THE CANADIAN LONG POEM

THE CANADIAN LONG POEM:
DOUBLE-TALKING ITS WAY
FROM LYRIC TO PARODY

By

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ABSTRACT

Eli Mandel opened the proceedings of the 1984 Long-Liners Conference by announcing the death of the long poem. Barbara Godard concluded that conference by proclaiming the death of the lyric. This study contests such a dual apocalyptic vision, and seeks to retrieve both the long poem and the lyric--if not for posterity--at least for the duration of this thesis.

The Introduction establishes my theoretical framework. I argue that, although the voice in the contemporary Canadian long poem disrupts the autonomous voice of the Romantic lyric, the long poem still retains vital connections to the original lyric form. I maintain that the roots of lyric (as described in the work of Andrew Welsh) are present within the long poem, and that those roots, linked as they are to an oral culture, provide a space for orality within the medium of print.

In addition, I state that because oral expression is linked to situationally-based interactions between speaker and audience, the presence of orality within the long poem confers upon the form a focus that subverts the solipsistic focus of the Romantic lyric. The subversive activity of the orally-informed lyric voice is further augmented by a narrative voice, which acts parodically to disrupt the autonomy of both the speaking person and the story being told.

I then examine four Canadian long poems, and show how the authors use the double-voiced characteristic of the long poem to define for themselves a sense of identity and a poetic voice. However, because the authors consistently undercut the autonomy of their own speaking voices and of their identities, they deny their texts and themselves any authoritative status as a source of final truth. I maintain, therefore, that their method offers the **reader** an opportunity to decide such questions of value, and reclaims for the long poem the social focus of the original lyric form.

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Introduction

A RUMOR OF DEATH--A PROMISE OF RESURRECTION

"There is a death here, indeed," Barbara Godard announces in her closing remarks on the 1984 Long-Liners conference (318). The death which she proclaims, and in which she rejoices, is the death of the lyric. Godard's assessment of the lyric's moribund condition is determined by her belief that the lyric voice, speaking out of a position of omniscience and authority, is the definitive characteristic of the form. It is certainly true that in the twentieth century, lyric poetry has assumed characteristics which entrench what Godard calls "an absolute position (rather than a relative one) for the subject so as to deny that it is produced at all" (312). Poetic practice that attempts to disrupt this position presents a threat to the lyric, and since such disruptive practices have become increasingly more common, it is not surprising that Godard posits the lyric's demise.

In The Dance of The Intellect, Marjorie Perloff traces the development of a poetic theory that has determined the general characteristics of lyric. She situates the genesis of what we have come to regard as lyric poetry within the Romantic tradition of Keats, Coleridge and Emerson, and states that "[i]n keeping with the Romantic

model, the "I...is a Solitary Singer; [the] voice, even at its most whimsical or ironic, is never less than serious about the truths for which it searches, the tone is meditative and subdued; the addressee is always the poet himself" (21). In a succinct statement, Perloff identifies the lyric as that "poetic mode"...--in which the isolated speaker (whether or not the poet himself), located in a specific landscape, meditates or ruminates on some aspect of his or her relationship to the external world, coming finally to some sort of epiphany, a moment of insight or vision with which the poem closes" (156).

Perloff, therefore, agrees with Godard that the speaking voice is the definitive characteristic of the lyric. She perceives that any attempt to subvert that voice will create poetry which is no longer lyrical, and envisions a poetics of the future in terms of binary oppositions. She speculates that the dilemma facing poets is "whether poetry should be lyric or collage, meditation or encyclopedia, the still moment or the jagged fragment" (23). It is this either/or mentality that seduces both Perloff and Godard into a stance that requires the denigration, and ultimately the burial of the lyric as a viable poetic form today. But if the work done in linguistics in the past quarter of a century has taught us anything, it is surely that, although language is subject to constant change, such changes do not emerge fully formed like Athena from the head of Zeus. They

develop and evolve along a continuum, new forms, simultaneously divesting themselves of, and bearing with them the characteristics of the older forms. Based on this awareness, I want to suggest that there is a way of seeing lyrical and "non-lyrical" poetry in less polarized terms. In order to do so I intend to examine the contemporary Canadian long poem--the very form which Godard claims has displaced the lyric and buried it alive.

I will argue that although the voice in the long poem displaces the autonomous voice which we have come to expect in the lyric, the long poem reclaims aspects of language which originally contributed their forms to the lyric tradition. The loss of the autonomous voice does not, therefore, render the form finally and conclusively, non- or perhaps in Godard's terms, anti-lyrical. Although deprived of an "I" entrenched in absolute hegemony, the long poem includes other aspects which link it irrevocably to the lyric tradition. Any efforts to clarify those "other aspects" and to discuss how they function within the long poem will inevitably be indebted to the theoretical work of Andrew Welsh.

In The Roots Of Lyric, Welsh claims that "[l]yric is finally less a particular genre of poetry, than a distinctive way of organizing language" (21). His search for "basic structures of poetic language" (23) leads him to conclude that riddle, emblem, charm, and chant are aspects

of the phanopoeia and melopoeia, which characterize the lyric tradition. These terms, derived from Frye, Pound, and ultimately Aristotle, provide a structure which suggests to me a definition of the lyric as something more than the emotive navel-gazing of an egocentric persona. The roots of lyric allow for a tradition of riddling, not in the manner of an isolated speaker, musing to himself, but in a way that implies the presence of a listener who can participate in finding the answer. They provide an opportunity for emblematic representation whereby introducing an actual picture into a verbal context..."the verse...explores some of the conceptual meaning of the image, and...is a teaching" (Welsh 47,48). They organize language into patterns of repetition, which like those of ancient charms, enable language to "charm" or "call forth from poet and reader, new ways of seeing, and new powers of action" (161). Combined with charm melos, song melos becomes chant, a form that requires communal performance and participation. It is obvious that these roots of lyric underwent a transformation during the years in which lyric poetry was developing into its present form. The connection with communal activities came to be hidden by a Romantic focus upon the speaking voice of a single persona, and that voice has since become the definitive characteristic of the form. It is understandable, therefore, that when Godard perceives the disruption of this autonomous lyrical "I", she proclaims the

death of the lyric. I believe, however, that roots of lyric which Welsh unearths are represented--in a somewhat altered form--within the language of the contemporary Canadian long poem. The lyric is not dead. It has merely reverted back to its original roots.

Although some of these roots are identified with an oral rather than a written culture, I do not mean to suggest that orality should now be valorized at the expense of the written word. Given the effectiveness with which Derrida has argued the privileged position accorded to the former by the western metaphysical tradition, such an approach would be inane. My attitude is similar to that of Dennis Cooley, who asserts in The Vernacular Muse that he does not intend to "promote oral culture above print culture,...but to reopen some space for orality in the face of a print culture, which...has consolidated itself as a measure of literature" (197). I want to argue that the roots of the lyric, as identified by Welsh, provide this space in the contemporary long poem, that those roots, together with a narrative voice that continually de-centers itself, comprise a form which, as Godard claims, disrupts the transcendental speaker but which does not sever all connection with its lyrical past. In the true spirit of parody, it reclaims that which is of value from that past and makes it new. Rather than dis-membering itself, it re-members the lyric attributes which originally created a vital form and

reunites them with that other vital form of "story."

In The Dance of the Intellect Perloff examines the etymological roots of the term "narrative." She traces the term back to its Greek and Latin origins and concludes that "it is an appropriate term for a reflexive activity which seeks to know...antecedent events and the meaning of those events" (157). As Perloff points out, this definition can be applied to a variety of poetic genres. Lyric poetry, for example, as practised by Yeats or Stevens readily fits this description. But within lyric poetry, the course of events and their meaning are articulated by the transcendental ego of the speaking subject. Narration does not in this sense include the concept of "story" as I wish to define it. With no intention of being perverse, I would like to conflate, for the purpose of this work, the two terms of distinction made by the Russian Formalists. I shall not be speaking of "story" as being merely "fabula" or the material for plot, but of story as being both plot material--fabula-- and "sujet" : the process of giving to the fabula a specific syntactic shape. Within the contemporary long poem, both fabula and sujet, plot material and its organization are presented according to the paradigm outlined by Linda Hutcheon in A Poetics of Postmodernism. In "Theorizing The Postmodern," Hutcheon reflects upon the tendency of postmodernism to "incorporate that which [it] aim[s] to contest" (3). This parodic reworking is a dimension of the

long poem which Perloff affirms when she states that "when story reappears in postmodern poetry it is..a point of reference, a way of alluding, a source ...of parody" (161). The authors whose work I will discuss use story in this manner. They use narrative technique to subvert both the story and the speaking person by foregrounding the artificiality--the constructedness--of both elements. By so doing, they deny absolute veracity to either, and confer upon the reader the privilege, and the responsibility, of deciding for herself what value, if any, the text contains.

Godard invokes the question of value when she claims that despite the long poem's subversion of an absolute position for the speaker, it "still retains certain similarities with the lyric" (317). She claims that "both are ideolects rather than sociolects, that is language related to an individual person not language related to a social group" (317). Godard bases her assertion upon the fact that historically "most poetry has been linked intimately with dancing and music, with social institutions and with conventions of performance" (317). Such poetry (the epic, for example) is, according to Godard, a socio-lect. Godard's criticism of the idiolect derives from its emphasis upon individual, rather than social values, and she perceives that the communal values of epic and ballad derive from an oral culture. She claims that "[w]hile literary poets invent, oral poets depend on formulae. In the one

case the author is an original, a genius, a free agent, while in the other s/he recirculates communal material and is not perceived to be an authority" (313). Her criteria do not, however, put the long poem outside the boundaries of the sociolect. A space for orality, while perhaps not adhering to formulaic conventions, is nevertheless provided by the roots of riddle, chant and charm that exist within the language of the long poem. The author, rather than being an alienated genius, or even just a free agent, is at pains to point out the communal roots of her/his material and to define her/his own status as one that lacks any final authority. I believe, therefore, that the presence within the long poem of the roots of lyric that stem from an oral tradition and the techniques of its narrative form situate it as a sociolect. I disagree with Godard's statement that, although the long poem disrupts the all-knowing "I", it still uses language related to the individual rather than the social group. Someone (an individual) must always tell the tale, but the telling will be determined by a set of conventions shared with the listener. If, as happens in the long poem, the teller incorporates and then subverts those conventions, s/he is using language in a "social" manner just as surely as the scop who regaled his audience with the story of Beowulf or The Wanderer. The fact that the contemporary poet, unlike the scop, fails to offer an unequivocal meaning does not indicate that meaning does not

exist, nor that he is unconcerned with the effect of his "performance" upon his audience. The difference lies not in the degree of involvement, but in the kind.

A related (and equally problematic issue)--the question of authority--is one which bedevilled those attending the Long-Liners Conference on the Canadian Long Poem held in Toronto in 1984. Despite the presence of many practitioners of the form, there seemed to be no over-riding consensus on just what a Canadian long poem is. Many of the participants had strong opinions, but none claimed to be an authority. In his opening remarks Eli Mandel suggested--only half-jokingly--that "the real title of The Long Poem Anthology by Michael Ondaatje should be Border Blur: An Anthology of Mixed Genre Writing in Canada. Certainly, those who have appropriated the form in the past fifteen years would agree--if on nothing else--that the long poem is a mixed bag. It incorporates elements of biography, autobiography, history and documentary. It interweaves passages of prose-like text with passages of poetry, and privileges neither. It is undoubtedly the poem for all seasons, a source of satisfaction and frustration to writers and readers alike.

Dorothy Livesay is among those who claim that the long poem is a documentary. In "The Canadian Documentary: an Overview" she states that "a poem is an archive for our times" (127). However, that statement does little to enhance

the understanding of the genre as I shall be referring to it in this thesis. She views facts as being fixed and objective and regards the poet's task as being the recording of those facts--albeit with sufficient dramatic flair to convert them into myth. In spite of her seemingly restrictive approach to objective fact, Stephen Scobie asserts that Livesay aptly described the dialectic process which takes place in the long poem. In her 1969 essay "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," she claims that the "dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poets" (267) is the key characteristic of the form. Scobie agrees with her definition and maintains that the contemporary long poem represents "the attempt to define the identity of the self by a dialectic process of contrast to the other" (Scobie 1984, 270).

