Lyric Scholarship in Controversy: Jan Zwicky and Anne Carson

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Jan Zwicky and Anne Carson are two of Canada's best known and most influential poet-scholars of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Both are university educators and lyric poets, and both have published texts that challenge the conventional distinctions separating classical scholarship, art criticism, philosophy, and poetry. In *Eros the Bittersweet* (1986), for instance, Carson conducts a scholarly inquiry into the effects of the Greek alphabet on ancient conceptions of lyrical selves in love, freely and anachronistically supplementing her arguments with examples from such moderns as de Beauvoir, Freud, Kafka, and Woolf along the way. In the philosophical treatises *Lyric Philosophy* (1992) and *Wisdom & Metaphor* (2003), Zwicky speaks out against the skepticism of analytic philosophy by advocating for modes of inquiry that are not solely reliant upon logic and reason, but embrace such conventionally "artistic" paths to knowledge as emotion, intuition, and physical sensation. Zwicky's and Carson's writings are powerfully suggestive of the ever-present need of intellectual communities to reflect on the circumstances and decisions that distinguish academic faculties (and artistic genres) from one another; and, through Zwicky's work in particular, the term *lyric* has come to signify a contemporary movement in which poets and scholars are resisting what seem to them to be prescriptive and unethical programs for academic pursuit.

This essay represents my strategic decision to interpret some of Carson's scholarly and creative methods as examples of lyric, with *lyric* in this case carrying the political connotations that the term bears in Zwicky's writing, and in the work of certain scholars and poets now following her example. The most obvious result of this decision is that Zwicky's and Carson's writing lives are brought into relation with each other within these pages: a juxtaposition that is still infrequent in Canadian literary criticism.[1] Though the two poets are dissimilar thinkers in many respects, they have occupied similar positions on the academic and literary stages of Canada and the US, and their respective

approaches to scholarly and creative publishing suggest ample material for comparison. More pointedly, the application of the term *lyric* to Carson's work enables a discussion of "lyric scholarship" within the frame of academic controversy: a topic that I consider to be particularly timely now that a revised second edition of *Lyric Philosophy* has appeared from Gaspereau Press (2012), even as academics and poets taking up the mantle of Zwicky's lyric are making their voices heard more than ever before.[2]

Revisiting the Montreal poet and critic David Solway's infamous *Books in Canada* attack on Carson in 2001, this essay connects Solway's preoccupation with Carson's scholarly and pedagogic influence in North America to later complaints echoed by the poet and critic Zach Wells, in a severe critique of Zwicky published in *Books in Canada* in 2004. Solway's essay, "The Trouble with Annie: David Solway *Unmakes* Anne Carson," is informed in part by contemporary concerns — which were, at the time, being vocalized virulently by American education critics — about the politicization of North American universities, whose humanities departments were being reshaped from within by new work in feminist, postcolonial, race, and queer theories in the last decades of the twentieth century. Beyond criticizing Carson and her work, Solway's essay reacts against academia's growing awareness of the inadequacy of the scales that once measured brilliant poets against bad, and memorable intellects against the mediocre. "The Trouble with Annie" is as much a lament for a lost ideal of humanities teaching as it is a polemic against Carson herself, and it argues that Carson's fame is the result of a failed educational system: one in which the distinctive, unique voice of the individual (and historically masculine) ego might no longer be glorified. Similarly, Wells's criticism of Zwicky implicitly attributes her lyric approach — in this case translated into the context of literary reviewing — to a markedly feminine and naive intellectual stance. Solway and Wells write as though Carson's and Zwicky's respective approaches are the result of ignorance, miseducation, and cultural fashion rather than deliberately strategic decisions, and they treat Zwicky's and Carson's scholarly "failings" as identifiably female flaws. As a new generation of creative academics attempts to set lyric thought to work in the university, it is worthwhile to consider how representations of gender have inflected its reception in the past. Though many among the "rising generation of lyric scholars" (Lahey 26) are activating *lyric*

in the interest of ecological awareness and ethical engagement with the non-human world, it is clear that lyric work brings the residually masculinist attitudes of much academic and literary culture into focus as well.

Discussing Carson's work through the lens of Zwicky's lyric requires some qualification: Carson's readers typically interpret the genre-bending qualities of her books and visual performances as signs of postmodernist abandon, and a taste for the (Nietzschean) playfulness of incongruity and unlikely juxtaposition (see Campbell 9; Kirsch 39; Murray 103). Zwicky's formal innovations, on the other hand, are unequivocally opposed to the spirit of postmodern play. Linguistically, Zwicky emphasizes responsibility to material reality; structurally, she emphasizes cohesion and resonant integrity; philosophically, her goal is to intervene against intellectual traditions (analytic philosophy and poststructuralism in particular) that do not seem to do justice to the material world — particularly to the current world brought to ecological crisis by human desire for technological and rational mastery. In contrast, the postmodern qualities of Carson's writing have sometimes seemed distinctly anti-lyrical to critics: in a review of *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse* (1998), Adam Kirsch suggests that Carson's incorporation of intertextual allusion and academic structures in that text is "at heart nonpoetic, even antipoetic," and he argues that Carson "moves very far from the lyric, and begins to write something that is halfway between a prose poem and a puzzle" ("Mere Complexities" 37).[3]

Traditionally, studies in poetics associate lyric voices with self-expression, often representing the heightened, artistically attuned consciousness of a powerful and singular mind at work. Zwicky's sense of lyric suggests the opposite: her philosophy devalues the primacy of the ultra-vocal lyric ego, and advocates instead for the self-supplanting pose of the attentive listener. *Lyric Philosophy* and *Wisdom & Metaphor* are both composed of hundreds of diverse parts — aphorisms, fragments of poems, reproductions of paintings and advertisements, transcriptions of musical scores — and, as such, they run the risk of appearing to be strikingly incoherent. As with polyphonic compositions in music, no one voice in either *Lyric Philosophy* or *Wisdom & Metaphor* is meant to overpower any other; no one ego reigns supreme. Kirsch's review of *Autobiography of Red* takes issue with the book's unconventional structure because it seems to him that Carson's allusions and framing devices "are not integral: they are showy, deliberately exterior to the main enter-

prise" (40). In Zwicky's philosophy, as in much of Carson's work, the main enterprise *is* exteriority, and multiplicity: both poet-scholars demonstrate that seemingly variant elements can ignite gestalt perceptions of wholes greater than the sums of their parts. In Zwicky's thinking, lyric is enabled by "the resonant structure of the universe" (*Lyric* L70):[4] all of her writings proceed from the thought that the world itself exists in a state of cohesion far more complex than any one poem, person, or voice could comprehend alone. For her, lyric compositions are reflections of "Unity that is dependent on multiplicity for its meaning, that depends on multiplicity *in order* to mean" (L67).

