

UNHOMELY STATES
THEORIZING ENGLISH-CANADIAN POSTCOLONIALISM

edited by
CYNTHIA SUGARS



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"THE WHITE INUIT SPEAKS:
CONTAMINATION AS LITERARY STRATEGY"*

Diana Brydon

My title is inspired by the coincidental appearance of the Inuit as symbolic figure in two important Canadian novels published in 1989, Kristjana Gunnars' *The Prowler* and Mordecai Richler's *Solomon Gursky Was Here*. By echoing the influential American ethnographic text *Black Elk Speaks*, I mean to highlight the assumptions about cultural purity and authenticity that post-modernism and post-colonialism, and these two texts, both use and challenge. *Black Elk Speaks* itself is now being recognised as a white man's construct, fusing traditional Lakota with Christian philosophy—a hybrid rather than the purely authentic of the anthropologist's dreams (Powers). Unlike those who deplore a perceived loss in authenticity in *Black Elk's* cultural contamination, Gunnars and Richler explore the creative potential of such cross-cultural contact. For them, as for the bilingual Canadian poet Lola Lemire Tostevin, "the concept of contamination as literary device" would seem to be appealing. Tostevin argues that "Contamination means differences have been brought together so they make contact" (13).

Such a process defines the central activities of post-modernism and post-colonialism—the bringing of differences together into creative contact. But this is also where they part company. For it is the nature of this contact—and its results—that are at issue. For post-colonial writers, the cross-cultural imagination that I am polemically calling "contamination" for the purposes of this article, is not just a literary device but also a cultural and even a political project. Linda Hutcheon ("Circling the Downspout") in this collection¹ points out that post-colonialism and feminism have "distinct political agendas and often a theory of agency that allow them to go beyond the post-modern limits of deconstructing existing orthodoxies into the realms of social and political action." In contrast, she argues, "post-modernism is politically ambivalent" (72). At the same time, however, she concludes that the post-colonial is "as implicated in that which it challenges as is the post-modern" (88). This assertion depends on a leap from the recognition that the post-colonial is "contaminated" by colonialism (in the word itself and the culture it signifies)

* *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*, ed. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (Calgary P, 1990), 191-203.

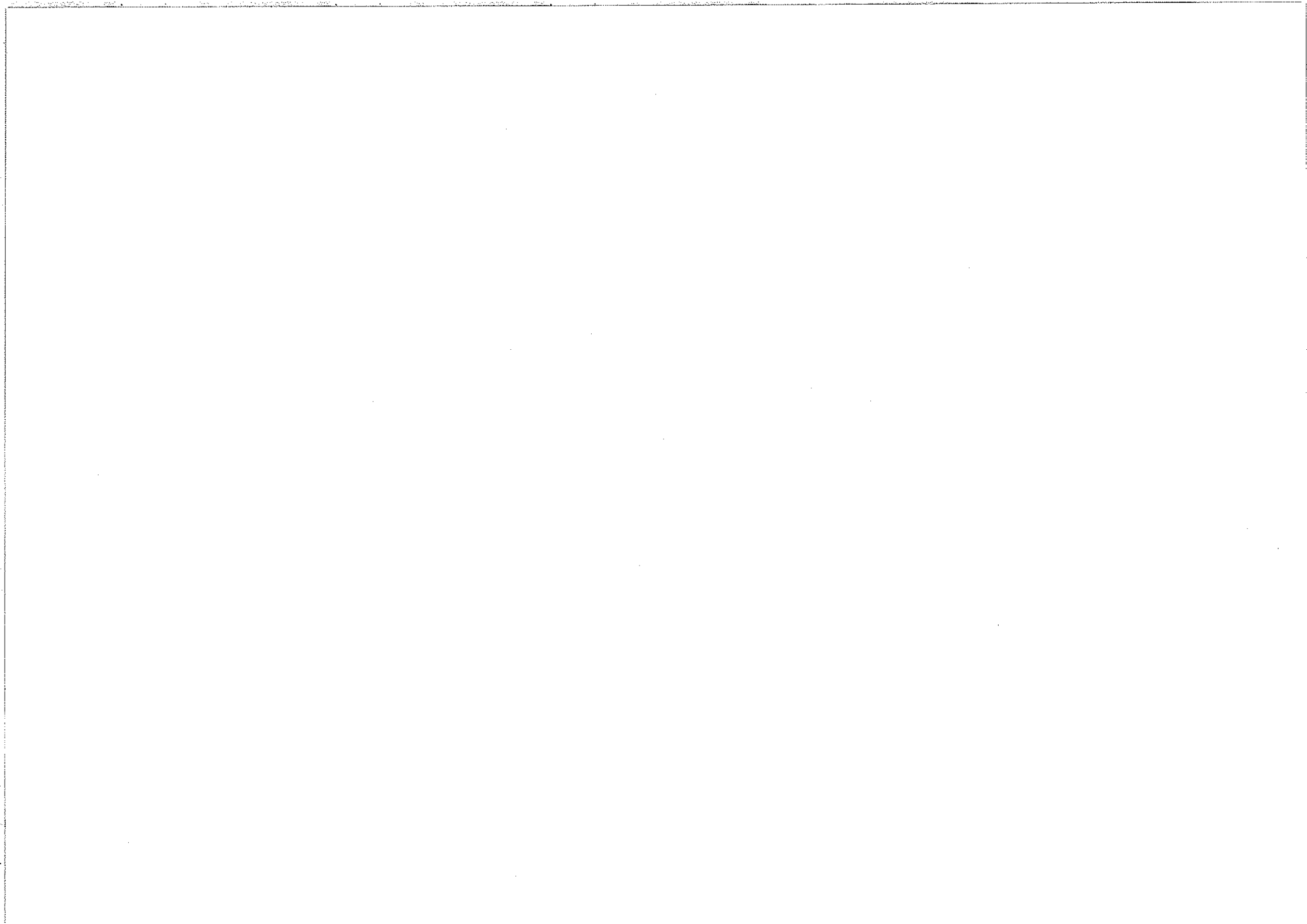
to the conclusion that such "contamination" necessarily implies complicity. It is this notion I would like to explore more fully in the rest of this paper.

