TOWARD A POSTMODERN MULTICULTURALISM?

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ISSUES OF IDENTITY IN CAROL SHIELDS'S <u>THE STONE DIARIES</u>

By

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Abstract

Theorizing "multicultural" identity has only just begun. The <u>Canadian Multiculturalism Act</u>, passed in July 1988, officially recognizes and promotes the pluri-ethnic composition of Canadian society. The popular assumption that ethnicity and culture might be vital influences on the development of identity has prompted the recent effort by sociologists, politicians and literary critics to outline the manner in which multiculturalism, having first flourished within a relatively weak national identity, might turn around and strengthen the nation's identity with a distinctive, pluralist agenda. Linda Hutcheon's postmodern theory of multicultural identity focuses on the "differences" generated by the ethnic and cultural dialogue that is an inherent condition of a multicultural society, differences that prevent the nation from forming, in postmodern terms, a necessarily exclusive "master-narrative" of cultural identity. Hutcheon's understanding of the aims of multiculturalism differ from the aims described in federal policy which focus, rather, on developing a sense of national unity within cultural and ethnic diversity. This discrepancy suggests room for debate and a need to expose clearly the principles that might underlie a theory of multicultural identity. Postmodernism is first and foremost a theory of "difference" and not a theory of identity. As such it indiscriminately subjects all discourse, including

discourses of national and individual identity, and even the very belief in stable, centred identity, to a self-conscious process of deconstruction or, in other words, to a process that demands recognition of "different" ways of seeing the world. After examining the effects of postmodern identity on Daisy Goodwill in Carol Shields's novel <u>The Stone Diaries</u>, it is possible to conclude that, while postmodernism fosters a healthy cultural and ethnic exchange at the national level, it ironically obscures cultural and ethnic roots at the individual level and exposes the individual to the threat of isolation and meaninglessness.

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Introduction

The central question of my thesis is whether a postmodern configuration of Canadian multiculturalism threatens individual identity. Given that culture is today accepted as perhaps the primary determinant of identity, a natural assumption regarding multiculturalism might be that its implicit appreciation of cultural differences would in fact strengthen the social fabric of Canada's pluri-ethnic population. Indeed, such was the hope of the Liberal and Conservative governments of the 1970s and 80s who officially inscribed the promotion of multiculturalism into the national agenda. The tendency of present-day literary criticism to focus on ethnic and cultural issues in Canadian literature seems to confirm that, at least within literary circles, cultural determination has gained a firm step on the path toward articulating that elusive Canadian identity. Essays on Canadian Writing has recently (Winter 1995) published a volume dedicated to the study of ethnic issues in Canadian writing, and Winfried Siemerling's introduction emphasizes that "the emergence of ethnicity as a critical category in literary theory" has profoundly coloured today's "'politics' of reading" (8). Siemerling points to Donna Bennet's study of the emergence of "'ethnically identified writers'" as illustrative of the constructedness of ethnicity and culture as categories of reference, and of their growing importance. Grove, Ostenso and Salverson, for example, writers from the 1920s, are today valued for their ethnic

contributions to the canon; Bennet writes that in earlier criticism these authors "'were not perceived as concerned with questions of immigrant and ethnic identity but accepted into the mainstream because they were recording a settlement experience common to all Canadian immigrants'" (in Siemerling 8).

Echoing this description of contemporary criticism, Sherry Simon and David Leahy's article "La recherche au Québec portant sur l'écriture ethnique" argues that the novelty regarding ethnicity "consiste en la *reconnaissance*" (389), the recognition that ethnicity might play a primary role in the development of a body of Québécois literature and, consequently, a Québécois identity. A similar *reconnaissance* is happening all over Canada. Smaro Kamboureli's introduction to <u>Making a Difference</u>, an anthology of Canadian multicultural literature published in 1996, writes that the inclusion of the native perspective into the literary canon "is a reminder to other Canadians that we have all been travellers, that, somewhere in our personal or familial histories in the recent or distant past, we all belonged somewhere else" (15). The image of Canada as a homogeneous "white" society is being denounced as a myth that has functioned to confine Canadians of ethnic descent other than British or French to the margins of cultural, economic and political activity. The *reconnaissance* of the multicultural make-up that has traditionally been viewed as a homogeneous group of predominantly English speaking and white people has not only helped Canada's mainstream to understand the hitherto ignored cultural, ethnic and religious differences that prevented them from developing a strong national identity,

but has also opened up a cultural dialogue within which people of all ethnic origins are encouraged to contribute.