In *Lyric Philosophy*, Zwicky writes of lyric thought as "an attempt to comprehend the whole in a single gesture" (L73). In her philosophy, complete lyric experience transcends human language and artistry: it is that in which one's phenomenological sense of self (the mode in which my ego is understood to be distinct from that which I perceive) is no longer the lens through which the world is seen. For Zwicky, human beings' capacity for language use, and our attendant, characteristic perception of ourselves as separate from our surroundings, is the cause of lyric desire — the impetus for lyric thought and composition (L132). Lyric desire is the *eros* to be one with external reality, to experience "fusion as the lifting of the screen of 'self' that separates us from the world, fusion as the complete fulfilment of the intuition of coherence" (see L127, L133). To give in to such desire for fusion requires the abandonment of self: "To fuse the self with the world," Zwicky writes, "is to forfeit the self" (L133). What *Lyric Philosophy* explores, therefore, are the ways in which thinkers and artists — *lyric* philosophers — might channel lyric's "intuition" of coherence into investigations and compositions that are multi-dimensional, resonant, and concerned to know the world for reasons other than its potential use-value. Lyric philosophy and art (categories that need not be distinct from each other) are characteristically "poignant, and musical," and move "by association of images" (L73). They might "sew thought together along lines of musical coherence as well as cut it according to semantic and syntactic demarcations" (L95), and they are "based in an integrity of response and co-response; each dimension attending to the others" (L181). "The mouth of lyric," Zwicky writes, "is an ear" (L181).

Although Carson's work does not share the same concern for ecological and intellectual ethics that drives Zwicky's, many of her writ-

ings nevertheless enact lyric gestures. She frequently demonstrates that scholarly and emotional insight need not be distinct, and stages her own pedagogical strategies through the act of "setting things side by side" — as Zwicky puts it in *Wisdom & Metaphor* — "until the similarity dawns" (L7). Comparatively speaking, Carson's *Eros the Bittersweet* is different from Zwicky's *Lyric Philosophy* in scope, but not in spirit: both books are the honed, poetically mature versions of their respective authors' doctoral dissertations, and each stretches the genre of academic analysis through formal innovation and emphases on correspondence through juxtaposition. *Lyric Philosophy* is the structural transformation of Zwicky's thesis *A Theory of Ineffability* (1981), with which she completed her PhD in philosophy; *Eros the Bittersweet* substantially revises, and renders slightly more oracular and aphoristic, Carson's classics dissertation, *Odi et Amo Ergo Sum* (1981). It is no more than coincidence, but salient coincidence nonetheless, that the two scholars defended their respective theses little more than a month apart from each other at the University of Toronto, in the autumn of 1981. *Eros the Bittersweet* begins with a story from Kafka ("The Top"); it takes its chapter epigraphs from writers as diverse as Auden, Barthes, Basho, Blake, Donne, Keats, Rilke, Stendahl, and Queen Victoria; and, throughout its scholarly investigations, it turns for illustrations to modern novelists and philosophers such as de Beauvoir, Flaubert, Kierkegaard, Lacan, Montaigne, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Woolf. It is, in other words, a rather strange classical studies text: at once an inquisition into ancient Greek conceptions of triangulated *eros*, a study of the novel in ancient Greece, an argument that "Oral cultures and literature cultures do not think, perceive, or fall in love in the same way" (42), and, like the Kafka tale that inspires the study's preface, a lyrically personal inquiry into "the reason why we love to fall in love" (xi).

Carson's deepest intuition in *Eros the Bittersweet* is essentially Freudian: her theory of metaphor subtly echoes the economic theory of *eros* and *thanatos* that Freud developed during the First World War and published in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Celebrating triangulation, tension, and the mediation (rather than culmination) of desire in love, literature, and metaphor, in *Eros the Bittersweet* the space beyond metaphoric tension is also, analogically, "the end of the novel": what Freud describes as the body's return to an earlier state without tension — death. "The unplucked apple, the beloved just out of touch, the

meaning not quite attained, are desirable objects of knowledge," writes Carson: "It is the enterprise of eros to keep them so. The unknown must remain unknown or the novel ends" (109). Notably, *Lyric Philosophy* proceeds from a similar understanding: for Zwicky, lyric desires integration "whose fulfilment is impossible: the archer who strains to make the ends of the bow touch — even though this can happen only if the bow breaks" (L134). Negotiating this tension, in Zwicky's work, is her concept of domesticity, which "embodies relief from the tension of lyric desire" by accepting "the essential tension between lyric desire and the capacity for technology" (L134-L138) — by accepting, in other words, human beings' characteristic use of language, which marks our separation from, and the unknowability of, the non-human world. *Eros the Bittersweet* and *Lyric Philosophy* both recognize the dissolution of the self as the outcome of lyrical culmination. For Carson, this finality is tinged with dissatisfaction: when desire is fulfilled, the story ends. Zwicky's writings are more ambivalent: the forfeiture of one's phenomenological sense of self may well result in blissful, egoless integration into an oceanic whole.

