# CANADA, THEN SCATOLOGY, THEN THE NOVELS OF DAVID WILLIAMS

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In "Canada: The Borderline Case" (1977), Marshall McLuhan claimed the role of supplement for Canada: "A border is not a connection but an interval of resonance, and such gaps abound in the land of the DEW line. . . . Canadians never got 'delivery' on their first national identity image in the 19th Century" (226-27). McLuhan's Canada is "hidden ground," existing as a cipher between two logo-centres; if McLuhan's language is not that of Derrida, it is surely not far off.[1]

In "For or Against the Moon," a brilliant defense of the deconstructive tradition, Michael Keefer has Derrida "throwing spears in both directions from the edge of the world defined by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* . . . one spear, thrown into a gap between signifier and signified, splinters the latter into an infinite regress of supplemental signifiers; another hurled at the 'transcendental signified' which in 'logocentric' metaphysics puts an end to this regress sails on without resistance" (307). Against planet, world, and centre, Keefer defends the tradition of "the moon," whatever is outside of "'all that is the case'" (306). The only criticism of deconstruction that Keefer takes seriously is the historicist one—that deconstruction ties itself too closely to function and to metaphysics.[2] Keefer answers this partially by repeating Derrida's distrust of "national-security" appropriations of academic discourse, and more fully in his own critical stance elsewhere.[3] However, there is a curious scene near the beginning of "For or Against the Moon," in which Keefer pretends a scene of writing: Annapolis Basin, spring tide, full moon. The essay is built around the extended metaphor of the moon. But metaphor is a comedown from metaphysics and leads to ironies much more pointed than the inadvertent juxtaposition of Derrida the spear-thrower and Derrida the refuser of the military complex. From one point of view, the descent from neologism into the archaic language of

transfer is something like Fredric Jameson's "meta-commentary," the moment when the author gives away his own limited historical position. Still, Keefer only gives away geography. Since 1969, when we left waste behind on the moon, the historical moon has been part of "all that is the case," just slightly less hygienic than the one in the eye or in metaphor. More immediately, Keefer's Annapolis Basin is a McLuhanesque place, a hidden ground from which the dynastic (European, American, ancient Egyptian) texts can be read and criticized. "Canada" is again the gap in the text, showing up geographically, but washed clean of history.

Of course McLuhan, for all his brilliant probes of language, was never too careful about history, and "Canada" is outside Keefer's main concern.[4] Still, if this peripheral rhetoric is any clue, then recent versions of "Canada" in Canadian writing divide fairly neatly between the under-named and the over-named. In his 1965 "Conclusion" to the *Literary History of Canada*, Northrop Frye programmed Canadian writing by defining it as the absence of a Blake or a Milton. Much recent writing has retained his theorized
colonial gap despite reversing the implicit value judgement. Although in Atwood's *Bodily Harm* it is Rennie's departure from Canada that suddenly puts Canadian relations with developing countries into historical focus, in *The Handmaid's Tale* the polemics of reproductive choice are transposed onto (because taken from) the polarities of American culture, so that Canada becomes the sanctuary beyond Gilead, much in the same way that in Atwood's early poems, Canada is the zero-end of the poem: "in this country the animals / . . . have the faces of / no-one" ("The Animals in that Country"); "I am the space you desecrate / as you pass through" ("Backdrop Addresses Cowboy").[5]

The same is true in Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* and *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. In the former, Canada is more or less a rumour (as the scene of one of Buddy's stories, 12); in the latter, the border that Billy criss-crosses (20). The only named inhabitant, Captain Poetry, fails to show up (84). Until *In the Skin of a Lion*, Ondaatje's history is entirely Sri Lankan or American. The prairie version of this depletion is *Seed Catalogue*, in which Robert Kroetsch inverts Homer's tribal encyclopedia with a heroic catalogue of absences. At one end of Western literary history, Eric Havelock insists, was the summing up of *doxa*, the exhaustive genealogy whereby the first literary artefact gathers in

itself all previous words; at this end, Kroetsch implies, the oral re-invades the printed, and the Western-European word disappears westward into a gap.