Scobie's statement provides a useful description of the activity which I see inscribed within the four long poems that this study investigates. Although they differ somewhat in form--three of the poems are autobiographical, and one is a biographical/historical fiction--each of them is intensely fascinated with the concept of identity. In McAlmon's Chinese Opera Scobie interrogates the notion of identity by giving full narrative play to the relationship between the historical persona of Robert McAlmon and the author/narrator. Robert Kroetsch's Field Notes, his "vasty project," explores the genesis of identity and growth on a

variety of levels. He explores the growth of vegetables, a past, a poet and a lover, and discovers en route the simultaneous unmaking of these same vegetables, past, poet and lover. Daphne Marlatt's journey to her mother's home in England, recorded in How Hug A Stone, describes a process that evokes and locates the source of the self in language--the mother-tongue. in the second person is Smaro Kamboureli's odyssey to reconstitute a self, split by the experience of living and writing in two languages. Each author is, therefore, acutely concerned with the concept of identity, but that is not to suggest that these long poems are a contemporary reworking of the notion of the isolated genius defining self and art in a state of romantic isolation. The echoes of an oral culture within the lyric voice hark back to a communal life, thereby subverting any glorification of a unique and singular experience. Acting in tension with this lyrical voice is a narrative one that, by disclaiming an absolute subject position, erases even as it enacts the search for a final and complete "identity." I would suggest, therefore, that the contemporary Canadian long poem is an "ideal" (under erasure) vehicle for parody--that act which "inscribes continuity while permitting critical difference and change" (Hutcheon 1985, 4). It parodies what Perloff, using Bloom's phrase, calls 'the internalized quest romance,' whose hero is the poet himself, and whose 'antagonists' are everything in the self that blocks

imaginative work' (in Perloff 174). In the contemporary long poem, the status of poet as hero is established and then undermined. This poetry denies the legitimacy of an "I" that is wholly self-sufficient. It inscribes continuity with the lyric past, while subverting the solipsistic focus of the Romantic lyric voice, and re-tells received story in a manner that locates the vitalizing effects of the story-telling activity, not in the truths contained within the story itself, but in the total act of enunciation between writer and reader.

CHAPTER 1

THE POETICS OF ROBERT KROETSCH: "[F]RAGMENTS...SHORED AGAINST [OUR] RUINS"

"The quest that involves me is a quest not for truth or the holy grail but a quest for the self" states Robert Kroetsch in "The Canadian Writer and the American Literary Tradition" (Kroetsch 1983, 12). On the surface, such a statement seems to express an all-consuming narcissism. However, Kroetsch's search does not take the form of isolated self-contemplation. He situates it within the framework of a community, a community as small as Heisler, Alberta where he was born and as large as the country of Canada for which he formulates a voice. The process of finding a voice, is for Kroetsch, intimately connected to the search for self. In "For Play and Entrance: the Contemporary Canadian Long Poem," he identifies that voice as being one "trying to talk its way back from solitude (from self to person?)" (1983, 107). This comment implies an attitude which presumes a journey backward in time, is aware of the presence of the other, and is somehow constituted by orality, even if the mode of articulation is print. The voice "talks back." "Our endless talk is the ultimate poem of the prairies," asserts Kroetsch, and adds that "in a culture besieged by foreign television and paperbacks and

movies, the oral tradition is the means of survival" (in Lecker 14). Kroetsch appropriates that oral tradition and inscribes it within the contemporary long poem. He uses forms whose roots derive from the lyric tradition, but counters the authoritative voice of the Romantic lyric with a narrative technique whose self-parody subverts received story, and whose open-endedness invites the participation of the reader. Robert Lecker maintains that Kroetsch's emphasis on the need to preserve the oral tradition "is fundamental to his aesthetic, but always overlooked" (Lecker 13). Unlike Godard who regards the formulaic aspect of oral poetry as being its definitive feature, Lecker emphasises its improvisational aspect. He maintains that "the defining features of oral poetry are spontaneity, idiosyncrasy and personal expression...characterized by a narrative fluidity arising from the absence of any fixed unalterable text" (14).

Field Notes, published in 1981, enacts the "narrative fluidity" to which Lecker refers. The book, although entitled The Collected Poetry of Robert Kroetsch is an incomplete collection. Its contents are carefully selected from previously published works, and Kroetsch's seemingly arbitrary manner of selection denies validity to the idea of a fixed text. Even the title of Field Notes demonstrates Kroetsch's avoidance of "the temptation to write the final book" (Kroetsch 1983, 105): it is sub-titled

1-8 a continuing poem.

This attitude to discourse, with its focus on spontaneous utterance rather than fixed pattern, implies a corresponding distrust of the written word, and involves Kroetsch in a paradoxical situation. As a writer he must find a voice within the inhospitable environment of the written word. In order to do so, he posits a theory of writing that expresses within it the contradictions which he perceives as inherent in the process itself. Speaking of the contemporary long poem, he says that "the problem for the writer...is to honor our disbelief in belief--that is to explore our distrust of system of grid, of monisms, of cosmologies perhaps, certainly of inherited story--and at the same time write a long work that has some kind of (under erasure) unity" (Kroetsch 1983, 102).

One of the sources of "unity," or at least of continuity, within Field Notes is the presence of the poetic voice. The voice is one which is endlessly talking. It is not, however, the meditative voice of the traditional lyric poet reflecting upon emotion recollected in tranquility. The voice is firmly located in the present, and while it may investigate--even ransack--the past for material, it does so only to juxtapose the two, not requiring that the past confer any ultimate meaning upon the present. There is no overwhelming epiphany or moment of insight and vision. There is, however, within Field Notes a continual

interrogation of the process by which the poet finds his voice.

Finding a voice, for Kroetsch, necessitates a confrontation with the past. In conversation with Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson he speaks to the issue which Harold Bloom's Anxiety Of Influence has made so familiar, Kroetsch claims that "the writer constantly tries to solve the problem of artistic tradition...[but] I guess I don't like to solve the problem" (Neuman/Wilson 3). This sense of ambivalence, the need to make the attempt while not expecting or even desiring a final solution, is a central dynamic in Kroetsch's approach to writing. One must be aware of the tradition, even steeped in it, but one must not reproduce it, for to do so is to make a pact with death. "To lose the tradition is fatal, but to surrender to it is fatal," asserts Kroetsch in a frequently quoted gnomic utterance (in Lecker 4). The tension which derives from a confrontation with the past emerges in what Kroetsch articulates as a "hesitation even to write the long poem," a need to find "a way out of the ending of the lyric, with its ferocious principles of closure, a being compelled out of lyric by lyric" (Kroetsch 1983, 92).

What does it mean to be compelled out of lyric by lyric? I would suggest that one thing it means is that the long poem contains aspects which have their roots in lyric. Lyric, in turn, according to Welsh's theory once again,

derives its roots from an oral culture, a culture which he claims has an obsession with "naming." "All our languages," Welsh says, "post-Eden and post-Babel as they are, still seem to carry memories of that old dream," (25) the dream in which like Adam we can give things their correct names.

Donna Bennet confirms that Canadian writers indulge in this passion for naming. In "Weathercock: The Directions of Report," she claims that "Naming--Adam's job--has long been an issue in Canadian criticism" (116). She also asserts that it is an issue which is of particular interest to Robert Kroetsch, and that he has progressed from an initial conviction and desire to name, to a position which argues for the necessity of un-naming. She quotes Kroetsch as saying: "At one time, I considered it the task of the Canadian writer to give names to his experience, to be the namer. I now suspect that on the contrary, it is his task to un-name" (in Bennet 118). I want to argue that Kroetsch pursues his quest for self by means of this un-naming, and that in order to do so, he uses those aspects of lyric rooted in an oral culture. He inscribes them but embeds them within a narrative that constantly subverts its status as truth, and by so doing creates a means of escape from the lyric's "ferocious principles of closure."

As we have seen, Welsh adopts the terminology of Pound in order to investigate the roots of lyric. Pound's "fundamental powers that form the language and direct the

meaning of poetry" (in Welsh 21) coincide with Northrop Frye's way of defining the "literal phase of meaning in a work of literature" (Frye 18). Frye's opsis, and melos, correspond to Pound's phanopoeia, and melopoeia. Frye's definitions suggest to Welsh the validity of looking for "the root forms of the language of lyric poetry" in riddle and charm, the respective roots of opsis and melos.

Citing the work of Archer Taylor, Welsh locates the origin or riddle "in the oral traditions of all cultures" (27) where, in its simplest form, it "is a question that stops (or blocks) us until the puzzle becomes clear and we find the answer" (29). Welsh claims that this simple form of the riddle is gradually absorbed into the literary culture, where it becomes a more elaborate structure, designed to express "the process of seeing, knowing, and naming" (26). But the concept of naming is a complex one, since "[i]n the process of finding the name, of reading the unknown in terms of the known, paradoxes arise because the unknown never completely fits into the known" (32). Therefore, Welsh concludes, the naming which the riddle evokes "creates a space," (44) a space in which the poet develops a fuller knowing. The riddles posed by Field Notes create such a space. The text continually asks, either implicitly or explicitly, "How do you grow a poet," and the process of finding an answer yields a more complete--if ambiguous--knowledge both of the nature of the poet and of poetry.

Kroetsch's poetic practice and theory express a profound dislike of completion, endings, and closure. He warns those who will listen "Do not feed the apocalypse," and I hesitate, therefore, to confine Field Notes within a rigid structure in order to facilitate discussion. But since, as Robert Lecker points out (125), the arrangement of the poems in Field Notes follows a loose chronological order of publication dates and, since the author chose to select them in that particular manner, I will read them as a map that imposes some sequential design on the development of a poetic identity. Kroetsch defines his identity by using a double-voice. He inscribes a lyric voice that has its roots in an oral tradition and a more overtly narrative voice which, by parodying its own story-telling activity, invites the reader's participation. In Kroetsch's hands therefore the contemporary long poem continues the lyric tradition even as it subverts the solipsistic self-absorption of the lyrical Romantic voice by including other voices in its own creative process.

The first three poems in Field Notes, "Stone Hammer Poem," "The Ledger" and "Seed Catalogue" all contain within them elements of the known. As such they should provide material for the solving of the riddle of identity, demanding of author and reader only the process of "reading the unknown in terms of the known." But the "found" material in Kroetsch's poems is just as paradoxical as the

ancient riddle-forms.

In Field Notes the known and the unknown are nebulous concepts. There is a continual interrogation, both of the validity of the material which constitutes (the known) fact, and of the ability of the narrator to interpret any "fact" correctly. This is Kroetsch's method of "honoring our disbelief in belief" and the basis of his conviction that "[p]erhaps we tell a blurred story because the story is blurred" (Kroetsch 1983, 103). Appropriately enough, he refuses to choose a single-minded approach to composition. As Lecker notes, in the process of telling the story and naming the poet, Kroetsch uses techniques that derive from archeology, genealogy, linguistics, and a poetics of play and desire (125).

In "Stone Hammer Poem" (13-19), Kroetsch conducts the search for identity within a context that suggests an archeological excavation. His method reinforces the sense of a layered site that the idea of a dig implies. He names and re-names the stone which is the poem's subject, by unearthing layer after layer of additional information. Initially, the stone seems to have all the dependable solidity that any solver of riddles could want. It is "this" stone, specific and particular, possessing a sense of monolithic presence. But as a result of his naming, its status changes from artifact to tool to weapon. It "become[s] a hammer / of stone, [a] maul" capable of

smashing either "the /buffalo's skull" or "the skull / of a child" (13). Just as suddenly, however, it loses its sinister aspect and becomes a harmless "paperweight" on the poet's desk. This naming and re-naming of the "found" material in order to solve the riddle of origins creates a space in which the poet can investigate both the stone's history as artifact and its history in his own life.

Kroetsch's investigation traces the history of the stone along an ever-regressing course in which it may have fallen "from the travois," been "left...in / the brain of a buffalo" or "is [as] / old as the last / Ice Age" (14). His language is tentative, making clear that such events "may have" occurred, but that his conclusions are purely speculative.

His investigation of the stone's history in the poet's family is equally as speculative. The stone is discovered only to be quickly re-buried under a confusing arrangement of syntax. "The paperweight," he says, "was found in a wheatfield / lost (this hammer / this poem)/" (13). By using language which transforms the stone into a collage of fragments, Kroetsch establishes the long poem as a form that privileges fragmentary archeology over continuous history. His practice is consistent with his poetic theory. In "For Play and Entrance" he describes the long poem as one "in which archaeology supplants history by saying there can be no story, only abrupt guesswork, juxta-

position, flashes of insight" (1983, 93). These qualities are akin to the spontaneity, idiosyncrasy, and personal expression which, as we have seen, are characteristics of the oral tradition. By investigating the stone hammer within an archeological framework, Kroetsch makes a space in the poem for an orally based understanding of his own identity, as well as that of the hammer's.

He extends his investigation of the stone hammer to a consideration of a history of the land and a history of the people who live there, thereby moving away from any potentially solipsistic, or Romantic lyrical focus. The people use the land "[c]ut to a function" (13) believing that it is their property. But Kroetsch points out that the land

> ...did not belong
>
> to the Indian who
> gave it to the Queen
> (for a price) who
> gave it to the CPR
> (for a price) which
> gave it to my grandfather
> (for a price) who
> gave it to my father
> (50 bucks an acre
> Gott im Himmel I cut
> down all the trees I
> picked up all the stones) who
>
> gave it to his son
> (who sold it)
>
> (17)

Kroetsch's language queries the whole record of ownership, and therefore casts doubt on the veracity of his ancestral

history in the same way that his speculative language fictionalizes the stone's archeological history. However, his story-telling is not merely a destructive process. The repetitive patterns of language (a manifestation of what Welsh associates with charm) create for the reader a new way of seeing, and for the poet a new power of action. The reader participates in a continual revision of the history of the poet and of the stone, and the poet transforms the stone into his muse. The stone hammer /paper- weight is not, however, the unfailing source of inspiration that the muse of the traditional lyric poet once was, since Kroetsch writes his poems for it only "[s]ometimes" (19), but it is a muse with a communal dimension, whose writer is engaged in a dialogue with a community of voices from the past.