In its issue of January 2012, the academic magazine *University Affairs* remarks upon the growth of "lyric scholarship, a young hybrid field" (Berkowitz 3). In a feature article entitled "Academic papers get poetic," the poet and journalist Anita Lahey affirms that lyric scholarship is "quietly flourishing in Canada," and states further that *Lyric Philosophy* is "a bible of sorts for the rising generation of lyric scholars" (26). Lahey's article reports on two sessions that ran during the academic Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities in Fredericton, New Brunswick, in the spring of 2011: a joint session between the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English and the Canadian Philosophical Association, on "Jan Zwicky and Lyric Philosophy," and a corresponding poetry event where the conventional hierarchy of academic scholarship was inverted with readings of poems on scholarly themes, rather than presentations of scholarly papers on poems. Recording conversations with a number of the poetry event's attendees, Lahey's article assembles a variety of descriptions of lyric work. Lahey introduces it in opposition to traditional scholarship: "We tend to think of a 'lyric' as a musical and intensely emotional written work," she writes; "Scholarship, on the other hand, is seen at its ideal as cool, objective analysis" (26). Clare Goulet is quoted as saying that

"Academic scholarship has, by and large, for the last 100 years or so allowed one form of knowing to be the only way . . . . But the lyric approach, as opposed to dissecting, taking apart for the purposes of examination, is about keeping something whole and alive in its context" (26). Further, Rob Winger suggests "that the lyric approach is far from new: its worth was proven by influential Canadian poets and thinkers such as Robert Kroetsch and Daphne Marlatt as far back as the 1970s" (27).

There is much to be noted here: the distinctly ecological resonance of Goulet's suggestion that lyric keeps a thing "whole and alive in its context"; the implied opposition between that ecological imperative and (less ethical?) processes of academic "dissection," which suggest deconstruction; the allusions to a critical and scholarly history that has not been welcoming of emotionally inspired work. These themes point in more directions than a short essay can hope to pursue, and so the brevity of Lahey's article leaves much to be mulled over. There are, however, a number of generalizations that could be clearer: for instance, the "one form of knowing" to which Goulet refers does not adequately account for the diversity of revolutions and politicizations that have shaped academic studies, in the humanities and elsewhere, in the past century. Even taking into account Michel Foucault's stark depiction of the university as an "institutional apparatus through which society ensures its own uneventful reproduction, at least cost to itself" (224) — an estimation that Carson echoed in a speech delivered at McGill University in 1998 ("The Idea" 7) — it will not do to gloss over its complex histories. As Heather Murray has argued (with departments of English specifically in mind), "in order to reform and understand the discipline . . . it is first necessary to shift the focus of examination *down* and *back*" (3).

There was a time, Murray writes, when Canadian universities were, "in the public eye and their own, more closely attuned to the public system of education overall, with university professors characteristically producing public lectures, programs for humanities studies, and even lower-school curricula and texts" (74). In Canadian English departments, these public relations were enforced in part by the historically "high proportions of creative writers among departmental staff" — a proportion that was, Murray argues, "an important component of the progressive politics of the discipline" (80-81). Of course, not all combinations of creative inclinations and academic situations result in lyric

scholarship, as Canada's numerous and widely incongruous traditions of academic-creative writers attest. Indeed, Winger's suggestion, in the *University Affairs* article, that Kroetsch and Marlatt are precursors to lyric scholarship is more contentious than the article lets on: while the case might be made for the lyric quality of some of Marlatt's work (in *Lyric Philosophy*, Zwicky transcribes a portion from Marlatt's *Touch to My Tongue* [1984] [R81]), Kroetsch's characteristic cocktail of documentary poetry, Bakhtinian novelization theory, Derridean and Yale School deconstruction, Foucauldian archaeological discourse, and Heideggerian phenomenological ontology is in many ways antagonistic to Zwicky's conceptualizations of lyric. Zwicky takes great pains in *Lyric Philosophy* and elsewhere to challenge the philosophical assumptions that inform Kroetsch's postmodernist work, and her writings are resolutely opposed to the theoretical vocabulary that Kroetsch delights in. Consider, for instance, an essay such as "For Play and Entrance: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem," where Kroetsch writes of unity "under erasure" (118), and of the sexualized "perpetual delay" of discovery (119), and where he suggests, furthermore, that "our interest is in, not story, but the *act* of telling the story" (120) — that is, in linguistic and textual process rather than content. In the essay "Once Upon a Time in the West: Heidegger and the Poets," Zwicky addresses some of her problems with Heidegger's and Derrida's thinking, in a voice that could be that of a cattle rancher or prairie wheat king: "it's not that there's Things, Out There, an ya gotta take care of 'em unh-uh; it's that human language equals Thought equals the Whole Sheebang" (*Thinking* 192). "I know there's no way I can prove with some argument that that's not the way it is," the voice continues, "an yeah, I even know that if I try, whatever argument I come up with's gonna Always Already be set on self-deconstruct. But that seems to me to be a problem with arguments, not a problem with the world" (195). While there might be great value in reviewing Kroetsch's writings in the effort to seek out lyric qualities, aligning his work too quickly with Zwicky's subverts the very purpose of Zwicky's philosophical project.