If we accept Hutcheon's assertion that post-modernism is politically ambivalent, what are the implications of such a theory? There are at least two that interest me here. Firstly, what enables this ambivalence? Post-modernism takes on a personality; it becomes a subject, human-like in its ability to express ambivalence. The functions of the author, declared dead by post-structuralist theory, resurface in post-modernism and in the post-modernist text through the concept of ambivalence. The authority of the post-modernist text comes from this ambivalence, this ability to see all sides, to defer judgement and to refuse agency. Secondly, what are the effects of this ambivalence? It would seem to suggest that action is futile; that individual value judgements are likely to cancel each other out; that one opinion is as good as another; that it would be futile and dishonest to choose one path above any other; that disinterested contemplation is superior to any attempt at action. In effect, then, ambivalence works to maintain the status quo. It updates the ambiguity so favoured by the New Critics, shifting their formalist analysis of the text's unity into a psychoanalysis of its fissures; and their isolation of text from world into a worldliness that cynically discounts the effectiveness of any action for social change.

To refer to contradictions instead of a fundamental ambivalence places the analysis within a political rather than a psychoanalytical framework. Post-modernism and post-colonialism often seem to be concerned with the same phenomena, but they place them in different grids of interpretation. The name "post-modernism" suggests an aestheticising of the political while the name "post-colonialism" foregrounds the political as inevitably contaminating the aesthetic, but remaining distinguishable from it. If post-modernism is at least partially about "how the world dreams itself to be 'American'" (Stuart Hall qtd. in Ross xii), then post-colonialism is about waking from that dream, and learning to dream otherwise. Post-modernism cannot account for such post-colonial resistance writing, and seldom attempts to.

Much of my work over the past decade has involved documenting the contradictions of Canadian post-colonialism. Reading Canadian literature from a post-colonial perspective, recognizing Canadian participations in empire and in the resistance to empire, one quickly encounters some of the limitations of post-modernist theory in accounting for Canadian texts, even for those apparently post-modernist in form. Because Linda Hutcheon is one of Canada's preeminent theorists of the post-modern, this essay engages with her work first of all as a way of posing some of the problems I see when the post-colonial and the post-modern are brought together.

Despite post-modernism's function as a problematising mode, several assumptions central to imperial discourse survive unchallenged in the work of its defenders. These include an evolutionary model of development, a



search for synthesis that relies on a revival of the notion of authenticity, and an insistence on judging a work on its own terms alone as if there were only one true reading. A post-colonial reading would reject such assumptions; post-modernist readings affirm them under the guise of a disinterested objectivity.