"The Ledger" (23-43) continues Kroetsch's dialogue with the past. The ledger itself is an artifact, another piece of "found" material that contains within it information about the settling of Bruce County. It is a material record of Kroetsch's ancestors, and of their efforts to survive in a new land. As such it is a valuable resource in the poet's search for identity. However, like the stone hammer, it is not dependable. Its record of credits and debits frequently does not balance. The ledger survives, but as Kroetsch complains, it does so only "because it was neither / human nor useful" (23). The ancestors whose lives it records, being both human and

useful, failed to survive and it is their history--and thus his own--which Kroetsch is at pains to recreate.

He does so by writing a ledger about the ledger. His "book of columns," like the original ledger, does not add up. It does not provide any clear and final solutions. But his poem performs a more valuable, if different service. His use of language functions like an ancient charm whose "basis" according to Welsh is "its magic," its ability "to make things happen, to cause action" through "the repetition of sounds...and the rhythms that grow out of the recurring sounds" (Welsh 144). The charm aspect of Kroetsch's language, its repetition of sounds and rhythms, is a poetic activity that reclaims the ancestral voices of the past from their entombment within the pages of the ledger. Significantly, however, the first voice which the poet charms into existence is his own. He declares that the ledger, "the book of final entry," is incomplete. It has

> some pages torn out
> (by accident)
> some pages remaining
> (by accident)
>
> and therefore, he
>
> the poet: by accident
> find[s] in the torn ledger
> the green poem.
>
> (24)

Within this green poem he records a collage of voices. There are voices from pre-existing texts--histories of the district, census files, personal letters--combined

with "new" material in the voice of the poet. The interplay between the old and the new becomes a kind of incantation that conjures up the realities of life in 1854. In order "[t]o raise a barn; [t]o raise oats and hay; [t]o raise cattle and hogs;" it is necessary to "kill the bear / kill the mink / kill the marten / kill the lynx / kill the fisher / kill the beaver / kill the moose" (26). A series of arrivals--"the stump fence" "the snake fence" "the stone fence"--are voiced against a series of departures--"the trout stream" "the passenger pigeon," "the pristine forest" (29).

Kroetsch's words enact a repetitive pattern of gain and loss, a pattern which does not necessarily balance and which seems inevitably to result in silence. John Millar, having spent his life "shaping the trees," is "pushing up daisies" (29). Gottlieb Haag's only son is the "first man hanged for murder in the County of Bruce" (31). "The children,...hearing Joe Hauck scream (his arm mangled by the turning wheel) [are] silent" (36).

But such silence is no surprise to Kroetsch who knows that "[w]e silence words by writing them down" ("Seed Catalogue,"63). He challenges the silence that his words have created with more words, reclaiming the ancestral voices by invoking their presence in chant. He sings a "Thernody:/a song/of lamentation" (42) that derives its content from the names of residents in the ledger. The

passage contains the rhythms...and repetitive catalogues as well as elements of prophecy and public lament that according to Welsh characterize a communal chant (Welsh 137). The lament is for the fact that only "the ledger itself" remains. The prophecy acknowledges death as the only reality, since "[t]ombstones are hard to kill." It insists at the same time, however, that in order "TO REST IN PEACE/ you must marry the terror" (43). By recalling in chant, the death of his ancestors, Kroetsch shows his willingness to marry the terror that emerges from the silence that their death creates. His emphasis on the pronoun "you" invites (or perhaps demands) the reader's participation in the chant and her/his involvement in the task. His search for a poetic voice is, therefore, one which finds its source within an oral tradition (even if its expression is in print) and which engages itself in a dialogue with a community of ancestral voices from the past and a community of readerly voices from the present.

The story most firmly entrenched in the communal memory of Western civilization is, perhaps, the myth of Eden. In "Seed Catalogue" (47-67) Kroetsch uses the myth as the background for his continuing quest for origins. He juxtaposes his own story of the growth of a prairie garden with the original garden story in a parodic reworking that questions, even as it asserts, the viability of the old tale, and which does not suggest that the new story provides

an all-encompassing cosmology.

Kroetsch's prairie garden is one in which the father, instead of being all-knowing, is "puzzled / by any garden that [is] smaller than a / quarter-section of wheat and summerfallow" (49). He does not exercise omnipotent power over the creatures in his domain, but is continually frustrated by a lowly badger who "threaten[s] man and beast with broken / limbs" (50). Unable to control or to kill his enemy, the father (no model of Truth) covers up his inadequacy by lying.

Kroetsch, the progeny of this inadequate father, enacts a ludicrous latter-day Fall from a horse that was "standing still." This fall, lacking any cause, is a prelude to a more serious one. He and Germaine (his prairie Eve) make love in blissful innocence until informed by the priest that it is "playing dirty." The cause of the second fall seems no less ridiculous to Kroetsch than the fall from the horse, since it poses an insoluble dilemma. If making love is playing dirty, "how do you grow a lover" (51)?

The dilemma is in fact an all-encompassing one. How do you grow anything in a "home place" defined by the extremes of "the January snow" and "the summer sun" (49) where "the gopher [is] the model, "and" [g]ophers ate everything" (55). Kroetsch's answer is that you emulate the model. You acquire a voracious appetite that devours all the old stories, and you re-tell them in order to create a

poet, a prairie town and a garden.

Telling the story is a problem, however. Kroetsch insists that "[t]his is God's own truth" (51) but since God's own truth is being parodied within the garden story, his claim rests on shaky or at least ironic foundations. He undermines the truth even further by rejecting sequential narrative and by providing a variety of answers to a repeated series of questions. All these techniques comprise a method of un-naming. Like an Adam whose original mandate has been rescinded, he takes upon himself the task of un-naming the received story of the garden, the prairie town, the lover and the poet. He uncovers a world of absence and invokes "[a]...muse of forgetfulness" (65) that creates a world of silence. However, this world of silence provides a space for the poet's own story and a space for the re-creative activity of the reader who can evaluate the poet's story and speak her/his own word (as I do here) against the silence.

Paradoxically, Kroetsch simultaneously creates a world that is alive with noise, a world "full of a lot of A-1 Hard Northern Bullshitters" (55). "The hired man laugh[s]," the "mother whisper[s]," the bull-shit artist tells a ribald joke, and the poet "shout[s] poems at the paying customers...of the Chateau Lacombe" (60). The young farm-boy, unable to be a "postman" because "[t]here was no one to receive [his] application," sings a defiant parody of

a gambler's song into the silence (55).

"Seed Catalogue" is Kroetsch's song against the silence. It is both a lament for a past that once provided clear answers, and a celebration of its disappearance. He poses a series of riddles and by parodying a world of easy answers creates a space in which the poet's voice can charm a new world into existence. He solves (under erasure) the riddle of his own identity and that of the prairie community by reclaiming in print a world constituted by orality. The multiple communal voices he records reinforce the effect of a narrative technique that undermines a univocal version of received truth, and affirms the long poem as a poetic form with an ability to look outside itself for answers. This description reflects E.D. Blodgett's opinion that "Kroetsch's understanding of discourse...is oriented toward its discontinuities, its play, its apparent disregard of the book as guarantor of the absolute" (4).

The world that Kroetsch reclaims in "Seed Catalogue" is, however, a world in which the crucial question of survival--"Adam and Eve got drownded--/who was left" (67)--is left unanswered. Clearly, a return to orality does not totally solve the problem of identity and its accompanying search for a poetic voice. The problem is sufficiently difficult as to demand from Kroetsch a new approach. In "How I Joined The Seal Herd" (71-74) he temporarily sets unanswered questions aside and rejects both oral and written

language. He seeks his identity, instead, within a pre-linguistic environment. Envisioning a return to the primordial world of the ocean, he imagines a mating with an amorous cow seal and reduces his poetic voice to a "whisper" out of deference to her sensitive ears.

Although he seeks a means of communication not based on words, he is naturally forced to use "(words again, /words)" in order to tell the story. As hard as he tries, he cannot escape his need of language and his compulsion to use it as accurately as possible. He even finds it necessary to re-word his account of his post-coital ecstasy. "I'm a new man (mammal, I correct myself)" (74). "Seal Herd" is, therefore, a failed attempt to reject the use of language. Although Kroetsch does not inscribe riddle charm, and chant in his poem, he continues to emphasize orality. "I was still a man, / I had to talk" (73) asserts the narrator. And talk he does, telling a story which belongs within the oral tradition of the "tall tale." Kroetsch's concern with the inadequacy of words is serious, but this story is a light-hearted voicing of his willingness "to honor [the reader's] disbelief in belief."

In "The Sad Phonecian" (77-102) Kroetsch emerges from the depths of the ocean to the wharf of the ancient Phonecians where he reasserts his loyalty, or perhaps his indebtedness, to the use of words. Like the ancient phonecians, he affirms the value of the phonetic alphabet,

and like them also, he transports the letters of the alphabet to new and strange destinations. He juxtaposes a character of the alphabet against each of twenty-six dramatic monologues, and elaborates metaphoric connections to each letter. The connections are inscribed as a collage of puns, cliches, and proverbs, embedded amid alternating sequences of "ands" and "buts." The method of inscription, a charm-like repetition of patterns, and a chanting of long catalogues of items, confers an overwhelming sense of orality upon the poem. At the same time, the tentative nature of the assertions in the text, reinforced by the fact that the letters of the alphabet have bits and pieces missing, emphasizes the alphabet's inadequacy as a means of communication. The poem thus reclaims the roots of lyric, while denying the moment of epiphanic clarity that might be expected to emerge from a form as entrenched within the lyric tradition as the dramatic monologue.

The lack of clarity inherent in language presents a serious problem for "The Sad Phonecian." His inability to communicate transforms him into The Sad Phonecian of Love. Kroetsch suggests, however, that such a failure in communication owes more to the characteristics entrenched within the "written" rather than the spoken word. The Sad Phonecian is rejected by the woman from Swift Current who "developed a thing for adverbs" (80). Unlike a verb which acts, the adverb performs a mimetic function that might be

said to belong more within the context of the "written." It modifies and describes. It is, as Cooley asserts in The Vernacular Muse, "informationally rather than persuasively directed" (196). The woman from Swift Current, as her taste in language indicates, does not want to be persuaded but to be informed. [S]he...resisted; she wronged by refusing." (She "scorned [his] offer of sex in a tree-house") (77). Her lack of susceptibility to the persuasiveness of the spoken word, excludes her from love and sex: "She [knows] avoidance" (88). She presents a dramatic contrast to the Sad Phonecian, who in "trying to talk his way back from solitude," avoids nothing, despite the fact that he frequently ends up "with [his] foot in [his] mouth" (90). The linguistic calisthenics of the Sad Phonecian, inscribed within the poem, are Kroetsch's example of a language that is resolutely active or--to use his term--"verb/al" and, therefore, by implication capable of generating action and communication.

"The Silent Poet Sequence" (105-113) continues Kroetsch's dialectic between the written and spoken word. The poet's voice is reduced to the relatively "silent" musing appropriate to the dramatic monologue, because he judges that both the written and spoken word are inadequate means of communication. He complains that his alter ego, Earache The Red, "talks too much" (105). But he is equally distrustful of the written word, since his poems are

misinterpreted as love-letters by "a patient in the asylum" (106). Although tempted briefly to become the romantic hero of his own dramatic monologue, he eventually refutes such a "written" solution to his problem, and reinscribes orality, ironically by "eat[ing] his words" (112). He regurgitates those words in the form of a hilarious parody of St. Francis' Canticle to the birds. Talking to his irreverent congregation--"a flock of two thousand birds that shits on [his] car" (113),--he rejects the idea of canonicity for himself, and by implication for the written word. "Francis, [he says], is the name; skip the saint business." The Silent Poet's struggle with language, therefore, enables Kroetsch to subvert the authoritative voice of the dramatic monologue, and to suggest that the orality inscribed in the contemporary long poem is capable of communication, even when its words are "for the birds."

Kroetsch may criticize the validity of a literary canon, and contest it by injecting elements of orality into his work, but he sill must confront the issue of print. In order to deal with the problem, he uses a narrative voice that inscribes and then subverts the "written" tradition. In "The Winnipeg Zoo" (117-127) he assumes and then undercuts the role of a Romantic poet enduring the absence of his imaginative muse. The effort of delving into genealogy, archeology, and linguistics has failed to give Kroetsch any clear understanding of his poetic identity. On the

contrary, the effort has reduced him to a state of exhaustion. He claims that he is "unable to imagine the act of writing, unable to imagine" (117). However, unlike his Romantic ancestor, he does not think that the dilemma is his alone to solve. He buttonholes the reader, and stresses the seriousness of the problem. "[L]isten", he insists, we must take care of our stories" (117). Taking care of the story is, therefore, a mutual effort. In Labyrinths of Voice, Kroetsch says that he "think[s] of the reading act as an incredibly demanding, an exciting act (175). "The Winnipeg Zoo" makes those kinds of demands on the reader. Kroetsch does not provide a linear story line. He merely presents an encyclopedic collage in which numerous dramatis personae appear and re-appear with some regularity, but without clearly defined functions. The obscurity of "The Winnipeg Zoo" makes it a mystery story, but it is one that parodies the genre of detective fiction. Audobon the artist--Kroetsch's alter ego, and perhaps the reader's--commits a crime. He "dips the beaded sight into the flattened V on the gun's barrel, and...then it is done" (119). The reader must decide what is done, and why. However, in order to do so, s/he must reject the ratiocinative methods of the mystery stories' super-sleuth. Instead, s/he must be attuned to the fictionalizing nature of narrative, and to the alterity of linguistic codes.