This discourse of Canada-as-gap is an important ruse which allows the Canadian writer to begin a story that is not simply an appendage to Europe; Linda Hutcheon, in *The Canadian Postmodern*, has suggested that the historiographic impulse to address other national histories can be read as Canada's entry into the world community. The recourse to other histories of production, consumption, power, and ideology may, conversely, be read as a flight from our own historical wastes. Here the metaphor of scatology insinuates itself: implied in every logic of production and consumption—from the body's to that of all mechanical and industrial extensions of the body—is the logic of excretion; a culture can be known by its waste. The historicizing writer, whether modern, post-, or "After post-," often destroys gaps by using scatology as a sign for *presence*. The fouling of Coalhouse Walker's Model T in E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, for example, becomes a tangible figure for all American gifts to the Negro—the most obvious sign in the systematic oppression of a minority, no matter how elusive history is in the novel. Canadian novelists have relied on similar patterns since at least the 1950s. In *The Second Scroll*, A.M. Klein's narrator experiences the ghetto in Casablanca as an intensely scatological place; Duddy Kravitz possesses his land in stylized primate manner by urinating his name into the snow; the constipated narrator of Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* is the anthropological mediating term between native abasement and white colonization of Quebec.

In the first two works of prairie novelist David Williams, *The Burning Wood* (1975) and *The River Horsemen* (1981), scatology traces the marginalizing of the native that haunts Canadian history. In *The Burning Wood*, a white fundamentalist boy, Joshua Cardiff, goes Indian in order to mitigate a growing sense that his Christian culture has betrayed its ideals. Next to the Bible camp that his grandfather built is a Cree reserve; once his grandfather nominates Joshua as thief, Joshua senses his own marginality in his family and befriends a Cree boy, Thomas. During a camp-meeting in which the preacher speaks of saving one's immortal soul, Thomas distracts Joshua; together they cross the camp boundary to watch a Sun Dance being made. Thomas's mode of distraction is at first scatological. He materializes and humanizes

the preacher's transcendental language so that the unnamed "accursed thing" becomes "real bad gas" (111). Drawn by the sermon, Joshua fears that his soul may become "a squalid and smelly one" (118), something like Thomas's. Joshua has learned from his fundamentalist culture to locate his soul transcendentally until the scatological functions of the body undermine metaphysics and transcendence. If scatology deconstructs the language of the old centre, it nevertheless locates another centre—the body—so that scene and smell replace gap and regress. As the lower breath, the fart is the nether inversion of *pneuma.*

The scatologic, much like the erotic in this early novel, becomes something that Williams incorporates into the Christian version of the self:

> an Indian man stood at the foot of the driveway and, facing the house, urinated in the snow. He took his unrelieved time about it, sending up a great cloud of steam above his head, catching the last of the sunlight, so that he began to resemble the picture of an angel alighting in an old illustrated Bible. Joshua was relieved because his mother was in the kitchen at the time, peeling potatoes. He kept Janie forcibly away from the picture window. (41)

Despite the intuitive adoption in Joshua's language, his intent is to keep his blood family from his imagined scatological kin; while Williams's rewriting of Rudy Wiebe's Old-Testament Indians doubles native scatology onto Christian spiritualizing in an attempt to naturalize the latter, Joshua's "relief" is only emotional. One of the problems Terry Goldie has identified in such versions of history is that the writer consumes the history of the other: "The indigene is Other and the white signmaker, the self, must find some means of dealing with Other, by denying or embracing" (65). Goldie goes on to tie this literary process to the refusal of native land-claims and of requests for political autonomy. For Goldie, even scatology can become a facet of desire (Goldie 77).

