading of "China", we again have here a mimesis of writerly subject and textual form, the excavation of a unity beneath the fragmentary. It is: Barry McKinnon the Man-Poem. With this concept of "greater unity" mclennan brings his readers right back to Arnold's altar 'ad unum ... principium', eviscerates in ideological ritual what he wants to celebrate.

Another crucial marker of the cultural lag seen here is McLennan's difficulty articulating his reading of *form* as an active factor poetic processes. The strain in McLennan's sentence "it is the movement that represents" is that of a dedicatedly postmodern poet of "procedural open-form" trying to *read* form, and failing. Even Northrop Frye writing in 1961 deals with the form-content problem with greater acumen than this experienced, widely published postmodern poet. He notes of how the "irony of form" presents a basic interpretative problem to any critic: "the literary structure is always ironic because 'what it says' is always different from 'what it means'" (in Davey 1988; 3). My question to reviewers is: why not abandon this framework since it so clearly fails when applied to new writing? Why not use the critical tools that have been available at least since 1974? From the perspective of the other CanLit camp, the failure of the Arnoldian-Leavisite model to account for postmodern poetry is often framed as a failure of the poetry itself.

Contemporary visual art, although no cultural utopia and with its own internal lags, has at least made a substantial move away from the suspiciously content-oriented evaluative idiolect of poetry reviews. It has developed a critical vernacular based in critical theory, powerful enough to at least address the particular complexities of contemporary artmaking. I stress the vernacular here because of the predictable objection that a critical method I would propose, founded in formalist, poststructuralist, Marxist and phenomenological theories, could only flourish in academia. (Academia in the context of poetry reviews is a fantasy trope consistently framed as an alien site, its language an incomprehensible jargon.) Contemporary arts reviewers are not necessarily more erudite than poetry reviewers, but they *are* using better conceptual tools, and they are therefore

far more tolerant of the difference, surprise and challenge posed in postmodern art practices. (On an anecdotal note, consider how many Canadian postmodern poets are also art critics: Michael Turner, Lisa Robertson, Peter Culley, Jeff Derksen, Nancy Shaw, Christian Bök, Margaret Christakos, Darren Wershler-Henry. ) Because of this receptiveness, reviewers in the artworld have become much better at drawing meaning from all the dimensions of the cultural artefact that poetry reviewing normally relegates to a passive domain of form. Even poet-critic Juliana Spahr, as she nudges towards new methods in "Everybody's Autonomy" produces a passive formulation:

To ignore the formal characteristics of the work is to ignore one of the crucial ways works carry meaning. Further, such an approach reads all work as bland and apolitical. (12)

To say that form can "carry meaning" is simply is not pointed enough - it hasn't been since 1923 - and her syntax here makes her statement read as if she means: "form *also* has meaning". Reviewers' inability to "read" form, and contextual choices at the *macro* level of a poetics (even when they're reviewing it favourably), reveals that the Arnoldian critical context still encourages a concept of form as a neutral container, well-wrought. Atop the basic premise of the radical contingency of values, a literacy of form is a necessary aspect of the new forms of "literary competence" (Jonathon Culler) that Davey first called for in *Surviving the Paraphrase*.

The second sentence of the Spahr quote above, however, is the more interesting one. In the Arnoldian ideological framework, there is often a predictable retreat into liberalist superstition that only manifest content of a text - neither its formal properties or cultural positioning - has political consequence. This framework of reading cannot treat form or context as meaningful, cannot further extrapolate political implications from

formal decisions - both issues which are fundamental to the compositional choices made by postmodern poets. The impossibility of maintaining such a position in poetics - where, as Northrop Frye suggested, form itself provides a ground of *constant* irony - should now be clear enough.

## **A CONSERVATIVE DRIFT**

The tendency in Canadian poetry reviewing towards an illiteracy of form, and a brutish positivism - as Lawrence Grossberg articulates it "the assumption that there is only one valid way of knowing" (128) - has increased since the early 1960s when the postmodern troubles began. Compare, for example, Al Purdy, a poet usually upheld as a secular saint of middlebrow, masculinist Canadian beer-drinking Joe Average CanPo - bar brawler with the heart/pen of gold, and now with a statue of bronze in Queen's Park - reviewing Roy Kiyooka's *Kyoto Airs* in a round-up review of work by John Newlove, Gerry Gilbert and Roy Kiyooka in *The Canadian Forum*:

Roy Kiyooka is a slightly-other kettle of idiom...[Kiyooka] certainly has cut away extraneous material and verbiage from his writing. In a remarkable poem called 'The Warrior', Kiyooka creates an energy vortex in which all things turn inward and circle to an end inside the poem without question. The poem answers any implicit questions in process of asking. (1964; 143)

Contrast this with Shane Neilson, former poetry editor at *The Danforth Review*, author of *The Beaten Down Elegies*, reviewing Roy Miki's *Surrender* in 2002, in a 5-part suite of reviews treating all the poetry books nominated for the Governor General's Award that year. Here I quote sentences from several paragraphs, first to last:

In this book, it is difficult to pick just one offence against style and taste; *Surrender* is instead a repeat offender ... Indeed, confusion's a constitutive experience when reading through the whole book. But I must ask: who

wanders on a tarmac desiring insularity? ... In Canada, he had no reason to be intelligible, he was rewarded precisely for being unintelligible... *Surrender* is anti-poetry; it deserved no award, and that it won the GG suggests the irrelevance of the institution. ("Surrender")

Again, a swarm of Arnoldian tropes, now filtered through a mind that seems as fiercely literal as a Doberman pinscher's: mimetic verifiability, immediate emotional legibility, and its capacity to communicate clear messages. Ideology becomes pathology: Neilson's outrage has a distinctly moral slant, which may give readers a "false positive" signal of the reviewer's aesthetic passion. (If this is passion, it is what Dostoyevsky called "administrative passion": the passion of a minor official zealously enforcing regulations.) Roy Miki would underline the racial dimension here. When racially marked writing falls outside a given post-colonial economy of racial-ideological signs, it is unrecognisable as either racialised or as literature (Miki ). The other poets Neilson chastises in his survey are Tim Lilburn, George Elliot Clarke, Don MacKay, and Jan Zwicky, but Miki is the only one whose work is pushed entirely outside the scent-marked territory as "anti-poetry". He cannot make anything at all of Miki's writing:

In order to complete the book, the reader must abandon the fruitless process of asking questions – a faculty necessary to enjoy poetry fully- and simply accept that this bland book isn't meant to make you feel or know anything. ("Surrender")

Al Purdy, thankfully, is not like Neilson. Even back in 1964 he is not fixated on poetry's meaning being entirely produced in mimesis, representation or message. More open minded than this much younger poet, Purdy is able to read the effects of the form of Kiyooka's poetry, and he reads how Kiyooka's formal choices constitute meaningful choices that "answer any implicit questions" (143). He even lays down a sentence of vernacular, poetic theory in his description of those effects: "Kiyooka creates an energy

vortex in which all things turn inward and circle to an end inside the poem without question." Whether or not the poetry checks out in so many ways, Purdy has had a meaningful experience. Neilson, by contrast: "style and taste" (Arnoldian normativity), "repeat offender" (creepily authoritarian language of law and governance), "unintelligible" (literacy, literary competence), "it is anti-poetry" (proscriptive essentialism). Neilson has produced an idiomatic, evaluative checklist of Arnoldian tropes against which he tests the poetry. When it (predictably) fails the test it is stamped "nonpoetry: supplication denied".

Neilson is one of a noticeable group of at least 15 reviewers active right now who are more conservative, more programmatic, more pathological, less literate (in the terms I have outlined) than even their worst cultural protectionist forebears of the 1960s. I cannot measure the influence these reviewers have - nor is the question really relevant to this study - but they do not lack public venues in which to publish their reviews: *The Antigone Review*, *The Malahat Review*, *Quill & Quire*, *Canadian Notes & Queries*, *The Danforth Review*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Books In Canada*.

## **IDEOLOGY**

I have framed my study with two of the more vexed terms in critical theory. Above I sketched my own tactical appropriation of the term *postmodern*, in the restricted context of poetics. What, then, do I mean by the even more chimerical term *ideology*? If as Terry Eagleton complains, there are "almost as many theories of ideology as there are theorists of it" (1994;14), rather than making the term useless, this variability is the best reason theorists in poetics should use the term. If critical theory is to function as a

subversive practice of decoding, undoing, and recoding dominant representational social codes, it has to avoid bounding itself in a linguistic restricted economy (Georges Bataille) of normative scholastic practice, the fixed terminologies of bureaucratic and epistemological power" (Perelman 1994; 168). The socially transformative potential of terms like *ideology* and *postmodernism* lie at least partly in their dynamic instabilities. As it is, multiplicity of uses make the span of the terms wide enough that they only acquire functional meaning actively, in *use*. This is most characteristic of poetry (although even that broad characterisation is often challenged) which as Bob Perelman writes, only has available to it "radically particular words" (1994; 168). Such particularity arises not from the *nature* of the word but from how, where, when they appear in sequence, in time, in text. In this terminological *poiesis* begins the longed-for "abolition of the boundary line between poetry and theory" (1996; 166). As Perelman celebrates in Charles Bernstein's terminologically non-committal poetics: "[In *A Poetics*] potential sites of definition become loci for counterdemonstrations of a writing practice that disrupts any form of containment" (1994; 312). Poetry, which "must remain undefined", can best operate as a critical social force in conditions of a less restricted *general economy* (Georges Bataille). As Perelman continues in "Poetry In Theory":

Ultimately, it's all for the glory of poetry, which will remain ornamental to the degree that it avoids the issues of power, history, bureaucracy, and class that theory addresses. But theory also is in need of the particularity and the sonic and rhetorical resources of poetry if its powerful but jargon-heavy insights are to travel effectively outside the circuits of conferences and graduate seminars. (1996; 159)

To return to my own terminology, the trajectory of the concept of *ideology* I draw from extends from Althusser's fundamental "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"

into its realisation in the cognitive-linguistic research of thinkers such as Andrew Goatly, who published in 2007 a book called *Washing the Brain - Metaphor and Hidden*

*Ideology*. To begin with, Althusser writes:

... ideology is not an aberration or a contingent excrescence of history: it is a structure essential to the historical life of societies. Further, only the existence and the recognition of its necessity enable us to act on ideology and transform ideology into an instrument of deliberate action on history. ... Human societies secrete ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life. (1971; 88)

Yet *ideology* remains, as Raymond Williams noted in 1976, a term commonly used as a pejorative, to describe a condition of false-consciousness that an someone else - usually an opponent occupying an antagonistic position in the cultural field - has. In this familiar misappropriation, as Terry Eagleton writes "ideology, like halitosis, is in this sense what the other person has" (1991; 2). The concept of ideology I am employing does not admit much pejorative inflection, because its point of departure is not a binary "false consciousness" representational model of *truth vs illusion*. It definitely does not imply that all reviewers are capitalist androids, although it can be tempting to think of some of them that way. Ideology is far more a question of ritual practice, of a lived "political unconscious", than conscious consent to specific ideological contents.

Although there are many conscious, intentional instrumental applications of ideological tropes in reviews, the unconscious character of the ideology in question is more significant, precisely because it directs thought without conscious consent. As Althusser explains in "Marxism and Humanism":

In truth, ideology has very little to do with 'consciousness', even supposing this term to have an unambiguous meaning. It is profoundly unconscious, even when it presents itself in a reflected form (as in pre-Marxist 'philosophy'). Ideology is indeed a system of representations, but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with



‘consciousness’: they are usually images and occasionally concepts, but it is above all as structures that they impose on the vast majority of men, not via their ‘consciousness’. ("Marxism")

A fundamental premise, then, of my use of ideology is Althusser's, that ideology is embodied in material practice, in structures. Possibly inconsistent with Althusser's analysis, my own premise is that the use of language - especially conventionalised languages like the ideolect of poetry reviews - is as material as bare knees on a cold cathedral floor. Although language-use is not a fully directed, conscious activity, in every possible sense a word's use is an action, a position-taking. As in the Pascal aphorism Althusser cites, in the process of writing reviews, reviewers join the congregation of neo-Arnoldian culturism. In writing their criticism in a largely conventionalised, generic mode, reviewers perform a somewhat bizarre, poetry-subject-forming ritual. As Pascal wrote: "Kneel down and move your lips in prayer, and you will believe." (in Althusser 1971; 168)

Review texts themselves are visible palimpsests. Formulaic phrases, generic reasoning, moments and movements of originality, expressions of feeling, drippings of autobiographical grease, conventional summary and description, predictable diction, eruptions of novelty, attempts at registering the poetry as both experience or reified aesthetic product; the constitutive elements of the review-collage-palimpsest distinguish themselves clearly with obvious staples, cut marks, glue lines, and sedimentary layers. The ritualistic, ideological character of reviews is discernible in their very texture.

The specifically *linguistic* aspect of materialised ideology was expressed by Slavoj Žižek in the preface to *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* He uses a Soviet-era joke about "The Missing Ink" to suggest his analogy. The joke, in full:

In an old joke from the defunct German Democratic Republic, a German worker gets a job in Siberia; he is aware of how all mail will be read by censors, he tells his friends: 'Let's establish a code: if a letter you get from me is written in ordinary blue ink, it's true; if it's written in red ink, it's false.' After a month, his friends get the first letter, written in blue ink: 'Everything is wonderful here: the shops are full, food is abundant, apartments are large and properly heated, cinemas show films from the West, there are many beautiful girls ready for an affair - the only thing you can't get is *red ink*.' (2)

As Žižek explicates this, our ideological condition under the more "refined conditions of liberal censorship" is a matter of not having the means to express or describe our condition. He writes:

One starts by agreeing that one has all the freedoms one wants - then one merely adds that the only thing missing is 'red ink': we 'feel free' because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom. (2)

Banal examples of the linguistic "lack of ink", as Žižek would have it, abound. During the last Canadian federal election, for example, the election results were reported on the "leftist" CBC television thus: "Conservatives: 124 // Liberals: 103 // Bloc: 51 // NDP: 29 // Other: 1" (in Mancini "Journal"). The ideological question here is: who's the Other? What platform did the Other run on? White suprematism? Ozone restoration? Neo-Stalinism? Yogic flying? Here the whole spectrum of national politics is crunched into four terms; whatever shreds of alterity remain in Canadian parliamentary politics are practically inexpressible. The apparently unintentional choice of using Other in that report has chilling ideological ramifications.

As this pertains to poetry reviewing in Canada, the situation is slightly different. The *ink* is not really "missing". Unlike the Siberia in Žižek's joke, the right ink is available for reviewers, but they rarely use it. The situation entices me to try to imagine the scene of writing at the reviewer's desk. I can picture a number of pots of ink - blue,

red, green, purple, black - for the time being assigning the red ink to the theory-based I have been calling for, while the blue ink represents the Arnoldian ideolect I have begun to chart. In this scene, the pot of red ink is there on the desk but when time comes to review a book, the reviewer passes it over. What I cannot know is why. Is there an ideological *taboo* in place (i.e. "I see it, but that's not the colour of ink we use for reviews")? Do the reviewers not *see* or have they *forgotten* that the red ink is there on the desk? Do reviewers programmatically refuse to use it (i.e., as Bruce Serafin might say: "I will not write reviews in that inhuman, corporate-communist colour!")?

Žižek's startling analogy can be misleading, however, if one takes its focus on what's *missing* as exhaustive of the problem. The terms that *are* used (blue ink) force reviewers to shoehorn profoundly different poetics into the basic categories. In a *space of possibles* (Bourdieu) with now an enormous number of possible positions for poets to occupy, all positions are crushed into the small container of a severely limited, pseudo-positivist jargon. "Anti-poetry" above - like the CBC's Other - marks the constant failure of the critical language of Canadian poetry reviewing.

The failure is ideological. It is an illustration drawn in missing ink. This side of the linguistic-ideological question is what Andrew Goatly's book on embedded metaphor addresses. Goatly, following recent trends in conceptual metaphor theory, articulates a distinction between *live* and *dead* metaphors that could, in my own study, be expanded to include various *live* and *dead* tropes and concepts. (I prefer the term *embedded* metaphor for how it echoes the embedded war journalist.) Goatly writes:

If we call conventional metaphors "dead" or "inactive", this is because they are old and their interpretation does not demand as much conscious activity on our part. But this does not mean to say that they have less effect on our cognition. In fact, it is precisely because they are

conventionalised that they may achieve the power to subconsciously affect our thinking, without our being aware of it. (2007; 22)

In poetry reviewing the tropes or metaphors as they are ritually elaborated shape the judgements made. Is Nelson Ball's minimalist poetry, for example, "open-ended and freeing" or "half-finished and under-realised"? A few pages later, Goatly takes a stronger position:

The scale of metaphorical effect runs in the opposite direction from the scale of ideological effect, precisely because with literal language and conventional metaphors the ideology is latent, and therefore all the more powerful. (2007; 29)

Ideology, often in the form of a white paste called *common sense*, is what binds. Writing about the critical language of Canadian poetry reviews is an Althusserian question of writing about "the whole medium of our [poetic] subjecthood", (1971) not about a simple, homogeneous set of experiences or writings, or a collection of undercooked opinions. Many reviewers (like Serafin and Neilson above) write with a carnal, rhetorical flair meant to signal that they are fully in command of a specialised language (*restricted linguistic economy*) of poetry criticism. Too often, they are half-consciously applying the conceptual framework that, as a group, Canadian poet-reviewers have proved themselves unable to escape, and surprisingly unable even to extend. Rather than thinking through postmodern poetry, they are thinking through the ramifications of thinking postmodern poetry through a highly restricted, mismatched ideolect.

Thinkers working in the field of poetry must admit they are working in a field entirely of contingencies, abstractions and phantasms. The commonplace objections to postmodernist arguments in terms of physical, determinate truths that resist textualisation, like the law of gravity, or density of matter, can have no correlates in art: there's no

material determinate like a "law of gravity", or even concrete sensory information, to which positivism can appeal as a grounding commonality. It is difficult to measure the effect or influence that reviews have in the field, how they mar or determine a single book's status or influence. It is even more difficult to measure the influence that the Leavisite-Arnoldian paradigm has on poets writing in Canada. However, T.S. Eliot's characterisation of the poetry reviewer does not hold, either. He writes: "The present age has been, rather, uncritical, and partly for economic causes. The 'critic' has been chiefly the reviewer, that is to say, the hurried amateur wage-slave." In Canada, at least, most reviewers are practising, actively publishing poets themselves, poets who take "the job of criticism" very seriously. I will risk therefore that this ideological condition not only produces the reviews, but shapes, possibly even produces, the poetry. This returns the argument to the structuralist positions/fields theory of Bourdieu. In charting the idelect of Canadian poetry reviewing I risk concluding that Canadian poetry since the 1960s has been largely symptomatic of the ongoing positions war, and thus, in a certain sense, empty of other content than the signal of position. It is harrowing to see again and again, across decades, that poets' opportunity to speak to other poets about poetry produces such a stable set of concepts and reaction. It seems accurate to characterise the review text as a little theatre of linguistic-ideological ritual. It is also possible that what I describe here is actually the basis of Canadian literary ideology as a whole. Whether the reviewer is a believer before the rituals begin, the act of writing reviews probably produces such believers, with the wiggling of the imperfectly interpellated literary subject, i.e. Bruce Serafin's feistiness, Shane Neilson's passion, as they might be described. The most militantly individualist, pathological reviewers appear to be the most perfectly

interpellated. Certainly, their reviews are the always the most saturated with the concepts tagged here. Canadian poetry appears to be still functionally produced by this framework, whether (in Foucauldian terms) in the very act of resisting the framework, or in simply writing to genre like a kind of verse-columnist producing copy for a poetry daily. If it seems outrageous, as it might, that I am going to interrogate (torture) even the sacred guiding trope of *craft*, that outrage is the best indice of its hegemony. There is a profound identification in Canada of these Arnoldian concepts with poetry, and with the poetic itself. The *frisson* of the postmodern turn, the chill of conscience at hearing the value of *craftsmanship* questioned, shows a fear that Canadian poetry itself would vanish with these ideas. Much of the poetry produced in Canada since 1961 proves otherwise.