Despite Kroetsch's claim that "the secret is in the

ketchup bottle" (a red herring?), the primary clue lies outside the poem itself, and within "Seed Catalogue." "We silence words by writing them down" (63) asserts Kroetsch in that poem, and in "The Winnipeg Zoo" he connects silence with the presence of the writer. "I am here, it is quiet," claims Kroetsch at the beginning and end of the poem. The answer to the mystery of Audobon's crime is hidden within that silence, and paradoxically within the etymology of Kroetsch's written words. The solution makes artist, writer and reader equally culpable in the "plot" that silences words. The activity of the artist--Audobon, who "sights," Kroetsch who "cites" and the reader at the "site" of the text--transforms life into stasis. After Audobon's act "[t]he ducks in the duck pond cannot fly, the sun sticks out its shadow" (119). After the writer's and reader's act, words have been made to assume specific, and limited meanings. All other meanings have, at least temporarily, been silenced.

However, Kroetsch's silence conveys a message. He parodies both the fabula and sujet of his "story." The "plot" foregrounds the fictional nature of the story-telling process by its emphasis on the multiple meanings within the linguistic sign. It, therefore, inscribes and then subverts the hope (implicit within detective fiction) that a univocal truth is accessible to ratiocination. At the same time the syntactic shape of the story, its sujet, parodies the

process whereby telling a story releases the poetic voice of the isolated, wordless Romantic genius. At the end of this story, there is no exuberant poetic voice rejoicing in the return of his creative muse. There is only a quiet voice who reminds the reader--perhaps reassuringly, perhaps threateningly--"I am here."

Having established the parodic tenor of his story-telling voice, Kroetsch gives it a double edge in "The Criminal Intensities Of Love As Paradise" (131-144). He presents simultaneously, two versions of a day in the life of lovers in Jasper Park. In the left-hand column, he uses the densely metaphoric and symbolic elliptical language which we have come to associate with the Romantic lyric. In the right column, he provides a "straight story," a presumably realistic "translation" of the obscurities contained in the column on the left. The ledger with its checks and balances has returned, but once again, as in that poem, things do not quite add up. The lyric voice belies the high seriousness appropriate to its form. It combines banality and philosophy in a single phrase, and is ludicrously aware of its metaphysical and surrealistic connections. The narrative voice in the right column is also self-parodic. It is resolutely "prose-aic." An unwary reader might rejoice that Kroetsch has finally succumbed to telling a story in a traditional linear, sequential, factual manner. However, this narrative voice is so conventional

that as Lecker says "we can only see the text as a parody of its own form of expression" (146). A story-telling method that parodies both traditional lyric poetry, and traditional narrative style is not merely a cynical gesture on Kroetsch's part. It is, instead, his way of expressing a poetic voice with a social dimension. His method foregrounds the constructedness of language, and thereby makes the reader aware of her/his function within the process of enunciation. S/he recognizes the ambiguity inherent in language, and the conventions s/he uses to interpret story, and must, therefore, also accept responsibility for whatever truth emerges from her/his interpretative strategies.

Kroetsch's search for a poetic identity and for a poetic voice is not conducted, therefore, within a solipsistic framework. He inscribes it in a manner that demands the participation of an "engaged" reader. Writer and reader must take care of the story because the story itself is shared. It is "our" story. As recorded by Kroetsch, the story is largely constituted by orality, an orality that emerges from a lyric voice that uses riddles, emblems, charms and chants. This lyric voice further emphasizes orality and critiques the "written" tradition by displacing the autonomous voice of the Romantic lyric. The parodic effect of the lyric voice is reinforced by a narrative voice that subverts both received story and its

method of enunciation, thereby allowing a space for the participation of the reader. Both voices inform the poetics of an author, who in his quest for self, inscribes the story of a community and a country, and whose voice in the final words of Field Notes becomes "a nesting tongue [to] hatch the world" (144).

CHAPTER 2

GOING TO GROUND: MARLATT'S JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF SELF

As we have seen in Field Notes, "taking care of the story" is one of Kroetsch's main concerns. Telling the story is of at least equal concern to other writers of the long poem. In fact, Frank Davey claims that, although "writers have attempted to replace narrative as the long poem's dominant sign"..."it [is] still the central issue of the form" (Davey 1983, 184). This is certainly true of Daphne Marlatt. In How Hug A Stone, she uses the process of telling the story as a means of clarifying her ambivalent feelings about narrative. Like Field Notes, Marlatt's story records a search for identity and a search for a poetic voice. She conducts a search for self by delving into her own and her mother's past in order to make sense of the fears and contradictions that define her present. Her story is a record of the events that occur, of the people she and her son encounter on a trip to England and, most importantly, of the transformation which the journey effects in Marlatt and in her poetic voice.

Marlatt's voice is a very different one from Kroetsch's. Whereas Kroetsch is fascinated by the oppositional concepts that words can represent (the ledger

with its two columns, the alternating and/but formulations of "The Sad Phonecian"), Marlatt is intrigued by the ability of words to generate incremental levels of meaning. In "Given This Body," a recorded interview with George Bowering, she speaks of language as an organism which "is a leafing out...It's a body," and she is "trying to recognize its full sensory nature as much as possible" (Bowering 60). She is, therefore, not as interested as Kroetsch is in presenting the dialectic between opposites but wants instead to let language speak as broad a range of meanings as it can.

Letting the language speak this range of meanings involves Marlatt in a process that transforms her poetic voice from one of fear to one of celebration. Her actual journey to the south of England is paralleled by an internal journey in which she attains a kind of double vision. She begins to see and to know her mother more clearly, at the same time that she perceives for herself a more intimate relationship with language, the mother tongue. Her journey, although analyzed internally,is not, however, the private experience of an isolated lyric heroine. She is in a continual dialogue with other people in an attempt to define "how this fits in the world" (Bowering 64). The poem involves her within the social context of an oral tradition. To use Frank Davey's phrase for explaining the attitude that defines the writer of the long poem, she is involved "in a

collaborative relationship with person and event" (1983, 198). "We live in the world," Marlatt remarks, and adds "I don't want to get out of this world. I want to learn everything I can about what it is...to be mortal" (Bowering 60). Learning about mortality requires Marlatt to ask numerous questions. She poses the riddle of her personal and poetic identity, and into the space which the questioning creates, she inserts emblematic representation and charm-like language. These aspects, together with the multi-voiced dialogue, and a narrative technique which is distrustful of the very process of story-telling, makes How Hug A Stone, like Field Notes, a poem that reclaims the roots of lyric, while it subverts the Romantic lyrical voice.

Marlatt's distrust of received story is profound. She speaks in her text of story as "the plot we're trapped in" and yet she is equally wary of the alternative, since as she says, "without narrative how can we see where we're going" (15). In response to this ambivalence, she devises a technique that enables her to tell the story while calling it into question. Dated journal entries and maps provide an illusion of realistic representation, but the maze-like intersecting lines of the maps, together with an intricate linguistic pattern emphasize the unavoidable artificiality and constructedness of the writing process. In this way she is able to repeat a version of her story that at the same

time parodies the idea of story as a factual re-telling of objective data.

However, a parodic re-working of the concept of story is not the only site of Marlatt's use of repetition. In How Hug A Stone, she repeats words, other voices repeat stories, and people repeat patterns of behaviour. As we have seen, "the repetition of sounds in the language" is a characteristic of charm, and the function of charm is "to make things happen" (Welsh 144). Marlatt's repetitions do make things happen. They generate a new poetic voice for her, and a new understanding of the transformative power of language for the reader.

Marlatt inscribes a background for her use of repetition at the very beginning of her story. In flight between Vancouver and England, she comments on the Agatha Christie movie being shown. The movie is "dense with intrigue" in which "an elderly English lady plots, enraged mother at the heart of it: lost" (15). The words are a microcosmic representation of the issues which Marlatt will investigate within the text, and as such provide a basis for analyzing the development of her poetic voice.

The elderly English lady is an all-pervasive presence who undergoes a constant metamorphosis in the story. At first, she is merely the character in an Agatha Christie movie, but she becomes in turn the "grandmother monolithic in mauve," Jean, the "mother's closest school

friend," and that staid old lady, the British Empire with its attendant history. These ladies are the dramatis personae with whom Marlatt talks in order to solve the riddle of her mother, "the enraged mother at the heart." The mother/daughter relationship has an eternal dimension about it, and Marlatt has said that she believes one "can only articulate the eternal through the...local and the time-bound" (Bowering 58). Hence she recreates the very local and very time-bound voices of England, and engages them in conversation.

The grandmother, living alone, tells a story which re-creates the emphasis on "keeping up appearances" that characterized the Victorian way of life. Other daughters were "very pretty" but Marlatt's mother, "Edrys capped it all" (28). Edrys, after a brief flash of independence, "of wanting to learn dress designing and dressmaking" (29) dutifully played out the role of housewife assigned to her. The grandmother's story is told in affectionate terms, but the "singsong" voice recreates for Marlatt and for the reader, "the music of futility," of a past devoid of choices, a future that is enshrouded in fear.

Fear is the motif that underlies many of the voices that Marlatt records. The grandmother is afraid of losing first place in people's affection. "I always want to come first with people" (34) she says. Her son, afraid of his mother's volatile temper, "brood[s] under the shadow of the

wild grey mere" and claims that "she never should have had children" (33). Even the minor characters in the story are immersed in fear. The voice of Marlatt's landlady predicts disaster, verbalizing an apocalyptic vision of "the image of the end" (49). According to Jean, this environment of fear seriously affected Marlatt's mother. She always imagin[ed] the worst," worried about whether she was "doing the right thing" and "seemed to enjoy setting people against her" (66,67).

Marlatt judges this fear to be a result of the British imperial vision of history (of life as following a pre-written script), and its presence reinforces her own distrust of written story. She claims that "we feed ourselves stories" in order to avoid the knowledge that our lives often fail to "make sense." Stories which have a beginning, a middle and an end reflect back to us "a linear version of our lives" (15), and thereby allay our insecurities. She suggests that this vision of life as a linear script informs the thought patterns of the people she meets, and that such a vision evokes within them a feeling of helplessness that emerges in a language devoid of vitality. Such a language is characterized by the repetition of meaningless slogans and cliches, and is accompanied by a sense of helplessness. Jean's speech patterns are a prime example of this use of language. Confronted by the irrational reality "of five year olds

looting burned out shops," Jean invokes an empty belief in the ability of people to achieve "the common good" by the use of "Reason." Since she has been told that there is a particular way things "ought to be," she bemoans the fact that it is "all me-me" these days, but adds helplessly that "[she] suppose[s] all these people know better than I" (70).

In contrast with this version of speech (which is in reality an a-version to speech and an example of the written word vocalized), Marlatt uncovers and records "a constant stream of speech" that is spontaneous utterance. This vernacular stream flows through the lives of people who have an intimate connection to the life of the land. Along with the "sorry darling," "o bloody hell" and "what rubbish" voiced in her aunt's cottage there is a "whole lot of spinning and cutting going on" (24,25). Marlatt implies that the process of changing "the dirt of Devon fields, sheep turd and grass smell" into the coat on one's back, transforms one's understanding of the relationship between the word "coat" and the "coat" which the sheep formerly wore. She makes connections which "try to realize the full sensory nature of language" by uncovering its underpinnings in the natural world.

She emphasizes this revitalizing link between the spoken word and the natural world by inscribing voices from an inherited oral tradition, and by suggesting their ability to generate new powers of action within a social context.

"Take heede to the weather the wind and the sky" is a piece of folk wisdom which results in the "tedding, cocking... shaking turning, spreading" of the hay "that is sweet an' dry an' green as't should be" (25). The language which she records, with its repetitious rhythms and its song-like cadence reflects the roots of charm and chant, and results in the communal activity of haying, becoming thereby "the voice of society acting for the benefit of the community" (Welsh 166).

However, Marlatt's voicing of the charmed language of the earth lacks the power to deliver her from the sense of entrapment that derives from her unresolved relationship with her mother. Even in the midst of recording the oral tradition she is aware of being scripted by the lives which preceded her. "[I] thought I was free," she says, realizing that she is not, that she and her mother "are fixed in the one script, the proscribed line of relationship" (46).

Her most successful attempts to escape the fear and to break with the proscribed line of the script derive from her activities with her son. With him she encounters the vitalizing force of a "spoken" present. He saves the "sounds" of language. He tapes the continuous "purring" of the telephones, his own imaginative adventures "stalking horses in a field of cows" (36), and tells her his dream in vivid detail--"like it was" (59). With him too, she can once more contact the source of a vitality that resides in and

emerges from the "sounds...that rise with the living exhalations of the earth" (38). Playing tag with Kit, she escapes temporarily from the nameless "dread" that haunts her. On the common she can be free, "wild in the spoken world" of "crow caw, dog yip and grass flick" (39). Such freedom is, however, temporary, and always undercut by a "feeling that the longer [she stays in England / the more [she] tempts fate" (54). What is required is a confrontation with the nemesis of a pre-written script, and an exorcism of the terrible sense of futility that it engenders.