I am aware here of entering disputed territory. The quarrels over the meaning of postmodernism are well documented elsewhere in this book [*Past the Last Post*] and in numerous others. Post-colonial criticism has its own disputes, with a scantier and more recent documentation. I would distinguish the post-colonial criticism developed by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* from that developed by the U.S.-based Jameson, Gates and Spivak, which to my mind suffers from some of the same assumptions as does post-modernism.

1. THE EVOLUTIONARY MODEL

In "Circling the Downspout" Hutcheon writes that "[t]he current post-structuralist/post-modern challenges to the coherent, autonomous subject have to be put on hold in feminist and post-colonial discourses, for both must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity: those radical post-modern challenges are in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses" (72-73). There are several problems with this statement. The first is the notion that there is a single evolutionary path of literary development established by the European model. Secondly, there is the idea of a norm of subjectivity also established by the European model. Thirdly, there is the implied assumption that poetical commitment (to the liberation of nation or women), even in non-European countries, must necessarily express itself through a literary realism that presents a unified subject along the nineteenth century European model. And finally, it seems to demean literary criticism as a "luxury," something nonessential that not all societies really need, as if critique is not a necessary component for culture or identity building.

These assumptions are so strongly embedded in our western culture that even texts challenging such notions are read to confirm them. Consider Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, a complex metafictional work challenging notions of a unified subjectivity that is often read as a traditional *bildungsroman* consolidating a simple achievement of just such a selfhood. Yet as Simon Gikandi argues, "Caribbean women writers are concerned with a subject that is defined by what de Laurentis calls 'a multiple, shifting, and often self-contradictory identity, a subject that is not divided in, but rather at odds, with language'" (14). This is the kind of subject whose exploration Hutcheon argues must be "put on hold" in feminist and post-colonial writing, yet in fact we find it in many of these texts, if we read them with the openness we bring to European fictions.

2. THE SEARCH FOR SYNTHESIS

In expressing her unease with the use of post-colonial to describe the settler and multicultural contemporary cultures of Canada, Hutcheon suggests that perhaps Native culture "should be considered the resisting, post-colonial voice of Canada" (76-77). This search for the authentic Canadian voice of post-colonialism mirrors the title of her book on post-modernism in Canada, *The Canadian Postmodern*. Just as we saw a unitary subjectivity being affirmed in the evolutionary model, so we see a unified voice or style being advocated here. Although Hutcheon here identifies Robert Kroetsch as "Mr Canadian Postmodern" (*Postmodern* 183), I would argue that there are several Canadian post-modernisms just as there is more than one Canadian post-colonial voice. A term may have multiple, subsidiary meanings without losing its usefulness in indicating a general category.

Hutcheon's assumption that the post-colonial speaks with a single voice leads her to belabour the necessity of resisting the totalising application of a term that in her analysis would blur differences and deny the power relations that separate the native post-colonial experience from that of the settlers. Certainly turning to the post-colonial as a kind of touristic "me-tooism" that would allow Canadians to ignore their own complicities in imperialism would be a serious misapplication of the term. Yet, as far as I know, discussions of Canadian post-colonialism do not usually equate the settler with the native experience, or the Canadian with the Third World. The kind of generalisations that Richard Roth criticises in Abdul JanMohammed's work do tend to totalise in this way, but this kind of work always ignores countries like Canada. To my mind, Hutcheon gets it backwards when she writes: "one can certainly talk of post-colonialism in Canada, but only if the differences between its particular version and that of, especially, Third World nations is kept in mind" (79). The drawing of such distinctions is the whole point of talking about post-colonialism in Canada. The post-colonial perspective provides us with the language and the political analysis for understanding these differences. The danger is less that Canadians will rush to leap on the victim wagon than that they will refuse to recognize that they may well have some things in common with colonised people elsewhere.

Hutcheon's argument functions as a sort of straw man that misrepresents the post-colonial theoretical endeavour as practised in relation to Canada, deflecting attention away from its radical potential. Her argument demonstrates that in our care to respect the specificity of particular experiences we run another risk, that of a liberal pluralism which uses the idea of different but equal discourses to prevent the forming of alliances based on a comparative analysis that can perceive points of connection. Consider the following statement from *The Canadian Postmodern*: "If women have not yet been allowed access to (male) subjectivity, then it is very difficult for them to contest it, as the (male) post-structuralist philosophers have been doing lately. This may make women's writing appear more conservative, but in fact it is just

different" (5-6). By positing female writing as "just different" from the male norm, Hutcheon erases the power differential she has been trying to establish, while reaffirming the male as the norm and the experimental as more advanced than and superior to the conservative. It sounds like special pleading for the second-rate, while on the surface it reaffirms the liberal myth of society formed from a plurality of equal differences.