## **PART 2:**

### **“A RETIRED ENGINEER WHO READS HOUSEMAN AND LISTENS TO RECORDINGS OF DYLAN THOMAS”: THE TROPES OF FANTASY**

#### **PREAMBLE: FANTASY AND IDEOLOGY**

What do I mean by *fantasy*? I draw my concept of *fantasy* directly from Slavoj Žižek's *The Plague of Fantasies* where he outlines a Lacanian-Marxist model of the specific social functions of fantasy. An account of the phantasmic elements of the Arnoldian-Leavisite ideolect is necessary because, as Žižek writes, "ideology has to rely on some phantasmic background" (1997; 1). The structural role it plays is in a supportive, dialectical relation to the *crafts* metaphors discussed in Part 3. To anticipate that analysis: if *crafts* metaphors figure literary economy in terms of a reader-writer relationship of customers and merchants, wherein the reader is a customer of meanings, someone has to play the customer, whether or not that person substantially exists. Further, in any context of evaluation and verification such as poetry reviewing, negative comparatives have to be available to underline what the object of scrutiny *is* and what it is *not*. As such, a number of phantasms teach the reviewer how to *desire* by displacing the reviewer's desire into / onto an imaginary Other. In poetry reviewing, these fantasies set limits on what is *legitimately* desirable. They provide, thereby, pseudo-objective grounding for a positivist discourse of values that, in seeming to lie *outside* the poetry under scrutiny, verifies what substantive *crafts* language insist is inherent *in* the poem. As Ron Silliman maintains in *The New Sentence*: "Words not only find themselves attached to commodities, they

become commodities and, as such, take on the "mystical" and "mysterious character" Marx identified as the commodity fetish" (quoted in Derken 52).

Distancing his specialised concept of fantasy from the popular uses of the word, Žižek establishes his Freudian premises:

To put it in somewhat simplified terms: fantasy does not mean that when I desire a strawberry cake and cannot get it in reality, I fantasise about eating it; the problem is, rather, *how do I know that I desire a strawberry cake in the first place? This is what fantasy tells me.* (1997; 7)

A legitimate desire for the correctly valued object (in this case True Poetry) then, is defined in relation to an Other (in this case, an almost entirely imaginary one). As much as the fantasy narrative insists upon the centrality of the poem as such, reviewing is rarely about "the poem itself", or even about the reviewer's experience of that poem, but about the performance (which takes place in the theatre of the review itself) of enjoyment or displeasure before a phantasmic audience. As Žižek says of the formation of fantasy:

the little girl noticed how her parents were deeply satisfied by this spectacle [of her enjoying the strawberry cake], by seeing her fully enjoying it - so what the fantasy of eating a strawberry cake is really about is her attempt to form an identity ... that would satisfy her parents, would make her the object of their desire ... (1997; 7)

More than this alone, in reviewing "the object [here: the poem] is reduced to a token which is totally insignificant in itself, since it matters only as the point in which my own and the Other's desires intersect: for late Lacan, the object is precisely that which is 'in the subject more than the subject itself', that which I fantasise the Other (fascinated by me) sees in me" (1997; 9-10). In this case, however, that Other is pure phantasm, and there's no "strawberry cake" of The Poetic that desire can reliably zero-in upon. Strawberry cakes exist *as such*, poems do not.



Of the numerous sustaining fantasies I could examine here, I mainly choose those that are overtly displaced from the sensory site of encounter with the poem. Among the many I neglect are: the Absent Ideal, Career Conspiracies, Career Trajectories, the ongoing Crisis of CanLit, the spectre of the Death of Poetry, the ubiquitous but mysterious Everyday, the worrying Nation, longed-for Posterity, the listening and waiting World Audience. Here, various fantasies of readership are most structurally crucial. Most of these phantasmic readerships - the Grandparental Reader, the Ideal Reader, the Lost Audience of Poetry, the Ordinary Reader, the Sensible Reader, the Serious Reader, the Demanding Reader - can fit for the purpose of analysis under the ordinary umbrella of a Common Reader. (Reviewers often enough shift from term to term in the course of a single review.) The imagined desires of a Common Reader teach the reviewer what it is *legitimate* to desire in poetry, and, by extension, what compositional options are legitimately available to the poet. In this very context, many contents and subject matters are framed as illicit objects of poetic desire. A traditionally illicit desire or content in Canadian poetry is the political. Here, as so often, being outside the sphere of True Poetry, politics is poetically extramarital, as Stuart Newton writes: "Unfortunately, at the present time, Can Lit has fallen into an affair with politics" (1975; 2). The politics that fully emerge in reviewing by the 1970s are a consumerist/democratic shopper politics. In a systemic sense, it is therefore an insult to the pseudo-democratic Common Reader to not write for (the imaginary) everyone. (One of the ideological premises of consumerism is that everything on the market is available to everyone - you only need enough money.) Even sympathetic reviewers will affix a kind of "Parental Advisory" label to certain books. As Sparling Mills worries: "the decision to use the word 'Mazinaw' as the title of

this book could be controversial. Its unfamiliarity might discourage potential buyers."

(106) Or as Douglas Barbour, author of 14 books of postmodern poetry, cautiously endorses:

These translations are examples of what Nichol has elsewhere called 'research,' explorations in form (almost pure form; 'content' is not something the authors concern themselves with). In a sense, such writings are intended for limited audiences, but they can prove interesting to any reader willing to try them... Poets, especially, should find much to ponder about the strictures and structures of formal poetic procedures in its pages, but even the common reader could discover much of interest here. (1987; 106)

The structuring condition here is what Barbour imagines the Common Reader may or may not want to read.

As a normative influence, the phantasmic Common Reader curtails critique and investigation ("research", as Barbour notes Nichol called it) by the assumption that critique is not what the Common Reader desires, dramatically narrows the compositional horizon. Barbour's distinction, made in good faith as usual, centres on mimesis, reflection and representation as the *normal* content and rationale of poetry. The customer-is-always-right-wing assumption is that the Common Reader prefers a smooth, normalised product that is, as it were, "stocked with memorable imagery" (Irie 151) . Crime author Rosemary Aubert makes this product-control supplication to poets in one of her reviews: exactly this supplication to poets in one of her reviews, issued as a dire End of Poetry warning:

the clear, smooth, understandable poem has a definite place in the modern canon. In times when publishers are eschewing poetry in favour of things more 'commercial,' it is perhaps time that Canadian poets considered their readers more carefully - not only their readers who are poets and critics, used to reading books with a fine-tooth comb, but also their readers who are members of that hard to please but demanding clique: the general public. Voracious but impatient, the general reader reads to understand and to be pleased. (1981; 94)

If poetry is suffering from publishers' decreased interest, her proposed solution is not to build a counterpublic or cultivate other modes of reading, but for poetry to become more "commercial" by becoming more homogenous with other products. Her assumption is that quotidian habit and taste are a known, stable quantity, simply "there" to be mined as a market rather than an effect produced in the discursive circulation of cultural texts and forms. Neither do Aubert's comments take into account the political economies of publishing. Questions she might be asked: where would a Common Reader buy a poetry book? Where is the spontaneous encounter supposed to take place? The ideological gap here is partially filled by the Canada Council's program "Random Acts of Poetry" (see: "Random Acts" 2008) through which selected poets are paid to approach to strangers - who perform willy-nilly as Common Readers - read them poems and shove books into their hands.

What, then, are the broader ideological implications of writing exclusively for this Common Reader - an imaginary public? Michael Warner argues in "Publics and Counterpublics" that a reading public, insofar as it has existed since the rise of print culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is a discursive entity that "Exists only by virtue of being addressed" (50). From the paradigmatic focus in Canadian poetry on the private as the proper sphere of poetic activity arises a personalisation of public address as intra-individual communication - the poet, and the reviewer, are really communicating directly with a single, unique individual on the other end of the wire. (This is the pretence that Frank O'Hara's "Personism" played on, easily understood as the personalised gaze of the commodity: "These boots were made for me!") As the Aubert review shows, there are usually specific class assumptions in place about that phantasmic individual, metonymic

of the Common Reader that are a presumed condition for this communication to take place. As Warner maintains: "The assumptions that enable the bourgeois public sphere allow us to think of a discourse public as a people and, therefore, as an actually existing set of potentially numerable humans. A public, in practice, appears as *the* public." (51; his emphasis) This is, in part, the error that would make a project like Random Acts of Poetry seem like a good idea.

On the same plane, extending outward from the average poetry customer or "even those not used to reading poetry" (Aubert 94), reviewers deploy an even more generalised notion of The Human. But what does it mean to write about a poetry as *human*? Al Purdy sings in praise Dorothy Livesay that; "she is a much better and more human poet now ... Livesay is nearly sixty years old now, but I am hopeful ... that this very human poet will go on to another plateau of personal discovery with poems to match" (1968; 88 - 89). The assertion presupposes a definitional limit. Every valorisation of certain aesthetics as "human" requires, by the simple logic of discrimination, that other aesthetics are less-than human. So The Human valorises certain aesthetics bound in specific categories of literary emotion, and to produce their negative (usually implicitly, sometimes explicitly): the Inhumane. A reader of Inhumane postmodern poetry, by extension, is uncommon, abnormal, perverse - other poetry publics are illegitimate. (Many postmodern poets - Steve McCaffery, Adeena Karasick, Natalie Stephens, Christian Bök, Daniel f Bradley, to name only a few - have accepted branding, or have self-branded, as perverse.) In a review of a book by Marlene Cookshaw, Sharon McCartney, author of three collections of poetry, provides the underlying formula:

the problems confronted are recognisable, and the voice is very human.  
There are details here I recognise: the mother's distrust of mirrors and

telephones, 'desire for flight,' the speaker's refusal to 'be blindly / content with the elephant's ear,' her wanting *the whole elephant*. Isn't that what good writing is about - sounding out our commonness (105)?

Poetry that transgresses the imagined limits of "our commonness", that affronts the imagined values of the Common Reader, or which does not deal in those characteristic markers of The Human, is often judged as not only bad but, by negative implication, as not *human*.

Postmodern poetry has often been framed this way. And, as the citation from Aubert shows, the inhumane elements it brings to literature are ascribed an historical, "original sin" guilt of having accelerated the loss of a broad audience for poetry. Worse, reviewers fear, contrary to lived experience, as Brian Fawcett does that "It'll probably destroy what little audience poetry has left" (1991; 101). In this phantasmic economy, the imaginary void of audience is inhabited by the Common Reader who is, in fact, that audience which has been lost and which must now be wooed back. Academia, imagined as the source of "the postmodern style" in poetry (because as mimetic, reflective, or expressive it is assumed to merely *illustrate* a preconceived theory) is an *uncommon* site, precisely where the Common Reader *does not* reside. The language of academia, then, is an alien language: "jargon" is non-human speech, academics are out of the fray of humanity. An unusually overt example comes in a review of an essay by Jeff Derksen that was included as the afterward to a selected poems of John Newlove. Reviewer Rob Taylor, a student journalist and poet, muses that Newlove "spoke to us as Vancouverites, as Western Canadians, and, most importantly, as humans" in a mode of "honest communication" that is in direct contrast with Derksen's "mega-syllabic disaster of an afterward":

the only real problem the book has is the inclusion of an afterword by SFU English professor Jeff Derksen. The poor man has clearly been stuck between the university's concrete walls for far too long, as his handful of rather lucent observations on Newlove's writing are buried in nine pages of academic garble. ... Derksen's presentation at the book launch and screening was all the more frustrating. While reading from his afterword, he would occasionally wander off of his notes and suddenly find himself communicating with the audience like a human being, only to quickly fall back into his prepared spiel. ("Newlove")

Here the True Poetry of John Newlove accords with the licit desires of the Common Reader, and Humanity at large, becomes another phantasmic subject. True Poetry is one of the fantasies. In poetry reviewing, in practice, the strawberry cake is itself constantly displaced, imagined - the little girl of Žižek's example not only has to imagine the parents watching the performance of desire, but has to imagine the thing itself. Poetry in reviewing, is, in practice, constantly displaced, deferred. The complex activity of reading suspended in favour of the performed act of regulatory judgement or evaluative description.

In contradistinction with the metaphors of craft and the conceptual apparatus of positivism, these are best understood as *tropes* of fantasy rather than *metaphors* because there is not a specific conversion in each case. Metaphor is a relatively direct conversion of terms, a comparative exchange: this is that, or this is as that is. Although the tropes recur with recognisable contours they work as background assumptions; the comparative hinge of metaphor is absent.

## **A RETIRED ENGINEER**

Fantasy tropes are sometimes brought out of latency in startlingly literal forms. Early into his 72-page "denunciation" of Canadian poetry at large "The Great

Disconnect", David Solway, author of over 24 books of poetry and non-fiction, in fact allows us for a moment to gaze into the smartly furnished livingroom of his imaginary reader. Solway asks:

[A] Purdy is a national icon and [John] Ashbery the long-time darling of the conventicles, so there might be some ancillary if unlikely reason to browse intermittently, but can one frankly conceive of any intelligent middlebrow reader spending an evening with Anne Carson or Jorie Graham in the way that my neighbour, a retired engineer, reads Houseman and Hardy and listens to recordings of Dylan Thomas? Answer honestly. (144)

This saturated sentence helps reveal how many fantasies sustain the Arnoldian-Leavisite idelect: it is practically a haunted Victorian mansion. Solway, who has written of himself as "doubly-marginalised" (as a self-defined anglophone Montrealeois Zionist Jewish metrical poet) is as clearly as anyone among the culturists Raymond Williams identifies as "convinced that they are the sole defenders of art in a hostile world" (1966; 37). What often slips by in reviews as *The Reader* is given a figurative contour, a smoky wraith arising from the nexus of imaginary readerships that include the overlapping (and contradictory) conceptions of the Common Reader and the Ideal Reader, the General Reader - all of which are directly evoked later in Solway's review-essay. (Like many reviewers, Solway shifts between terms, even between specific positions, in the course of a review, while circling around and within the fixed terms of the idelect.)

Considering the language more closely, the use of *one* (rather than *you*) implies a form of commonality, and becomes exclusive in implication. The question, then: who does it exclude? The rejected poets in the third clause are U.S. and Canadian women, while the model poets to whom they are contrasted are U.K. men - including A.E. Houseman, who writes homoerotic war poetry, Thomas Hardy who writes misogynist

social criticism, and Dylan Thomas the hard-drinking, womanising bad boy. Given this, what gender is "any intelligent middlebrow reader" likely to be? The figure of the retired engineer here will not present itself to the imagination as feminine. In the elaboration of this Common Reader the masculinist associations of the *crafts* metaphors are subtly upheld, while the phrase starting with *any* implies further that this Common Reader is the only reader whose attention counts.

What conceptual social role, or political agency does this fantasy grant poetry? Seen as an extension of the crafts model, poetry is here reserved a special, autonomous, elite place. Poetry, even poetic experience itself, is part of the amassed wealth of the hard-working engineer; luxury comfort (and explanatory soundtrack) for a wealthy man's declining years. In "The Ideology of Canon Formation: T.S. Eliot and Cleanth Brooks", John Guillory unpacks Brooks' reading of a Donne poems in terms that illuminate the cultural concepts at work in the review passage above:

The 'doctrine' here, that the 'well-wrought urn,' is not just the proposition that the poem is an artifact ... *it is rather that the urn belongs to the world of value and not to the world of power....it is the marginality of values which is both deplored and established by the idealisation of literature. There is no other place for this value than the mausoleum of well-wrought urns.* (192-93; my emphasis)

The mausoleum here is the wealthy engineer's livingroom - a place of withdrawal, not of activity; this is not poetry on the job site, but busily productive life recollected in tranquillity.

Although elsewhere in the review-essay the language of craft emerges overtly ("artisanal respect" (184); "mutual appreciation of craftsmanship" (184); "poems erected" (184); "mastery" (183); "skill traditions" (183)), the engineer is easily seen as an Ayn Randian übermensch to the humble (but ubiquitous) craftsman in other fantasies: an



upwardly mobile revision of the Poet As Craftsman. The inevitable, moral dimensions are of the phantom presence of labour and class as shaping factors. As in the "genuine remaining hardware store" of Part 3, the engineer's livingroom is a site specifically tied to a nostalgia of valorised work. Versus the quaintly archaic hardware store, the livingroom of evenings, haunted with memories of a life lived, and a rest well-earned (as epiphanic lines in poems, and other textual pleasures, must so often be "earned"). The crucial difference between the hardware store (Poet's realm) and the livingroom (Common Reader's realm) is in the class position of the fantasy subject: blue collar vs white collar, labouring vs managerial class. In underlining that this retired engineer is "my neighbour" Solway places himself (and poetry, by extension) in geographical, intellectual, and class proximity to the engineer. "The underlying sensibility", as David Antin acidly remarked of T.S. Eliot, "is the snobbery of a butler" (121).

As Solway's essay moves forward, Bourdieu's theory of the cultural field and struggles of position are played out in an almost parodic fashion. As in the passage above, the reviewer here invests certain figures / names with specific relative meaning / position. To Solway, Ashbery and Purdy represent two stylistic poles of bad-but-historically-somewhat-interesting poetry, Graham and Carson as the corrupting, intruding agents of worthless poetry (the ubiquitous "false coin" that debases the value of the authentic currency), set against darlings of discipline (Houseman), intelligence (Hardy) and passion (Thomas). With such clear set-ups, rather than articulating a positional argument, the reviewer then moves the figures in relation to each other in simple, violently foreshortened evaluative operations. In this fantasy the field itself becomes a

phantasmic trope, argumentation a strange role-playing game, the positions struggle as a poetic game of *Risk*.

## THE COMMON READER

The trope of the common reader is almost never evoked as explicitly as it is in "The Great Disconnect", but it reveals more clearly the phantasmic nature of the figure shouldering the evaluative ideology of Canadian poetry reviewers. Even George Woodcock in his reminiscence of Milton Acorn, admits the phantasmic nature of the Common Reader, although his own valuations usually depend on the trope.

Acorn, who thought himself *vox populi*, the voice of the people, was in fact very much the poet's poet. It was the poets who created a special prize for him when *I've Tasted My Blood* failed to win the Governor General's award in 1970. And though on that occasion they named him 'the people's poet', that was more in recognition of his intent than a literal statement about his relation to the people, who bought his books no more than they did those of ... other contemporary campus and public library bards. (1990; 102)

It is poets, not the people, who call Acorn The People's Poet.

When evoked, the Common Reader is often rendered simply as the Reader, which is arguably even *more* normative. "Common" at least marks some discriminatory intent; The Reader makes invisible that intent, rendering the trope more completely ideological. Robin Mathews may complain that "G.C. Miller also presents the reader with cliché ill-expressed" (143), but the presence of the trope is as clear in other grace-note phrases that might not attract much attention: "most readers", "readers today". The most overtly normative examples are actually in the context of praise. Statements like the following, indirect promises that the work is accessible to any Common Reader, are nothing less than you-are-with-us-or-against-us assertions, with no third option visible. In a recent

review, Nathaniel G Moore praises a new (and very postmodern) book by Jordan Scott: "Failing to appreciate the subtle depth of focus [in *Blert*] here may require you to consult your mouth or heart for a pulse or feeling" (2008). The reviewer qualifies his excitement, however, by assuring readers that the book does not challenge the Common Reader's extant notions of quality, or value, as *Blert* occupies "the middle ground between the pathologically-avant-garde and the post-vulnerable-unguarded in Canadian poetry. Jordan Scott is seeking a truth and clarity" (2008). In a much earlier review, also praising a postmodern poet, J.K. Snyder, a well-published poet and English professor retired from St. Mary's University, gives his assumed Reader no outs:

John Donlan's *Domestic Economy* is a remarkable book; one way or another, it will be an important one. No one who cares for or about poetry, especially perhaps, poetry in this country will be disappointed in it; and there is a deep temptation in reviewing it to say only that if you do care you will buy it. (1991; 164)

It is significant, then, that Donlan's book is domesticated; the postmodern "intelligence" of the book would not be enough to recommend it if the subject matter and emotional range of the work were not set within the known, licit limits:

*Domestic Economy* constitutes one of the most assured, as well as the most beautiful, depictions we have of post-modern Canada; nor is it easy to say which is the more astonishing: the easy command of everything philosophical and cultural that has gone into bringing about the post-modern or the intimacy and immediacy with which the daily facts of life in this country are brought to art. (164)

There are fascinating moments in reviews when the reviewer revises or withdraws a judgement based on the very limits. Vancouver reviewer Lyle Neff, author of 3 books of poetry, the first of which was nominated for a Dorothy Livesay prize, reviewed my own first book *Ligatures* in 2006. He first grants it some slightly back-handed praise in which he manages to make my poetry sound both cute and threateningly alien:

His first book of poems and poem-like things, *Ligatures*, has a friendly-looking tricycle silhouetted on its cover, portending, you'd hope, the kind of avant-gardeism that doesn't depend for its effects on a degenerate erudition, but rather on an absolutely fresh, even child-like, approach to important questions. It's a pleasure to report that Mancini mostly lives up to his trike, coming off usually like a bright Martian inquiring into this thing humans call language, and only occasionally like a grouchy Marxist who has read 20,000 books and got tenure the year Foucault died. ("Introducing")

But whatever endorsement he thus gives my "intellectually-distinguished and instantly-remaindered" book is withdrawn on behalf of a Common Reader, finally advised against daring to try this book.