In a subsequent issue of *University Affairs* (February 2012), the scholar Cheryl Bartlett writes of having read Lahey's article "with delight," and goes on to note how a colleague's research has been crafted with "lyric inquiry" (n. pag.) — another small example of the discursive currency that Zwicky's lyric is beginning to attain. The nature of lin-

guistic exchange is such that meaning disperses as a single word proliferates among an expanding group of speakers; while this dispersal may attach a florescence of new meanings to the word, it may also obscure its original sense. In Zwicky's use, *lyric* refers to instinctual, ontic desire, as well as to a range of intentional methods of thought and composition; and, though strategic adaptations of *lyric* will no doubt continue to enable positive conceptualizations of alternative academic work, the word will become a catch-all if the "rising generation" neglects the critical and institutional histories from which it came. In *Forge* (2011), Zwicky's latest collection of poems (which received a nomination for the Griffin Poetry Prize in 2012), a short suite entitled "Practising Bach" exemplifies lyric's economic nature. The second poem in the suite, a prose piece called "Loure," asks: "Why is Bach's music more like speech than any other? Because of its wisdom, I think. Which means its tempering of lyric passion by domesticity, its grounding of the flash of lyric insight in domestic earth, the turf of dailiness" (26). "Loure" represents a unique moment in the tempo of these poems: each is named for a dance, and this one moves slowly. Its prosaic form sacrifices the reading speed offered by shorter lines while attempting to retain musicality through vocalic echo: wisdom results from the "tempering of lyric passion"; the audible quality of "passion" echoes in the "flash" of insight; "domestic earth" and "turf of dailiness" form a harmonic pair. This internal resonance, however, does little to explain the poem's terms: the referential significance of words like *lyric* and *domesticity* depends either on the reader's familiarity with Zwicky's characteristic use of those terms, or on one's willingness to seek their meaning elsewhere in her writings. The poem points to a wide material and intertextual context that exists beyond it, and, as such, fails according to artistic standards (such as Kirsch's) that prioritize self-containment and obvious unity. The poem is but one point on a path that must be followed back to Zwicky's philosophical work in order for its own meaning to be realized, and, as such, it acts as a signpost, not a destination.[5]

In *Wisdom & Metaphor*, Zwicky describes metaphor as the expression of "a homology, an isomorphism, between the way two things gesture" (L9). While she and Carson have attracted appreciative audiences by cultivating homological resonances in their work, less sympathetic readers have been unwilling to accept the terms of such connections, interpreting deliberate choices made on the basis of outward direction

and metaphoric juxtaposition as signs of scholarly weakness: as misunderstandings, mistranslations, or misleading errors and omissions. For instance, one early review of *Lyric Philosophy* commends Zwicky's desire to challenge philosophy's analytic tradition, but suggests that the book neglects to consider a number of intellectual traditions that might have made the job easier: "To create lyric philosophy," writes Donald Phillip Verene, "she must rely for everything on Wittgenstein, the standard canon of moderns, and her own introspection" (128). Verene's review overlooks the recuperative project of *Lyric Philosophy*, which highlights the artistry, unconventionality, ambivalence, and mystery of Ludwig Wittgenstein's thinking: as with Zwicky's poetry collection *Wittgenstein Elegies* (1988), *Lyric Philosophy* attempts to remove Wittgenstein from the ranks of analytic philosophers, poststructuralist theorists, and postmodernist poets who have, in Zwicky's view, misunderstood him (see Furlani). Zwicky's writings frequently work to defamiliarize historical heavyweights, and this has been one of Carson's recurring achievements as well, most notably in *Economy of the Unlost (Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan)* (1999). Bringing an ancient Greek lyricist and a German-language poet — a survivor of the Holocaust, moreover — together in conversation is a move intended, in Carson's words, to let them "keep each other from settling" (viii), a choice that foregrounds the importance of both defamiliarization and lyric attunement to isomorphism. Significantly, Solway's "The Trouble with Annie" accuses Carson of misrepresenting her reliance, in *Economy of the Unlost*, on another scholar's work, but his charge was dismissed by some of those who subsequently came to her defence: Ian Rae, for instance, argued that it did not "diminish the originality of Carson's larger project, which is to draw connections" ("Hoaxes" 46).

Circulating throughout critical receptions such as these are questions regarding the nature of the writer's responsibility to the reader — particularly when that writer is known to be a scholar and an educator as well as a poet — and of the reader's responsibility to the text: his or her willingness to accept that understanding may require the translation of an idiosyncratic vocabulary, or the recognition of metaphorical, rather than strictly logical, correspondence. Such questions are informing current critical discussions of lyric philosophy and scholarship, and they are also at stake in the controversies that touched Zwicky's and Carson's careers roughly a decade ago. In 2001, Solway drew upon his status as

an established literary critic, college educator, and associate editor of the now-defunct review magazine *Books in Canada* to publish a polemical attack on Carson's scholarly and literary status; three years later, soon after Solway republished "The Trouble with Annie" in his essay collection *Director's Cut* (2003), Wells published a polemical attack on Zwicky in *Books in Canada*, echoing a number of Solway's characteristic complaints. Both attacks dwelt implicitly on issues of poetic and pedagogic influence, and marked Zwicky's and Carson's relations to university teaching as contentious aspects of their writing lives.

Solway's condescending use of the diminutive "Annie" in "The Trouble with Annie: David Solway *Unmakes* Anne Carson" not only infantilizes Carson, but also invokes Alfred Hitchcock's 1955 comedy *The Trouble with Harry*. In the film, Harry's corpse is concealed, revealed, and re-hidden by the people who suspect themselves to be responsible for his death, and Hitchcock's depiction of this morbidly circulating currency is the prevailing metaphor in Solway's attack on Carson, which represents her as a monstrous golem made manifest by her readership, "moribund despite her apparent mobility" (26). In both the *Books in Canada* essay and the version that appears in *Director's Cut*, Solway accuses Carson of intellectual appropriation, though he never utters the word plagiarism, but instead "invents," as Rae notes, "a wealth of equivalent terms" ("Hoaxes" 49). "Looking closely at Carson's practice," Solway writes in *Books in Canada*, "it remains a moot question which is more precarious, the scholarship or the poetry which it often vitiates" (24). Though this version of the essay provoked defensive responses from scholars (Jennings, Rae), Solway's condemnation of Carson as a researcher and teacher was contested less exhaustively than were his allegations concerning her poetic talent.