In a sense Williams falsifies his own biography by having Joshua go to the reserve: Stony Lake Bible Camp was next to Chagoness Reserve and Williams counselled at Stony's "Indian Camp" as a youth ("After Post-modernism" 281), but he never crossed over to the reserve (*Connections Two* 117). In another sense, the novel reproduces personal and historical binaries, mediated by scatology. The use of the Cree as a generalized trope for the

body is perhaps inevitable, given the opening scene of the novel where Joshua imagines himself as "David in the cave at Engedi, approaching now so carefully, carefully, to cut the skirt of the sleeping king's robe" (1). In the original text, Saul was not sleeping, but excreting. How can one speak for the body when culture and acculturized text veil it? The issues in *The Burning Wood* are mainly personal, but history chooses the minority from which the dialogic voice speaks. If Williams's first novel cannot help but incorporate the indigene—climaxing in a tragic replay of the buffalo hunt with stolen Clydesdales and reluctant cattle—at least Joshua's moment with Coming-day's wife does seem to exist outside the poles of denial and embrace: "He smiled in a rush of sympathy, though his bowels twitched at the sight of her rotting limbs" (132). The incipient scatology here is Jacobean ("bowels of compassion"), not Cree.

Williams's next novel, *The River Horsemen*, is much more sophisticated technically, though it deals mainly with the same fundamentalist/Cree binaries. The four main narrators paddle a canoe up-river to Saskatoon during the Depression—Nick Sobchuck to find his mother in a mental hospital; Many-birds to find his absconded love, Agnes; Jack Cann, a fallen-away revivalist preacher, and Fine-day, a failed shaman, both ostensibly to accompany Nick. Williams inverts Huck Finn's proto-American journey: the horsemen go up-river; the hygienic binaries where each race is represented by its best hope are split again so that there are multiple psychotic relationships.

Like Joshua Cardiff, Jack Cann bears the obvious literary signs for Jesus Christ and, even more than Joshua, Jack seems to be a centre for the novel's incorporation of native semiosis in the same way that he himself is a conspicuous consumer of "rollkuchen" and of his wife, Crystal (91). Williams seems to incorporate a whole range of Plains Cree culture in Fine-day (shaman and, historically, a survivor of the Northwest Rebellion of 1885), as well as in Many-birds (the Cree trickster Wisahkecahk). However, the Cree here are neither simply personal figures in the constellation of the white sign-maker nor attempts to recover exact historical voices in the tradition of Rudy Wiebe's Cree or Peter Such's Beothuk in *Riverrun*. To tribalize a name might be to archetype the character, but the Irish apostrophe after the "O" in Billy O'jibway insists upon parody. Moving beyond Twain, the journey parodies Wisahkecahk's mythic canoe-journey during

which he helps to restore the world after a great flood (Nelson 46). The ex-convict Many-birds forces Jack to recapture the lost body of Christianity, but this is strictly inadvertent.

Like Keefer's "moon," parody orbits a main text. In *The River Horsemen* even the "moon" is replaced by Many-birds. His peripheral challenge is antinomian and somewhat sinister:

> Never have got outa the pen alive if I worried. Keep your mind a blank. Every day drain it dry.
>
> Then I feel something else about to drain . . . .
>
> "Water to water, I say, "dust to dust."
>
> It's what the priest said over Billy Left-hand after he got outa the hole. Throat cut the same day. In the dining hall.
>
> At the last minute I think to stick out my cup. My friends all sit, blinking like owls.
>
> "What's wrong with you birds? None of you ever laugh?" I put the cup to my lips, swallow fast. Hot. . . . At once I know a way to beat that fucker, bald Head Moon. Outshine him myself.
>
> The cool air licks at my crack. Between my legs I see the old man grin at last.
>
> "Hey, old man, I think you should kill yourself. That would be the funniest thing. Here it's easy. So easy a guy like you could do it. Let me show you."
>
> I flip over the rail, headfirst. I hear them all gasp just before I start to fall.
>
> Upsidedown I grin at a starry sky. Old Bone, I think, your light is put out. You won't dare to show your face again.
>
> Then I land, like a cat, in mud to my knees. (148)