This confrontation engages her in another repetition. She retraces the steps of a journey to a Guest House at Ilfracombe where she and her family stayed in 1951. The voices that greet her there are remembered ones, and it is by invoking their remembered presence that she is able to understand the sources of her fear. As a child of nine, she was aware of, but unable to comprehend, her mother's terror about leaving England for Canada. She merely absorbed the atmosphere of anxiety that surrounded her grandfather's talk "about strain and cracking," and in child-like fashion, assumed that she must be responsible for the situation. Childhood pranks, combined with admonitions from her mother that "you, the oldest, you ought to know better" (46) reinforced her guilt and convinced her that she "deserved worse" (47).

In returning, as it were, to the scene of the crime,

Marlatt recognizes that "the enraged mother at the heart of it, lost" is her own mother. She is able to see that her own fear of being trapped in a pre-scripted life derives from her mother's experience of having "no stars to plot [her] course, only foreboding and hope against her father's words, against the script" (45). Marlatt's ability to recall voices from her own very personal oral tradition enables her to use her imaginative powers to invent a different script from the one in which she had previously believed. She identifies her own fear as an irrational offshoot of her mother's, and the process of separating the fears frees her to revise both their scripts.

But such revision does not happen automatically. Before Marlatt can totally escape from old fear, she has to confront other memories that the visit to Combe Martin engenders. These are not directly related to her relationship with her mother, but reflect instead the fears that derive from living in an environment that is obsessed by war. Remembering the past, and fearing the future, Marlatt is "split and blown in 2 opposite directions at once" (49). Her landlady's view of history does little to reassure her. That elderly English lady insists that the truth--a future of "wars and rumors of wars--is written" (49). The television with its current dismal news "confirms [her] view of history, this plot we're in." Surrounded by this atmosphere of hopelessness, and concerned for Kit who

is ill, Marlatt struggles against "grey despair" (51). At this point the implications of Marlatt's experience extend outward to the reader. The news on the "telly" is our news. Like Marlatt, we connect dates with significant historical events. We are bombarded daily by our own equivalent of "the Israeli attack" which she records, just as within her text we are now relentlessly bombarded by images of history as a trap that we "must break out [of] before it buries us, [since] stories can kill" (51). But Marlatt provides both herself and the reader with a means of escape. She inscribes in the telling of her story an alternative pattern to this apocalyptic view of history. Her prose adopts the charm-like aspects of its lyrical roots, and she weaves a repetitive pattern of climbing and descent, of rambles over "steep cliffs' that emerge into light, and of explorations into the darkness of "coves with caves" (48). The pattern she inscribes suggests the "idea of going down and rising again" that Welsh suggests is "the central element of ritual charms" that "inaugurate a new planting season" (Welsh 140). Since, as we have seen, this repetition of patterns has the ability to call forth new ways of seeing and new powers of action, it is not surprising that by giving voice to these patterns, Marlatt effects a transformation in her vision of her mother, and in her own and the reader's perception of "story."

The visits to caves, and her son's fascination with

the "treasure" they may hide, evokes within her a memory of a trip with her mother to the caves at Wild Pear Beach. The family was trapped by the incoming tide, and Marlatt recalls the "pan-ic (terror of the wild)" (55) that informs her mother's voice. Familiar with the insecurities that haunted her mother, Marlatt imagines the voices of self-criticism with which she must have chided herself. However, she also remembers that despite the panic, "despite the 'irresponsible,' 'incapable' hammers in her head," her mother was able to help her three children "climb up and over." "Exhilarated," by her achievement, she revelled in it, "taking [them] close to the edge over and over" (55). Marlatt divests herself of the memory of her mother as a woman wholly dominated by fear. In doing so, she acts within the tradition of an "orally based expression," which according to Dennis Cooley is "located in a present that constantly redefines its past by shaking off memories that are no longer useful" (The Vernacular Muse, 196). Her action disrupts the received script of her mother's life and demonstrates, that by engaging its lyrical dimension, her poetic voice can effectively oppose the totalizing effect of "written" story.

But Marlatt's is not an insular vision. She has an almost religious sense of the function of poetry. She claims that "a writer's job is to continue to give accurate witnessing to what's happening...You cannot change the

world, [but] [y]ou can change consciousness & language is intimately tied up with consciousness" (Bowering 37). Her poetic practice suggests to the reader that by using patterns of language connected to the cycles of the natural world, it is possible to generate a more vital language. Such methods, she suggests, give voice to a story that effectively contradicts (literally, speaks against) the sense of futility evoked by a linear vision of history.

Marlatt's map of Ilfracombe, Combe Martin provides a supplementary text to her revision of story. She superimposes the lines of her own journey upon the lines of the map, and adds her own notations of places which are not officially depicted but which are significant to her. Welsh claims that "the emblem, like the riddle...is a teaching" (48) and Marlatt's maps teach the reader the same lesson that she inscribes within her poem. Her notations are an emblematic (and therefore visual) representation of her emphasis upon the necessity for superimposing personal narrative life lines upon the pre-written official text.

The lines of Marlatt's maps form a vaguely circular image, and this image of the circle is of primary importance to the rest of her story. As we have seen, her recollection of the experience in the caves suggests the necessity of daring to go "close to the edge." But Marlatt knows that despite her mother's willingness to dare those edges, and despite the fact that she was inwardly "raging at the false

front of society," she eventually "laps[ed], controlled, into silence" (67). Recognizing within herself patterns similar to those of her mother, the "rebel bound to the dutiful one," she enacts a repetition of her mother's script. Alarmed by Kit's illness, she lapses into silent "brooding." But since such silence means the death of the poetic voice, Marlatt confronts it. She does so by exploring the pre-linguistic source of language. That exploration (like Kroetsch's fear that in joining the seal herd "[he] was going / too far...past everything") (74) fills her with a sense of foreboding, and takes her to the edge of linguistic expression. Not surprisingly, given Welsh's theory about the paradoxical nature of riddle, her search to define "what is the limit?" (68) takes her from the edge into the centre. Her story circles back to the beginning, to "the enraged mother at the heart, lost," but the search now, is not for her biological mother, but for mother-tongue, and ultimately for herself, "the nameless creature she is at the heart of this many chambered shell" (65). However, the journey into "the blue/black hole at centre" is a fearful one and Marlatt prepares for it by creating for herself a charmed circle of words, the activity that Welsh refers to as "a bridge to the non-verbal consciousness" (Welsh 155).

"[D]elphiniums blue and geraniums red" are the words which generate Marlatt's story. Once more she takes her cue from the natural world, and lets its vitality inform her

language. The colour of the flowers is like the light which "suffuses hayfield, appletree, vegetable garden hedge" (69) and she invokes its "healing colour." But despite this assertion, her pattern of repetition conjures up only unhappy memories. She literally "sings the blues," chanting a litany of miseries both personal and social. She recalls being "blue with the cold on the Didcot platform," and again during some long forgotten hockey game. "In the face of annihilation" (70) she hears only empty phrases like "tactical advantage, counterforce capability and stockpiling." She perceives that those around her retreat into fearful hiding like the dormouse with "doubtful paws to eyes." Despite its dismal content, her story still manages to enact within its form an alternative to the apocalyptic vision of history that it records. It concludes by circling back to its original image of the "dormouse curl[ed], imagining delphiniums blue." Marlatt's charmed circular story does not enact the healing for which she had hoped, but it does usher her into a new pre-verbal state of consciousness. Alarmed by Kit's worsening condition, she reacts in elemental terror. "[L]ost, panicked, like a bird beating wildly against a branch," and undone by the task of mothering, she asks the pertinent question: "who mothers me" (71)?

This search for the absent mother is a variation on the theme of naming which, as we have seen, is an obsession

of the oral culture. Laurie Ricou's essay "Phyllis Webb, Daphne Marlatt and simultitude" stresses the fact that women have a particular necessity to find new names for reality. Ricou suggests that such a necessity derives from having "to live with the gaps in language and to fill in the gaps" (208). He points out that a patriarchally inscribed culture has not proved viable alternatives for words like "lumberjack," "chairman." or the generic "he." Female literary practice, has often, therefore, sought to find new names. Ricou claims that Marlatt seeks new names by taking a particular interest in the etymology of words, and, as we have seen in How Hug A Stone, in recording how "the word was spoken by women" (208). Ricou does not suggest that an interest in orality and etymology is exclusively a female pursuit, but that it provides a framework for a particularly "feminist signature" (208).

In the process of naming, Marlatt invokes the charm root of lyric, disrupts the tradition of received scripted story, and paradoxically inscribes a particulary feminist signature within her text. Her efforts are directed toward naming the "enraged mother at the heart," out of a fear that "she will swallow [her] up if she does not admit Her, name Her" (34). This enraged mother is not the biological parent so much as the mythical earth-mother presence whom Marlatt confronts at Stonehenge and Avebury. Marlatt's repetition of names of the ancient fertility goddess has "the

fertilizing effect" which Welsh claims ensues from such a use of charm. It generates within Marlatt a new way of seeing and a new way of knowing. In chanting the many names of Mary/mother, Marlatt realizes literally--makes real in the text--an awareness that the birth of a "Son" who is begotten of the father, not the mother, defines "the limit of the old story" with its circular pattern of maternal (earth-generated) birth and death. She concludes that the Christian myth, by focusing on the necessity that this Son redress original sin, leaves man "with a script that continues to write our parts...in the endless struggle to redeem old wrongs old sacrifices" (73). Against this pre-scripted linear story, and into the space created by her attempt to solve the riddle of "who mothers me," Marlatt inserts her own particularly feminist signature. She names by not naming and her text is a hymn of praise to an absence, to an inarticulate source of her poetic voice, the earth itself. She writes her own story that tells of (Her) story, that of the mythic earth mother

> who although there are stories about her, versions of history that are versions of her, & though she comes in many guises she is not a person,she is what we come through to and what we come out of, ground & source, the space after the colon the pause (between the words) of all possible relation (73).

In the beginning, therefore, was not the word. In the beginning there was "at the centre, earth, only earth" (75), and impressed by the groundedness of the great stones at

Avebury, Marlatt embraces, "hug[s]...nose in to lithic fold" the source of her poetic voice (75).

Marlatt's story of the earth mother grounds her voice in the inarticulate, but she insists that although "you have to exist without language...be in [the] body, that isn't enough." She claims that "the inarticulate has to be made sense of in some way, & that's where language comes in" (Bowering 59). The language which makes sense of Marlatt's confrontation with the inarticulate is the voice of her son. He calls to her at Avebury, he call[s] to the pigeons in Trafalgar Square. His voice is noisy and insistent. It links her with him inside an oral culture that is, as Cooley says, "embedded in the flow of time, public and shared" (195), and it generates within Marlatt a linguistic response which expresses that public connection. She uses the power of her newly defined poetic voice to perform a ritual chant. Grounded firmly now like her stone mothers, she can "stand in [her] sandals and jeans and beat out the words, dance out the names at the heart of where we are lost," dancing against "(the fear that binds)" (78). Her words perform the communal function of a chant by using language as a means of escape from a paralyzing linear vision of history. Since we share her language just as we share her inherited version of history, her solution is available to us. We know that Kit Marlatt's complaint about England that "here everyone's scared deep down" (78) is our reality as well. In a world

constantly threatened with annihilation we need a new source of hope. Marlatt's poetic voice, with its roots in an oral culture that is "public and shared," provides that hope for a communal solution.

It is clear, therefore, despite the search for a personal identity, that Marlatt's voice in How Hug A Stone does not express the solipsistic concerns of the Romantic lyric. Her search for identity within the long poem involves her in a continual interaction with person and event. She re-calls voices from the past and, using the riddles, emblems, charms and chants of an oral/lyrical tradition, tells her story. By re-telling the story, she acquires a new and more complete understanding of her mother, and revises her attitude to narrative. Instead of just being "the plot we're trapped in," narrative becomes "a strategy for survival" (75) for herself and for the reader. Her narration performs the valuable parodic function of reclaiming that which is of value from the past and making it new. In her hands the contemporary long poem acts as a vehicle for transforming her poetic voice from one of fear to one that celebrates new life. Having divested herself of a plot dense with intrigue, and made peace with the enraged mother at the heart of it, Marlatt concludes How Hug A Stone with the triumphant assertion that "we want to be where live things are" (79).

CHAPTER 3

STEPHEN SCOBIE AND ROBERT McALMON: WRITING FACTS--TELLING FICTIONS

Like Marlatt, who wants to learn everything she can abut what it is to be mortal, the main character in McAlmon's Chinese Opera proclaims that " CONTACT / must be with everything" (22). Scobie's book is a record of McAlmon's search for an ultimate failure to achieve that contact. Ironically, Scobie completes McAlmon's project and his text enacts the multi-dimensional contact which McAlmon seeks. In the process, he defines his own identity and inscribes a poetic voice that has its roots in lyric, even as it disrupts the autonomous lyric voice.