Mancini[']s] typographical insanities and mathematical insults to English aren't just for laughs ... but they also aren't for everyone. ... This is not to cut down Mancini's witty and mirthful accomplishment in *Ligatures*, but to say that it's a rarefied piece of work, a cunning and esoteric thing, built for connoisseurs. ("Introducing")

Here the reviewer actually *defers* to the imaginary Common Reader, a kind of Joe Poetry the reviewer has to protect. As Žižek wrote "fantasy animates and structures enjoyment, while serving as protective shield against its excess" (2002;7) Here, the "excess" is in transgressing the imagined bounds of licit desire. In such formulations the Common Reader is truly revealed as that other Lacanian subject that Žižek's concepts of fantasy rely on: The Subject Supposed To \_\_\_\_\_, which is appears in his work in various forms: Subject Supposed to Loot and Rape, Subject Supposed to Believe, Subject Supposed to Enjoy, Subject Supposed to Know. Is the Common Reader above not, in these terms, a Subject Supposed to Not Know? A Subject Supposed to Buy Books? A Subject Not Supposed to be Burdened? A Subject Not Supposed to be Challenged? Or perhaps a Subject Supposed to Be Made to Feel Stupid by Postmodern Poetry? Neff tells his reader that he likes the book but does not think that the reader would. Thus the

Common Reader serves as a strange chaperone, shielding the reviewer from irrational postmodern exuberance. Similarly Norbert Ruebsaat writes, in a 1990 review of Robert Kroetsch's *Completed Field Notes*:

So, Robert - congratulations. I liked your book as a writer; I dislike it as a reader. Or: I like the book as reader, as text written from you to me, but as Reader (some kind of public individual/purchaser of books) I was thrown off and/or bored by it. What does Barthes call it - *lisible* versus *scriptible* Yet there's something compelling about this. Freeing up the text: finding other forms. [Certain sections] of Kroetsch's book ... work because I don't read them as 'poems. ... But a disappointment enters the moment I demand they be poems as well: that they answer the question: why are we in this book, as well as stating the demand: read me. (120)

Perhaps what's most interesting here is that whereas Neff projects this "everyone" entirely outwards as if it is a substantial social body, Ruebsaat demonstrates that he knows he has internalised this readership (that he is at least two readers in one, a split reader), without, however, making the next step towards being able to grasp the Common Reader as a contingent fantasy. Ruebsaat also suggests that he has been directly exposed to, if not studied, Barthes in the original French, quite beyond the fact that poststructuralist ideas are culturally available. Yet he chooses not to draw from this other pot of ink on his ideological desk, continuing to address Kroetsch's poetry in terms that it, de facto, rejects. The Common Reader appears to be in command; the phantom here makes reviewers afraid of losing the phantom's attention.

A necessary question therefore arises: by what authority does any reviewer presume to speak for a Common Reader? As Steve McCaffery asked in his rebuttal to Bruce Serafin in *Books In Canada*:

To appeal, as he does, to "the common reader" is to appeal to nothing but a judgmental and falsifying term that involves the promotion of a pseudo-consensual essence that does not exist in reality. In a blunter phrase, it is a

hollow slogan that insults the heterogeneity of individuals. Who has the right to generalise on quotidian habit? ("Rebutal [sic]")

The question might be answered in speculating on the structural distinctions between (nevertheless intertwined) tropes of Common Reader and the Public. the Common Reader is more phantasmic in character, because it imagines an actual encounter (at some unknown, deferred time) between that presumed reader and the text in question. This is illustrated in the (admittedly hilarious) form of Common Reader evocation so often seen: "What would my grandmother think of this?" (In the same review of *Blert* quoted above, Moore jokes about the Grandmother as Common Reader trope without fear of being misunderstood: "if you're into straight-forward traditional Canadian poetry, (Raffi, Anne Murray, Air Supply, Gordon Lightfoot) or want your narrative spoon-fed to you through a reed-straw whilst slowly having your muffin buttered by one of your grandmother's friends, you might want to leave *Blert* at home") Unlike Grandmother Reader, or the Common Reader, in poetry reviews the phantasmic Public is more of a statistical entity: book sales, audience numbers, mass readerships, the World Audience. But Canadian poetry reviewers, working still in a lyric paradigm of poem-as-private mode of address, prefer statistics with a human face. One of the shifts made in quite a bit of postmodern poetry (especially Kootenay School and after) is towards a more public mode of address, albeit with a specific public in mind. Part of the confusion the Common Reader (as Subject Supposed to Be Made to Feel Stupid by Postmodern Poetry) is presumed to experience is: Who is this intended for? To whom would this poetry make textual love? Or as Christopher Levenson wrote, reviewing KSW anthology *Writing Class*: "All this begs the question, who is conceived as the audience here?" (2003; 135)

If the fact that the Common Reader is less stable or repeatable than the crafts metaphors seems to weaken it as an analytical concept, it should not do so. Žižek's model of fantasy accounts for the fact that the Common Reader is not an entirely stable trope, since as fantasy it can be subtly or wholly reinvented by each reviewer. Hence also the blurry distinction between forms of phantasmic reader. Some reviewers shift quite casually between reader tropes of Ideal, Common, Reader, Sensible, Ordinary, Average, Everyday, General, Grandparental. Žižek frames this in terms of sexuality:

This role of fantasy hinges on the fact that 'there is no sexual relationship', no universal formula or matrix guaranteeing a harmonious sexual relationship with one's partner: because of the lack of this universal formula, every subject has to invent a fantasy of his or her own, a 'private' formula for the sexual relationship - for a man, the relationship with a woman is possible only inasmuch as she fits this formula. (1997; 7)

Translating Žižek's sexual terms into aesthetic ones, we realise that neither is there any "aesthetic relationship". There is no healthy, correct aesthetic relationship for reader to aspire to, consequently each reviewer must pull together his/her own formula using the given terms, as people must do in any ideological system. As Žižek wrote of the Siberian ink: "we 'feel free' because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom" (2002; 2), and a reviewer, especially an aggressively evaluative one, can work with a custom formula of "standards of excellence".

Assumptions about the desires of the Common Reader are often projections of the reviewer's own aesthetic formula. The reviewer universalises his/her own reading as a common denominator of human response, implicitly or explicitly imagining him/herself as a 'normal' reader and/or making a specific gesture towards identification or market solidarity with the Common Reader. The limits of this aesthetic universalism are most

easily seen when the underlying class tensions and or positional assumptions come directly to the surface. In the same review cited above, Rosemary Aubert writes:

For the average middle-class reader, this book is like a glimpse through the window into a kind of home one has heard about but never seen, though that home is as likely the streets as it is to be run-down rooming house room. ... 'A Special Occasion' is an apt, funny, tragic vignette of life in an inner-city, inelegant apartment building. Anyone who has ever lived in, or even visited, such a building will recognise it at once. ... [Plantos'] book presents a viewpoint, a voice, from within a usually silent crowd. (1981; 95)

In Aubert's custom formula, like Solway's, the Common Reader is entirely a bourgeois Reader; where she writes "silent" she might as easily have written "invisible". In reviews where a certain poetry is rejected and the Common Reader so clearly imaged, a clear separation is made between rejected writing and the reviewer. Here the reviewer makes a close identification with the fantasy subject, producing the rejected poet as an *enemy*. It is a mistake in this sense to think of the reviewer's *we* or *one* as *Royal* or even *collegial*. The reviewer's *we* is the Common Reader trope, with the reviewer now explicitly included in that group. As poet Stephanie Bolster -awarded the Governor General's award in 1998 for her book *White Stone: The Alice Poems* - writes:

When I jokingly characterise the quintessential Canadian poem, to my students, as a first person domestic lyric - perhaps involving the washing of dishes by a window outside of which weather occurs - am I describing not what is written but what certain editors prefer? When I consider my own poems of this kind - of course I write them - throwaways, what possibilities am I curtailing? We all know that trying to be original rarely results in true innovation. Perhaps the best way to truly reflect the culture out of which one writes is not to think about that culture. But to do that, one has to trust that the culture lies firmly under one's feet. (2006)

## **ACCESSIBILITY**



In this context, the questions of *accessibility* that arise so often are very rarely interpretative questions. When a reviewer complains of a work being "so inaccessible", or, inversely, takes the time to praise a poem for "accessibility", the commoner behind the curtain is the Common Reader. One of the features that are imagined to make a poetry accessible is emotional range, tonality and fixedness. Certain works are inaccessible because the emotions evoked are indefinite:

The use of stream of consciousness to break down old ways of understanding tends to leave the reader out of the experience. The images carry hints of sharp and painful edges, like a knife, but the feelings remain somewhat ambiguous. (1978)

These universalising gestures tend to occur within, or as an introduction of, a sentimentalised Human. At such moments the Common Reader and reviewer are closest; the reviewer is often projecting his/her difficulties or tastes, universalising the limits of their own interests or literacy. Such statements as "This poetry is inaccessible" or "This poetry provides no point of entry" not only serve to universalise a particular experience, but more to frame the universalised interests as if they are the limits of a normal and *healthy* literary competence. Everything that exceeds these limits is pathologized. "Accessibility" makes a normative standard of certain limits of interest or literary competence (Jonathan Culler) by implying that anything else is beyond the *reasonable* limits of literacy. By extension, anyone who can read the "inaccessible" material is cognitively abnormal, lives in a different reality than that imaginary body of people implied by the Common Reader.

Writing about the reception of language writing in Canada, Jeff Derksen reads illegibility in terms of Canadian nationalist "politics of recognition" that has "dampened

and depoliticised the effects of language writing in Canadian institutions" (57). Derksen observes that:

Politicised texts that contest normative representation within language and within a politics of recognition, or texts that look for effects outside of a subscribed agency, are re-figured as 'difficult' - which shifts them into being language puzzles to be decoded by an individuated reader. Or such texts are designated 'experimental,' leaving them within an aesthetic realm unaffected by social determinants. This depoliticizing of texts enacts a national boundary of intelligibility by failing to engage with the material determinations of these texts. (57)

"Difficulty", as a descriptor, serves mainly to make the textual strategies of the postmodern poet appear ahistorical, particularist and apolitically negative of the Common Reader. The contrast is in terms of physical access or of representational puzzles.

"Many of the lines treated unto themselves are very interesting, many of the delineations and periodicity are worthy of pause, but together the poem is difficult to crack." (Rotstein "Anatomy")

The metaphor implicit in the word *accessibility* is often literalised in its lexicon. Accessible poetry is one "whose door is always open" (Snyder 1991). Even in the context of domestic myth and minutiae, the poems that someone like Michael Ondaatje writes "are accessible to anyone who wants to try - he doesn't alienate his audience but seduces them into that privacy" (Musgrave 1974). In contradistinction, a reviewer (projected as The Reader) might feel that he/she "remains outside of the circle of friends" (Aubert 109) of a poet, or even become a kind of victim of its textual cruelties, its inaccessibility. As Waymen Chan writes of Brian Henderson's book *Year Zero*:

I yearn to interact with these written words, yet I'm somehow shut out cleverly. ... Henderson takes us away from the emotional trappings of flesh towards the theory of generative enslavement .... Again I'm shut out by paradox, sleight-of-hand, waiting at the doorstep of Master Language. (1996; 84)

In that sense it is a protective discourse: reviewer shields the Subject Supposed to Be Made to Feel Stupid by Postmodern Poetry from an encounter with the dangerous excesses of an illicit text.

## **THE HUMAN**

When Canadian poetry reviewers use the word *humanism* or *humanist*, so often pitted against the postmodern, it is normally a term set in opposition to the *inhumane*. As Linda Sandler, who edited an issue of *The Malahat Review* devoted to Margaret Atwood in 1977, writes: "I suggest also that [Irving] Layton's self-advertised pole-vaulting heroism is a parasite, feeding on his sense of belonging to a persecuted race - and that coarse rhetoric is not convincing as humanism or as poetry" (1974; 94). The verbal gesture here is not usually towards the historical, philosophical meanings of those terms, either a Renaissance humanism of classical learning or the later secular appropriation of the term in the name of reason as guiding power and faith in technological progress. Humanism, in poetry reviewing, is subservient to the broader category of Human, and means something like an affection for the paraphernalia of culture, and a belief in feelings or emotion as the highest form of poetic *truth*. In this aesthetic Humanism, poets can signal their participation in this order by various lexical means, either drawing the relatively fixed set of poetic terms or pointing to a love of certain intersubjective things (the furniture of the everyday) that appear to have resonance with the Poetic. Dr. Margaret Harry, formerly an associate professor of English at St. Mary's University, in a review of books by Tom Wayman and John Lent, makes the contours of this humanism clearer:

The fragmentary thoughts and images that move through his mind are matched by a deliberate fragmentation of form. Within the chronological framework of the sequence is detailed the clash between the ephemeral observations of a mind partially occupied with the sub-intellectual business of driving or sitting at a roadside café and the highly literate enclosing context; and entangled in this primary conflict is another, where the poet is caught between the triviality of contemporary reference and the ungrasped, timeless reality of the lake, the trees, the road. (1983; 74)

The "enclosing context" is "highly literate" because it is made up of items from the "timeless order" (a formula that is slightly different for each reviewer, but which draws from a common lexicon), contrasted with the sub-literary features of "driving" and the "roadside café". Here the contemporary is "trivial", which means for the reviewer a drop in aesthetic register, and other "timeless" items are poetic. That "the road" is included is most revealing. Presumably the road, a comparatively new invention, was also sub-literary or sub-poetic at one time, but with the triumph of car culture it has become naturalised, joining "the lake [and] the trees" in Nature. In practice this is how the Human is normally defined by reviewers.

To be fully Human, however, poetry almost necessarily has to seem to come from a discernible subjective somewhere, to arise from a nexus of poetically licit feelings and personality. Even if poetry can participate in a public discourse of some kind, the lyric remains the paradigm. As Sharon McCartney writes: "Poetry is not fiction; it's not enough to simply tell a story. We have to be able to identify a speaker, a 'someone' whose voice is the reason for the poem" (1990). If certain cultural products can be called "very human", then, others must be less-than human. The phantasmic Human in poetry reviewing, then, has definite limits, policed borders.

In contrast with *we*, *us* extends even further than the Common Reader outward to a conceptually vague but nevertheless totalising trope of Humanity. *Us* is a universal hug.

The Human in question is, again, phantasmic-ideological, even if it gestures to a "real" subject. If the Human in some ways, then, is a fantasy of a more complete commonality - Adrienne Rich's "Dream of a Common Language"? - it is revealing that this Human is so often evoked with highly specific, cultured forms and markers of domesticity. It extends from a naturalisation of forms of life under late capitalism. As it is for Rosemary Aubert's *Bourgeois Reader*, for Don Precosky, Dean of Arts and Social Services at the College of New Caledonia, life is homogenous, and safe: "We are voyeurs, parasites vicariously drawing meaning from the safely distanced tragedies of others as they are served up to us in convenient bites on radio and television" (1990; 113). the Common Reader's life is a space of mildly troubled domesticity "the domestic jungles we inhabit so clumsily" (McCartney 105). In response - poetry, the balm, the comforter, the healer of inner wounds: "The 'little epiphany' here is something we all know—that music, indeed all art, is food for the soul." (Shreve "How") This is the specific Human content that makes poetry *accessible*.

## **THE POSTMODERN**

What reviewers describe as the *inaccessibility* of postmodern poetry, often transforms "difficulty" into more than interpretative or even qualitative issue. Inaccessibility, as the concept relates to the fantasy Common Reader and Human does not merely make postmodern work bad poetry, or non-poetry, but puts it often beyond the fray of the Human: inhuman gibberish. Outside the politics of recognition - and poetics or mimesis, reflection and expression - the Human is unrecognisable. Any de-humanising discourse, even in the seemingly innocuous context of poetics, must be understood as

crypto-racist, especially if the reviewers maintain these tropes out of fear or as an assertion of taste. One of the manifestations is in the use of the word "cynical" as a smear, by which reviewers rarely appear to mean that the poet under scrutiny is a ruthless careerist, but that the poetry lacks the normalised (as above) signs of feeling that produce the Human as fantasy. Stylistically, it often means a lack of certain rapturous aesthetic tones, a refusal to draw exclusively from a specified "poetic" lexicon. Other forms of textual pleasure, and other reading practices, are illegitimate or queer. A crossover figure such as poet Erin Mouré, then, can have structural importance in the divided field, because the work appears to meet many normal "standards" while being postmodern in mode. Leona Gom, author of 5 books of poetry and 6 novels, celebrates Mouré's writing because

even when the poems don't quite work, when they leave you with a sense of having missed too much, they are still rewarding. ... Image builds on image, detail on detail, always appearing effortless, the craft beautifully absorbed into art ... there is a recurrence of themes of loneliness, violence, injustice - it is a look at life's hard edges, but this is hard-edged poetry. And if there is cynicism, there is also a strong core of humanism, of caring about this world and the people in it. (1985)

As Gom introduces it here, the term *cynicism* reveals the assumption that cynicism is considered an abiding characteristic of postmodern poetry. So in lacking these markers (which form a surprisingly consistent set), postmodern poetry can be positioned as fundamentally antagonistic to both the (phantasmic) Human and Poetic. Postmodern poets, apparently, have no feelings, or at least, the Common Reader can never know what the poet's "true" feelings are, which is in effect the same. The familiar adjectives: "cold", "cerebral", "intellectual", "academic", "inexpressive", "bloodless": the textual strategies of postmodern writing are consequently read as *cruel*, inhumane, de-humanising, even

anti-human. In Don Precosky review of Sharon Thesen's *Pangs of Sunday* and Barbara Carey's *the year in pictures*, he outlines the assumption: without a religious belief (which, God absent, The Poetic can provide) human life is abysmal, cruel, mute. Postmodern poetic cynicism is figured as an effect of not being connected to this "higher power", as expressed either in religion or the Poetic "timeless reality of the lake, the trees, the road", as per Margaret Harry. Precosky laments that these poets

present an all-too-accurate description of what life is really like for most people today ... most of us don't really believe that there is a power that moves through all things ... an electricity waiting to be plugged into. A lot of our poets now place that power in 'Language,' but it's rapidly becoming apparent that that particular pudding is not very good eating and that a lot of our postmodernist poets sound like each other and are all becoming boring ... [In Thesen's book] the day of rest gives rise to pangs because of its emptiness first, of routine, and second, of traditional meaning. We are supposed to stop the daily grind of things to do something special - to celebrate our connectedness with a higher power. When that belief in the connectedness is gone then rest turns to 'pangs'. (1990; 115)

Grasping for that lost connection, pretending its there, or reproducing it in Human or Poetic form is perma-modernist poetry's solution for postmodern, late-capitalist ills.