Her assertion of Canadian difference from other post-colonial experiences functions in a similar way. The focus on uniqueness denies us the insights to be derived from careful comparison. Far from separating it from other post-colonial nations, Canada's pluri-ethnic composition allows for points of connection with some experiences elsewhere which when analysed comparatively may yield insights into how power operates, other than by sheer force, in our own fairly comfortable world. Far from totalising, a post-colonial analysis can identify structural patterns of oppression and the moves that coopt difference to maintain oppression as well as the strategies for resisting it.

Hutcheon suggests in "Circling the Downspout" that "Canada has experienced no actual 'creolization' which might have created something new out of an adaptation process within a split racial context" (78). What about the Metis, and the literature now being created by Metis writers? What about a writer like Tostevin, equally at home in English and French? At a less literal level, what about the metaphorical creolization of novels like *The Prowler* and *Solomon Gursky Was Here*? Most of the rest of this essay concerns itself with challenging this claim.

3. THE CULT OF AUTHENTICITY

Paul Smith suggests that post-modernist discourse replaces the "conflictual view and the comic view of the third world" with a "cult of authenticity" (142). This seems to be what is happening with Hutcheon's assertion that only Canada's native peoples may claim to speak with an authentic post-colonial voice. Such an assertion connects her approach to post-colonialism to that of Fredric Jameson which produces a first world criticism respectful of a third world authenticity that it is believed his own world has lost. But what are the effects of such a "cult of authenticity"? Meaghan Morris concludes her analysis of *Crocodile Dundee* with the statement that "[i]t is hardly surprising, then, that the figure of the colonial should now so insistently reappear from all sides not as deprived and dispossessed by rapacity but as the naive spirit of plenitude, innocence, optimism—and effective critical 'distance'" (124). The post-modernist revisionings of the colonial and post-colonial that Smith and Morris discuss function to defuse conflict, denying the necessity of cultural and political struggle, and suggesting that tourism is probably the best model for cross-cultural interaction.

Hutcheon's argument that Canada's native peoples are the authentic post-

colonial voice of the nation, with its implication that descendents of settlers and immigrants represent at best a contaminated post-coloniality, conforms to this post-modernist model. To challenge it, as Hutcheon knows, is fraught with difficulties because authenticity has also been used by colonial peoples in their struggles to regain power over their own lives. While post-colonial theorists embrace hybridity and heterogeneity as the characteristic post-colonial mode, some native writers in Canada resist what they see as a violating appropriation to insist on their ownership of their stories and their exclusive claim to an authenticity that should not be ventriloquised or parodied. When directed against the Western canon, post-modernist techniques of intertextuality, parody, and literary borrowing may appear radical and even potentially revolutionary. When directed against native myths and stories, these same techniques would seem to repeat the imperialist history of plunder and theft. Or in the case of *The Satanic Verses*, when directed against Islam, they may be read as sully the dignity of a religion that prides itself on its purity.

Although I can sympathise with such arguments as tactical strategies in insisting on self-definition and resisting appropriation, even tactically they prove self-defeating because they depend on a view of cultural authenticity that condemns them to a continued marginality and an eventual death. Whose interests are served by this retreat into preserving an untainted authenticity? Not the native groups seeking land rights and political power. Ironically, such tactics encourage native peoples to isolate themselves from contemporary life and full citizenship.

All living cultures are constantly in flux and open to influences from elsewhere. The current flood of books by white Canadian writers embracing Native spirituality clearly serves a white need to feel at home in this country and to assuage the guilt felt over a material appropriation by making it a cultural one as well. In the absence of comparable political reparation for past appropriations such symbolic acts seem questionable or at least inadequate. Literature cannot be confused with social action. Nonetheless, these creole texts are also part of the post-colonial search for a way out of the impasse of the endless play of post-modernist difference that mirrors liberalism's cultural pluralism. These books, like the post-colonial criticism that seeks to understand them, are searching for a new globalism that is neither the old universalism nor the Disney simulacrum. This new globalism simultaneously asserts local independence and global interdependencies. It seeks a way to cooperate without cooption, a way to define differences that do not depend on myths of cultural purity or authenticity but that thrive on an interaction that "contaminates" without homogenising.