McAlmon's Chinese Opera is a record of a world in process. Scobie tells about life in America in the early days of the century, about the Paris of the 20's, two World Wars and the first atomic bomb. Like the work of Kroetsch and Marlatt, therefore, Scobie's text defines the lyric voice as one that is expressive of a communal experience. The text also poses a question about the formation of a poetic voice. It asks to what extent that voice is determined by inherent qualities of greatness and to what extent by the accepted conventions of the time. Because Scobie inscribes in the text an audience in the form of a

listening "you," the riddle implicitly demands the reader's involvement. McAlmon's Chinese Opera is not, therefore, one more lyrical tale of the poet as a Romantic, failed genius, but creates the environment for a potential dialogue between persona and reader on the function of art.

Scobie uses the documentary-like aspects of the contemporary long poem to avoid giving his investigation a solipsistic focus. At first glance, Scobie's text, which is told in the first-person, seems to be autobiography. It quickly becomes clear, however, that this first person voice is merely Scobie's authorial technique for transmitting his interpretation of McAlmon's life, and the text resembles biography. But the poem does not quite fit within this category either, since Scobie claims in the Afterword that although he has "stuck close to the facts as [he] knows them" he has "not hesitated to modify, rearrange, or even invent some incidents" (93). Scobie asserts that McAlmon himself is best regarded "as a character in a historical fiction" (93), and perhaps "historical fiction" is the category that best describes the text. The story of McAlmon is, therefore, an example of the "border blur" between genres that Eli Mandel commented upon at the Long-Liners Conference. Scobie's text parodies the traditional idea of history and biography and thereby subverts the authoritative speaking voice of the "biographer," and the factual nature of the tale he tells.

However, despite its indeterminate position within broad generic categories, McAlmon's Chinese Opera precisely fulfills the requirements for the Canadian long poem which Dorothy Livesay outlined in 1969. In "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," Livesay proclaims that the main characteristic of the form is a "dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet" (267). As I mentioned in the Introduction, Scobie agrees with Livesay's assessment, and in an essay in Canadian Literature, he elaborates upon the reasons for "the attraction and the usefulness of the form." He claims that those reasons are two-fold: "a fascination with the interplay between fact and fiction, history and imagination; and the attempt to define the self by a dialectic process of contrast to the other" (Scobie 1984, 270). In Scobie's poem, the interplay between fact and fiction disrupts the conventional idea of story as "received truth," and the dialectic between Scobie and the adopted persona of McAlmon, inscribes a theory of art and life which reflects Scobie's own poetic practice, and his own poetic voice--always in relation to the other. In Scobie's own words "the persona is...a mirror, whose very alterity reflects the image of the other who is/is not yourself" (Scobie 1984, 276). The persona, therefore, facilitates the poet's own search for identity, and for a poetic voice.

Scobie is at pains to point out that McAlmon's

poetic voice is intrinsically constituted by orality. McAlmon "tells" the story of his life to an unnamed listener from Canada. His voice fulfills the function which Cooley associates with the voice of the long poem. It is essentially pragmatic: "(addressing an audience with the hope of somehow affecting it)" (Cooley 185). Such a pragmatic approach also recalls the oral poetic tradition in which, as Walter Ong suggests in Orality and Literacy, the manner of telling a story "is subject to variation from direct social pressure" (67). The inclusion of a listening audience is, however, also an essential feature of the traditional dramatic monologue and in choosing to use a form so deeply entrenched within the written lyric tradition, Scobie must ensure that McAlmon's voice avoids the solipisism of the Romantic lyric hero. He does so by creating a role for McAlmon in which, like those of the oral poet, his words can somehow affect the audience. Within Scobie's text, McAlmon becomes a prophet, proclaiming his message to all those who have ears to hear.

The prophetic role is not defined (as is sometimes popularly construed) by the ability to predict the future. The primary task of the prophet has always been to proclaim that which is dead and to call forth new life. McAlmon's words proclaim the death of mankind's ability to communicate without lies and evasions. He equates this inability with a habit of mind that pursues abstract reflections, with

writing that makes reality a timeless moment, and with a vision that is turned inward upon the self. In opposition to this, McAlmon offers the possibility of a vision that looks outward upon the world, and expresses what it sees in a writing that is linked to an oral expression, "embedded in the flow of time, public and shared, best with distractions" (Ong in Cooley 195).

Ironically, McAlmon is unable to reap the benefits of the vision he proposes. The world cannot accept either his vision or his language. His voice is reduced to the whisper that tells his story to Scobie's audience of one, and his vision is reduced to "dead eyes wide open / frozen blue)" (75).

Scobie effects this textual transformation in his persona by using a poetic technique similar to Marlatt's. He inscribes within the text patterns of repetition which, as we have seen, reflect the charm root of lyric. His repetitions include patterns of imagery, of words and of phrases. Unlike the repetitions in <u>How Hug A Stone</u>, however, these do not work a charm-like magic that engenders new life. They function, instead to cause action of a different kind. As Welsh points out, many ancient charms were designed to cause the death of the enemy, and Scobie's repetitive patterns eventually create, at least on paper, the death of McAlmon's poetic vision and voice--an interesting comment in itself on the effect of the written

word, and one that provides support for Kroetsch's claim that we silence words by writing them down.

Such an effect is obviously rather threatening for a poet like Scobie, seeking to define his own identity and his own poetic voice. His voice seems to emerge only at the expense of the persona's. Scobie counters the irony implicit in this situation by erecting barriers between the objective facts of McAlmon's life and his own subjective feelings. He adds to the main body of the text pictures of himself and of McAlmon, two statements about McAlmon by other people, and his own Afterword (a "factual" biography of McAlmon's life). These additions maintain a sense of alterity between the poet and the persona. They also disrupt the omniscience of the lyric voice in the main body of the text, and subvert any conviction that the story can be told in its entirety within fixed, immutable boundaries. McAlmon's Chinese Opera, therefore, contests the traditional autonomous voice of the lyric and asserts the "narrative fluidity" which, as we have seen, is associated with the oral tradition (Lecker 14).

Although Scobie's language reclaims the repetitive patterns which are intrinsic to the charm root of lyric, it also combines charm language with that root of lyric which Welsh refers to as speech-melos. Welsh claims that "modern poetry...works toward releasing [the] rhythms of the spoken language...by dropping the conventional metrical patterns"

(197), thereby reclaiming the roots of lyric. Scobie's prose does precisely that. In fact, he tells McAlmon's story in language that is almost indistinguishable from prose. Unlike the language of Marlatt and Kroetsch, Scobie's poetry inscribes a definite linearity. Subject, verb and object follow each other in proper syntactic order. There are none of the ellipses or sudden shifts in direction which characterize the poetry of the other two authors. Instead, Scobie lets the natural rhythms of speech determine his choice of language, a choice that is particulary appropriate for inscribing the ebb and flow of sound of a man "who always talked in paragraphs" (9). The presence of such a voluble method of expression is, of course, also appropriate to a traditional prophetic voice.

However, Scobie's inscription of that voice, as I have suggested, works ironically, transforming life into death. He includes repetitive patterns of imagery that make a connection between poetic vision, death and decay. The relationship between the two concepts is a complex one, and the primary dynamic seems to be that vision and decay turned outward have a positive dimension, while either one turned inward, results in death.

McAlmon's vision is related to place. Just as Kroetsch situates his voice within the context of the prairies, and Marlatt defines hers within the natural world, Scobie suggests that McAlmon's voice is conditioned by his

upbringing in the American mid-West. McAlmon spent most of his youth in South Dakota, and the size of the country is an objective correlative within the text for the expansiveness of vision which McAlmon associates with an ability to write well. He claims that "[y]ou have to have walked that land / a whole Dakota afternoon / to understand modern writing" (11). The implication is not that art must reflect reality with mimetic accuracy, but that a writer's voice must be able to express the fact that the process of life unfolds slowly within a vast continuum of time and place. It must be, McAlmon claims, "not writing but contact / with the whole multifarious world" (34).

Contact with the whole world necessarily demands contact with disease and decay, and Scobie's text recreates McAlmon's attitude to such processes, giving them an ironic twist. McAlmon associates disease and decay with movement, and movement in turn is associated with the ability to talk, to write, and to establish relationships with others. In this way "the open sewer" (19) of the Hudson River attains a double nature. It should be only an image of death. It "stank with garbage" and was the repository for the "bodies of dogs and Negroes bloated, / decomposing outward from their wounds" (19). Despite its macabre aspect, however, it is the background for a revitalizing friendship between McAlmon and William Carlos Williams. At the end of the day, exhausted from their jobs, the two writers sit beside the

river which "at least kept on moving" and share a "dialogue" of their poems and stories (21).

The implication seems to be that although death and decay are unpalatable, they are an organic process linked to movement and life rather than stagnation and death. In recalling his relationship with Bryher, the wealthy heiress whom he marries and divorces, McAlmon invokes other images of decay. The memory is like "a leg cramp, a rotting tooth a dull ache, fading" (23). It is not decay that converts their relationship to stasis, however, but the telling of lies, a use of language McAlmon connects to the written word, and to a narcissistic vision.

Bryher's use of language is determined by her up-bringing. Raised in Egypt, she was exposed early to a written language associated with death. She "deciphered hieroglyphics on tombs," but she also "learned the language of bazaars" (24). Her attitude to their marriage reflects the language of barter. It is a "bargain," through which she receives a "pass from her parents' prison," and McAlmon is left to guess about her love, "suppressed / and cryptic as crossword clues" -- presumably unspoken (25,26).

Scobie contrasts the situation between McAlmon and Bryher with situations in which McAlmon's life reflects a philosophy of a free give and take rather than barter. "I would take what they gave me without suspicion," McAlmon claims, referring to his willingness to "listen to anyone

talk" (20). In his travels through the mid-West, he learns a wisdom that is orally based, "embedded in the flow of time public and shared" (in Cooley 195). "[I]n a half dozen summers" he learns, "how to sit for hours not thinking, / how to talk to anyone beside me, / how to drink fast and / how to drink slow" (14). His university experience, on the other hand, with its written wisdom, teaches him to forget... what some wise men thought good reasons / to get them through till dawn" (14).

However, the wise artists of Paris (Hemingway, Eliot and Stein) are not interested in transposing the wisdom of any orally prolific culture into print. Their emphasis is on the necessity for "shining phrases / glittering, concise as telegrams" (34). Paris, therefore, does not allow McAlmon scope for his vision or a medium for his poetic voice. Although it is "a magnet of possibilities." it is also a symbol of death. It is the "queen of [the] dying cities" (32). Scobie invokes the names of the city streets of this dying metropolis in a long charm-like recitation (33)--as if to convert its possibilities into the reality of a voice for McAlmon--and temporarily, at least, his charm succeeds.

McAlmon's voice erupts into a multi-faceted story of Paris in the 20's. His story-telling captures both the vitality of an oral culture and the stasis of a writing community. He records the words of artists, writers and

musicians, conveying in the process a "contact / direct as a camera's eye" (39). At the same time, he manages to suggest the futility of the literary pursuit. He includes in his text, as "found" material, a rejection letter which in stilted prose expresses the pretensions of "an h'English printer" at having been asked to "place such literature [Mcalmon's novel] before our workpeople" (38). But McAlmon's voice is a minority of one, and he succumbs to using the language of the majority. Caught up in the post-war depravity of "dead" Berlin, he becomes involved in relationships based "on the bitter mechanics of love" (41). The abuse of oral language typified by the lies and evasions that these relationships demand results in a constriction of his vision. He narrows its focus to that of "a proud cold eye trained like a rifle on the captive world" (41). His vision, formerly capable of reflecting a "horizon [that was] a perpetual doorstep to possibility" (34), is reduced metaphorically to a weapon of destruction. In this way, Scobie's repetitive inscription of disease imagery (despite the positive connotations he imposes upon it) fulfills its charm-like function of transforming life into death.

To complete the irony, Scobie inscribes in the text a universal symbol of health that ensures McAlmon's destruction. Bill Williams, "the good doctor," comes to Paris from Paterson. The relationship with Williams is a focal point in McAlmon's life, and one seemingly based upon

a shared poetic vision. But Williams's vision has changed. His eye, which previously had inhabited "A quiet inner country" (21), has acquired a clinical focus. He asks questions about McAlmon's marriage as "a doctor / diagnosing some disease" (47). Distraught by their mutual inability to reclaim their former friendship, McAlmon leaves Paris without saying good-bye to Williams. His voice, like his vision, becomes atrophied. Unable to communicate his vision of life and art to the Parisian world or to his best friend, he resorts to "stopp[ing] them dead" with "McAlmon's Chinese Opera," "a long / high wordless toneless wail" (48).

McAlmon's aria is not the melancholic complaint of a failed poetic genius, but is akin to the behaviour of the Ecstatic, "the direct ancestor of the Old Testament Prophets" (Robinson 31). The ancient Ecstatics have often received bad press. As Robinson points out in Prophecy and the Prophets, there is a reluctance among scholars to connect the "canonical" prophets with a group of men "whose symptoms resembled those of the epileptic, or even the insane" (36). Nevertheless, there is a direct historical connection between prophets and ecstatics, and both are linked to an oral tradition. Scobie emphasizes the connection between McAlmon and the ancient Ecstatics by including in the Afterword a comment by John Glassco that while emitting his Chinese Opera, McAlmon seemed "actually either out of his mind or trying to become so" (92).