## **ACADEMIA and BLACK MOUNTAIN**

Within these ideolectical limits, Academia is also a fantasy site that functions in reviews mainly in contrast with this discourse of a phantasmic Human. Much of what is overtly identified as de-humanising about postmodern poetry - that it is "cerebral" rather than "bodily" for example - has its imagined origin in a phantasmic Academia. As Greg Gatenby writes when reviewing *Death of a Lady's Man* by Leonard Cohen, the Academic is an affront to normal reading practices, patterns of feeling and cognition:

From there he moves to the kind of commentary tendered by especially sententious doctoral students, and ultimately so confuses the reader with

his shifts of tone that only the perfect insomniac (or his friends - or a harassed reviewer) could fail to put the book down in exasperation by midpoint. (78)

It was indeed under the very sign of the scholastic that postmodern poetry entered the Canadian poetic field in a dramatic way. Black Mountain College is the name of the legendary U.S. arts college where Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan and Charles Olson taught for several years. These are the paternal figures whose work had such a determinate influence on the writing of the young TISH group. In the reaction against TISH poetics and community politics "Black Mountain" assumed a temporary, totemic status in this ideolect as a shorthand for bad postmodern poetry and for negative cultural influence invading Canada from the U.S. Milton Acorn, in the same vein of cultural protectionism as Robin Mathews, published an article called "Avoid the Bad Mountain" in the little magazine *Blackfish*. The implications of his article are clear enough from the title alone. Acorn writes:

I shall not say Black Mountain this article, but instead say Bad Mountain; as a comment on what (I think) should be done, and what (I think) should be avoided ... Bill has fallen under the influence of the Bad Mountain, and in most the poems he writes, even today, still is there... Avoid American models ... So when I say AVOID THE BAD MOUNTAIN, what I principally mean is avoid Yankee models.... Do not, repeat *not*, try to found a school of poetry. That's why TISH was such a disaster area. (1972; no pagination)

In the resistance or opposition to the strain, the name takes on extreme, rather predictable, literary resonances. The darkness, the mountain, the foreignness - the influences that come down from this dark Academic place are all evil. The Academic indeed is a phantasmic object of fear, in negatively constitutive relationship with a concept of the ordinary and the Common Reader. As Wynne Francis, after whom Concordia University



has named an "Award for Excellence in the field of Canadian Poetry Studies", writes of Irving Layton:

The book closes with a poem destined for anthologies. The critics may tut-tut all they like about its sentimentality and its archaic rhetoric, but Layton's public, which ranges far wider than academia, will love every word of it. (83)

Sarah Ahmed, in "The Economy of Affect", unravels the emotional structures of contemporary forms of xenophobia and tribalism.

This narrative is far from extraordinary. Indeed, what it shows us is the production of the ordinary. The ordinary is here fantastic. ... The ordinary becomes that which is already under threat by imagined others whose proximity becomes a crime against person as well as place. The ordinary or normative subject is reproduced as the injured party: the one 'hurt' or even damaged by the 'invasion' of others. (118)

The injured party here is often figured as Poetry itself, just as often The Reader. Although most reviewers hold (at least) undergraduate degrees, the "jargon" of Academia corrupts "natural" language and speech, drives the out The Poetic, destroys emotion, is inhumane. Rob Taylor, as we have seen, can only hear a "mega-syllabic disaster". Weyman Chan, sympathetic as he is, fears the "lofty semiotic nightmare" or paints "jargon" as something sinister: "language languishes as mere encryptions which cast very small shadows indeed against the world's passage"(86). Kathy Shaidle notes the how the invasion of foreign influence, in both nationalist and poetic-essentialist terms, empties poetry of life. School is a poetic bummer:

Sentest 'divides his time between Europe and Montreal;' this may explain why these pieces sounded less like poetry than like elevated-yet-empty Euro-style philosophising. Few of these poems really come alive ... much intellectual name-dropping, but not enough heart, soul, or passion. (2008)

## **THE TRADITION**

Shaidle's complaint about "Euro style philosophising" gives evidence of another running contradiction in poetry reviewing: the place of phantasmic Tradition. The role of the Tradition as part of the ideological background is multi-faceted, but directly related in a number of ways to the Common Reader. Like the Common Reader, the Tradition helps structure poetic desire, although in a more parental, police-like way. In many reviews, both Common Readers and Traditions are evoked in the context of normative regulation, and so the performance is in a sense watched by multiple sets of phantom eyes. At least three competing uses of Tradition are common, and like the concepts of readership often appear in the same space, overlapping, contradicting, competing. Linda W. Wagner, author of a recent biography of Sylvia Plath, in a single bristling passage evokes at least three imaginary Traditions:

[1 and 3] Anyone professing to be a 'new' poet today has the usual two routes open to him [sic]. Either he must do what the old masters were doing - organic form, swift image, juxtaposition - and do it better; or he must map a really new course... [2] For every claim to innovation, history provides an earlier example of the new method or theme, as antidote. ... [2 and 3] The modern reader is hard to please. He demands proof that a newly published poet can excel in one of two alternatives. Does Gregory Orr out-Williams Williams and Ignatow, or does he take us in a new direction? ... [3] Given, this truth: that all readers in the past expected from new poets was a fairly consistent voice, some good poems, and a sense of craft. (1974; 89)

From passages such as this, a phantasmic Tradition can be discerned in at least three forms, a set of conceptions discernible in T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent". Tradition is

1. a fantasy trope of audience
2. an implied or named body of texts that constitute the reviewer's (usually implicit) textual orthodoxy

3. synonymous with mimetic, reflective, expressive (easy-to-read)  
poetry - in this sense, "traditional" is what poetry was before its corruption  
by toxins of postmodernity

Wagner evokes Traditions 1 and 3 in the section beginning "Anyone professing",  
Tradition 2 in "For every claim, Traditions 2 and 3 with "The modern reader", Tradition 3  
with "Given".

Prizes, and academic endorsement (ironic in light of the current of fear of  
Academia) appear as a cultural filtration system that separates out certain estimable  
works for canonisation. Apparently, these are the *only* means by which readerships are  
created and legitimacy of whatever kind is won for books. Wagner's Tradition here is,  
like Robert Lecker's, singular, monolithic, complete, while being international in scope.  
During the 1970s international validity seemed to be a pressing issue for Canadian poetry  
reviewers, who would try to imagine Canadian poetry within the framework of an  
international canon. David Carpenter, author of numerous books of fiction and a  
collection of poetry, thinks it important to take a moment in a review of Kroetsch's *Stone  
Hammer Poems* to make a canonic wager: "This is not his finest book. He seems destined  
to be considered by literary historians as primarily a prose-fiction writer" (1976). More  
interesting is Stuart Newton, who adopts a "tough love" position on CanLit, holding it up  
to the light of international scrutiny: "Unless a double standard is applied to their work,  
one standard for traditional English and European literature and another standard for Can  
Lit, then Colombo and Marlatt have not added anything worthwhile to literary tradition"  
(68). As no.2, then, The Tradition is composed of texts that have currency as classics,  
which in itself might be innocuous, except that in many cases the result is blandly

internationalist, museological concept of the literary field. To reiterate John Guillory's point: "There is no other place for this value than the mausoleum of well-wrought urns." Similarly, Charles Lillard imagines the tradition as a stable collection of internationally approved texts, all of which share some quality of greatness. Greatness here is produced as a reliably translatable product. Befitting transnational export, such texts are not marked by eccentricities of localism, or micro-ecological structures of feeling:

Alaska has produced one book ... British Columbia has produced no major poets ... To the southward, *Literature* is in no better condition. A few novels, and one poet. Robinson Jeffers. Jeffers might have been a major figure, if it had not been for his tragic, essentially warped vision. (144 - 145)

The self-publishing imperatives of postmodern poets were developed quite consciously in the face of this pseudo-historicism. Many postmodern poets adopted their own means of publishing, and in practice proposed alternate models of audience-formation. Instead of a Penguin Classics paradigm, they pushed a communitarian, collective, vision and a complex aesthetics of scale that could effectively navigate the local and the transnational. All the qualities Lillard thinks mar greatness - eccentric localism, patois, other readings of literary history - in practice gained international readerships for Canadian poetry and poets.

Like the Common Reader, however, the Tradition also works in reviews as a scrutinising audience, as a parental literary chaperone. Here (Traditions 1 and 3), The Tradition is a gallery of phantomic eyes watching over, and policing the work of reviewer or poet. It is, in an Althusserian sense, the voice of aesthetic conscience. In no.3 the Common Reader's attention is the territory at stake. Traditional means in accepted styles; postmodern poets often work quite consciously to develop new styles. In this vein, the

Tradition can be the basis of a position-taking. Tony Tremblay can praise Louis Dudek, seeing him in the Traditional line of intellectual types: "The only intellectuals worth anything are Virgillian - generous with guidance, intolerant of folly, and brought to sickness by the tragic" (1999; 15).

More recently, the Tradition has been used as a basis of a performed outrage. A reviewer stages a performance of outrage for the watching Tradition, siding with the tradition *against* the poet under review, a kind of security guard keeping cultural treasures safe of poetry safe from their greatest threats - other poets. A reviewer sides, in aesthetic outrage, with the Tradition *against* the poet under review, as if guarding territory. Burt Almon, author of 6 books of poetry, growls that:

[Crystal] Hurdle's verse is undistinguished, the best images coming from Plath's work in a kind of pastiche. Those battered old symbols, Ken and Barbie, are dragged out of the toy box to make a feminist point. Taste aside, Ezra Pound once observed that technique is the test of sincerity, and Ted and Sylvia fails that test. This poet has not earned the right to address Plath as 'Sivvy'. ("Sincerity")

Almon here is taking special care to separate the good materials of a "true" (here, unpolitical, non-feminist) poetry from the marred-by-power "feminist" materials. His protectionist project is to keep 'bad' poetry from 'polluting' the great. Somewhere in a cultural afterlife, Almon's good deed is noted. As Phyllis Webb writes: "For [any anthologist] there is a question: have I included a Fredegond Shove and left out a T.S. Eliot?" (150) Reviewer Zachariah Wells, thirty years later, takes a bullet for master W.B. Yeats:

There is no dynamism to writing like this, no verbal dexterity, no powerful rhythm, no imagery or metaphor, nothing at all to lift it above the humdrum of quotidian banality the book represents. But ya gotta marvel at the naïve nerve to quote Yeats in the midst of such drek! ("Griffin")

Both speak of essentialist, facile distinction between good and bad poetry, distinctions that treat the fact of canonic status as a given, expressive merely of the works inherent quality (and quality = veracity) rather than a long social and institutional process. As Raymond Williams notes in "The Creative Mind", what here is asserted as evaluative rigor, then, demanding that Canadian literature be "competitive" in a transnational, transhistorical literary marketplace, is merely an "easy but false solution to the problem of quality in art" (1966; 29).

One of the underlying, unstated structural premises here is that the Tradition, as such, is singular, unitary, and has been agreed to on general consensus. Both the examples above lack any sign of awareness that Yeats and Plath are not valued equally, uniformly across the literary field, meanwhile smoothing the ideological conflicts within the poetry being protected. If it is protection, it is the kind of protection that went into restoring Uccello: scrubbing them of their colour.

## **POETRY**

Although the processes of value formation and canonisation, and the contingencies of value have been illuminated by Barbara Herrnstein Smith and John Guillory among others, Tradition as an ideological phantasm has not been studied to my knowledge in terms of its implicit temporalities and spatialities. As might be apparent from the sweeping normative assumptions implied above, these temporalities are not the uneven, differentiated temporalities of daily life, but something more like Bakhtin's "adventure time". The elements in the Tradition are essentially mythologised - hence the museum like circle of protection around the treasured Poets

T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" should be read also for the temporality it provides for fantasies of the Tradition, because by extension it is the temporal frame of perma-modernist poetry. Eliot writes

the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole life of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. ... The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. (499)

This supra-synchronic (all of literature as a single "moment") temporality is becomes in fantasy not only the time of Tradition, but of poetry itself, producing a phantasmic Poetry as part of the ideological structure.

As Jameson argues in "The Barrier of Time", the "ideological illusion" of Poetry as supra-synchronic pushes poetry into the a-chronic space of mythology.

The more successful the historiographic construction [of the synchronic] - the conviction that everything is of a piece, that the relations between existences and facts are much stronger than their possible relationship to what is no longer and what is not yet, that actuality is a seamless web and the past (or tradition) a mere intellectual construct in the present - the stronger this case is made intellectually, the more inevitable is our entry into a Parmenidean realm in which some eternal system reigns around us like a noon beyond time only faintly perfumed with the odour of heated plangs and informed by the echo of cicadas and the distant and incomprehensible memory of death... the more airtight the synchronic system laid in place all around us, the more surely history itself evaporates in the process, and along with it any possibility of political agency or collective anti-systemic praxis. (89)

Here Jameson's treatment of utopian time productively re-opens the concept of fantasy. Poetry as a fantasy works in competing temporalities: as phantasmic background it is the Parmenidean realm of Tradition; but also as object of longing, a fantasy in the

vulgar sense of "wish-fulfilment". Poetry, in both senses, is something overtly, and always, "dreamed of" by reviewers, as "aspired to" by poets. In the entire history of poetics, few have expressed certainty that the strawberry cake of Poetry exists. Like an hallucination, the thing appears always hovering in view, yet ungraspable. Poetry, as fantasy, is an absent ideal (where there is significant slippage between Tradition as fantasy and Poetry as fantasy) a present but uncertain phenomenon, and a kind of "place" set in the mythical temporality of Eliot's "ideal order". There is a deep structural tension between the everyday as compositional, representational field, and the "infinite" or "universal" towards which the Common Reader is supposed to be buoyed *through* these particularities.

In "The Creative Mind" Raymond Williams identifies this very tension; somewhere in the uneasy compromise between Romanticism and modernism of the bureaucratic kind Eliot professes, the sensibility of the contemporary Canadian permanentist poetry reviewer is generated. Williams quotes from Shelley's "Defense of Poetry" to make the distinction. Certain other passages make clearer the tensions Shelley is marking for poetry within the temporalities and spatialities of everyday life. For reviewers now, the local everyday detail is a gateway to the infinitude of utopic time, the Tradition itself, the phantasmic Human:

Poets ... were called in the earlier epochs of the world legislators or prophets: a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters. For he [sic] not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time. ... A Poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not. (341 - 342)



Poetry, here participates in and observes the everyday but only to the extent that it "withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things ... [and] purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being" (in Williams 10). Modernism largely retains this paradigm of poetry (and art) as extraordinary, transformative. As Liliane Welch writes: "the violence of nature, the pressure of history are [sic] sung within the context of a form which guarantees an ultimate harmony, and which preserves at is transcends" (112). although Eliot transforms the mythical place of Shelley's "antique land " into the Tradition itself. No more Homeric battlefields, no more journeys through infernal realms: an Eliotic Tradition becomes the mythical, timeless setting for the canonic adventures of the phantomic Poet and reviewer.

It is in this context that I have read the strangely stilted *language* or *style* Canadian poetry reviews. Why so many reviewers will choose an phrases like "volume of verse" instead of "book of poetry" (or use "latest effort"; "deft lyricism"; "polished in craft"; "dutifully ostentatious"; "weighty tome"; "standard of excellence"; "passionate fervour"; words like "one"; "lamentable"; "posterity"; "accolade") has been the most frustrating riddle throughout my research. Now I can finally see it as part of the construction of Poetry as a fantasy, mythical "place" and ideal, absent object, and Tradition as all the things above named: audience, setting, and chaperone. "Poetry", then, is visited by reviewers. The style adopted is, then, a kind of (a)historical literary travel writing.

Reading a passage like the following, from the same Greg Gatenby review quoted above, is like hearing the tin swords of the Society for Creative Anachronism clinking in the fields of a university campus - lived, but somehow far from lived reality:

Canada's senior anthologist [A.J. M. Smith] is also ... a very highly respected poet in some quarters, although kudos for his poetry have never been as overwhelming as they have been for other versifiers .... I also suspect though that the reading of Smith's poetry, like Guinness, is an acquired taste, and like that noble brew may be deemed less than essential by otherwise regular imbibers of literature. (1979; 119)

Or as Patrick Lane, "the best poet of his generation," ([patricklane.ca](http://patricklane.ca)) writes when reviewing the literary presses of Saskatchewan in 1981:

Literature is that creative work whose interest has a permanent, universal nature. ... What is basic to any literature is a desire for excellence and a refusal to accept less. ... While [local] support fosters writing, creates community, and brings along newer, younger poets and short-story writers, it can also be destructive in not making enough demands for excellence. What is needed is honest criticism. Critics, publishers, editors, and writers themselves must take risks and be willing to deal openly and constructively with what is happening and what has happened. ... These major changes [in the Saskatchewan presses] indicate a new vigour, and act of faith in western literature. (52 - 56)

To Raymond Williams, this privileging of art has its historical place, but the future of art and the humanities lies in other directions that rediscover the links between "ordinary social life" and creativity. Writing in 1966, he may not have been able to guess how far certain movements like Fluxus and the Situationists would go in again opening up everyday life to an aesthetic gaze:

To see art as a particular process in the general human process of creative discovery and communication is at once a redefinition of the status of art and the finding of means to link it with ordinary social life. The traditional definition of art as 'creative' was profoundly important, as an emphasis, but when this was extended to a contrast between art and ordinary experience [as it was under Romanticism] the consequences were very damaging. In modern industrial societies, particularly, it came to be felt that art would be lost unless it was given this special status. (1966; 37)

### **PART 3:**

## **"ONE OF THE FEW GENUINE REMAINING HARDWARE STORES" : THE DISCOURSE OF CRAFT**

### **PREAMBLE: METAPHOR AND IDEOLOGY**

Even outside the restricted field of poetry reviewing, there is often a spontaneous ideological equation of poetry with *craft*. Books on poetry aimed at seducing a mass audience not only reinforce this association, through using it as a gateway concept turn it into a fundamental assumption for many that many. Poetry continues to change, yet titles of books about poetry remain the same: *Real Sofistikashun : Essays On Poetry And Craft* (2006); *The Verse Book Of Interviews : 27 Poets On Language, Craft & Culture* (2005); *On Poetry And Craft : Selected Prose Of Theodore Roethke* (2001); *The Art and Craft of Poetry* (2001); *The Craft of Writing Poetry* (2000). A search in the database of the magazine *Canadian Literature* (founded in 1959) using the string *craft + poetry + review* returns an astonishing 23,139 results.

The equation POETRY IS CRAFT is what cognitive scientists George Lakoff and Andrew Goatly call a "metaphoric theme" or "root analogy" (Goatly 25). In his Marxian revisions of Lakoff's work in "Ideology and Metaphor", Goatly provides a few common sense examples of such themes: POWER IS HIGH; SEX IS VIOLENCE; TIME IS MOVEMENT; TIME IS MONEY; QUALITY IS MONEY/WEALTH. Goatly reports that in cognitive science, theories of latent metaphor in language, including Lakoff's, have tended to be based on a dialectic of "living" (deployed) vs "dead" (embedded) metaphors. The psychological premise at work (recalling Viktor Shlovsky's concept of literature as a device of

*estrangement*) that a metaphor "dies" in language as users become habituated to it; it begins this journey as a brilliant comparison of two seemingly disparate things, and gradually it loses its effective shine. Yet, in "Metaphors, Idiom and Ideology" Michael Billig and Katie MacMillan argue that this model "is too simple to account for the complex, rhetorical processes by which a metaphor might pass from a striking, novel comparison into an unthinking idiom" (460). Outlining a theory of how metaphor passes into idiom and thereby becomes constitutive of ideology, they elaborate: "There is another way that idiom can contribute to ideology. The metaphorical vehicle may not simply wear down, or run over, the topic. But the topic can ground the vehicle." (460) The passage from idiom to ideology is achieved in an interpellative process of iterative repetition. (We can think of *ideolect* as relatively fixed collection of idiomatic metaphors, concepts and tropes.) This iterative process, however, does not simply "wear down" or "kill" the metaphors: instead, it embeds them more firmly in linguistic practice. There, as ritual forms, the metaphors occupy a place between the living and the dead, as it were, both unconsciously habitual in use and actively extended (given the "kiss of life", as Billig and MacMillan write) in new, productive iterations. In the practice of any ideolect, there is a dynamic relationship between "unthinking" use of the root analogy, wherein, as Billig and MacMillan write, they are used "literally rather than in a consciously metaphorical way", and the active extension of its logical premises. They continue: "One might say that the living metaphor starts dying once it begins living within language." (460)

Within the restricted, linguistic economy of poetry reviewing, this spontaneous ideological POETRY IS CRAFT analogy has developed into an elaborate descriptive

lexicon. Because it occupies a place in the linguistic foreground in clearly marked adjectives, qualifiers verbs and nouns, crafts discourse is the easiest strand to identify in critique, and also the easiest for a reviewer to unreflexively rely on. It is, however, also the least contestable because it is the most naturalised; paradoxically the most completely dead, and the most fully alive. Like the everyday embedded metaphors that Goatly identifies, POETRY IS CRAFT goes unrecognised as an analogical premise. But consider some common terms used to characterise poets and poetry: accuracy, apprentice, balance, carve, clarity, concision, consistency, control, craft, fine, finish, forge, form, grind, hone, integrity, job, mastery, materials, overwrought, precision, purpose, polish, refined, sharpness, shine, skill, strength, sturdiness, task, technique, toil, trade, tune, work. All of these commonplaces arise from the metaphorical implications of *craft*. In their habitual use, the metaphorical terms take on a self-evident, literal meaning.