The *Director's Cut* version of "The Trouble with Annie" asks, "if the work is so obstreperously bad, how account for the reputation?" It then answers this question itself:

> This is mainly spread and consolidated by editors, critics and reviewers, whose bookish expertise — regardless of whatever previous accomplishments they may licitly boast — can be described in far too many instances as a kind of higher Sesame Street word-and-number recognition faculty. They tend to sound like sciolistic Counts and half-educated Big Birds, reacting with manic delight

> to the lexical doits and clippings and allusions that Carson-type poetry provides for their enlightenment. (44)

This passage, the tone of which is characteristic of the essay on the whole, is remarkable for its condemnation of Carson's readership more so than Carson herself: the problem, as Solway sees it, is not simply that an audience with undiscerning ears is too easily satisfied by obstreperous verse, but that it delights in being educated by it, and embraces its use of outdated and foreign intellectual currency — the passage's "lexical doits." Significantly, the ancient Greeks consummated their notions of foreignness, adversarial relations, and the inability to speak Greek in one word, *barbaros*: root word of the English *barbarian*. If Carson is a barbarian instructor, as Solway's depictions of her noisy, foreign lexicon of scholarship and poetry seem to imply, then those who choose to study under her must by the same logic be self-defeating listeners. In the *Books in Canada* version of the essay, Solway deprecatingly remarks that "Readers will tend to question their own intelligence rather than the poet's competence when confronted by the capricious or the nebulous" (24), and suggests that Carson "may be the recipient of the benefits of an upward displacement assigned by critics who cannot surrender the hermeneutical cachet which [she] confers" (25). Grimly, he writes: "We have become dabblers in poetry and classical scholarship without having to know much about either" (26).

In the *Director's Cut* version of "The Trouble with Annie," Solway makes a significant addition to the reproofs with which he challenges Carson's academic status. He writes that the American education critic Roger Kimball, the author of *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (1990), has also "taken Carson to task for intellectual appropriation and poor scholarship, or in his own words, for 'sycophantizing Aristotle's *Poetics*' and producing a piece of literary theorizing *à la mode* that begins with an egregious mistranslation of Aristotle and never really recovers" (42). Solway is here referring to a review by Kimball published in the *TLS* in March 1991, surveying the latest series of the classics journal *Arion*. Kimball's review is indeed disapproving of Carson's contribution to the journal, but it is not exactly as Solway depicts it: for one thing, Kimball's use of the phrase "sycophantizing Aristotle's *Poetics*" is not, in fact, "in his own words," nor is it a deprecation of Carson at all: the phrase simply records the title of Carson's essay "'Just for the Thrill': Sycophantizing Aristotle's *Poetics*,"

which is included in the issue of *Arion* under review. For another, Kimball at no point seems to accuse Carson of intellectual appropriation, as Solway says he does. Why then does Solway make this claim?

The answer lies in part in the critical personality that Kimball cultivated for himself in the 1990s, and in the issues of the *TLS* that were published in the months immediately preceding the statements that Solway paraphrases liberally in "The Trouble with Annie." In a January 1991 issue of the *TLS*, *Tenured Radicals* is reviewed unfavourably by Peter Brooks, who writes that in Kimball's work — and in the writings of likeminded contemporaries such as Allan Bloom, Lynne V. Cheney, and William Bennett — "The polemic [against contemporary humanities departments in the US] has been pursued with more *ressentiment* than reason" (6). Brooks takes issue with Kimball's alignment of intellectual and political radicalisms (5), and notes the "blatant contradiction" between, "on the one hand, the allegation that the new forms of humanistic study have alienated students, purported to have deserted humanities courses in droves, and on the other hand the assertion that the radicals have laid hold of the minds of the vast majority of the young, and are indoctrinating them in their perverse ideologies" (6). Despite obvious disagreement with many of Kimball's views, Brooks also concedes to a number of his points: he writes, for instance, of his shared distaste for some of the uses to which "theory" has been put, and regrets that "the new ideas have sometimes flourished in a kind of intellectual vacuum, without a sufficient sense of their origins and contexts" (6). The polemical nature of Kimball's writing is, ultimately, Brooks's sticking point: though he concurs that "There are pressing intellectual issues to be debated in American universities," he maintains that books such as *Tenured Radicals* "give us precious little guidance to them" (6). "Reason, dialogue," and "good will" are among the qualities that Brooks believes are necessary for "the working-out of some usable answers" (6).[6]

Kimball responded to Brooks's review of *Tenured Radicals* with a letter to the editor published in the subsequent issue of the *TLS*:

> The often nihilistic fatuousness of much that goes on in the name of scholarship and teaching in the American university today has, I believe, been amply documented. Doctoral dissertations and books investigating the rock videos of Madonna; papers at the Modern Language Association devoted to "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl", "The Lesbian Phallus: Or, Does

> Heterosexuality Exist?", "Counterhegemonic Discourse in *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Winter's Tale*" . . . all this along with the sundry barbarisms that have congregated under the name of "theory" are now well known to be business as usual in higher education. (14)

The offending project titles listed here would have been familiar to any *TLS* readers who had already acquainted themselves with *Tenured Radicals*, throughout which Kimball's frustration with the American academy's apparent takeover by feminists is repeatedly demonstrated by his use of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's paper "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl" as an exemplar of "the destruction of the values, methods, and goals of traditional humanistic study" (xi; 145-46; 192; 201). The tenured radicals of Kimball's book and letter are those scholars "who have conducted a devastating assault on the liberal arts curriculum across the country, deliberately degrading and politicizing the humanities in the name of feminism, ethnic studies and multiculturalism; and it is they who have begun to campaign against free speech and pluralism for the sake of enforcing a narrow vision of political correctness" ("Letter" 14). Kimball's review of *Arion* appeared just one month after his letter to the editor was published, and his arguments therein that the journal "must set itself against the intellectual and political pieties currently regnant in the academy" in order to be "independent of intellectual fashion" provide the best contextualization of his opinion of Carson. Not intellectual appropriation in the sense of plagiarism, then, but rather intellectual appropriation in the sense of flagrantly running in the herd, is what is at stake in Carson's work so far as Kimball is concerned.