Darlene Barry Quaife's *Bone Bird* is one of the most interesting of these new creole texts. Aislinn Cleary, part-white and part-native, learns to reach out to others through her initiation into a mixture of local Vancouver Island native spiritual practice and her grandmother's beliefs, brought with her as a

refugee from Mexico fleeing the aftermath of Pancho Villa's thwarted rebellion. Her friendship with two tree planters temporarily working in town acquaints her with the stories of other refugees: Hugh's Chinese mother fleeing the Second World War in the Pacific and Ivan's Polish mother fleeing the same war in Europe. Hugh is researching and documenting historical and cultural links between China and the West Coast of America that might explain the similarities he has discovered between certain artistic symbols. He and Aislinn need each other to complete this work. The "bone bird" metamorphoses as a spiritual guide, leading Teodora, Aislinn's grandmother, out of despair into new life and directing Aislinn toward new journeys with Hugh, and as "the scavenger," mascotting the unemployed loggers of Aislinn's town toward new lives elsewhere. The political realities of a colonial economy where a logging operation can first destroy the material bases of the native culture and then that of the settler culture logging the trees by shutting down the single industry company town are at the heart of this narrative. They are at once part of a global system of exploitation and a specifically evoked particular experience, with its own smells, sights, sounds, pleasures and pains. The text records these accurately, with love and anguish, but it directs its quest for spiritual values toward the alliances that can survive, resist, and renew. The only advocate of cultural purity is Aislinn's racist, and very ill, English mother, a war bride who did not know that her Canadian husband was part-Indian until it was too late to turn back.

4. JUDGING THE WORK ON ITS OWN TERMS

Hutcheon's conclusion to her *Poetics of Postmodernism* admits the "limited" aims of post-modernism and its "double encoding as both contestatory and complicitous" (230). She acknowledges that "I would agree with Habermas that this art does not 'emit any clear signals,'" but adds that its saving grace is that "it does not try to." It cannot offer answers, "without betraying its anti-totalizing ideology" (231). I have suggested that it does surreptitiously offer answers—in ambivalence itself, in the relativity of liberal pluralism, in the cult of authenticity that lies behind its celebration of differences. But is it true that answers necessarily totalise? Are these the only alternatives? Is Hutcheon here asking enough of the post-modernist text? Or is she even asking the most interesting or the most important questions? Isn't the effect of such a conclusion to preserve the status quo and the myth of an objectivity that itself totalizes? Can we legitimately ask more of a text than it asks of itself? Post-colonial criticism suggests that we can.

5. READING THE WHITE INUIT

To read Kristjana Gunnars' *The Prowler* and Mordecai Richler's *Solomon Gursky Was Here* is to enter two very different literary experiences. Both nod to post-

modernist antecedents (Gunnars to Grass's *Tin Drum* and Richler to Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) and employ post-modernist techniques (fragmenting narrative, doubling incidents, metafictional commentary, interrupted chronology, mixing of modes), but in *The Prowler* these techniques are integral to the way the text makes its meaning whereas in *Solomon Gursky* they are entertaining excrescences on a tale almost Dickensian in its fundamental faithfulness to a realist's investment in character and story.

Far from surrendering the author's authority, Richler delights in his control, duplicating it within the text in the story of Solomon Gursky's/Sir Hyman Kaplansky's manipulation of Moses Berger. Here the author plays his reader as a fisherman plays a fish, the fish gladly seizing the hook of narrative in return for the pleasure of the quest. *The Prowler* abandons such myths of control in search of an equal partnership between writer and reader, both prowlers seeking to transgress the boundaries of traditionally delimited territories and seeking to subvert the linearity and predicability of traditional plots with their winners and their losers. *The Prowler* puts as much distance as possible between the writer as prowler and the idea of an author God in control of the story. Prowling the borders, silences and dead ends of stories, reader and writer nonetheless come together to share a point of view, to discern emergent patterns, and to make choices about how we make meaning in the world.