### **THE CRAFTS DISCOURSE**

It is possible to organise a critical reading of crafts discourse in the ideolect of poetry reviews around four main principles. 1) The deep ambivalence in reviewing about issues of labour / work, particularly insofar as forms of labour function as markers of identity and class position and insofar as exchange value is accumulated relative to the labour expended. 2) An equally deep ambivalence about class positions as such. Reviewers have constantly shifting / shifty notions about the class positions of poets and readers, and, no less, an obsessive uncertainty about which class interests are served by the production of poetry, and even by the practices of reading itself. 3) The tendency, as outlined above, to describe poetry and language using terms that metaphorically

substantiate both. A curiously rigid, rather than rigorous, reviewing project seems to require an object more stable than the phantomic non-thing of poetry. As a result, a kind of fantasy empiricism becomes a structural element of the idelect.

Without the ground of bodily experience that Lakoff Mark Johnson argue in *Metaphors We Live By* root other commonsense analogies, reviewers creatively reiterate the analogy of craft by projecting substantial, empirical character on words "themselves" as well as on certain formal strategies. In many cases, the poem is imagined as a fixed, definite object. The poem is a craft object rather than a socio-linguistic event that emerges from complex interrogative meeting of reader, context, and publishing form. Certain haunting questions are never far out of mind: What is a poem? What kind of "work" is writing poetry? How can a reader be sure about the poem's character? What are the limits of poetry's facticity? What is the relative class position of the poet? What position does poetry have in the hierarchy of cultural forms? Given that poetry is under (if not un-) read by a large public, on what experiential grounds can a reviewer base claims for poetry's cultural importance? The tensions these questions emerge from is structural: their irresolution is a constitutive feature of the idelect. (As per Derrida, the "spectres of Marx" continue to haunt the bourgeois public sphere, unexorcised even by the fall of Soviet communism, or China's shift into hyper state-capitalism.) The passage of these terms from idelect to ideology is made by productive iteration, a self-interpellation that occurs in the process of writing (and in revising) reviews. To take up an argument made by Stuart Hall in "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism Without Guarantees", idelect "provides the repertoire of categories which will be used, in thought" (44). Idelect becomes, in reiterative practice, the *material* foundation of a

literary ideology. Ideology, however, is not a closed circuit. As Hall asserts: "The paradigm of perfectly closed, perfectly predictable, systems of thought is religion or astrology, not science" (45). Despite powerful centrifugal forces at work because of the restricted terms of the idelect, in even the most strictly evaluative project, multiple discursive frames inevitably overlap, contradict each other. There is ideological leakage, as it were, excess and overflow. As Michael Davidson writes, there is a "proliferation of discursive frames, 'social heteroglossia,' and their interaction, 'dialogization'. The active interchange among these levels ... [which] reflect a similar dialogue among social codes (ideologemes) occurring in the world at large" (144).

In this sense, reviewers' local answers to any of the implicit or explicit structural questions become integral sites of struggle in the positions struggles of the poetry field, struggles internal to the field but which parallel (or even parody) social struggles at large. As with the variant fantasies of the Common Reader, there is not a stable formula in how these questions are answered by reviewers, but they are generally answered within the limited vocabulary of crafts discourse. The determining effects of the idelect then, require, as Stuart Hall argues,

Understanding 'determinacy' in terms of setting of limits, the establishment of parameters, the defining of the space of operations, the concrete conditions of existence, the 'givenness' of social practices, rather than in terms of the absolute predictability of particular outcomes. (45)

## **CLASS POSITIONS**

The various figurations of the Common Reader force class issues into view. In the phantasm of the Common Reader these are generally either projections of the reviewer's own class assumptions, or expressions of what appears to be flagrant class longing. The

class of the Common Reader, seen most clearly in the figure of the retired engineer, is sometimes also the class with which the reviewer longs for poetry to be associated.

Overlapping these ideolectical strands, the class question as it manifests in crafts discourse is more specifically: what class position is held by the phantasmic Poet? The issue of the Poet's relative class position is usually answered indirectly by the reviewer's specific conceptualisation of poetry as a form of work. The answer to the underlying question - What is the poet's labour? - is itself an answer to the broader class question: Is the phantasmic Poet a skilled labourer, a member of a cultural bourgeoisie, of a clerical-managerial class, or part of a quasi-religious, quasi-spiritual autonomous elite? As sociologist John Myles summarises Bourdieu's linguistics, language practice is

just another form of more general social practices of [class] distinction... the 'language market' ... should itself be seen as having been structured by past struggles over the value of its different areas of practice... Thus the character of a class's trajectory depends on how a class fares in its struggles over value in the linguistic field. (883 - 885)

This shiftiness about class is as much part of an ongoing class struggle as it is symptomatic of poetry's uncertain position in the hierarchy of cultural forms. "Poetry" survives broadly as a uniquely honorific category - as when a compliment is paid to something as "poetic" - while remaining a culturally marginal practice - the deluxe "under-achieving commodity" (Derksen). What Hal Foster calls the "lobotomy" of the cultural "brow system" (6) has even made poetry's position on the brow registry uncertain; is poetry high-, middle-, low- or no-brow?

Poetry's afterlife as an honorific category for many Canadian reviewers appears to depend on its association with highbrow cultural values (as Raymond Williams noted in "The Creative Imagination") while the Poet's class position may not be as clear. In the



dominant Poet as Craftsman fantasy, however, there is an acute bias towards conceptualising poetry as a masculine form of work. (I will use the masculine suffix *-man* as the fantasy itself is dominantly masculine.) In *Writing Degree Zero*, Roland Barthes lightly traces the historical origins of these positional anxieties and suggests how they changed cultural concepts (and fantasies) of writing as a cultural practice. Within the bourgeois public sphere, an empiricist culture of trade and bureaucracy, around 1850, Barthes writes, literature “begins to face a problem of self-justification” (1968; 62). In Barthes' view literature re-secures its cultural place not by rejecting the given terms (the radical move that many postmodern poets would eventually make), but by totally incorporating them into the phantasmic, linguistic apparatus of literary culture. The class status of the writer and the status of writing *as a form of labour* become defining issues in positions struggles within the poetry field.

According to Barthes, this incorporation of dominant terms leads literary culture eventually to incorporate the logic of capital, and many structural aspects of today's literary ideology are produced. The image, and lexicon, are familiar:

There begins now to grow up an image of the writer as a craftsman who shuts himself away in some legendary place, like a workman operating at home and who roughs out, cuts, polishes, and sets his form exactly as a jeweller extracts art from his material, devoting to his work regular hours of solitary effort. ... Writing is now to be saved not by virtue of what it exists for, but what it has cost. Labour replaces genius as a value, so to speak; there is a kind of ostentation in claiming to labour long and lovingly over the form of one's work. There even arises, sometimes, a preciousness of conciseness (for laboring at one's material usually means reducing it). (1968; 63)

This "image of the writer" is, of course, the fantasy figure in the ideological background, the Poet making goods for the Common Reader. This fantasy, as it persists in poetry reviewing in Canada, retains its strongly masculinist bias: Poet as *Craftsman*. More

generally, however, Canadian poetry reviews are exactly premised on a figure of Poet as a skilled worker. The "job of the poet" is a demanding, but rewarding (not financially: symbolically, spiritually, culturally), and respectable form of work - if done respectably, of course. Poetry as work is conceived as a form of skilled labour. Other class concepts of the Poet are defined negatively against the dominant concept of Poet as Craftsman. The "legendary place" Barthes mentions is normally the site of the craftsman's toil (the workshop or studio), or of the reward for such labour ("Canada's Parnassus" or the tastefully furnished livingroom of the retired engineer). And here, both on grounds of work and exchange, in the fantasy of empiricism and poetic facticity, language is increasingly described as if it is a substance, a material, that the craftsman can bend to his/her mastery to produce the hardened cultural artifact or the gleaming machine of the poem. In the ideological imagination, the craftsman can also appear to occupy an ambiguous class position: well-paid (the elite of the imaginary working class), skilled (educated but practical), producer of luxury goods (specialised commerce dependent on the demands of an imaginary upper class). That is, the Poet as Craftsman is not just a node of authenticist resistance to the postmodern condition, but provides an ideal ideological compromise within that condition.

## **A GENUINE HARDWARE STORE**

Reviewing a selected poems by prolific Maritime poet and publisher Fred

Cogswell, J.K. Snyder imagines the scene of Cogswell's poetry in crafty terms:

The poetry is not always beautiful, nor often even very handsome, but there is a solidity of execution which grows on the reader and an unpretentious seriousness that commands respect. The pleasure one gets from this book is quite like that one has in finding one of the few

remaining genuine hardware stores: a quiet, darkish place, with a settled sense of work and notion of order that honours the idea of craft, knowing as it does, that all serious craft is in the service of the beautiful, and, as far as we can make it, the true. (1991; 156)

"Pleasure" here already marks the social territory of poetry as narrow; poetry is from the outset instrumentalised away from other possible cultural politics. By the time the word "craft" actually appears, that metaphor and its ramifications have already been evoked in multiple ways, most clearly in the elaborately extended metaphor of the hardware store. *Craft* is evoked indirectly in the term "genuine" (i.e. authentic) itself, the rarity of the legendary place "one of the few", tradesman's labour in the "settled sense of work", the humanist and perma-modernist paradigm of artistic form, and poem as artifact: "notion of order". Aside from the issues of authenticity and verity "genuine" puts in play, the premises announced with *pleasure* are that poetry operates socially not as a critical social force, but as a stabilising social force. It is a highly rarefied, subjective and individualised form of entertainment. As Michael Davidson claims: "the reader may only witness, in a passive sense, the author's testimony" (143). Poetry is an art of individual pleasure, of (perhaps stoic) consent and acquiescence. The phrase "few remaining genuine" positions poetry in a sentimentalised cultural past, its practitioners implicitly heroized as part of a vanishing way of life or disappearing social relations. A structural tension arise here as to where poetry fits into conditions of life in postmodernity. The implicit comparison is with a largely phantasmic past, reflecting Jameson's own comparison of modernist depth (Van Gogh) against postmodern vacuity (Warhol). Snyder marks an ideological distance from postmodernity: the phantasmic past is where all things genuine reside, and the present is a time of truth-threatening inauthenticity. Poetry's practitioners like Cogswell are authentic modernist, individualist hold-outs

against the equalising, flattening tide. Nostalgic reviewing such as this often has attendant neo-conservative values, as it does here: love of order, and sober seriousness, virtuous labour; the poet's "settled sense of work". Because Snyder leaves his definition "the beautiful" unstated, his already implicit definitions (pleasure, sobriety, seriousness, work, order, authenticity, masculinity) fill that gap: a highly ideological manoeuvre, regardless of Snyder's intent. (It is an odd contradiction that he starts by saying that Cogswell's poetry is not beautiful, then yet sees Cogswell's craft as being "in the service of" beauty.) The hesitating clause "as far as we can see it" seals this notion of the beautiful into the sarcophagus of inadvertent pun: poetic-emotional "truth", and a carpenter's "true".

As Jürgen Habermas argues in "Modernity - An Unfinished Project", the tense relationship with modernity visible in reviews like this may be read in light of modernity's unfulfilled promises. Even as the accelerations of cultural forms and technological means continues, an observer can lament that "the project of modernity has not yet been fulfilled". In Habermas' words "the disillusionment with the very failures of those programs [of modernisation, education, science and objectivity] that called for a negation of art and philosophy has come to serve as a pretence for conservative positions" (13 - 14). David Solway's retired engineer and Snyder's hardware store evidence that, as Jürgen Habermas argues, for many conservative and neoconservative writers:

These experiments [of modernism and postmodernism] have served to bring back to life, and to illuminate all the more glaringly, exactly those structures of art which they were meant to dissolve. They gave a new legitimacy, as ends in themselves, to appearance as the medium of fiction, to the transcendence of the artwork over society, to the concentrated and planned character of artistic production as well as the special cognitive status of judgements of taste. (11)

The gendered language is also entirely reflective of the idelect. Although no "man" is explicitly present except poet Fred Cogswell and reviewer J.K. Snyder, the masculine associations of the hardware store remain strong in our current ideological moment. Here the Poet, subtly figured as a carpenter, is more likely to evoke Milton Acorn than Margaret Avison, Ken Babstock than Karen Solie. A sentence later in the review, Snyder has a moment self-reflection about this lurking bias, but he recuperates the ideological overflow even before the end of his statement: "I suppose it is man's poetry, but one of those rare men strong enough to love and to absorb the hurt in loving." (156). The postmodern male is implicitly contrasted to the perma-modern male, the former effete, weak, unserious. Beyond the programmed gender of the carpenter, extensions of the craft metaphor into descriptive language in the rest of this review, as elsewhere, are clearly masculinist. Cogswell's poetry shows "solidity of execution"; "commands respect"; is "strong"; shows that he has "mastered" his material and tends to be "bigger and better" than most. This rare genuine hardware store is indeed the site of such manly poetry, and such limiting ideology.

### **TROUBLES WITH CRAFT**

If my premise is that ideology is not a matter of "distortion" of a true seeing, it is worth asking if I'm implying that the POETRY IS CRAFT equation is false? The answer is primarily that it is not a "false" view, but in reiteration produces a specific ideological position about poetry and value. Yet why *not* use crafts metaphors to describe poetry? Are they not pedagogically useful? Why is *craft* a troubled and troubling metaphorical premise for a poetics?

The answer comes out of the model of iterative linguistic ideology and the production of value. The issues at stake are not so much of "representation" but of means, use and material consequence. I understand the production of ideology as an iterative process, extending from both social ritual, as in Althusser's adoption of Pascal. Althusser quotes: "Kneel and you will believe". Language use is a social ritual in this precise sense. The sheer repetition of this fairly determinate set of concepts, tropes, and terms produces ideological positions - knees bent before the admirable poem. In Althusser's formula, iterative ritual produces *belief*. In the cultural sphere, in poetry reviewing, belief is exactly synonymous with the structure of *value*. The cultural problem with POETRY IS CRAFT, then, is that its continued reiteration produces value for certain forms, modes and practices of poetry. This is what makes Canadian poetry reviews surprisingly predictable, even though the space given to reviews is not actively censored, the range of opinions *possible* in the space is narrowed drastically by the linguistic vehicle that produces those opinions. Reviewers do not think or feel precisely alike - contra the usual reading of Althusser, ideology never forms a perfect circle - but the dominant reviewing idelect is evaluative in its premises, with a very low capacity for bringing into relief the complexities of readerly (or writerly) experience. And so complexity is lost in favour of judgement or descriptive poetic plot-summaries, summaries articulated in the reviewer's evaluative idelect. *Craft*, in particular, as a metaphorical premise produces pseudo-empiricist psychology that must read the literary values it produces not only as non-contingent but as substantially inherent in the poem as object ('well-wrought urn') and in language itself. It works to make the sign, as Voloshinov argues, uniaccentual, to remove it from the contingencies of discourse into an imaginary courtroom of "objectivity". With

the affective complexities of reading muted, the tensions around cultural positioning and hierarchy that might have otherwise transformed reviewing practices (as they have in contemporary art) are instrumentalised instead through *craft* as *reactionary* positional issues in the poetry field.

Reviewers use *crafts* discourse not only as literal, but as self-evident. Yet the heavily metaphorical premises and logic of *craft* are perpetually in contradiction with the subject of the discourse (poetry). Craft is not precise enough or complex enough to account for the compositional operations or work of making poetry, i.e. for *poetics*. Take, for example, the base word itself: *craft*. What can it mean to praise or denigrate the "craft" of vastly different perma-modern and post-modern poets? d.h. sullivan, for example, can write appreciatively of postmodernist Lionel Kearns: "Next to all this hard-nosed work poetry, Lionel Kearns' reflective approach to things is soft, personal, almost romantic at times. Some of the old Kearns' standards have been reprinted here, including such masterpieces as 'The Birth of God' and 'Transport', both of which show his superb awareness of language and craft" (134). Twenty-four years later for Neil Querengesser can write of a perma-modernist poet Karen Shenfeld that she: "[Karen] Shenfeld has remarkable poetic gifts and has clearly worked hard at perfecting her craft. She attends to the finer details of diction, patterns of sound and image, and subtle rhythms and phrasing that result in many polished poetic gems" (129-131). Although the idelect is habituated as the specialised, correct language for addressing poetry, there is a steady aporetic leakage whenever the moment comes to "deliver the goods" as reviewers say. Something in this tension, this irresolution, actually sustains this idelect as a common sense of

poetry reviewing, as sometimes the only absolutely clear position that emerges from a review will be the answer to the quality referendum: good or bad?

What does *craft* propose for a poem? I will approach the answer in reverse. It is difficult to miss poem-as-artifact implication in Cleanth Brooks' famous critical trope of the "well-wrought urn". At this ideological stage, the well-wrought urn, at least, declares itself as metaphorical, so it is easy to treat it as "mere" metaphor. Brook's adoption of the urn as figure is in fact an ideal example of a the creative extension of the metaphorical theme POETRY IS CRAFT, already "dead" when Brooks published his book in 1947. *Craft*, as an elaborated principle, functions more subtly: it can only apply to writing practices aimed at producing *repeatable* effects or functions, functions or effects far more specific than the historical avant-garde's call for the *new*, or even Russian formalism's call for the *defamiliarisation* effect. (Remember what the ubiquitous *urn* did for the perma-modernist concept of form: form as a simple vessel for content.) In this context it is possible to better see the relationship of New Criticism to crafts discourse. Brooks' project (along with Empson, Wimsatt, and Beardsley) was in fact to instrumentalise literary criticism as a commodified form of technical expertise that could be reliably transmitted through the regulatory organs of academia. And there is a further step: at the limits of its logic, *craft* creates value for certain types of poems, those which perform Poem as a fantasy and value (here: *poetry* as an honorific category), and as genre. Those are the types of poems, the perma-modernist, that most easily accrue cultural capital, a cycle of "success" that is self-perpetuating.

A comparison of an expanded, postmodern poetics with a reductive theory of genre can further illuminate the limits of this logic. Compared to a poem, there are



comparatively stable, material concerns on which to base a judgement of, say, a rocking chair or a table. A rocking chair is good if it allows a person to comfortably rock. Tables, cupboards, jars, cars, well-wrought urns - the functionality of these crafted objects usually supersedes their symbolic value. Unlike poetry, and especially unlike postmodern poetry, their quality can be ascribed in terms of repetition of the same action, effect, or function. The chair has to rock every time, the cupboard door has to open smoothly, the sauce should be thick but not too thick, etc. A craftsman, properly speaking, is an expert artisan, a skilled worker, when he/she can make more or less the same object or effect every time.