The parody here mocks Fine-day, the shaman who has had an initiatory dream of dismemberment, death, and rebirth.[6] Earlier, and therefore doubly the wrong end round in the shaman's narrative, Williams had Many-birds parody the shaman's birth experience: "'You was born out d'wrong end, old man'" (70). Parody does not attempt to get the culture "right," even though it does still reserve a special status for the sign-maker. What is important is not just that Williams imitates the culture-mocking and self-injuring jokes of Wisahkecahk, the key causative agent in Cree mythology (Nelson 120), but also Many-birds's scatology.[7]

Many-birds's excess, in stepping in Agnes's chamber pot and in risking his life to moon her new, more dangerous lover Many-guns, is a cross-cultural parallel to Nick's indecent exposure

during his teacher's monologue on "one flag . . . one throne . . . one Empire" (109). When Nick's father defends Nick by recalling that "the former king give up his throne that way" (111), he discovers the jealousy with which even a small empire guards against the republican sentiments of a minority. Yet Nick's father, like Many-birds, despises women and creates his own minority.[8] He repeatedly criticizes his wife for her inability to resign herself to the delivering of and caring for children: "'I saw a big lady squat down between the rails. When I come up to her, she had a baby dropped in the back of her skirt, like a bloody shit. . . . She was no squaw, Anna, but a Ukrainian woman'" (73). In each case the body identifies a history of oppression. Although the novel opens with the auctioneer's cry "Gone" (11), the enforced sale of the house, the farming equipment, the furniture, and the family Bible does not echo the social fatalism of the more well-known version of prairie Depression society, Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*. What is "gone" in *The River Horsemen* is a can of sockeye salmon; consumption (and waste) must inevitably follow: "Somebody feasts tonight" (11).

The histories that Williams' scatology traces are the histories of disillusionment. Christian culture is metaphorically purged when Nick claims to have thrown up the Bible (17), but the scatology of the more mythical speech-exit from the body suggests that Nick, who hasn't fully digested the King James Version, cannot be the one to divest himself of the myth. It is Jack, rather, who simultaneously distrusts and imitates Many-birds's scatological discourse, in response to an insufficiency in his own culture. Jack manipulates the other's culture, drawing the "dog-god" out of his lair: "'So you finally came forward, did you Brother Many-birds? You chose at last to humble yourself before God and man?'" (184). Jack's projective language, couched in the terms of denial, revises the indigene into a version of the devil, while Jack appropriates the metamorphic possibility of Wisahkecahk's mythical end: "It would be difficult, I expect, to be a tree" (*Horsemen* 215, Ahenakew 253).

Without Goldie's approach to such cultural doubling, it is impossible to understand the image of the indigene in white writing; any strict reading of appropriation, however, would emasculate narrative. The writer would first be limited to characters of his own culture, then to his own gender, his own class, his age-group, profession, and finally to a science-fiction vortex of

genetic duplicates. An alternate possibility is to paraphrase Hélène Cixous's rhetoric of the female man in "Tancredi continues": is the North American a native who is ending or a European who is beginning to be a native in order to be a European? *The River Horsemen* resists Goldie's historical closure; but neither does the novel allow the scatological body (penultimately shared between Jack and Many-birds) to continue. Many-birds attempts to escape from Many-guns in the muddy back lanes of Saskatoon by letting Highway Mary urinate to clean his windshield. But her finite bladder simply runs out. When Many-guns catches up, the Christian payment that Jack makes on behalf of Many-birds re-sets the semiotic (and bodily) barriers between Jack and Many-birds. Instead of redeeming Coyote as Sheila Watson does in *The Double Hook*, Williams allows the trickster to escape the text, bowels intact, avoiding "the premature reconciliation in art and criticism of unreconciled social conflicts" (Fekete 56).[9]