These reading experiences are different in the power they allocate to writer and reader, and in the distance they are willing to travel to question dominant assumptions about the way the world works and whether or not it is possible to change it to make it a better place. Richler's is finally a conservative vision and Gunnars' a radical one. Nonetheless, both texts insist that the reader must move beyond a post-modernist ambivalence into a world of moral decision making. Neither Gunnars nor Richler offer answers, but their texts do make value judgements and encourage their readers to make them too. Although they recognize inevitable complicities, they choose contestation; they discover free spaces for resistance; they introduce love and freedom into worlds of pain and hatred. In their work, post-modernist devices serve post-colonial ends. Although the experience of reading these two books is very different, they offer similar visions of the marginalised, similar questionings of myths of purity and authenticity, similar affirmations of cultural contamination, and similar insinuations on the political agency that characterizes the post-colonial. These similarities, I would suggest, derive from the particular circumstances of a Canadian post-coloniality that is not indigenous but in the process of becoming so.

Just as the North functions for many non-Northerners as a final frontier, so the Inuit can seem a last symbol of cultural integrity. Both Gunnars and Richler explode these myths of North and Northerners. For them the North is an archetypal colony and the people who inhabit the North find their identity in dispute between those committed to maintaining an ideal of cultural purity and those who favour cultural interaction.

The Prowler explains that "White Inuit" are Icelanders, Northerners who survive on a diet of fish in a country with a history of multiple colonisations. As "White Inuit" their identity is already hybrid, privileged by race and underprivileged by location. The narrator's already hybrid identity as white Inuit is further complicated by different parental legacies, by language, by class, and by changes in the power structures governing her island as well as shifts in her geographical location. Her response to such endless discriminations of difference is to multiply the contaminations: "The solution was to study more languages. I would learn French and German, Faeroese and Inuit. I would confuse them all" (Section 133). If language determines identity, multiply the identities; confuse the categorisers; transgress the limits imposed on identity. She will be a boundary-crosser, a border-prowler. Cultural purity, the myth of her homogenous Icelandic society, is not possible even there.

But neither is it possible to be all things to all people. To speak Danish and English is not to betray her Icelandic identity, but to ask questions such as "Why has there been such a long history of starvation?" (Section 44) is to begin to recognise that "it is not possible to sympathize with all sides at once. When you choose your allegiances, I thought, you ally yourself with the one who suffers" (Section 142). Such an alliance entails drawing connections between political realities and private lives, between military occupations and imperial control on the one hand and the shortage of food and shelter on the other, between comfort in Denmark and the United States and suffering in Iceland.

The text's post-modernist celebration of multiplicities—"I imagine a story that allows all speakers to speak at once, claiming that none of the versions is exactly a lie" (Section 68)—is complicated by its recognition that "human psychology is determined by politics. And politics is determined by diet. That is, those who eat best win" (Section 155). Material realities ground the text's utopian desire for surfeit in the remembrance of a manipulated scarcity. Nonetheless, *The Prowler* chooses to end with an image of hope, rewriting the story of Noah's Ark as an Icelandic myth of a new beginning with a communal welcoming after the disaster of the Second World War. This Ark contains the mothers and fathers of future generations, returning Icelanders enriched by their contact with the outside world.

Richler too reappropriates the story of Noah's Ark in multiple rewritings that turn the doomed ship *Erebus* of the Franklin expedition into an ark that enables the survival of his mythical Jewish explorer Ephraim Gursky. Gursky takes as his emblem the raven that disappointed Noah on the Biblical ark but that represents a survivor trickster figure for North American Native mythologies. The raven, who "speaks in two voices" (500), provides an alternative creation myth to that of Genesis for Ephraim's grandson Solomon. Solomon's son Henry meets his death on what his neighbours term "Crazy Henry's Ark," and his son Isaac only survives through an act of cannibalism that appears to symbolise Richler's view of father/son relations in this text. Despite the cul-

tural contaminations of Richler's Ark of origins, it remains throughout its transformations a purely masculine process that limits its celebration of cultural hybridity.

Ephraim introduces Jewish customs into Inuit practice, to the confusion of anthropologists and historians seeking cultural authenticity in the far North. Richler's comic invention of "The McGibbon Artifact," "the only Eskimo carving of what was clearly meant to represent a kangaroo" (61) makes a serious political point reiterated throughout the text, that the movements of peoples and interactions of cultures that have characterized the twentieth century have taken place as part of the military expansion of capital, but that there is always a space for resistance, for eluding control and surprising the enemy. Ephraim Gursky beats the convict system that built the British empire in the nineteenth century; Solomon Gursky beats the capitalists at their own game in the twentieth. The multiple colonial childhoods that Kaplansky/Gursky/Raven invents to entertain his British guests draw the reader's attention to the structural similarities produced by the expansion of empire even as the stories function for his listeners as isolated instances of a titillating authenticity.