Although McAlmon does not qualify for the heroic status of the Ecstatics who were "universally recognized as one in whom God dwelt and through whom God spoke" (Robinson 36), his ecstatic utterance still fulfills a prophetic function. His aria is a protest against the failure of the listening audience to fulfill its role in the creative process. He recites a litany of such failures, and the cumulative effect makes his Chinese Opera seem the only reasonable response. "Eliot...over from London to hear Pound's opera/ sat at the back and slipped away / untouched by contact with his friends" (48). Another audience heaps a "din of abuse" at Antheil's/ player pianos and airplane propellors" (48) and Pascin's suicide leaves a sensation-hungry audience "asking for more" (54). Given such a failure of empathy on the part of the listening audience, McAlmon enacts in his opera the meaninglesness which the audience seems to deserve. His response inscribes once more Scobie's belief in the vitality of an orally-based poetic voice, since it gives credence to Ong's claim that oral "[n]arrators narrate what audiences call for or will tolerate" (Ong 67).

But, as I have suggested, McAlmon's Chinese Opera has its roots in lyric as well as in orality, and Scobie inscribes those roots in a form of lamentation that is connected with the written lyric tradition. The ubi sunt motif has injected an elegiac note into poems as old as The Wanderer and The Seafarer, and Scobie reclaims it here to

emphasize McAlmon's nostalgia for a vanished past. He catalogues a list of losses that suggest the romantic image of the dissipated artist in gay Paris. " Where are," asks McAlmon, "the legendary drinkers," "the nights that met the dawn," "the song that Nina sang...genteely obscene" (57). But he immediately rejects such a romantic stance by a bitter "the hell with it" and a parodic reworking of "ou sont les neiges d'antan" that undercuts the sentiment and re-inscribes the phrase as it is heard rather than written. "Where are the years downtown?" he asks dismissively (57).

McAlmon's tone is not the only dismissive feature of his behaviour. Like the ancient prophets, he shakes the dust of Paris from his feet and his farewell to it enacts the "threatening, wooing, confessing, cursing" mode which Ong associates with orality (in Cooley 196).

> to hell with Paris,
> the city of light be damned
> implacable, relentless, forgiving
> nothing from all your wasted days,
> I've had enough
>
> of its inescapable
> inhuman unbearable
> eternal
>
> beauty (60).

McAlmon's cursing of Paris is based on its inhumanity, and he continues a search for a more human beauty that might renew his poetic voice. He embarks on ten years of travel around Europe and the United States, and the record of his journey is a catalogue of narrative detail

which is a chant of futility. The catalogue is not, however, only a record of his personal failure to "find someone... anyone, to make the evening whole-" (61). It reclaims its lyric roots, and in the manner of ancient chants, it records the history of the tribe, and is an elegiac lament for the failure of the human community to achieve anything but the horror of "Nazis in the streets," "eleven dead in the place of concord," and the close of "the decade...in war and murder" (61,62).

McAlmon's return to the United States at the end of that decade marks the end of his literary pursuits and the completion of his prophetic role. In doing so, he temporarily rejects words altogether. Like Kroetsch joining the seal herd or Marlatt seeking a pre-linguistic earth mother, McAlmon "live[s] for three weeks a pure / non-verbal existence" (72). But a silent prophet is a contradiction in terms and Scobie effects another transformation in his persona. He reinscribes McAlmon's voice, and casts him in the role of that other prophetic ancestor, the blind seer. Once again he invokes images of decay, but this time decay is turned inward. McAlmon sells trusses that hold "decaying things...in until they die" (61). That image of temporary stasis conjures up a series of images of dryness and sterility, among them the burned out condition of McAlmon's vision. The sun "that burns [his] eyes," (67) thrusts him into "a loving darkness" that is the seer's milieu.

Traditionally "the principal function of the seer was to describe events past, present or future which are hidden from the ordinary man" (Robinson 30). But Scobie's seer debunks any spectacular heroic status. He has already recorded the past, most which is already known to the ordinary man; his present is a very ordinary "room at the corner of 2nd and Cactus, and as for the future, it deserves only the negative pronouncement of a bad pun: "No phoenix rises from the desert here" (69), asserts McAlmon.

Just as he disrupts his own heroic status as an all-knowing seer, McAlmon also questions the false bravado that informs the autobiographical impulse to tell the whole "truth" about a life, no matter what the consequences. The bomb that dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki carried with it the word 'civilised,' destroying forever, "the pride of words" (74). The "bomb in a brown paper parcel" that dropped in his own life was Williams's autobiography, in which Williams took the old scars of McAlmon's marriage to Bryer "cut them open, and left them to bleed and fester in his casual eye," thereby betraying his and McAlmon's "thirty years of" friendship (79). In doing so he exposed McAlmon to the one thing that he most greatly feared. "What I never wanted was pity" are the first and almost the last words of Scobie's text. Williams, therefore, debases the pride of words and McAlmon's own pride by "writ[ing] that shit for all his drooling public" (7).

The destructive nature of Williams's autobiography automatically calls into question for the reader, the value of McAlmon's own story. Scobie grants his persona some final words germane to that question of value, and those words befit his status as a latter-day spokesman for, if not a prophet of, the parodic aspect of contemporary writing. McAlmon's words completely deny any possibility of monumental self-importance to the lyric voice in Scobie's text, and they insert the text into Ong's "situationally based" environment of "an appeal to audience" (in Cooley, 196). McAlmon orders the audience (the reader) to accept what is written with a grain of salt. He does not suggest a silent moment of reverence in front of the timeless truths of a sacred text, but an explosion of noisy (oral) glee. "Begin laughing," he asserts "when you hear all the posthumous lies...begin laughing to scour out my name from your memory's substitute stone" (83).

Scobie's presentation is, therefore, an ironic re-working of the ancient prophetic voice. McAlmon does not claim any supreme knowledge and denies such a knowledge to others. He is a prophet intent only upon telling his story in a way that excludes self-pity, and that recognizes the tentative nature of a reality that "makes all judgments lies" (86). In the final analysis his prophetic function is aborted. He does not, as did the prophets of old call people to new life.

Scobie, however, assumes McAlmon's prophetic function and completes it. His text calls forth new life by enacting the teachings of McAlmon's poetic voice. Instead of aiming as Eliot did for a "simplicity / Costing not less than everything," McAlmon aimed for "the true abundance"... "nothing less than everything, spread throughout a poem that could never end" (81). Scobie's text inscribes that abundance. He takes advantage of the documentary nature of the long poem to present what seems to be McAlmon's autobiography, but inscribes within it elements of biographical "fact" and historical "fiction." Despite making links with the traditional lyric form, he subverts the authoritative lyric voice by undercutting the prophetic role of his persona. In the process he makes the contemporary long poem a creation that in the words of another prophet enable the reader to "milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of [its] glory" (Isaiah 66:11).

Conclusion

KAMBOURELI'S DANCE: DEFINING A MULTIPLICITY OF (ABSENT) SELVES

In the previous three chapters I have been arguing that the contemporary Canadian long poem reclaims aspects of language which originally contributed their forms to the lyric tradition. I have defined those roots of lyric--using the theory of Andrew Welsh--as being a manifestation of riddle, emblem, charm and chant. However, I have also suggested that the lyric voice inscribed within the long poem is quite different from the one which has come to be identified with the Romantic lyric. The roots of lyric which I have explored derive from an oral culture, and their presence gives the long poem a social focus, rather than one which emphasizes the individual experience of an autonomous speaker. Besides this lyric voice with its oral roots, the long poem inscribes a narrative voice--which, unlike that of the Romantic lyric--rejects a belief in its ability to discover and to express eternal truth. Instead, as we have seen in the stories of Kroetsch, Marlatt, and Scobie, it records a search for identity that ironically calls into question both the process of narration, and the autonomy of the narrator. Together, the orally-informed lyric voice and the parodically-oriented narrative voice establish the long

poem as a form that has evolved along a literary continuum. It maintains roots in the lyric past, but disrupts the conventions of the Romantic lyric by inscribing a postmodern parodic challenge to the autonomous lyric voice.

Given the evolutionary nature of the long poem, it is not really surprising, that despite emphasizing orality, it also inscribes conventions associated with the "written" word. The necessity for such conventions derives from the inescapable fact of the reader's absence. Unlike the ancient forms of epic and ballad, the long poem is not usually designed to be sung or recited to a live audience, and in the absence of such an audience "the writer conjures up a fictional person or persons" (Ong 177). The process of doing so involves writer and reader in a relationship that depends upon a mutual understanding of literary conventions. As Ong says, "the writer must be familiar with the tradition so that he can create fictional roles for the reader that s/he is willing to play" (Ong 177). The writer's familiarity with the body of literary knowledge that constitutes intertextuality is, therefore, an essential component of the creation of the long poem, and one which confers upon it the inescapable status of having been written.

We have already noted the presence of such intertextuality within Field Notes, How Hug A Stone, and McAlmon's Chinese Opera. Kroetsch uses the story of the Garden of Eden as a point of reference, Marlatt substitutes

her/story for a patriarchal view of history and Scobie describes the well-known "romantic" lives of expatriate American artists in the 20's. Significantly each author inscribes what s/he aims to contest: in other words, each uses parody. Parodic texts have always existed contemporaneously with non-parodic works, and according to Abrams "[f]rom the early nineteenth century to the present, parody has been the favorite form of burlesque" (18). Ironically, therefore, although the use of a parodic voice establishes the long poem's communal--and oral--focus by undermining the status of the speaker as genius, free agent or voice of authority, it also inscribes a link to the "written" past.

It is similarly ironic that the authors of the long poem inscribe another link to the written tradition by including recorded conversation within the text. Kroetsch, Marlatt and Scobie use dialogue to give their work a sense of immediacy that accompanies such a supposedly overheard oral conversation. But the use of reported dialogue is a technique with a written literary history that extends back at least to Plato who used the form to inscribe (among other things) his own particular concerns about the spoken versus the written word. In the past several years, the work of Derrida has made the literary world acutely aware of the irony inherent in Plato's written use of dialogue to idealize the oral.

I am not claiming that the authors I have discussed consciously use oral dialogue in order to subvert their "written" texts. Nor do I intend to make this thesis the site of a potted version of Derridean thought. I merely want to suggest that an awareness of Derrida's argument reverberates within the texts I have examined. In fact a Derridean critique of my thesis might infer that it constitutes an implicit confirmation of Derrida's claim that our western culture is unconsciously fearful of the written word. As we have seen, Kroetsch, Marlatt and Scobie are at pains to inscribe within their written texts techniques which reclaim the roots of an orally-informed lyric tradition. And as we have also seen when the inscription of such orality fails to assuage the authors' anxiety about the ability of their "written" texts to communicate effectively, each of them resorts to fantasizing a pre-linguistic existence. Kroetsch joins the seal-herd, Marlatt embraces a mythical, pre-verbal earth mother, and McAlmon emits his "wordless, toneless scream."

This distrust of the "written" that engenders an emphasis on orality, and a subsequent return to a pre-literate womb is also present in Smaro Kamboureli's text, <u>in the second person</u>, although it takes a somewhat different form. She too expresses fear that the written word is an inadequate signifier but her distrust is further complicated by the fact that it is disseminated over two languages. As

a Greek who has become Canadian she must express a dual reality in her writing, and the difficulty of doing so engenders her search for a unified identity and for a stable poetic voice. Kamboureli, like the other authors I have discussed, seeks to define her identity by a dialectic contrast to the other. However, the other against whom she defines herself is the "second person" of her title, the original "you" whose identity was constructed within the Greek language. Her text is, therefore, much more self-reflexive than the other long poems I have discussed. It also operates much more overtly within a definite Derridean framework that inscribes a poetics of "writing."

Derrida's work challenges the assumption theoretically entrenched within the western metaphysical tradition that language was originally possessed of "a plentitude and not lack, presence without difference" (Derrida 218). Kamboureli attempts to reclaim that illusory sense of plentitude. Her transition / translation from Greek to Canadian English engenders within her a sense of depletion, and a need for "the other, that you" (13) who exists in another country and in another language. Her search for that absent other takes her on a journey that is a parodic re-working of the literary tradition of a "nostos," parodic, because the journey ironically contests the possibility of such a return to origins.

She claims that her search for the fullness of

identity "becomes a dance" (13), a phrase that also links her work to contemporary Derridean poetics with its emphasis upon the dance that differance enacts within language. Kamboureli's dance of differance between the present (under erasure) I, and the absent (also under erasure) you, enacts what Ulmer calls "a dehiscience of iteration, an economimesis that redistributes the property or attributes of names (29). In other words, the dance disrupts the illusion that the I and the you exist as self-sufficient enclosed structures, and thereby allows for a cross-fertilization that eventually permits an uneasy co-existence. Her textual search for the absent other, therefore, implies a belief in the metaphysics of presence while the process of inscribing that search subverts that same metaphysical concept. Because her search for identity inscribes a poetic voice that radically undercuts the idea of a self-sufficient autonomous I, it also, despite its self-reflexive nature, subverts the voice of the traditional Romantic lyric.