One of Solway's most oft-repeated complaints in the years surrounding his attack on Carson was that popular poetics in Canada seemed to him to have been "done by consortium": they seemed to be the product of a "homogenizing" and "smearing out" of "the diction of the presumably *singular* poet into dreary equivalence" ("Standard" 19). This frustration found another spokesperson in Wells, who in his *Books in Canada* attack on Zwicky wrote of his fear of falling "prey to the merciless philistine forces of the agora" (41), and complained of Zwicky's critical "impulse towards homogeneity, towards orthodoxy, towards the erasure of personality" (41). Wells's essay, "Strawman Dialectics," was published in *Books in Canada* while Solway was still an associate editor

of the magazine; primarily, it responds to an essay by Zwicky entitled "The Ethics of the Negative Review," which had been published in the *Malahat Review* earlier that year. In "The Ethics of the Negative Review," Zwicky suggests that when readers are confronted with "books we think are bad," "in public, we keep our mouths shut" (59-60). Wells's critique argues that Zwicky's essay establishes a hypothetical negative reviewer as a straw man to be admonished and taken down; and, it suggests that this reviewer could be read as "a caricature, a composite perhaps of the more vitriolic sides of Solway, Sarah, Starnino, Henighan, Metcalf, Marchand, et al." (40). Whether or not Zwicky had any or all of these critics in minds is impossible to tell from her essay, but both "The Ethics of the Negative Review" and "Strawman Dialectics" emerged in a literary atmosphere in which the fallout of "The Trouble with Annie" still lingered.[7]

"The Ethics of the Negative Review" implies more about Zwicky's characteristic interest in phenomenological ethics than it does about the composite figure that Wells perceived to be its target. In it, Zwicky instructs reviewers to "let the ego go" (62), a recommendation that echoes her efforts in *A Theory of Ineffability* and *Lyric Philosophy* to demonstrate that "the human ego does not comprise the totality of what is real" (*Lyric* L92). Without conflating two distinct senses of the word *ego* — one the correlative of individualistic hubris, the other the psychoanalytic understanding of the self — it is helpful to think of Zwicky's philosophical position, particularly its ecological relevance, as the source of her position on the ethics of literary response. If to review is, as she says, to "take a second look; or a third," or to take "the trouble to listen again, to listen with care, curiosity, and respect" ("The Ethics" 61), then the product of that looking and listening will be akin to the philosophical attention she encourages when she writes elsewhere of human interactions with non-human objects and species. Though she writes of having requested, during her tenure as the reviews editor of *The Fiddlehead* in the 1990s, that reviewers only choose to review books about which they are "genuinely enthusiastic" (54), "The Ethics of the Negative Review" is not a mandate for editorial censorship. Zwicky does not suggest that critics should be denied the space in which to write and publish negative reviews; rather, she wishes that they choose not to, of their own free will — particularly if they have been labouring under the misapprehension that either the canon or some ideal "standard of excel-

lence" requires "a cohort of hit-persons in each generation to maintain its authority" (56). Although *A Theory of Ineffability*, *Lyric Philosophy*, and *Wisdom & Metaphor* all demonstrate Zwicky's preoccupation with that which *cannot* be said, rather than that which *should not* be publicly spoken or printed, reading "The Ethics of the Negative Review" in correspondence with her more strictly philosophical work highlights the deliberation with which Zwicky asks reviewers to be open enough to perceive "not an award culture's hierarchy of achievement," but instead "a living chorus of voices, talking, murmuring, singing to themselves and to others" (61).

"The Ethics of the Negative Review" sketches a "portrait" of the ideal reviewer, someone who is "a kind of literary naturalist, someone with sharp ears and a good memory, who's willing to tarry alongside both us and the literary world" (61). This portrait recalls that of the birder in Don McKay's gently self-parodying poem "Field Marks," in which the birder "Wears extra eyes around his neck," and his "mind / pokes out his ears the way an Irish Setter's nose / pokes out a station-wagon window" (*Birding* 15). Zwicky's and McKay's writings suggest similar programs for ethical engagement with the world: whereas Zwicky speaks of "ontological attention" (*Wisdom* L52) and the deliberate perception of "connection rather than isolation" (*Lyric* L69), McKay speaks of "poetic attention," by which he means "a sort of readiness, a species of longing which is without the desire to possess" (*Vis* 26). These forms of attention resemble earlier pairings of phenomenological philosophy and literary criticism, such as those practiced in the mid-twentieth century by men such as Gaston Bachelard, George Poulet, and Charles Olson, and, through them, by Canadian critics such as Eli Mandel, Frank Davey, and others of "the Tish generation" (Godard, "Structuralism/Post-Structuralism" 29). The literary implications of Zwicky's philosophical position are part of this nebulous tradition, reflecting phenomenological modes of reading and response, as well as what Barbara Godard has called the "underlying theory of communication" that made Olson's model of proprioception so attractive to west coast poetics in Canada and the US ("Critical Fictions" 254). They stand in relation to that tradition, however, in much the same way that Jung stands in relation to Freud in the history of psychoanalysis: throughout her writings, Zwicky consistently emphasizes her disagreement with phenomenology's characteristic prioritization of the perceiv-

ing ego, and, as much as possible, attempts to foreground the material importance of the thing perceived rather than the identity of he or she who perceives it.