Solomon, the archetypal wandering Jew who survived prohibition in Canada and the Holocaust in Europe "didn't die of old age," Moses suspected, "but in the Gulag or a stadium in Latin America" (550-51). He becomes the spirit of resistance to oppression in all its guises, changing shapes as fast as his enemies, always one step ahead of those who would betray the human spirit. The danger in such tales is the homogenizing of differences into the repetition of a single narrative, and the elimination of collective action in favour of the myth of the superhuman individual whose triumphs can easily be used to justify the continued oppression of the rest of us. Its strength lies in its insistence that individual lives do matter, that each of us can make a difference, a point brought home by the book's title *Solomon Gursky Was Here*. The survival of the surprising Mr. Morrie and the rejuvenation of Moses further support such a reading as do other elements in the text.

Using the recurrent post-colonial metaphor of the colony as the empire's garbage dump, both Gunnars and Richler explore what it means to live in a place that is powerless to refuse others' refuse, what others have refused. Iceland is where other countries dump their lepers. "They did not think people on this remote island counted" (Section 41). Canada is where the British dump "the effluvium of their slums" (Richler 81). Both novels affirm, however, that such apparent disadvantages may be turned to advantage. Gunnars' narrator muses on how North America "turns out to be a place where major defects go unnoticed" (Section 149). A weakness elsewhere may be turned into a strength here. (This is a premise explored at more length in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*.) Similarly, Richler's Moses muses: "If Canada had a soul . . . then it wasn't to be found in Batoche or the Plains of Abraham or Fort Walsh or Charlottetown or Parliament Hill, but in The Caboose and thousands of bars like it that knit the country together from Peggy's Cove, Nova

Scotia to the far side of Vancouver Island" (64). In other words, that elusive Canadian essence is not to be found in historic defeats, military battles or the parliamentary process, but in the survival of working class communal culture at the local level throughout the land. The "effluvium" of British slums bring a tough cultural specificity to Canada that Britain rejected but our writers now embrace. This turning the tables on those who think they have you where they want you, this transvaluation of values is part of the post-colonial literary strategy that clears a space for history's silenced ones to speak. Strength comes not from victimhood, from what one has been denied, but from a reevaluation of what one has.

Richler's embrace takes in the ugly racism as well as the moral probity of the Bert Smiths whom he has Solomon see as the "essence" of this country (74). Bert Smith, like Moses's arch enemy Professor Hardy, believes in cultural purity but finds himself defeated as the "true north, strong and free" of the national anthem yields to Richler's celebration of a "mongrelized" nation (79-80). In a delightfully understated ironic reversal, just when Smith and his landlady, Mrs. Jenkins, think they have finally parted company, Richler shows us Mrs. Jenkins unconsciously seeing with Smith's eyes and Smith unconsciously speaking in Mrs. Jenkins' voice (444-45). For all their stubborn opposition to each other's point of view, they have inevitably contaminated one another through the proximity in which they have lived. Despite themselves, their horizons have broadened and they have grown in the process.

Both Richler and Gunnars retain the utopian dream of the quest for a just society, and locate that quest in the contaminations of cross-cultural exploration. Both write out of positions specifically located in the current debate about multiculturalism in Canada: Richler as a male, Canadian-born Jew and Anglophone Quebecker; Gunnars as a female, Icelandic immigrant to the Canadian West for whom English is not a first language. Both vigorously dispute any residual faith in the possibility of cultural authenticity. Both show how colonial relations permeate some European and North American experiences. It is not possible to postulate a Them and Us based on geography or the nation-state alone. These texts work to "resuscitate" the local referent from "the coma induced by typecasting" (Roth 249), showing how post-modernisms and post-colonialisms are themselves riddled by differences that nonetheless may be understood through a double-pronged analysis that looks for the workings of power in specific conditions.