Kamboureli's journal is the vehicle of her search for identity. By its very nature it inhabits the domain of the written, and she refers to it in terms that recall the western literary inheritance from Greek mythology. But although "it is a thread that links loops of memory" (13), unlike Ariadne's thread, it does not lead her to the centre of the labyrinth. Her text has no centre, no single moment

of epiphanic clarity, and therefore the process of "entering again the labyrinth of the real" (12) engages her in an activity that is more like that of Penelope's. She weaves the threads of her journal into a multi-dimensional pattern, and simultaneously unwinds the threads by calling the pattern itself into question. The resulting story has a texture that, to use Ondaatje's phrase, "slip[s] like mercury off the hand" (12).

The instability of Kambourelí's story is an objective correlative for the kind of instability she attributes to the journal itself. The written word is not to be trusted. She "gets lost in the pages of [her] old journals" (12). It is mysteriously self-generating. "It begets its own shape," thereby assigning to her only the function of an "amanuensis" (13). The process of dictating the words which this organic process produces is one fraught with peril. Her journal "recreates" her, but it does so "with difference." and the newly formed self is one which is vulnerable. "I can't hide behind words. Their surfaces expose me," she says (18). It is obvious that her distrust of the written word is profound, and as if in response to the journal's silent sense of self-sufficiency, she inscribes upon it an example of her more active, more "verbal" self.

She "talks to" her exiled Greek self, the second person "you." Like the other three authors, therefore, she

inscribes the "written" convention of a conversation overheard. Ironically, her dialogue with her absent other recalls an oral culture. It is--to use Ong's term--"agonistically toned" (43), essentially combative. Her words are directed to her absent self in an effort to expulse "the dead moments of [the] life" which it inhabits (21). Spurred on the sense of depletion which the loss of their mother tongue has engendered, she hopes to attain a self-sufficiency that she perceives is appropriate to the "literal figure of the I" (13). Her image of herself is a fractured bone, but it is "[a] fractured bone that heals itself" (21). She is misled by the thought patterns that Derrida claims inform western metaphysics. Ignoring the fact that the very necessity for designating the name "I" implies "its existence within a system of linguistico-social differences" (Derrida 112), Kambourelí remains convinced of the ability of the "I" to exist in a state of autonomous self-presence.

In order to achieve the autonomy of the I, she vilifies the absent you. "[Y]ou bore me, you amuse me, /...and, yes, / there are times that you wound me" (14), she says. Her attitude toward the absent other is murderous. "I want you to die," she claims. "Any form of death will do" (21). Nor does she maintain her homicidal tendencies at the level of wish-fulfillment. She calls down a curse upon the head of her perceived enemy that significantly is meant

to destroy the writing ability of the other:

> I will swallow light and spit out drops of darkness. You will stumble on them. Your pen will crack and your words will drip blood. You will never know the reason (24).

The curse is effective, or so Kamboureli suggests. It gives her a sense of freedom from the absent "you." Ironically, by invoking the curse with its roots in the oral tradition, she becomes reconciled to the writing process. She writes a long letter, and does so without her prior ambivalence toward the form. She revels "in the distance" that now exists between her present and her past self. But this jouissance is short-lived. Her oral curse is inscribed within the written, and as such it seems to disseminate over texts in the manner that Derrida suggests. The delicious sense of "anonymity" conferred by her written (graphed) curse is subverted by another graph--a photograph. There, "in the womb of an old photograph" she finds the previously expulsed you (28).

The re-presented image of the absent you awakens in Kamboureli a desire for a fruitful reunion with her past self. She embarks upon a nostalgic journey to her Greek homeland. Her hope for the success of that journey is influenced once again by a privileging of the "spoken" word over the "written." Prior to her departure for Greece, she and her friend "keep talking, keep talking, keep talking" (28). A series of telephone calls re-establishes old connections, and she exults that "[the] crosscurrents of

their voices initiates me into my other life" (29).

Her faith in the integrative powers of the spoken word is, however, like her previous satisfaction with the written word, very temporary. In Canada, she felt "exiled by virtue of sound," her "accent a reminder of [her] geography" (20). To her horror, she experiences a similar sense of exile in Greece. A "saleswoman wonders" if she is American. "[S]he says i have an accent," Kamboureli records and queries, appalled, "is it speech that betrays / our otherness" (35)? Obviously, the spoken word is as undependable as the written. The duplicitous "signature lies in the phone" (35). It is, therefore, incapable of any reintegrative activity since it is divided within itself. Kamboureli's experience thus affirms Derrida's claim that no autonomous self-presence inheres in the spoken word, and invalidates her hope that speech can reconstitute the wholeness of the split sense of self.

Convinced of the inadequacy of both written and spoken language, Kamboureli resorts to silence. She claims that "there is no telling of this story," for "what discourse what story could tell of this...search for the other" (40). Unable to find the words to tell her own story, she weaves the remnants of a previous one into her text. Lured by "a siren's voice to come to [the] space" (39) of the absent other, she enacts a contemporary Odyssey across the Aegean to the island of Sifnos. However, the

process of inscribing an intertext does not release her from her silence. On Sifnos, she can write neither in Greek nor in English about her "sensory experience of [the] landscape." When she attempts to do so, "only emptiness flow[s] on the page." Nor can she express its beauty orally. She "can't talk back to it" (46). In spite of this, (and perhaps demonstrating the powerful hold that a metaphysics of presence has over the western imagination) she continues to seek for origins within the word. She grieves the absence "of mother words" (48), assuming again that the elusive "you" is to be found within the rational milieu in which words inherently possess logical meanings. She has forgotten her prior realization that the other has a deviant "sense of logic." The you "rides the alogon"--the illogical irrational line--when it "want[s] to reach what [she] hasn't invented yet" (45).

Only when she relinquishes her rationally-informed search does Kamboureli succeed in making re-integrative connections with her absent self. Like Marlatt, she ultimately enacts in her text a reunion with mother-tongue, the body of language, and in the process defines for herself a feminist poetic voice. Gail Scott claims in "Shaping a Vehicle for her Use: Women and the Short Story" that "[o]ur relationship to language is first formed in our mother's womb as we listen to the rhythms and sounds of her body" (184), and Kamboureli begins to listen to that original

language. She finds traces of the other written within her own body, in her own sensual experience. "[Y]ou open up... like a pungent shell / your breath echoes the beating of my heart," (49) she says. She lends support to Scott's claim that "finding our women's voice...is a matter of getting in touch with our desire" (186), by immersing herself in a bodily experience of anticipation. "Stay in your unrest," she orders herself

> [w]hen love is against the throbbing of the mind,
> when the heart seeks the languor of the sixth hour of a summer day,
> when the fingers want to belie the will of the hand
> when the how tries to seduce the why (51)

For, she implies, in this state of tension the body can use its senses to provide a hospitable environment for the visitation of the absent other. When one is sensually alert, Kamboureli asserts then

> the eyes see with the blindness of a dark desire,
> the ears seal themselves from the caressing of the curious tongue
> the toes keep the feet from running away. They curl under the
> bare soles, bite at the hot cobblestones (51).

Her manifesto to deferred desire inscribes the dual signature of deconstruction and feminism. It suggests Derrida's theory of the activity of continual deferral of meaning, and it valorizes the process of a gradual coming-to fruition that inheres within the female experience of menstruation and parturition.

Such a patient waiting finally brings its reward;

Kambourelí is released from the sense of paralysis that accompanies her entrapment within a world of silence. Her insertion within the body of language enables a freedom of movement, and a sense of symbiotic plentitude. "I can still stir, she exults. I am the thorn in your blood's flow / and you are the garden where I bloom" (52).

However, her sense of completion is short-lived. Body language follows the pattern laid down by oral and written language. It refuses to grant her a resting place for any final sense of identity, or any stable "ground" for a definitive poetic voice. She experiences once more the absence of the other, and conducts a ritual exorcism in a new attempt to assert a self-sufficient identity. She attacks the duplicitous nature of the other in an act of triple homicide. She burns her Greek alphabet, with its written "faces," its oral "voices," its body of "bones" and "familiar shapes" (59). Having done so, she retreats back into the "desert" of silence, to the "foreign country" of a self who can no longer be stirred by desire. In her country "the name of hope / is a taboo" (60).

But her "silence" involves a "resistance of writing," and even such a negative force results in the re-emergency of desire, a "desire holding back" (62). Getting in touch with her desire reclaims her poetic voice. She returns to journal writing and clings to the "act of recording" as if to "life-liners" (64). But she still

inscribes a profound distrust of the process of writing, one informed by her own experience and coincidental with Derridean thought. "[T]here are no innocent readers, there are no innocent writers there is no meaning in the trace" she asserts (64). Despite her awareness of the continual deferral of meaning inherent within the written word, she makes her journal the site of an autonomous declaration of freedom. There is "no orio in origin," she states with finality. "[I] pronounce myself free." Presumably she sees the futility of a search for a plentitude that is non-existent. But as Kamboureli says herself "there is a lot of unlearning to be done" (65). To pronounce oneself free while simultaneously asserting the lack of a transcendental signified at the origin is a contradiction in terms, and the trace of the absent other soon invades her "freedom" with its absent/presence.

She experiences the absence within her body. "[I]'m what I'm not...a vacant w/hole, my body/ is alien to me" she claims (68). Locating the source of her depletion within her body ushers her into a renewed awakening of desire, and a celebration of a multiplicity that frees her from the obsessive focus upon the split between self and other. "[T]he other is her and it and him and me," she asserts joyfully. The other is welcomed as "the erotics of absence" (72).

However, such an enthusiastic embrace of a lack of

autonomy is not readily assimilated. Toril Moi points out in Sexual/Textual Politics that Lacan theorizes the development of the unconscious as being the response to "the primary repression of the desire for symbiotic unity with the mother" (101). "In one sense," says Moi, "the unconscious is desire" (101). Kamboureli's unconscious still expresses (in the language of dream) her desire for the m/other tongue long after her conscious self has accepted its fragmented condition. Her dreams reflect the deep-seated nature of her distrust of language in both its written and oral forms. Her Greek self "scribbles something on a piece of paper" (76) but Kamboureli is unable to read it. The elusive you "talk[s]" to others but not to her. Finally, in an unconscious re-enactment of her destruction of language in the bonfire, Kamboureli spews forth "screams made of consonants...and pure vowels" in an inarticulate stream, and calmly announces "my language is not me" (77). Like Kroetsch, Marlatt, and Scobie she reclaims for herself a pre-linguistic identity.

But even the process of dispensing with language at an unconscious level does not usher Kamboureli into a state of autonomy. She remains acutely aware of the presence of the other, who lives a non-linguistic existence within "the dim space of memories...in the spaces between words" (81). She finally comes to a reluctant acceptance of her lack of autonomy when she notices that she has "been keeping three

journals" (85) instead of the one which she is presently inscribing. Obviously the ability to sign simultaneously within three texts--without one's full awareness of doing so--denies to the self any impenetrable sense of autonomy. It seems that Kamboureli's distrust of the written is justified. Her journal truly "recreates [her] with difference" (18), but now she accepts that difference with some degree of equanimity. She weaves the thread of her discourse not to the centre but back to the beginning, where it unravels itself. She began her search for identity by "entering the labyrinth of the real" (12), and concludes it by asserting that "[m]issing the real. Loss is what repeats my encounter with reality" (86). By invoking loss as the ground of her reality, she acknowledges the impossibility of attaining any final sense of originary plentitude. She experiences the self as a being constituted by lack, and she "see[s] no contradiction" in claiming that "the absence of the other inhabits me" (86).

Kamboureli's distrust of the written lends support to Derrida's theory that such a fear is firmly entrenched within western thought. Her inability to enact a textual reconstruction of her identity to a state of "original plentitude" provides support for his "law of supplementarity" which claims that there is no originary "full" state of presence within language, but that there is always "a supplement at the source" (Derrida 304). The Derridean

framework of a dance of differance enables her to defer meaning continually, and in the process to transform her poetic voice. She uses her written journal in order to re-construct her sense of self, and inscribes in it a voice which alternately valorizes and denigrates both writing and speaking, granting to each the power of integrating the personality. When both fail to live up to expectations she resorts to silence, but eventually locates a sense of contentment--if not healing--within the body, thereby inscribing a feminist signature, and a feminist voice within her text.

As we have seen, although Kamboureli's text is resolutely written, it is also constituted with an acute awareness of the spoken word, and of an oral heritage. The long poem which she constructs is not, therefore, as Godard might suggest, a totally new form cut off from all previous roots. In fact, its very nature disrupts the kind of binary thinking that would relegate the lyric, or any other previous poetic genre to a dead past. Her text with its Derridean framework exposes the fallacy that lies at the heart of thinking in terms of polar opposites--absence/ presence, speech/writing, philosophy/literature. Poetry does not, therefore, have to be--as Perloff maintains--"lyric or collage, meditation or encyclopedia, the still moment or the jagged fragment" (23). It can, as we have seen in the work of Kroetsch, Marlatt, Scobie and now Kamboureli,

combine roots from the past with current poetic practice. The long poems I have examined exhibit a lyric voice with its roots in an oral and communal past, and a narrative voice which by simultaneously parodying the solipsistic voice of the Romantic lyric invites the participation of the reader in the process of enunciation. The contemporary Canadian long poem is, therefore, a form which is (if I may continue the Derridean tenor of this chapter) always already becoming.

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