Before we turn to Williams' third novel, *Eye of the Father*, it is worth noting that the sign of scatology can be used to evade history. The overnamed narrator of Kroetsch's *Alibi*, William William Dorfendorf goes further and further back into Europe and ends up in Canada, where he gives away part of his name and crumples his journal sheets as toilet paper. He inspects his stool, but it gives him no signs of his rape by Deemer, the (modernist) Calgary oil baron who employed him. That this shedding of the past is not a naive refusal is made clear by Deemer's legendary economic past.[10] In *Coming Through Slaughter*, the metonymic association of "manure" and the "gypsy-foot whores" (119), as well as the metaphoric connection between Buddy Bolden and the whores could implicate the history of American slavery. The post-modern does not here deny history, but history (signalled by scatology) cannot finally explain Buddy's desired insanity. Webb, the policeman, finds excrement unreadable. This very inscrutability, once it is converted to language, becomes a system in the text, so that excrement becomes a trope for the pre-textual world, becomes an alibi or pretext for the "real" thing. To Webb, Crawley's report about "the tail of shit" (30) is incidental to the search for Buddy. But to Buddy (and to Ondaatje), the things (mostly scatological) that don't *mean* are the substance of art: "the wet slime from toilets, grey rub of phones, the alley shit on his shoe when he crouched where others had crouched, tea leaves, beer stains off tables, piano sweat, trombone spit, someone's smell off

a towel" (40). Buddy plays the body, exactly that which no *text* can show. From the hypothetical breakthrough in hound civilization, when Buddy imitates a dog's urination (90), to Buddy's comments on the analysis of relationships—"I shat those theories out completely" (113)—it is clear in taking up the pre-history before jazz recordings, Ondaatje can make scatology stand for the *absence* of history. If scatology thus signifies Ondaatje's rejection of a historical role for Buddy, this can hardly be incidental to Canada's ahistorical appearance at the periphery of the text. It is not simply that Ondaatje favors oral history over documentary; in *Coming Through Slaughter*, to be "for" excrement is to play the inscrutability of the body over and against the text of history.

In Williams' most autobiographical novel, *Eye of the Father* (1985), scatology is no longer figured by means of the indigene, nor is it particularly Canadian.[11] The trail of excrement that Magnus Vangdal (the congenital Norse ancestor, ᛗ) leaves, comes from the stories that Williams' maternal grandmother told him about his grandfather ("After Post-modernism" 276). Magnus's novel-opening departure from Europe constitutes the New World. His emigration from parental responsibility constrains Magnus over and over again, as the absconding father repeatedly lights out for the territory, leaving the past—Norway, Copenhagen, New York, Duluth, Lacjardin, the Earth itself—behind.

Wound about the feigned innocence in the myth of the American Adam is Magnus's democratic self-invention, "Cabin John." The nickname's ostensible purpose is to differentiate Magnus from "Mansion John," John Smith. The girl that Magnus finds in Duluth, Georgie Halliday, is the fiancée of the absent "Mansion John," and, in that absence, Magnus believes that he is striking a blow for all latecomers from the periphery by turning Georgie's affections. In the stories that Magnus tells about "Cabin John," he understands himself as an Adamic innocent who must un-invent the oppressive but chimerical centre, the aristocracy that is in place even in America. However, by the time Magnus gets to Duluth, the reader has already seen the conflict between Magnus's "I might be anybody I chose to be" (37) and his hierarchical sense of a past-bound personality: "I really can't be comfortable anywhere but the bottom" (35). Certainly the terms by which Martin Ness and his whores have fleeced Magnus in New York—"if Ottilee takes to you, you won't freeze your ass off this coming winter" (40)—suggest Magnus's wished acquiescence

in a scatological economy: peddling hers to save his. Even from the first, the nickname "Cabin John" cannot help but signal a colloquial reading.