POETRY IS CRAFT, with the force of its reiteration in reviews, creates comparatively specific, non-contingent, obligations of qualitative intent. As a metaphorical principle in evaluation it creates value for certain kinds of poetry (postmodernist), generating cultural capital for certain types of poets and their corresponding positions in the cultural field. It also shifts the Poet into the trades, as it were, whether it is Carmine Starnino with his essay "Canadian Poets Learn Your Trade" or, less overtly, in Sheldon Currie's mixed appreciation of David W. McFadden: "Nevertheless there are some excellent poems in this book and anyone who can write an excellent poem can write more excellent poems" (111). Postmodern poetry that contradicts these terminological boundaries becomes, *by definition*, "difficult", "inaccessible" or "illegible". That is to say, in the terms of the idelect, that it cannot accrue any value. The only literary modes that could be usefully described in terms of *craft*, when the implied logic is pursued, then, are tightly generic ones: romance novels, westerns, detective. To press *craft* on poetry is to press poetry towards the conditions of highly generic forms of

literature, which contradicts the project of postmodern poetics. As Charles Altieri argues, the situational contingency of value becomes a compositional premise: "Value must be rediscovered, not recreated, and this is the challenge accepted by postmodern poetry" (617). To contrast, reviewer Alex Good (who, unusually, is prolific reviewer of poetry but hasn't published a book of his own) offers, as a joke, the dominant generic formula in a review of the poetry collection *Americana* by John Updike:

Not all poetry is difficult. One of the biggest trends in contemporary poetry, for example, has been the rise of anecdotal poetry that speaks in plain language about everyday occurrences. It usually presents a slice of life rounded off with a metaphor (this is poetry, after all) that comes in at the end like a punch line. We might call it observational poetry, composed in the spirit of a Seinfeld monologue, but usually not as funny. ("Americana")

Middlebrow, accessible, narrative, ordinary, representational, metaphorical, epiphanic: the "trend" Good mentions started long before 1961 (my date for the postmodern turn in Canadian poetry) and shows no sign of waning. In 2007 the Governor General's Award for poetry was awarded to Don Domaski's book *All Our Wonder Unavenged*, the previous year to John Pass' *Stumbling in the Bloom*; both of these books tidily fulfil Good's genre formula.

There is indeed evidence in some reviews of poetic knowledge being understood in terms of totally instrumental rhetorical techniques. Poets who have not mastered the techniques, and who do not use them with specific instrumental intent are chastised. The iterative interpellation-in-action is visible in a review of Mari-Lou Rowley's book *Viral Suite*. In a short passage, the reviewer moves from a concept of poetry as speculative knowledge into a cautioning the poet against speculation, against writing poetry without clear instrumental-authorial intent:

Science and poetry both try to fathom the universe, to come to terms, through physics and metaphysics respectively, with the paradox that we humans can experience finite portions of the infinite. Artistically, the combination is tempting: science is brimming with good metaphors. Science ... astounds with its symmetry, its connectedness, the way even curved lines lead somewhere and affect other lines. Poetry, too, hinges on relationships and intersections; language receives energy, changes course, discovers its potential. The danger with poetry, however, as my father likes to say, is that if you don't know where you're going, you might very well end up somewhere else. ("Viral")

Clearly, a poet should only have just so much negative capability (Keats) - too much puts him/her at risk of being unreasonable. Why would that be fearsome about ending up "somewhere else" in poetic composition unless the poet is mandated to know what the goal is before starting the process?

## **POET AS CRAFTSMAN**

At least four underlying factors are at work. Poetry and art at large are cultural sites for collective longings, or "fantasies" in the popular sense of wish-fulfilment, of unalienated forms of labour. Analysing the figure of the scientist in science fiction novels in "Towards Dialectical Criticism", Jameson uncovers the same tendency amplified:

these works ... rather openly express the mystique of the scientist: and by that I refer ... to a kind of collective folk-dream about the life-style of the scientist himself: he doesn't do *real* work (yet power is his and social status as well), his remuneration is not monetary or at the very least money seems no object, there is something fascinating about his laboratory (the home workshop magnified to institutional dimensions, a combination of factory and clinic), about the way he works nights (he isn't bound by routine or the eight-hour day) ... There is, moreover, the suggestion of a return to older modes of work organisation: to the more personal and psychologically satisfying world of the guilds, in which the older scientist is the master and the younger one the apprentice, in which the daughter of the older man becomes naturally enough the symbol of the transfer of functions. And so forth: these traits may be indefinitely enumerated and elaborated. What I want to convey is that ultimately none of this has anything to do with science itself, but is rather a distorted reflection of our

own feelings and dreams about *work* alienated and nonalienated: it is a wish-fulfilment that takes as its object a vision of ideal or what Marcuse would call 'libidinally gratifying' work. ... (62 Jameson's emphases)

I would extend Jameson's analysis by asserting further that the kind of "folk-dream" is a structural component of literary ideology, and of cultural ideology at large. The cultural position described here crosses not only the divisions in the poetry field, but even the disciplines themselves; a dream of flight from the oppressions of the wage-contract, expressed elsewhere as gambling addictions, the mania for lotteries, and celebrity-watching. Thus a problem of ideology in its troubled original sense of "false-consciousness" may arise as reviewers reiterate the terms of craft. Poets and their poet-reviewers, as the "slave over their line endings" (citing reviewer Shane Neilson), can imagine themselves in a distinctive solidarity with other skilled workers. with bricklayers, pipelayers, concrete finishers, weavers and carpenters. Poetry's always-incomplete process of self-justification is a dominant issue feeding these anxieties about poetry-making as work. Crafts discourse in reviews, then, pressures poets to "get a real job!". Even when "pleasure" is the putative base of a poetics, it is usually the pleasure of the Sabbath: fully "earned" with the sensual restraint of sweaty diligence.

In 2005, *Brick* magazine published a poetics statement by poet Don Paterson called "The Dark Art of Poetry" that is premised on confidently job-essentialist statements about poetry as work. (Note the crafty title for a magazine styled as internationalist, cosmopolitan and friendly-elitist, that is to say: educated middle-brow.) Seeking a sense of social strength, cultural pertinence, and self-justification, he suggest that poets will find this in neo-guildhood:

Only plumbers can plumb, roofers roof, and drummers drum. Only poets can write poetry. Restoring the science of verse-making might restore our

self-certainty in this matter, and naturally resurrect a guild that would soon find it had some secrets worth preserving. (21)

At first there might seem to be here a connection with notions of coterie that have attracted many postmodern poets - the difference is in emphasis rather than on reception but on *skill* in production, and the, mores specifically, the guild's extreme regulatory power: deciding exactly what kinds of products may be honoured with the name of poetry, which cultural workers deserve initiation as poets. Again, to emphasize, poetry is associated with skilled manual work, with craftsmanship, rather than bookish, highbrow toil. Paterson did not write that only geneticists gene, only academics academe, only psychologists psych. Nor, however, did he allow that a poet can be both plumber and poet at the same time: the poet is a type of worker *among* other workers. All of Paterson's comparative examples are "skills", far from both the abjection of factory labour and from the inhumanity of bookish intellectual creeps. The poet is a "wordsmith", not a "scientist". As R.J. MacSween writes, "Scattered throughout the volume are these short, finely worked passages, poems of painter and carver." (1982; 102)

A paradigmatic premise of this idelect is that linguistic communication is *expression*. The expressive paradigm of interpretation requires not only, as Michael Davidson critiques, that "poetry exists to reflect the poet's mind as he or she comes to grips with political and social contradictions" (143), but that poetic "meaning" is always an expression of something other than or prior to (rather than something produced by) the poem. From this paradigm emerges the concept that poetry is not only a constructive activity, but that the mode of construction is itself expressive of the poet. Although reviewers often write, as here an unnamed reviewer says of Steven Heighton, aporetic sentences such as: "[His] craft is extremely well polished" (*StevenHeighton.com*), the

notion extends backwards from product to that legendary place and to poet; the (imagined) work activity *expresses* the identity of the worker.

In a cultural context where young writers are called "apprentices", more experienced ones designated "masters", then, the fact that poets like Milton Acorn, David Huggett, Ken Babstock, Patrick Lane, and Kate Braid, not to mention Jesus Christ, worked as carpenters can be taken - and often is - as a literal means to help explain their writing / working ethos and the consistency of their poetic products. In the reiterative ritual space of reviewing, the metaphor is extended a long way from the spontaneous associations of poetry-making with craft. Poetry is a perma-modernist well-wrought china cabinet, never an abject, reified postmodern plastic chair. In 1990, when George Woodcock praises the recently deceased Milton Acorn, he uses carpentry as an extended metaphor: "the sense of fine crafting that in another aspect of his life we are told characterised his work as a good carpenter. There is no loose jointing, either verbal or intellectual in his finished poetry... no real incoherence, everything fits" (1990; 102). Zachariah Wells grants this ethos to an all-male group of grey collar poets including Babstock, Pete Trower, Joe Denham, Peter Richardson and Adam Getty.

These five poets have markedly distinct voices and techniques for approaching manual labour as a subject of their poetry. What they share is a commitment to their readers and to the art of poetry itself. This commitment consists ... of a resistance to literary preciousness and self-indulgent esoteric obscurity and an emphasis on craft and shared humanity. ... As workers themselves, they respect a job well done and the work that goes into a finely forged tool or weapon. ("Makin' It")

Tom Wayman's contention articulated in "Work, Money, Authenticity", an afterword to his book *In A Small House on the Outskirts of Heaven*, is that in CanLit there is a strict "taboo against accurately depicting daily work" (118) appears ironic in this light. U.S.

postmodernist poet Kenneth Goldsmith makes his position in the poetry field clear specifically by how he re-defines poetry as a form of work. He confuses all the attendant biases of gender, class, and labour forms that structure this literary ideology. He knows which buttons he's pushing when he tells us that:

contemporary writing requires the expertise of a secretary crossed with the attitude of a pirate: replicating, organizing, mirroring, archiving, and reprinting, along with a more clandestine proclivity for bootlegging, plundering, hoarding, and file-sharing. We've needed to acquire a whole new skill set: we've become master typists, exacting cut-and-pasters, and OCR demons. ... There is no museum or bookstore in the world better than our local Staples. The writer's solitary lair is transformed into a networked alchemical laboratory, dedicated to the brute physicality of textual transference. ("Information Management")

His success at capturing international attention and an unusually wide readership, although impossible without his unusually effective networks of distribution, is also indexical of the current ideological moment in poetry.

Although the job-title of the phantasmic Poets is usually masculine - carpentry, bricklaying, engineering, stone carving, and so on - the masculinist gender-bias becomes less acute as the conception of the work itself is metaphorically elaborated. Practices gendered feminine now intersect with masculine ones. Hard craft and handicraft overlap. Passages of poetry are "finely worked", poems are "well-woven", they are "stylishly constructed", or "tightly constructed" or "finely fashioned", poets can "forge a way to write", material elements are "worked into" a poem, the trick is "maintaining balance". The poem remains luxury goods and skilled work, however. A review by Weyman Chan of a book by Brian Henderson begins in a flourish of mixed metaphors, all drawn from this set:

So much depends on darkness and light, catalysts of the human imagination. Brian Henderson's latest offering in that richly varied poetic

career of his, spins untold gems of wisdom out of a thick brocade of birds and butterflies, eclipses and mystical states of mind. He coins it 'a kind of turning and / recalling embodiment,' this typography of language he gives us. (1996; 83)

## **THE WORK ETHIC**

The figuration of Poet as Craftsman, then, creates certain "employment" obligations that also, because the operant paradigm is of *expression*, create obligations of identity. When the "job of poetry" is so directly defined, the morality of the job becomes the morality of the employee, the Poet. The form of the poem, then, and its stylistic character, are equated with the moral character of the poet. The principles grounding this morality are the assumptions about the hard work of writing poetry, the labour that is supposed to impart symbolic / exchange value. A Poet's life is summed by poet David Ormsby in the simple formula: "Hard work, little recognition" ("Poet's Life"). But because the finished poem may not bear obvious traces of the hours spent in making it, reviewers fix their attentions on stylistic features that can be taken as *signs* of hard work, including apparent ease or facility as a sign of accomplishment; easy and difficult, aristocrat and artisan.

In "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All", both a critique and vindication of Althusser's theory of interpellation, Judith Butler finds in "the lived simultaneity of submission and mastery" (15) a crucial point of transfer between the logic of accumulation and the skilled labourer's work ethic. Labour, skills, subjecthood, language, conscience, ideology, performative iteration, in an interpellative process produce a morality of labour that is premised in Christian notions of sin and innocence. She argues that:



The reproduction of social relations, the reproduction of skills, is the reproduction of subjection, but here it is not the reproduction of labor that is central, but a reproduction proper to the subject, one that takes place in relation to *language* and to the formation of *conscience*. For Althusser, to perform tasks 'conscientiously' is to perform them ... again and again, to reproduce those skills, and in reproducing them, acquire mastery. 'Conscientiously' is placed in quotation marks ... thus bringing in to relief the way in which labor is moralised. ... If the mastery of a set of skills is to be construed [as Althusser does] as an *acquitting of oneself*, this mastery... will constitute a defense of oneself against an accusation, or, quite literally, a declaring of innocence on the part of the accused. To acquit oneself 'conscientiously' of one's task is, then, to construe labor as a confession of innocence, a display or proof of guiltlessness in the face of the demand for confession implied by an insistent accusation. (16)

In poetry reviewing, the "insistent accusation" is of writing bad poetry, the "confession" that poetry is hard to write, of which the Poet can only acquit him/herself with the signs of hard work. Skilled, diligent work in fact comes with certain reviewers almost to equal quality itself, as if there is a simple formula: work harder = write better. Far beyond the fact that reviewers assume (mistakenly or not) that good poetry is difficult to write, *poetry has to appear to have been difficult to write to be good*. Missing from my analysis of the Barthes passage above is the Marxist theory of value: as literature has adopted the logic of capital, so has it adopted its principles of value produced through labour. Implicated in the "crisis of self-justification" is the very mystery of how *exchange value* accrues that spurs Marx's theory. As Barthes said, "labour replaces genius as a value". Thus the POETRY IS CRAFT formula, itself an adoption of capital's logic, makes the translation of *use value* into *exchange value* (in poetry the "specific capital" of Bourdieu) that Marx applies to normal commodities apply to poetry:

A use value ... has value only because human labour in the abstract has been embodied or materialised in it. How, then, is the magnitude of this value to be measured? Plainly, by the quantity of the value-creating substance, the labour, contained in the article. The quantity of labour,

however, is measured by its duration, and labour time in its turn finds its standard in weeks, days, and hours. ("Capital")

At its not too rare extreme, the poem-object is treated by reviewers as if it stores labour energy like a rechargeable battery. As Marx quotes in Vol.1 of *Capital*: "As values, all commodities are only definite masses of congealed labour time." To the exact degree that this value accumulates through labour, the poet buys innocence. The characteristics of the poetry (stylistic, formal, qualitative) are further read, making the identification, as expressive of the poet's own moral character, quite in spite of the contradictory evidence that many canonic poets were louts, addicts, etc. A poetry that does not fulfil these "standards of excellence" is a poetry of laziness, of sloth, of sin. If acquittal of sin is purchased with labour, writing bad poetry becomes morally criminal.

It is in moral terms that the very common description of poetry as "self-indulgent", which is to say circular, insular, and masturbatory, has to be read. Purportedly a guild perspective of "quality control", in practice it is more like a Protestant neighbourhood watch. The Poet is assumed slothful until proven diligent, and equally common negative descriptors like "excessive", "too much", "too often" are moral excorations: the poet is failing to exercise the "impassioned restraint" through which value can *be seen to* steadily accrue, and the sin of presumed sloth absolved. Poetic arousal has to be reciprocal or it is a sinful pleasuring that the poet has not "earned" by also offering the correct stimulus that would guarantee satisfaction for the reviewer, otherwise it is self-indulgent "mental masturbation", as Byron famously said of Keats's poetry, "neither poetry nor any thing else but a Bedlam vision produced by raw pork and opium" (quoted in McFarland; 107).

Anita Lahey, in a review of Anne Glickman, provides an unusually clear account of a reviewer's interpellation into this ideology in process. She begins with a puzzled curiosity about the unevenness of Glickman's poetry, and as she rehearses the review through reading other reviews comes to a solution in moral terms: the poet hasn't worked hard enough, the poet is in a kind of sin. The structural dichotomy is between a logic of work (as productive accumulation and moral acquittal), versus play (as wasteful expenditure and immorality):

I look up Glickman's old reviews. I want to know how she was read when she came on the scene... I find her ... praised more than criticised. But I also encounter references to weak line breaks, to a cadence 'a bit too colloquial, a bit too Purdyish,' ... M. Travis Lane suggests that Glickman gets into trouble when she tackles weighty subjects: 'the lightness of her tone is a problem.' ... Reading *Running* through to the end, I conclude that Glickman is too comfortable. She is enjoying herself, her rhythms and insights, but a little too much, a little more than she has earned. ... She has not been tough enough on herself to realise her own poetic potential. (2004; 83)

Being "a bit too colloquial" implies that the rank or class so far earned by Glickman does not buy her this license. Lahey draws the conclusion, from reading other reviews, that Glickman hasn't "paid her dues". Hard work is a basic condition for "excellence", because it is the (undefined) activity through which quality (or value) is accrued. That value is the currency with which a poet may purchase the indulgence of "pleasure". When a poet appears, in these terms, to be "just playing" or is "not serious", even if the reviewer endorses the work, it can only accrue a severely limited amount of value. In this same context, "laziness" is a worse sin than self-indulgence, given that poetry as an activity is defined in relation to a concept of work. (This is another position that crosses the two camps of Canadian poetry, postmodern and perma-modern.) Laxness on the job, as it were, is the worst possible misbehaviour for the Poet as Craftsman.

Working hard, a moral premise, is the poet's "responsibility". So Carole Langille is relieved to find that poet Adam Sol's "is a world deeply felt, where responsibility is not taken lightly" (124). In the same vein, Brian Fawcett fumes in a 1978 review "The Conditions of Poetry in Canada":

I don't know what goes into a reversal of metaphor that leads someone to prefer abstractions like those in the last two lines quoted except to recognise the profound reactionary nature of it. The forms of expression are also reactionary - & [sic] by that I don't mean the presence of sonnets. Both reactions are symptoms [sic] of a fundamental laziness in their work. They take the easiest possible explanation [sic] of their condition, & [sic] the condition of contemporary poetry - it's all a trick. ... The assumption these people make, I suspect, is that poetry & life is [sic] so incomprehensible that it is to be met with tricks - sleight of hand, mind or whatever - to keep the show going. (1978)

Drawing his structures from several sources, including Bataille, Barthes and Bourdieu, Steve McCaffery in "Writing as a General Economy" provides a radical articulation of how a notion of "play" in extremis threatens the "restricted economy" of this literary ideology. He begins from the standard postmodern inversion of values (play valued instead over work), but progresses into an even more radical questioning of value itself that breaks open the simplistic dichotomy that might be drawn, for example, from Barthes' rather direct reversal of value in favour of *jouissance*.

Restricted economy, which is the economy of Capital, Reason, Philosophy, and History, will always strive to govern writing, to force its appearance through an order of constraints. The general economy would forfeit this government, conserve nothing, and, while not prohibiting meaning's appearance, would only sanction its profitless emergence in general expenditure: hence, it would be entirely indifferent to results and concerned only with self-dispersal. A general economy can never be countervaluational nor offer an alternative 'value' to Value, for it is precisely the operation of value that it explicitly disavows. (202)

In terms of the further poet-customer agreement implicit in craft discourse, the poet who hasn't worked hard enough, who has merely doodled, scribbled, idled or played

with words - what McCaffery characterises as "general expenditure", or "nonproductive outlay" (207) - has no moral right to ask for a Reader's attention. The incompatibility here between the Arnoldian-Leavisite ideolect and postmodern poetry is made completely clear. John Baglow pats poet Mark Truscott on the head, after chastising him for being nonproductive, finds enough evidence of work to purchase indulgence:

It must be said, though, that the book offers precisely that spurious invitation [of a night on the town]. There is not enough in it for a real night on the town. .... Instead we have page after page of what can only be described as verbal doodling ... But luckily this is not all there is to Truscott. ... Sometimes, as above, this is just the flash and dash of an enthusiast taken with his own discoveries, but when the frivolous mood wears off, he proves to be capable of much more. ... [but] 'Canadian Poetry' is proof that he can do far more than play with words. ... If Truscott can abandon the self-indulgence of "It Was," and give us instead the more lucid and compelling contents of his mind's "succession of torn envelopes," that night on the town will be well worth waiting for. (2006).