Perhaps the clearest difference between a post-modernist practice and a post-colonial practice emerges through their different uses of history. As Hutcheon points out, "[h]istoriographic metafiction acknowledges the paradox of the *reality* of the past but its *textualized accessibility* to us today" (*Poetics* 114). Without denying that things happened, post-modernism focuses on the problems raised by history's textualized accessibility: on the problems of representation, and on the impossibility of retrieving truth. Post-colonialism, in contrast, without denying history's textualized accessibility, focuses on the

reality of a past that has influenced the present. As a result of these different emphases, post-modern fiction takes liberties with what we know of the facts of the past much more freely than does post-colonial fiction. Richler's improbable introduction of fictional characters into historical narrative has more in common with the methods of a Sir Walter Scott than a D.M. Thomas. Neither he nor Gunnars deny that different versions of specific events will circulate, but they are interested in the effects of historical happenings: the effects of invasion, of military occupation, of food blockades, of revolution.

More than this, they do not hesitate to suggest that some interpretations carry greater validity than others: lies may be distinguished from truths; false values from valid ones. Gunnars writes: "Reading *Morgunbladid*, the Icelandic daily, I saw the population of the island was being reassured. The American Base, it said, is not a nuclear base. Some months later in Canada I happened upon an American military map. Iceland, it showed, *is* a nuclear base" (Section 30). Richler provides a diary entry showing Kaplansky asking his French neighbours who came to the dinner parties put on by the German officers occupying his house during the Second World War. One neighbour sobs in reply: "We had no choice but to accept his invitations. It was awful. His father was a pork butcher. He had no manners. He didn't even know that Pouilly-Fumé is not a dessert wine" (515-16). Here Richler relies on our knowledge of the Holocaust to "place" these values. Richler's most sympathetic characters need to believe that a writer should not be bought, that not everything can be turned into a commodity, even in a commodity culture. *The Prowler* believes that "the text desires to be true" (Section 69). Near its end, its narrator admits "That the text has been prowling in the reader's domain. Telling itself and then interpreting itself. . . . The text is relieved that there are no borders in these matters" (Section 164). In other words, neither author is willing to surrender the agency that Hutcheon sees as characterizing the post-colonial but not the post-modern. Their recognition of complicities does not make them complicit.

As Stephen Slemon points out in this collection [*Past the Last Post*], "Western post-modernist readings can so over-value the anti-referential or deconstructive energies of postcolonial texts that they efface the important recuperative work that is also going on within them" (7). Those deconstructive energies are at work in these two novels, but it is the recuperative power, which they seek to energize for their readers and their Canadian culture, that most distinguishes them. And it is this power that a post-colonial reading can help us to understand. The white Inuit are speaking. Who is listening?

Notes

1. [Editor's note: Brydon is referring to the collection in which this article originally appeared, *Past the Last Post*. Page references to Gikandi's and Slemon's articles

are to that collection; page references to Hutcheon's article are keyed to this volume.]

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"ENGLISH CANADA'S POSTCOLONIAL COMPLEXITIES"*

Donna Bennett

By Canadian history also is to be understood one history, not one French and one British, but the entire history of all Canada. There are not two histories, but one history, as there are not two Canadas, or any greater number, but one only. Nor are there two ways of life, but one common response to land and history expressed in many strong variants of the one, it is true, but still one in central substance. The reason for this is that the history of Canada after 1760 is only a continuation and extension of the history of Canada before 1760. There is but one narrative line in Canadian history.

—W.L. Morton, "The Relevance of Canadian History" (88-89)

I: CANADIAN LITERATURE AND THE POSTCOLONIAL MODEL

Conversations about Canadian politics, society and culture, if not saccharine accounts of the joys of multiculturalism, are full of complaint about the divisive nature of certain policies; they seem to begin and end as a "lament for a slain chieftain," the postcolonial dream of a unified, perhaps dualist, Canadian nation felled by the intrigue or ambitions of warring clans—the "French," the "ethnics," the "westerners," the "Anglo-Celts."

—Robert F. Harney, "So Great a Heritage as Ours" (228)

Discussions of literature in terms of a colonial mentality, colonial discourse, and the need for decolonization have lately been gathered together into a field of critical inquiry that has come to be known as postcolonialism.¹ Although *postcolonial* has been around as a convenient period term (especially for such things as American furniture and architecture) since early in the century, a more general postcolonial dialogue, arising out of the massive wave of colonies coming to independence after World War II, is a recent development. Use of a postcolonial perspective as a way of looking at literary studies began in the late 1970s among Australian critics.² An early example of this postcolonial approach to literary and cultural criticism can be seen in the spe-

* *Essays on Canadian Writing* 51/52 (1993/94): 164-210.