These matters inform the subtext of "The Ethics of the Negative Review," and their influence makes Wells's antagonistic approach all the more noteworthy. Rather than addressing the deeper philosophical stakes of Zwicky's essay, "Strawman Dialectics" conflates insinuations regarding Zwicky's gender with jabs at her intellectual legitimacy. Wells twice refers to her as "Dr. Zwicky" (given his essay's overall tone, the formality of the title suggests jest rather than respect), twice calls her "the good doctor," and at one point describes her as "our fair professor," running the moral connotations of the word *fair* into the word's aesthetic, and typically feminized, meaning (41-42). Arguing that Zwicky's position in "The Ethics of the Negative Review" is "fundamentally anti-intellectual," Wells remarks that this is "an odd position for a philosopher to put herself in," and comments further that it is "based on the fuzzy-wuzzy realm of feelings and emotions" (41). Zwicky is represented as being amateurish: Wells writes that she has "an insufficient critical consciousness of the agenda she advances" (41), and, moreover, he brings the significance of women's bodies and voices strangely into focus when he comments that Zwicky's loaded use of the word "negative" "brings to mind another trenchant political analogy, the abortion debate" (40). Within the context of "Strawman Dialectics," this analogy comes out of left field: it may be intended to call to mind questions concerning reproductive rights (an analogy in which the silencing of negative reviews would be linked associatively with abortion), but, more than anything, it conjures a politically charged image of the female body itself. Even more strangely, within the broader discursive context of Zwicky's writings, the analogy repeats, nearly verbatim, an argument that Zwicky herself anticipated in *Lyric Philosophy* more than a decade earlier.

Lyric Philosophy makes rhetorical use of a doubting interlocutor: a voice that crops up now and again to raise objections to the propositions that Zwicky puts forth. Early in the text, this voice asks, "Isn't this just another version of anti-intellectualism? Aren't you really just looking for emotion instead of thought?" (L86). "Zwicky" responds by asking in turn,

> What sort of examples do we have in mind when we say things like, 'emotion draws thought off course, muddies it'? The *Duino*

> *Elegies*? The Apollo from the west pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia? Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 95? More like debates over the legalization of abortion where, it seems, we can lose sight of certain issues in an *excess* of emotion — where our emotional investment in the realization of a particular outcome blinds us to thoughts (and feelings) that would tend to make that outcome less obviously desirable. (L88)

As "Strawman Dialectics" provides no indication of whether or not Wells had read *Lyric Philosophy* before composing his critique, the remarkable similarity between his arguments and those that Zwicky imagines in her own text casts suspicion over the integrity of Wells's essay. Irony may be at work here, but, even if so, it cannot discount Wells's troubling gendering of intellectual rigour in "Strawman Dialectics," particularly when his allusions to women's reproductive rights, and to stereotypically feminized minds, stand out all the more starkly without the added intertextual context of *Lyric Philosophy*. This stereoscopic targeting of, on the one hand, sex and gender, and, on the other, intellectual ability, is present throughout Solway's attack on Carson as well, and Wells repeats it elsewhere: in a *Books in Canada* review of the poet (and now professor) Triny Finlay's debut poetry collection *Splitting Off* (2004), Wells takes issue with Finlay's "treatment of feminist themes," and criticizes the book as "an example of a growing trend: a first book by a poet either slightly younger or slightly older than thirty who has received her formation almost exclusively within universities" (31-32). As with Solway's "The Trouble with Annie," Wells's response to *Splitting Off* assumes that feminism is currently so institutionalized within the university that to criticize it is now the more untraditional and liberating act. Similarly, Solway's and Wells's attacks on Carson and Zwicky suggest a disturbing correspondence between the viability of alternative modes of poetry, criticism, and scholarship, and the gender of their practitioners. For Solway, Carson is oxymoronically radical and modish; for Wells, Zwicky's "impulse towards homogeneity, towards orthodoxy, towards the erasure of personality" (41) is peculiarly feminine.

Running throughout both Solway's attack on Carson and Wells's attack on Zwicky is the discomfiting belief that those approaches to criticism, philosophy, poetry, and scholarship that I have here been calling *lyric* are not only gendered female, but also represent the failure of

literary and academic cultures in Canada. Not only are such perspectives narrowly conservative, they also betray deep-seated gender prejudices that are in and of themselves a hindrance to this, and any other, country's artistic and intellectual future. Though Carson has called herself "a classical philologist, not . . . an ideologue of institutions" ("The Idea" 6), like Zwicky's, her writings reflect a complex engagement with her multi-faceted role as a poet and a pedagogue, as well as with the analytical methods, hierarchical assumptions, and cultural stereotypes that have shaped her academic field. The individual choices that both Zwicky and Carson have made in allowing diverse genres of research and writing to influence and infiltrate their work represent these poet-scholars' shared ability to work beyond the restrictions of academic convention, and, in doing so, to help bring the political assumptions and cultural ramifications of those conventions to light.

Author's Note

For those whose conversation and editorial insight helped shape this essay, I am sincerely grateful. To D.M.R. Bentley, Alison Conway, Manina Jones, Phil Glennie, and Ian Rae especially, many thanks.

Notes

[1] The poet and scholar Tim Lilburn, whose name is among those most frequently associated with Zwicky's in the realm of Canadian literary criticism, is among the few who have set Zwicky's and Carson's names together in print. "I am a poet and an essayist," he writes in an essay published in *The Fiddlehead* in 2006: "I also have a scholarly interest in Plato. Perhaps it seems strange for a poet to have interests like this, but in this country it is not all that uncommon. I think of Jan Zwicky reading Wittgenstein, the pre-Socratics, and Plato; Erín Mouré, the French theorists and Augustine; Anne Carson, all the Greeks" ("Thinking" 156).

[2] The *University Affairs* issue mentioned above, and the essay collections *Lyric Ecology: An Appreciation of the Work of Jan Zwicky* (2010) and *Thinking and Singing: Poetry and the Practice of Philosophy* (2002), offer an accessible survey of the poets and scholars most intimately connected with, and/or influenced by Zwicky's writings. Carson's influence is less well documented, but a few salient examples may be noted. Anne Simpson employs *Eros the Bittersweet* in the rhetorical framework of the essay "Orpheus Recalling Eurydice"; and, in one of the poems that accompanies that piece in the essay collection *A Ragged Pen: Essays on Poetry and Memory* (2006), she seems to channel *Eros the Bittersweet*'s devotion to unconsummated desire, depicting Orpheus' love for Eurydice as a tense relation between the pair's real and imagined connections:

Ever since he arrived, each day
lengthening gradually into dusk, he's had trouble
sleeping. He misses her
more when he's with her. (80)

Méira Cook and Steve McCaffery each cite from *Eros the Bittersweet* in their respective introductions to *Writing Lovers: Reading Canadian Love Poetry by Women* (2005) and *Prior to Meaning: The Protosemantic and Poetics* (2001); and, in "Six Short Talks: reading in, around, & on (& on) Anne Carson's 'Possessive Used as Drink (Me): a lecture in the form of fifteen minutes'," Emily Carr mimics the form of Carson's first book of poetry, *Short Talks* (1992), by structuring her paper as a series of short, semi-ekphrastic vignettes. Finally, in "Drawing Breath: Creative Elements and their Exile from Higher Education," an article published in the pedagogic journal *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, the University of Glasgow professor Alison Phipps turns to Carson's *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera* (2005) in order to illuminate her advocacy of creative expression in the classroom.