Stuart Newton, in a review of books by Mona Fertig, Henry Rappaport and Edwin

Varney makes the poetic-moral position of the sternly sober evaluative reviewer still clearer:

These books disappoint the reader in a fashion that is peculiar to contemporary theories of poetry: vis-à-vis free verse and concrete forms. Worthwhile poetry requires much more than verbal and graphic stimuli. Unconcerned, the three writers plopped down their lines produced their graphics in three rather showy texts ... All this poor work occurs because Fertig has no sound notion of poetics. ... Fertig's random symbol scheme demands that the reader be the poet, in that the reader has to fuse together some sort of cohesion from such disparity ... [Varney's] book is not a serious proposition ... Poetry is not a free whim, it is a persistent vision that drives the poet to his pen and paper. ... Poetry, then, is much more than a reasonable account of a passing moment: it is very serious work. Good poems are not just chance. ... It is easy to hoax readers when they are meant to be open to Vers Libre, even easier when the readers are made to be the poet so that they are disinclined to judge. (1978; 142)

Value in poetry, then, is instrumentalised in terms of work: a good poem, then, "does" something, it "works" for its living. What it really "does" is signal in a correctly coded

way that the poet has worked hard in, again, the correct ways. Otherwise, it would seem, the hard work of writing poetry is an absurd, Sisyphean labour.

### **7 HOURS 7 DAYS 7 YEARS**

In this context it will be instructive to briefly examine the marketing, and reception of Christian Bök's 2001 book *Eunoia*. Although the book is read as a kind of sound bite version of the French literary movement OuLiPo that, by its unmatched popularity (by 2007 *Eunoia* had sold 20,000 copies, and continues to sell, compared to 200 - 300 total for an average book of poetry in Canada) has made possible the institutional recognition of postmodern poetry in Canada, its positive reception in reviews, positive and negative, has been almost entirely within the discourse of craft.

The marketing of the book played on these ideological terms directly. Before a single copy had been sold, the legend of its making had already been constructed among Canadian poets. First, the extreme formal constraint against which the book was written is simple enough to boil down to the length of a Hollywood pitch. As reviewer Patty Osborne relates: "*Eunoia* is divided into five chapters, one for each of the five vowels, and each chapter tells an outlandish story written with words that contain only that vowel". Difficult enough to accomplish, but readers learned long before buying the book that it allegedly took the author 7 hours per day, 7 days per week for 7 years to write the book. (Totalling 17,885 hours of unpaid labour, or, with the \$40,000 Griffin Prize it was awarded in 2002, \$2.23 per hour). Immediately the frameworks of skill, mastery, labour, difficulty, diligence are evoked. The author plays for the Common Reviewer of Canadian poetry exactly the phantasmic figure of the writer that Barthes draws, the writer who

"shuts himself away in some legendary place, like a workman operating at home and who roughs out, cuts, polishes, and sets his form exactly as a jeweller extracts art from his material, devoting to his work regular hours of solitary effort". *Eunoia*, a flagrantly postmodern work in its construction - postmodern in the sense that it self-consciously re-stages a high modernist moment as a media event - and utterly "cynical" in its emotionality, purchases by these means a moral innocence within the perma-modernist Arnoldian economy that most postmodern books cannot afford.

Yet there is a significant slippage between the account of the Poet's legendary devotion and the actual *content* of *Eunoia*. It is not simply that *Eunoia*, as Linda Hutcheon argues about much Canadian postmodern fiction, "asserts and then deliberately undermines such principles as value, order, meaning, control and identity ... that have been the basic premises of bourgeois liberalism" (7), but that it both fully confirms and utterly disavows those premises. It is both laboriously and intricately constructed, and completely superficial and flippant. The monologic address of its symbolic packaging, that the book expresses "sublime thought" totally contradicts the book's content, which is more like "mental masturbation" or McCaffery's "general expenditure":

Ubu hugs Ruth; thus Ruth purrs. Ubu untucks Ruth's muumuu; thus Ruth must untruss Ubu's tux. Ubu fluffs Lulu's tutu. Ubu cups Lulu's dug; Ubu rubs Lulu's buns; thus Lulu must pull Ubu's pud. ... Ubu blurts: push push. Ubu thrusts. Ubu bucks. Cum spurts. Ubu cums. (79)

Indeed, reviewers convey often enough that *Eunoia* makes a "spectacle of its labour", but they tend to leave out the keyword from Bök's own pronouncement on that theme:

the text makes a *Sisyphean* spectacle of its labor, wilfully crippling its language in order to show that, even under such improbable conditions of duress, language can still express an uncanny, if not sublime, thought.

Reading *Eunoia* against its reception is informative. If ever a poem did store "quality" like a battery charge, it is *Eunoia*. As congealed labour, then, *Eunoia* has taken on the magical properties of the most fetishised commodity: *Eunoia* emerges as an ideal object of Canadian poetry reviewing ideology.

What matters most here is, then, not that the legend exists (many books have legendary backgrounds like this; poets like Margaret Avison are famously unprolific), but that it is repeated in such a high proportion of all notices and reviews of the book; 12 of the 15 I have read. Even *Eunoia*'s most hostile reviewer Carmine Starnino (who seems to have staged his negative reception as a career-move) recounts the legend of labour, skill, and determination with some awe:

How else explain the growing legend of its execution? Bök's slog through the OED, the long evenings of revision, the seven years of toil. Sometimes we need to witness such self-punishing acts of technical adroitness to shake up our cherished idea of poetry as a muse-inspired sport. ... What isn't silly, however, is the sedulous skill it took to write them. ... To give credit where credit is due, poets who can bring off this sort of thing aren't exactly thick on the ground here. ("Vowel Movements")

Supportive reviewers are careful to indicate that they think the time *was not* wasteful expenditure, but properly accumulative. Bök is a *master craftsman*. As Michel Basilières declares: "The seven years of effort Bök poured into *Eunoia* have paid off. ... It's not only one of the best books of the year; it's quite simply a masterpiece".

Soon after *Eunoia* won the Griffin Prize in 2002, however, a parody entitled *Annoya* by Constrained Balks, appeared in the mailboxes of poets around Toronto. *Annoya* was clearly intended in part to undermine the legend by making Bök's "feat" seem easy. That is to say, when *Eunoia* was attacked it was attacked as a *form of work*. Whether seen as not so difficult to execute, as Alex Good ruminates: "It couldn't have



taken seven years to come up with stuff like this. Seven minutes with a good dictionary would do the trick." Or when framed as a form of unproductive *play* rather than a form of serious work or even the kind of play that is accumulative and rewarding. Pseudonymous reviewer Clive Staples - the name is taken from C.S. Lewis, whose full name is Clive Staples Lewis - contrasts work-like play to play-like play: "Traditional poetic forms (including the hardest of them all - free verse) are like chess. Lipograms are like tic-tac-toe."

When the content becomes itself ideologically resistant to value-accumulation, reviewers nevertheless give the book "its due" so to speak. Few lack respect for the work involved. Lyle Neff writes, in an article "Eunoyance: How the Griffin Decision Favours Effort Over Accomplishment" that: "*Eunoia* is not a digital piece of work, but represents, one hates to say, a triumph of the (eccentric, human) will. It is painful, when reading it, to think of how hard this man worked on this book. ... [But] if we grant that *Short Haul Engine* and *Eunoia* are both good books which took some heavy artistic lifting to make, doesn't Solie's book gain the aesthetic upper hand because it is a more buoyant read?" (44)

The problem is that tested against the craftsman's "standards of excellence" *Eunoia* does not give many affirmative results - yet the legend of its labour speaks as loudly. Using "trick" as "nonproductive play", as Brian Fawcett did, Gordon Neufeld says in an Amazon.ca review that: "[*Eunoia* is] little more than a party trick [because] ... if you set aside the fact that Bok uses only one vowel in each section, and examine the work for other poetic merits, it has few." More invested detractors, such as Lynda Grace Philippsen, cannot understand why "why someone of [Bök's] obvious ingenuity should

choose to spend seven years on such masochistic infliction. (Or is that affliction?)" Or, as Alex Good makes clear: "You're always left with the big tease of its conception: Why did Christian Bök choose to write a book like this?" Starnino asks the same question: "All well and good, but why would anyone wish to write this way other than for the mere curiosity of it?" Under a paradigm of mimesis, reflection and expression, poetry reviewers often cannot see the "point" of postmodern poetry, seeking in their interpretative work the solution to a puzzle that it does not, in fact, pose. Like any nonproductive activity: "*Eunoia* doesn't have any kind of purpose or point to it except as an experiment. Its prime directive is the only thing it has to say."

## CONCLUSION: AESTHETIC CONSCIENCE

In the Fall of 2003 *The Malahat Review* published a special issue devoted entirely to the subject of book reviewing. Edited by Marlene Cookshaw and Lorna Jackson, the contributors are authors from Canada, Britain and the United States who also publish reviews. A crucial impetus to the creation of the issue seems to be a dissatisfaction with reviewing practices, and most of the documents included are diagnostic, corrective, critical or negative in intent. If the editors and contributors are right, however, their dissatisfaction is not localised. A number of other recent essays about reviewing published in other magazines (*Geist*, *The Danforth Review*, *sub-Terrain*, *Canadian Notes and Queries*) and works like Darren Wershler-Henry's *10 out of 10 , or, Why poetry criticism sucks in 2003* confirm the suspicion: few publishing writers are happy with how book reviewing is now practiced.

With 22 short essays or critical notes, this special issue is set up as a kind of noisy roundtable, a thorough but informal discussion of a topic both dear and dreadful. With many pieces in dialogic or collaborative form, it stages a convincing performance of democratic debate, giving space to (ostensibly) dissenting, contrasting individual ideas. John Lent's article "Somebody Paying Attention: Reviewing, the Intellectual, and the Region" sets out as one of the more negatively-intentional pieces, promising to ask hard questions and even to attack some basic cultural assumptions. Querying the status of the intellectual in Canadian literary culture, Lent comes early on to suspect

that there is ... a vast, quiet, anti-intellectual malaise in our culture that interferes with the act of reviewing ... some shy, overly colonized, and slightly Canadian (i.e. easily embarrassed) side of ourselves does not want to reveal pure intellectual engagement, even though we admire it so much in writers from other cultures (88)

Outside of the tired tropes deployed here, we might anticipate from this when Lent writes "pure intellectual engagement" he is calling for something that functions outside pallid realms of reified value, outside the museums of urns and retired engineers. Throughout the piece, Lent repeatedly starts over, as it were, as if with each iteration he goes deeper into the problem: "I still haven't nailed this right" (89). What, then, does he propose as a solution to lift book reviewing in Canada from its low state? A return to *craft*, as if that concept were ever in eclipse.

there is not enough knowledge *or confidence about knowledge* that has to do with knowing enough about *composition* - the *crafts* of writing in different literary modes and genres - to support a wide field of first-rate reviewers (89).

"Pure intellectual engagement" somehow does not threaten to the basic formulae that criticism = judgement and quality = veracity. By the end of the issue the review genre has been questioned by so many voices, from so many perspectives, that it might seem bruised and broken, less certain than at the start. What remains largely stable, however, through this sustained application of intelligence and acumen, vehemence and enthusiasm - the special issue is over 130 pages long - are all the basic Arnoldian-Leaviste tropes, concepts and metaphors.

In a sense, this thesis has been an indirect answer to a question asked as the title and topic of three pieces in *The Malahat Review* 144, one of the driving problematics: "What's A Review Supposed to Do?" If the content of the answers to the question throughout is (for the most part) surprisingly unsurprising, the dialogic form of many of the contributions suggest potential structural slippages that are the cracks and fissures of hope.

To return directly to Althusser's theory of interpellation, let me introduce a new framework. One of the functions (and/or *effects*?) of reviewing is the formation in the literary subject of an *aesthetic conscience*. It is crucial here to recall certain details of the Althusserian premise: conscience does not express the "internalisation" of an ideology. As Judith Butler points out in "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All", Althusser's model "takes for granted the 'internal' and the 'external' as already formed" (Butler 13). The formation of aesthetic conscience occurs, then, when a mute cultural unconscious acquires vocabulary, learns its mouth. In the terms so familiar in perma-modernist poetry circles: it finds its voice. Butler further explains that:

For Althusser, the efficacy of ideology consists in part in the formation of *conscience*, where the notion of conscience is understood to place restrictions on what is speakable or, more generally, representable. Conscience ... designates a kind of turning back - a reflexivity - which constitutes the conditions for the possibility of the subject's formation. ... *Conscience is fundamental to the production and regulation of the citizen subject, for it is conscience that turns the individual around to make itself available to the subjectivating reprimand: a turning back and a turning toward* (13; my emphasis)

The answer to the question "What is a Review Supposed to Do?" then is partly (in a sense both local and global): to make the reviewer available to the subjectivating reprimand. Aesthetic conscience is the nagging voice that guarantees the reproduction of literary power. "Objectivity" in judgement, which so many of the reviewers in this issue of *The Malahat Review* fret about, lament that it is so difficult to achieve, is indeed only the predictable reciprocity of common sense.

The concept of conscience I am deploying, then, includes as a structural feature the *inner voice* in a specific, cautionary, normative form. But whereas the metaphorical site of conscience-formation for Althusser is the church, Canadian aesthetic conscience

speaks from the Arnoldian museum, with all of its common sense police, its engineers, and angry judges. This is how novelist Michelle Berry accounts her experiences as a reviewer in her contribution *The Malahat Review* 144: "On Being a Writer Who Is Also a Reviewer". An apparent assumption at work is that before she started reviewing she wrote her fiction in an unfettered, spontaneous way. In the process of reviewing, however, a nagging inner voice began to trouble her at the writing desk.

But as I wrote more and more reviews I found it enhanced my fiction writing. Getting out of my mind, seeing how others shaped their work, thinking about the process of writing and noticing the slight movements of thought and technique in a writer's work. I was studying writing again. ... There are problems with all of this too, of course. Studying writing again suddenly made me self-conscious about my fiction. It made me aware of everything I was doing as I did it. ("Ah, I've got this water image running through my chapter - is it good or bad? What would a reviewer think of this theme?") (86)

Berry like many of the contributors becomes aesthetically conscience-stricken through reviewing (several of the contributors frame their articles as confessions of guilt). Typically, also, the ideas or sensibility that introduces the passage seem promising, probing: "thinking about the process of writing and noticing the slight movements of thought and technique in a writer's work." The place it arrives is by contrast all too familiar: is it good or bad?

The Marlovian good angel / bad angel dialogue of conscience begins to come into view in several senses - and here is the possibility of structural slippage, where the circuit of ideology might be weakened. If conscience begins as a univocal nag, for many it seems to soon split into the performance of an internal dialogue. The question then becomes whether or not the two voices are merely the contrasting voices (yin and yang?) of the same structure of ideology. Two of the pieces in *Malahat* 144 in fact read just that

way: although one is an interview, the other an email debate, between writers who may as well be the right hand and the left hand of the same church organist.

Jan Zwicky's piece "The Ethics of the Negative Review" is a fuller extrapolation from the questions posed by the aesthetic conscience than Berry's mere hint, or the revising-on-the-go of Lent's piece. It is a long internal dialogue of the self "Jan Zwicky" and the aesthetic conscience of "Jan Zwicky". As author of 7 books of poetry, Governor General's Award laureate (1999) and a professor of philosophy at Uvic, the format looks promising, again. If philosophical inquiry is about changing the terms of the debate, asking different questions, then it might be a place to expect some felling of, or modification of assumptions as the philosopher turns back on herself. So what does Zwicky's aesthetic conscience answer? As Berry's, and Lent's process, the question to answer trajectory follows the path of least ideological resistance, to predictable ends. Zwicky concludes that "negative" reviewing is impossible because reviewers damning books "need to be sure beyond a reasonable doubt, each time we take up the rhetorical cudgels, that our judgement is going to stand the test of time. And frankly ... I don't think we *can* be that sure" (55).

We can draw from these three examples that while the primary questions asked are couched as philosophical, as critical and theoretical, they are in fact only technocratic because they never, as they promise, tread on any fundamental assumptions. Zwicky answers the question about reviewing and value, which she has framed with the chestnut: "The critics killed Keats" (54), in value's terms. The assumption of permanent value (as consequence of inherent quality) is never, in itself, in question, nor that the project of literature is the production of (writer-side) and scaling (reviewer-side) of Mount Everest-

like Greatness: "*Great* literature ... couldn't require boundary police to insure a readership. That of its own accord it continues to inspire whomever comes in contact with it is precisely in what its 'greatness' consists" (56). The question remains the evaluative reviewer's question: "what is most valuable?" Do "positive" or "negative" reviews contribute more to the cultural process of "culling" (Dessaux 96)? When the dialogue of aesthetic conscience speaks in these closed terms, it is indeed merely the voice (in stereo) of those phantasmic figures in the Arnoldian-Leavisite gallery: the Common Reader, the Tradition.

Whether or not critics of Althusser are correct to assert that the theory of interpellation cannot account for ideological excess or overflow, the moment of aesthetic conscience formation, as it produces inner dialogue also always produces the potential for that very excess that, as subjectivating, it would contain. Even as I point out the disappointing ends of the questioning processes of Zwicky, Berry and Lent, that the questioning process began at all has to be accounted. Indeed, recent theories of embedded metaphor and ideology insist that underlying assumptions are more determining when *unconscious*. As Andrew Goatly writes: "it is precisely because they are conventionalised that they may achieve the power to subconsciously affect our thinking, without our being aware of it (2007; 22)." If so, in its very production aesthetic conscience always has the possibility of exceeding its own structural limits, of doing more than providing an ideological guarantee. Steve McCaffery writes of the aporias of metaphor in "Writing as a General Economy". The micro-mechanisms of metaphor he outlines can be profitably remapped onto inner dialogue itself:



The semantic mechanism is rendered nomadic; meaning wanders from one term to another and any relationship through substitution and equivalence can only be asserted within the framing and staging of a certain loss. (204)

In dialogic process, even if internal, that loss always staged in the operations of metaphor can vastly accelerate. In such dialogic acceleration, even within fixed terms, weaknesses may develop in the ideolectical-ideological circuit. Thus hope that reviewing practices in Canada can change must lie partly in the practice of reviewing itself. Without the coming-to-voice of the underlying cultural assumptions that occurs with the formation of aesthetic conscience, those assumptions might remain mute, unmoveable.

## WORKS CITED

### ARTICLES, BOOKS AND OTHER

Ahmed, Sarah. "The Economy of Affect". Social Text. No.22.2 (2004): 117 - 139

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses". Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays. trans. Brewster, Ben. New York and London: Monthly Rev. Press, (1971): 127 - 186

---. "Part Seven. Marxism and Humanism". Marxists.org. [independent]. Accessed July 08, 2008. <<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1964/marxism-humanism.htm>>

Altieri, Charles. "From Symbolist Thought to Immanence: The Ground of Postmodern American Poetics". boundary 2. Vol.1.1, No.3. (Spring 1973): 605 - 642

Antin, David. "Modernism and Postmodernism: Approaching the Present in American Poetry". boundary 2. Vol.1, No.1. (Autumn, 1972): 98 - 133

Barthes, Roland. S/Z. trans. Miller, Richard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.

Barthes, Roland. Writing Degree Zero. Lavers, Annette and Smith, Colin. trans. New York: Hill and Wang, 1968.

---. "From Work to Text". trans. Howard, Richard. The Critical Tradition.

Richter, David H. ed. New York: Bedford/St.Martins, 1998. 901 - 905

Blaser, Robin. Introduction. Particular Accidents: Selected Poems by Bowering, George. Vancouver, B.C. : Talonbooks, 1980.