Magnus eventually discovers that "Mansion John" has reinserted himself in the time-line as an even later comer. Discovering Georgie and John Smith in coitus, Magnus rearranges the positions in the American Eden. He sodomizes Georgie so that he can arrive somewhere first and recasts himself as an anal, medieval devil. The children and grandchildren of Magnus inherit his history of violence against women and of fouling his own nest, inherit not just metaphorically, but materially. When his daughters, Sigrid and Christine, visit him in Traill, cancer has eaten away his bowel, and the women must clean out their father's ostomy pouch. The treasure he promises them, "a real pile" (110), turns out to be Freud's-gold, nothing more than the spilled ostomy pouch in his apartment.

It is left to Magnus's wife, Hilda, and her descendants to mitigate this scatological history. Hilda discovers a way out when she compensates for her banishment to the periphery of the town: the image of the town's social arbiter and Hilda's enemy, Mrs. Pederson, wiping herself with brome grass raises dialogic laughter against her lacerating authority. In the third generation, Wayne Goodman stumbles onto Magnus's "Eden" when he discovers Karen with an old boy-friend. His response is not Magnus's, but he nevertheless puts Karen into perpetual debt and sublimates his personal waste into language and vision. A symptom of this is the direction his class in Icelandic poetry takes. His understanding of Othin's literary mask is that it allows the masked one (god, author) to say smutty things without being held responsible. His student, Sheila, however, immediately attaches female history onto Wayne's interpretation of *Baldrs Draumar*: "I don't think a god has to take out his frustrations on a woman" (156). As the autobiographer in the text who wants to rewrite his family's history (starting with Magnus and ending with himself), Wayne's refusal to take Magnus's scatology into consideration defines his own unwillingness to confess fully. Once Wayne recognizes female history, he can confess Magnus's immediate presence in his own attitude towards Karen.[12]

By means of scatology, then, Williams presents a careful response to the notion of the Canadian self as a depleted and innocent sign: "I wanted to find a myth . . . that would put an end

to the perverse sense of our own cultural innocence" (After Post-modernism" 281). The problem after post-modernism, however, is that there is no certain way to re-attach language to history in a text—surely this is the problem that Goldie sketches: that, given the order of language, any narrative to take history seriously is also immediately determined by that history. The comic vision of the inclusion, of adoption and parental enclosure that ends *The Eye of the Father* could signify Williams's knowledge that by witnessing to history, he inevitably grants mastery to the narratives of confederation. In the more separatist narratives of post-modernism, signified by the violation that takes place in *Alibi*'s CanLit cave, Kroetsch attempts to deconfederate by crumbling an already-unreliable history. But even in *Alibi* violence is done before and after history. The nature of the relations between language and historical act create a terrible political opacity: take Canadian history seriously, and it traps you; replace the historical mastering narratives with a gap and history returns elsewhere as a repressed or shadow-text, haunting you.

## NOTES

[1] McLuhan speaks the same way in his letters: "the U.S.A. is socially and informationally the environment of Canada. Canada is, by way of being anti-environment, a prepared situation that permits perception of the environment" (to Claude Bissell, 4 Mar 1965). "Canada is the only country in the world that has never had a national identity" (to Pierre Trudeau, 2 Dec 1968). It's difficult not to hear an academized echo of a much earlier letter—"oh the mental vacuum that is Canada" (to Wyndham Lewis, 13 Dec 1944). *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, eds. Matie Molinaro, Corinne McLuhan, and William Toye. (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1987). During more careful (but no less general) moments, McLuhan speaks of culture not as gap at all, but as the retrieval of material from a vast "middenheap." In *From Cliché to Archetype* (N.Y.: Viking, 1970) 39, 65.

[2] See Edward Said, "Roads Taken and Not Taken in Contemporary Criticism," *The World, the Text, The Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1983).

[3] See "Deconstruction and the Gnostics," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 55:1 (Fall 1985): 74-93; or the Literature and Politics issue of *Dalhousie Review* 66:1-2 (Spring/Summer 1986); or "Right Eye and Left Heel: The Ideological Origins of the Legend of Faustus," *Mosaic* 22:2 (Spring 1989): 79-94, where Keefer connects the ideological debate in the Faustus legend to the outbreak of Western-European witch-hunts in the 1560s to the 1580s.