[3] Notably, Kirsch was among those who applauded Solway's *Books in Canada* attack on Carson, commending him, in a letter to the editor published in a subsequent issue of the magazine, for exposing a writer whose "complexity" is "plagiarized from Stein, Celan, et al." ("Letter" 40).

[4] The use of L and R in my citations from *Lyric Philosophy* and *Wisdom & Metaphor* indicates the texts' left- and right-hand pages.

[5] Zwicky writes elsewhere that because nature poetry is defined by the acceptance of, and reverence for, a world that exists beyond the scope of human language, no nature poem is ever "more than a finger pointing at the moon: its words do not 'contain' reality, but merely tell us in what direction we should look" ("Lyric Realism" 88). Though I have been speaking of the discursive effect of terms such as *lyric* and *domesticity* in "Loure," and thus referring to the ways in which the poem directs readers to the broader complex of Zwicky's philosophy, in Zwicky's view, a (nature) poem's purpose is not simply to participate in linguistic signification, but rather to act as "a kind of ontological signpost" (88), bringing to light its own inability to express that which lies beyond its linguistic purview.

[6] Here, one ought to consider the implications of Solway's sardonic worry, in the *Director's Cut* version of "The Trouble with Annie," that his essay "runs the risk of candour sounding like dyspepsia or defamation" (52-53). Although a number of Solway's points about academic integrity deserve consideration, his decision to cultivate the celebrity of his own critical voice through polemical shock tactics and misogynistic spectacle seriously undermined the validity of his critique. As with Brooks's review of *Tenured Radicals*, those who discounted Solway's *Books in Canada* essay were clearly influenced by its tenor (Jennings 39), thinking Solway to be "bombastic" and "grandiloquent" — "a contrarian whose own arguments turn against him" (Rae 47-48). Seemingly motivated by personal jealousy (Jennings 39), Solway's cries of critical conspiracy appeared strenuously overblown at the time of the *Books in Canada* printing, making his accusations regarding Carson's scholarship all too easy to dismiss. "I confess," wrote Chris Jennings in a letter to the editor published in a subsequent issue of *Books in Canada*, "I have not read John Felstiner's *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, nor have I yet taken Solway's suggestion that I compare Felstiner's work to Carson's, though I may" (39). In "The Trouble with Annie," Solway argues that Carson's *Economy of the Unlost* appropriates John Felstiner's readings of Paul Celan, and obscures Carson's reliance upon his work; he even provides page references to substantiate his point. In my opinion, the similarities between the passages he marks do not prove indefensible borrowing on Carson's part; however, those similarities do exist, and Solway's complaint in this respect is not unreasonable.

It is of particular significance that Jennings countered Solway's claims without investigating them fully. Whatever it was that Solway produced in "The Trouble with Annie"

— whether "dyspepsia," "defamation," or partially legitimate critique — both Jennings and Rae found his methods so absurd as to suspect his seriousness, and question whether or not the essay was part of a literary hoax like the prank Solway had pulled earlier by "translating" and publicizing the fictitious Greek poet Andreas Karavis. Ironically, the response engendered by Solway's invective situated him implicitly on more stereotypically female shores. "Verbal continence is an essential feature of the masculine virtue of *sophrosyne* ('prudence, soundness of mind, moderation, temperance, self-control')," writes Carson in "The Gender of Sound," whereas "the women of classical literature are a species given to disorderly and uncontrolled outflow of sound — to shrieking, wailing, sobbing, shrill lament, loud laugher, screams of pain or pleasure and eruptions of raw emotion in general" (*Glass* 126). "When a man lets his current emotions come up to his mouth and out through his tongue," she continues, "he is thereby feminized" (126). Because the academic ideal of reasoned argument is still today invested with the traditional Greek qualities of *sophrosyne*, a vitriolic essay such as "The Trouble with Annie" can, in this light, appear to be as perversely "feminine," and as foreign, as the barbarisms that it claims Carson's teaching represents. I note this not to condone Solway's hostile approach, but rather to draw attention to the ways in which critical reactions to work such as his may themselves be subject to the historical assumptions that differentiate "male" temperance and "female" noise from each other.

[7] In the spring of 2012, Zwicky republished "The Ethics of the Negative Review" online, in concert with the newly established feminist organization Canadian Women in the Literary Arts. From there, the essay met with another unsympathetic response by the critic Michael Lista, who responded polemically in an article published in the *National Post*. Whereas Wells's criticism of "The Ethics of the Negative Review" implies that the supposed "femininity" of Zwicky's philosophy renders her argument anti-intellectual, Lista's implies that Zwicky's call for active silence is, in fact, anti-feminist: "a miserable, low thing to tell another woman, another writer, another human" ("The good" n. pag.). This time, Zwicky responded to the criticism of her work, defending her position in a subsequent issue of the *National Post* (see "Good, bad" n. pag.). She also followed up, roughly one week later, with a renewed argument concerning the ethics of negative reviewing — one that deals explicitly with the online conversation that erupted in the midst of her written confrontation with Lista, and asks: "Do most girls favour gushy raves while most guys hanker for verbal brass knuckles?" The answer, she argues, is no (see "On critical culture" n. pag.).

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