Bök, Christian. Eunoia. Toronto: Coach House Books, 2001.

Bernstein, Charles. "Interview with Charles Bernstein" The Front Table. Seminary Co-op Bookstore. February/March 1999. Accessed July 08, 2008.

<<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bernstein/interviews/SemCoop.html>>

Billig, Michael and MacMillan, Katie. "Metaphors, Idiom and Ideology". Discourse Society. Vol.16, No.4. (2005): 459-480

Blodgett, E. D. Five-Part Invention: A History of Literary History in Canada. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.

Butler, Judith. "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All". Yale French Studies No.88 (June 1995): 6-26

Bourdieu, Pierre. The Field of Cultural Production. Columbia University Press, 1993.

---. "The Work of Art as Fetish: The Production of Belief". Text & Context: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, No.2 (1) (Spring 1988): 3-56

Davey, Frank. Surviving The Paraphrase: Eleven Essays On Canadian Literature. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1983.

---. "Canadian Canons". Critical Inquiry. Vol.16, No.3. (Spring 1990): 672 - 681

Derksen, Jeff. "Where Have All the Equal Signs Gone?" Assembling alternatives: Reading Postmodern Poetries Transnationally. ed. Huk, Romana. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2003. 41 - 65

Eagleton, Terry, ed. "Introduction". Ideology. London ; New York : Logman, 1994.

---. Ideology : an introduction. London ; New York : Verso, 1991.

Eliot, T.S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent". The Critical Tradition. Richter, David H. ed. New York: Bedford/St.Martins, 1998: 498 - 503

Fish, Stanley. "French Theory in America". NewYorkTimes.Com Accessed April 6, 2008. <<http://fish.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/french-theory-in-america/>>

Foster, Hal. Design And Crime. London : Verso, 2002.

- Ginsberg, Allen. Howl. City Lights Books, 1956.
- Goatly, Andrew. Washing The Brain : Metaphor And Hidden Ideology. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub. Co., 2007.
- . "Ideology and Metaphor". English Today 87. Vol. 22, No.3. July 2006: 25 - 39
- Grossberg, Lawrence. "Rereading the Past From the Future". International Journal of Cultural Studies. Volume 10 (1). London: 125 -133
- Guillory, John. "The Ideology of Canon Formation: T.S. Eliot and Cleanth Brooks". Critical Inquiry. Vol. 10, No. 1, Canons (Sep., 1983): 173-198
- Habermas, Jürgen. "Modernity - An Incomplete Project". The Anti-Aesthetic. ed, Hal Foster. Bay Press. Seattle/Washington, 1983: 3 - 15
- Hall, Stuart. "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism Without Guarantees". Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies. ed, David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen. London and New York: Routledge, 1996: 25 - 46
- Hutcheon, Linda. "Introduction". A Poetics of Postmodernism. New York : Routledge, 1988.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" The Jameson Reader. eds. Hardt, Michael and Weeks, Kathi. Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass. : Blackwell, 2000.
- . "On Interpretation: Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act". The Jameson Reader. eds. Hardt, Michael and Weeks, Kathi. Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass. : Blackwell, 2000.
- . "Towards Dialectical Criticism". The Jameson Reader. eds. Hardt, Michael and Weeks, Kathi. Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000

- . "The Barrier of Time". Archaeologies of the Future. London: Verso, 2005; 2007. 85 - 106
- Kraus, Rosalind. "Sculpture in the Expanded Field". *The Anti-Aesthetic*. ed, Hal Foster. Bay Press. Seattle/Washington, 1983. 31 - 42
- Lahey, Anita. Rev. of *Running in Prospect Cemetery: New and Selected Poems* by Susan Glickman". The Malahat Review. Vol.149 (December, 2004): 81-83
- Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark. Metaphors We Live By. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Mancini, Donato. Journal Entry. January 23, 2006.
- Mansbridge, Peter. "A Computer Network Called Internet". CBC. October 8, 1993.  
Accessed July 08, 2008.  
<[http://archives.cbc.ca/science\\_technology/computers/clips/4205/](http://archives.cbc.ca/science_technology/computers/clips/4205/)>
- Marx, Karl. Capital Volume One. Accessed July 08, 2008.  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm>
- McCaffery, Steve. "Writing as a General Economy". Artifice & Indeterminacy : An Anthology of New Poetics. ed. Beach, Christopher. Tuscaloosa : University of Alabama Press, 1998. 201 - 221
- McFarland, Thomas. The Masks of Keats. Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Middleton, Peter. "Imagined Readerships & Innovation in U.K. Poetry" Assembling Alternatives : Reading Postmodern Poetries Transnationally. ed. Huk, Romana. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2003. 127-141

- Miki, Roy. Broken Entries : Race, Subjectivity, Writing : Essays. Toronto : Mercury Press, 1998.
- Myles, John. "From Habitus to Mouth: Language and Class in Bourdieu's Sociology of Language". Theory and Society. Vol. 28, No.6. December, 1999. 879 - 901
- Perelman, Bob. "The New Sentence in Theory and Practice". American Literature. Vol. 65, No. 2 (June 1993): 313-324
- . "Poetry in Theory". Diacritics. Vol.26, Number 3/4. (Fall-Winter 1996): 158-175
- . "Polemic Greeting to the Inhabitants of Utopia". Assembling Alternatives : Reading Postmodern Poetries Transnationally. ed. Huk, Romana. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2003: 375 - 383
- . "Write the Power". American Literary History. Vol. 6, No. 2. (Summer, 1994): 306 - 324
- Said, Edward W. The world, the text, and the critic. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Smith, Barbara Hernstein. "Contingencies of Value". The Critical Tradition. Richter, David H. ed. New York: Bedford/St.Martins, 1998. 1551-1575
- Spahr, Juliana. "Introduction" Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity. Tuscaloosa : University of Alabama Press, 2001.
- Warner, Michael. "Publics and Counterpublics". Public Culture. 14 (1). Philadelphia, (2002): 49 - 90
- Williams, Raymond. "The Creative Mind". The Long Revolution. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966. 3 - 40
- Žižek, Slavoj. Welcome to the Desert of the Real! London ; New York: Verso, 2002.

---. The Plague of Fantasies. London ; New York: Verso, 1997.

## REVIEWS AND REVIEW-ESSAYS

Acorn, Milton. "Avoid the Bad Mountain". Blackfish. No.3, Summer 1972 [no pagination]

Almon, Burt. "The Sincerity Test". Canadian Literature. Accessed July 08, 2008  
<<http://www.canlit.ca/reviews-review.php?id=12589> >

Archer, Bert and Gartner, Zszsi. "True Confessions: An Email Debate on Perfectly Agreeable Books and Other Perils of the Trade". The Malahat Review. No. 144. (September 2003): 23 - 34

Aubert, Rosemary. "109 Poets". The Tamarack Review. Nos.81 and 82. 1981: 94-99

Badman, Derik. "*Eunoia* by Christian Bok". Weblog entry. Madinkbeard. October 11, 2004. Accessed July 08, 2008. <<http://madinkbeard.com/blog/archives/eunoia-by-christian-bok> >

Baglow, John. Rev. of *Said Like Reeds or Things* by Marc Truscott. The Danforth Review. [no date.] independent. Accessed December 8, 2005.  
<<http://www.danforthreview.com>>

Barbour, Douglas. "Three Horsemen Ride Far and Wide Over the Fields of Discourse". Event. Vol.10. No.2. 1987: 101-107

Basilieres, Michel. Rev. of *Eunoia* by Christian Bök. The Danforth Review. [no date]. July 08, 2008. <<http://www.danforthreview.com/reviews/fiction/bok.htm>>.

- Bolster, Stephanie. "Surviving Survival" The Northern Poetry Review. Accessed March 06, 2008. < <http://www.northernpoetryreview.com/articles/stephanie-bolster/surviving-survival.html>>
- Berry, Michelle. "On Being A Writer Who is Also a Reviewer". The Malahat Review. No. 144. (September 2003): 85 - 87
- Carpenter, David. "Stone chipped and hammered." CV II. Vol. 2, No. 2. May 1976.
- Chan, Weyman. Rev. of *Year Zero* by Brian Henderson. Dandelion. Vol.23, no.1. 1996: 83-86
- Colombo, John R. Rev. of *Tish* and *Cataract*. Canadian Forum. (December 1961): 202-203
- Crawley, Dennis. Rev. of *Eunoia*. Quill & Quire. Vol. 67, Iss. 10 (October 2001): 40
- Currie, Sheldon. "Intense Pleasure". The Antigonish Review. No. 11, (Autumn 1972): 110 - 111
- Dessaux, Robert. "Homo economicus". The Malahat Review. No. 144. (September 2003): 92 - 97
- "Eunoia". Publisher's Weekly. No. 248.47. Nov 19, 2001: p64(1)
- Fawcett, Brian. "East Van Uber Alles?" Unusual Circumstances, Interesting Times. Vancouver, B.C: New Star Books, 1991.
- . "The Conditions of Poetry in Canada". NMFG. No. 25. (1978) [no pagination]
- Francis, Wynne. Rev. of books by Waddington, Beissel, Scott, Layton, and Cohen. The Tamarack Review. (Spring 1967): 78 - 86
- Gatenby, Greg. "Poetry Chronicle". The Tamarack Review. (Summer 1979): 77-94



- Goldsmith, Kenneth. "Information Management". Poetry Foundation.org. 01.22.07  
-01.26.07. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/dispatches/journals/2007.01.22.html>
- Gom, Leona. Rev. of *Domestic Fuel* by Erin Mouré. Event. Vol.14, No.2. 1985: 146-147
- Good, Alex. "*Eunoia* by Christian Bök" Good Reports. [independent; no date]  
<<http://www.goodreports.net/reviews/eunoia.htm>> Accessed July 06, 2008
- Grubisic, Katia. Rev. of *Viral Suite* by Mari-Lou Rowley. Vallum. 2004. Accessed July  
08. 2008. <<http://www.vallummag.com/Review-Grubisic-Rowley.html>>
- Harry, Margaret. "Standing Apart." The Antigonish Review. No.55. (Autumn 1983):  
71-74
- Heighton, Steven. ed. Excerpts from reviews of *The Address Book* by Steven Heighton.  
StevenHeighton.com. [author's website]. Accessed July 08, 2008.  
<<http://www.stevenheighton.com/TheAddressBook.html>>
- Holmes, Michael. "Beautiful Thinking". Toronto Star. Sunday, February 3, 2002 (Ontario  
Edition): D14
- Irie, Kevin. Rev. of *Low Water Slack* by Tim Bowling. The Antigonish Review. No.107,  
(Autumn 1996): 151 - 152
- Johnson, Ingrid. "Eunoia: Poetry and Wordplay". Young Adult Review. Vol.8.1. (Oct  
2002): 57
- Laird, Steven. Rev. of poetry books nominated for the Governor General's Award in  
2007. Canadian Notes and Queries. No.71, (Spring/Summer 2007): 21-22
- Lane, Patrick. "The Saskatchewan Presses". Grain. November. Vol. IX, No.4., 1981: 52 -  
56

- Lent, John. "Somebody Paying Attention: Reviewing, the Intellectual, and the Region".  
The Malahat Review. No. 144. (September 2003): 88 - 91
- Lesk, Andrew. "Beautiful Feeling?". *ARC* 49 (Winter 2002): 79-80.
- Levenson, Christopher. "Five Anthologies". Canadian Literature. Issue No. 176. (Spring 2003): 134-37.
- Lillard, Charles. Rev. of books by Marlatt and Minden and McNeil. The Malahat Review. No. 38. (April 1976): 144 -150
- Lyon, Annabel. "What's A Review Supposed to Do?" The Malahat Review. No. 144. (September 2003): 35
- Mathews, Robin. Rev. of books by Davey and Miller. The Canadian Forum. (September 1962): 143
- May, Kee. "A Mystery". Weblog Entry. Kee May: A Mother of Necessity in All Inventions. July 31, 2003.<<http://keemay.teledyn.com/blog?page=28>> July 08, 2008.
- McCaffery, Steve. "Rebutal [sic] Critical Responsibilities". Books in Canada. (December 1990). Accessed July 08, 2008  
<[http://www.booksincanada.com/article\\_view.asp?id=2563](http://www.booksincanada.com/article_view.asp?id=2563)>
- McCartney, Sharon. Rev. of *The Whole Elephant* by Marlene Cookshaw. The Malahat Review. No.91. (1990): 105 - 106
- MacSween, R.J. Rev. of *Turned Clay* by Cheng Sait Chia. The Antigonish Review. No.48, Winter 1982. Fredricton: 101-102
- mclennan, rob. [sic] The Antigonish Review. No. 141. Accessed July 08, 2008.  
<<http://www.antigonishreview.com/bi-141/141-review-rob-mclennan.html>>

- McLaren, Leah. Vowel language: Leah McLaren talks to experimental poet Christian Bök, whose startling new volume has fun minding its A, E, I, O, U's. Globe and Mail. October 30, 2001: NA.
- Moore, Nathaniel G. Rev. of books by Scott and Tamaki. The Danforth Review. April 2008. <[http://www.danforthreview.com/reviews/fiction/tamaki\\_scott.htm](http://www.danforthreview.com/reviews/fiction/tamaki_scott.htm)> Accessed July 08, 2008
- Mullins, Andrew and McDonagh, Patrick. "A Poet's Life". McGill News Alumni Quarterly. Winter 1997. Hamilton: McGill University. Accessed July 08, 2008. <<http://newsarchive.mcgill.ca/w97/poet.htm>>
- Musgrave, Susan. Rev. of books by Ondaatje, Purdy, Kogawa and Bowering. The Malahat Review. No. 31, July 1974.
- Neff, Lyle. "Eunnoyance: How the 2002 Griffin Decision Favours Effort Over Accomplishment." Sub-Terrain. No.35. (2002): 44
- . "Introducing Five New Vancouver Writers". Books in Canada. 2006. Accessed July 08, 2008. <[http://www.booksincanada.com/article\\_view.asp?id=4721](http://www.booksincanada.com/article_view.asp?id=4721)>
- Neilson, Shane. "Poetry for Dummies: A Reference for the Rest of Us by John Timpane and Maureen Watts". The Danforth Review. [no date.] independent. Accessed December 8, 2005. <<http://www.danforthreview.com>>
- . Rev. of *Surrender* by Roy Miki. The Danforth Review. [no date.] December 8, 2005. <<http://www.danforthreview.com>>
- Newton, Stuart. Rev. of books by Daphne Marlatt and John Robert Colombo. West Coast Review. Vol.10, No.2. (October 1975): 66-68

- . Rev. of books by Mona Fertig, Henry Rappaport, and Edwin Varney. Event. Vol.7, No.1. (1978): 139 -142
- Osborne, Patty. Rev. of *Eunoia* by Christian Bök. Geist. No.44. (Spring 2002). Accessed July 08, 2008. <<http://www.geist.com/books/Eunoia>>
- Philippsen, Lynda Grace. "Letter to the Editor". Books in Canada. [No date]. Accessed July 08, 2008. <[http://www.booksincanada.com/article\\_view.asp?id=1992](http://www.booksincanada.com/article_view.asp?id=1992)>
- Precosky, Don. "Like a Dog in a Cartoon." Event. Vol.19, no.13. (1990): 112-115
- Purdy, Al. "Aiming Low". The Tamarack Review. (Spring 1968): 81 - 96
- . Rev. of books by Gilbert, Kiyooka, and Gilbert. The Canadian Forum. (September 1964): 141 - 143
- Querengesser, Neil. Rev. of books by Dupré, Powe, and Shenfeld. Canadian Literature. 193 (Summer 2007): 129-131.
- Redhill, Michael. "At play in the fields of the word". Globe & Mail. Saturday, November 10, 2001: D10
- Rotstein, Jason Ranon Uri. Rev. of *Anatomy of Keys* by Steven Price. PoetryReviews.ca. <<http://poetryreviews.ca/2006/09/20/anatomy-of-keys-by-steven-price/>>  
Accessed July 08, 2008
- Ruebsaat, Norbert. "Dear Robert (An Open Letter)" Rev. of *Completed Field Notes* by Robert Kroetsch. Event. Vol.19, No.1. (1990): 119-123
- Sandler, Linda. "Gustafson & Others". The Tamarack Review. No.62, November (1974): 89-94
- Serafin, Bruce. "Colonial Mentalities". Books in Canada. (November 1990). Accessed July 08, 2008. <[http://www.booksincanada.com/article\\_view.asp?id=2089](http://www.booksincanada.com/article_view.asp?id=2089)>

- Shaidle, Kathy. Rev. of *Grand Gnostic Central* by Bryan Sentes. The Danforth Review. 1999. Accessed July 08, 2008 <<http://www.danforthreview.com/>>
- Shreve, Sandy. "How Poems Work: Barbara Nickel." Globe and Mail. Accessed July 08, 2008. <[http://www.arcpoetry.ca/howpoemswork/features/2003\\_09\\_shreve.php](http://www.arcpoetry.ca/howpoemswork/features/2003_09_shreve.php)>
- Smith, Mark J. "Poetic poppycock". Letter. Globe and Mail. Saturday, March 1, 2003: A-18
- Smith, Stephen. "The Chirp Bird on the Rhinoceros". The Malahat Review. No. 144. (September 2003): 103 - 106
- Snyder, J.K. Rev. of books by Cogswell, Donlan, and Lane. The Antigonish Review. No.84. (Winter 1991): 155-165
- Solway, David. "The Great Disconnect". Director's Cut. Porcupine's Quill. Erin, Ontario 2003. 137 - 209.
- Staples, Clive. "Letter to the Editor". Books in Canada. [No date]. Accessed July 08, 2008. <[http://www.booksincanada.com/article\\_view.asp?id=1992](http://www.booksincanada.com/article_view.asp?id=1992)>
- Starnino, Carmine. "Vowel Movements: Pointless Toil and Empty Productivity". [no date]. Accessed July 08, 2008. <[http://www.booksincanada.com/article\\_view.asp?id=3370](http://www.booksincanada.com/article_view.asp?id=3370)>
- sullivan, d.h. Rev. of books by Howard White, Jim McLean and Lionel Kearns. Event. Vol.12, No.2. (1983): 131-134
- Taylor, Rob. "Newlove's 'Long Continual' Legacy". The Peak. Accessed July 08, 2008.<<http://www.the-peak.ca/article/2067>>

- Tremblay, Tony. "'Still Burning' ... Brightly" The Antigonish Review. No. 116. (Winter 1999): 11-15
- Various Authors. Letters to the editor regarding *Eunoia*. Books in Canada. [no date]  
Accessed July 08, 2008.  
<[http://www.booksincanada.com/article\\_view.asp?id=1992](http://www.booksincanada.com/article_view.asp?id=1992)>
- Wagner, Linda W. "Four Young Poets." Ontario Review. No.1, (1974): 89 - 97
- Webb, Phyllis. Rev. of Poetry 64. eds, Jacques Godbout and John Robert Columbo. The Canadian Forum. (May 1964): 150
- Welch, Liliane. Rev. of books by Bouraoui and Thurston. The Antigonish Review. No. 46. (Summer 1981): 108-112
- Wells, Zachariah. "Makin' It Work". Maissoneuve. June 14, 2004. Accessed July 08, 2008. <[http://www.maisonneuve.org/index.php?&page\\_id=12&article\\_id=787](http://www.maisonneuve.org/index.php?&page_id=12&article_id=787)>
- . "The Griffin Prize for Stuff Vaguely Resembling Poetry". Maisonneuve.org. May 17, 2004. independent. December 8, 2005. <[www.maisonneuve.org](http://www.maisonneuve.org)>
- Wood, James. "A Desire to Live By Words: An Email Interview with Lorna Jackson". The Malahat Review. No. 144 (September 2003): 107 - 113
- Woodcock, George. "Acorn's Remnants". Event. Vol.19, No.1. (1990): 100-102
- Zwicky, Jan. "The Ethics of the Negative Review". The Malahat Review. No. 144. (September 2003): 54 - 63