[4] For example, in a letter to Pierre Trudeau (5 Jan 1973), McLuhan speaks of Vietnam as a "resonant interval" and as a "gap" (*Letters* 461). This is a more serious kind of denial because Vietnam was a different type of historical object for the U.S. than Canada is; Canada, of course, is among those countries which have gained by American imperialism. This supports Arthur Kroker's analysis of McLuhan as anti-historical and as the "favoured courtesan" of the American empire in *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Inniss/McLuhan/Grant* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1984) 84. McLuhan's dominant metaphor—the "global village"—implies a condition in which all is periphery, in which societies and technologies are sedimented rather than ever at war.

[5] The same national ontology can be seen in Earle Birney—"it's only by our lack of ghosts we're haunted" from "CanLit," *The Poems of Earle Birney* (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1969)—and in William Kilbourn's *Canada: A Guide to the Peaceable Kingdom* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1970): "this non-nation nay-saying no-place of an un-Eden, this faceless unidentifiable blank on the map" (xi). Atwood's early poems, however, may be compared to her more recent "Marrying the Hangman," where the male-female tension is re-set in *Canadian* 18th Century history. For an alternate reading, that a "deterritorialized literature" expresses "the concerns of the Other," see Barbara Goddard, "Structuralism/Post-Structuralism: Language, Reality, and Canadian Literature," in *Future Indicative: Literary Theory and Canadian Literature.* ed. John Moss. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa P, 1987).

[6] For Cree shamanism and the historical Fine-day, see David G. Mandelbaum's *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical and Comparative Study* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1979) 160-70, 363-70 and the historical Fine-day's own account, posthumously edited by Adolph Hungry Wolf, *My Cree People* (Invermere, B.C.: Good Medicine Books, 1973). For a general theory of shamanism, see Mircea Eliade's *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy.* trans. Willard R. Trask (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1958). Despite Eliade's simple dualism of sacred and profane, this is still an excellent study.

[7] Nelson and Ahenakew relate a number of the myths surrounding Wisahkecahk. Nelson, an early 19th Century collector of Cree and Northern Ojibway myth, at first mistook Wisahkecahk, the *parody* of the Cree supreme Manitou, for the Manitou itself. One of the tales that Ahenakew reports contains the following comment: Wisahkecahk "was ever investigating how effects followed causes, for he had no help from hereditary knowledge" (Ahenakew 335). This implies that among the Cree, parody was not deconstructive, but confirmed, even as it mocked, the central cultural institutions. For generalized statements on the trickster, see Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (N.Y.: Shocken Books, 1956), and Franz Boas's introduction to *Traditions of the Thompson River Indians*, by James Teit (rpt. N.Y.: Kraus Reprint, 1969). Radin has come under attack from anthropologists who believe that the Winnebago culture that he studied was anomalous and not representative of Amerindian attitudes towards the trickster. However, the more one looks at Amerindian myth as *literature* rather than as field report, the more convincing Radin's account of the trickster's satire becomes.

[8] Wisahkecahk is closely associated with the male in Cree culture: he created man (Nelson 48).

[9] The idea belongs to Theodor Adorno—Fekete considers the position elitist and anti-populist, presumably because he conceives the utopian impulse to be of the people.

[10] Walter Pache shows very well how Kroetsch elsewhere sediments his historical traces in "The Fiction Makes Us Real: Aspects of Postmodernism in

Canada," in Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian Literature, eds. Robert Kroetsch and Reingard M. Nischik (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1985). Of course, having European critics comment on our fictions is yet another way of making the "gap" material and historical.

[11] For a good review of the novel, see William Latta, "Rune-writer," *Canadian Literature* 115 (Winter 1987): 191-93.

[12] For the connection between confessional autobiography and scatology in the metaphor of purgation see Martin Pops, "The Metamorphoses of Shit," *Salmagundi* 56 (Spring 1982): 52.

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