Given this positive potential of multiculturalism in relation to identity, it is not at all obvious why I am here insisting on examining a potential *challenge* that multiculturalism poses to identity -- or, at least, to a certain understanding of identity. Siemerling argues that, by definition, ethnicity implies an act of 'ethnogenesis,' a communal identification whose emergence is marked, at least for those who wish to be thus affiliated, precisely as different from the previous, seemingly unmitigated cultural identity to which it refers" (2). Siemerling explains that the immigrants' experiences of the new culture both colours and is coloured by their memories of the old culture. A continual process of evaluation and reevaluation ensues that works against the development of a stable national identity and creates, in Kamboureli's words, "a state in continual process, in a constant state of revision" (9). What draws ethnic writers together, what seems particularly Canadian, "is the anxiety many of these authors share about any homogenous image of Canadian culture" (Kamboureli 6).

This paradoxical description of the uncertainty of Canadian identity echoes recent statements by postmodern theorists such as Robert Kroetsch, for example, who, in an article entitled "Disunity as Unity," describes the essence of Canadians in terms of the tensions that pull us apart: "Canadians cannot agree on what their meta-narrative is. I am . . . suggesting that, in some perverse way, this very falling apart

of our story is what holds our story together" (21-2). Fragmentation, process, change

and instability, characteristics that might be applied to multiculturalism, are also

primary characteristics and consequences of postmodernism. Each shares the

fundamental property of "difference": multiculturalism by definition, and

postmodernism in order to disentangle itself from the meta-narratives that are the

objects of its critique. ("Difference" is the one principle that, paradoxically, refuses

to admit itself as a principle.) It is perhaps appropriate, then, that postmodernism

should be offered as a way of understanding the complexity of multicultural identity.

Ironically, however, a postmodern configuration of multiculturalism brings the

question of identity full circle, settling it, once again, in a state of cultural

uncertainty.

Explicit links between postmodernism and multiculturalism have been forged

by Linda Hutcheon in such works as The Canadian Postmodern (1988), As Canadian

as . . . possible . . . under the circumstances! (1990), Other Solitudes: Canadian

Multicultural Fictions (1990) and "The Canadian Mosaic: A Melting Pot on Ice"

(1991). My study will focus on Hutcheon's postmodernism as a possible avenue for

theorizing multiculturalism and will emphasize especially the irony that

postmodernism, because it is based first and foremost on a principle of "difference,"

in fact weakens the potential of multiculturalism to strengthen unified national and

individual identity(ies), a potential that might easily be, and in fact was by many,

understood to be one of multiculturalism's primary objectives. Multiculturalism

seems to walk a fine line between "the process of decolonizing the inherited representations of Canadian history, the literary tradition, and other forms of culture," and, on the other hand, "essentializing race and ethnicity, namely assigning to racial and ethnic differences, as well as their various expressions, attributes that are taken to be 'natural', and therefore stable" (Kamboureli 12). Postmodernism tips the balance away from essentialism toward decolonization by recognizing only one configuration of identity, whether national or individual: identity based on difference, identity that resists closure.

The opening chapter of my thesis will begin by outlining key events in the development of multiculturalism in federal policy and the role that multiculturalism has played in response to what many have described as the crisis of our national identity. The chapter will then present Linda Hutcheon's postmodern interpretation of these events, examining both the positive and negative implications of her position especially as they affect the development of identity. The second chapter, in order to examine more closely the potential effects of a postmodern configuration of multicultural identity on the individual, will test postmodern principles against the experiences of Daisy Goodwill, the protagonist of Carol Shields's recent novel The Stone Diaries, and will assume that, although Daisy is a fictional character, her feelings and conclusions are valid measures of the desirability of Hutcheon's theories for individual Canadians. The Stone Diaries, although not overtly "ethnic," reminds us that for many Canadians ethnic background is simply that -- more covert than

overt, obscured by time and cultural overlap. Especially within a postmodern

analysis, multicultural difference can obscure the ethnic origins of even a

"mainstream" Anglo-Saxon heritage such as Daisy's, ironically leaving the individual

more aware of cultural absence than cultural substance. More important, however,

The Stone Diaries is a novel about the construction of identity. I use the word

"construction" deliberately, for Daisy is the self-conscious *bricoleur* of her own story,

to borrow a term from Derridean poststructuralism, and, as such, suffers from a

precarious belief in her own subject position. Postmodern difference has a rippling

effect: the same "hybrid" nature it assigns to a multicultural national identity also

applies to individual identity and even to the very category of subjectivity. The

concluding chapter, therefore, will question whether a postmodern configuration of

multiculturalism, although perhaps an adequate representation of the complexity of

cultural movement at the national level, remains a viable theory of identity for the

individual.

Canadian Multicultural Identities

a) An Historical Overview

Two phenomena might be said to characterize Canadian social history:
multiculturalism and a crisis of national identity. Interestingly, the articulation of
multiculturalism and of a Canadian identity crisis within political and literary debates
occurred roughly in the same decades (1960s and 70s), suggesting a correlation that
critics have not neglected to explore. Politicians, sociologists and literary critics alike
are agreed that the relatively recent trend toward federal recognition and appreciation
of Canada's multicultural composition has profoundly affected how Canadians of all
ethnic origin define themselves. Not the least of these ethnic groups is Canada's
"white" anglophone population. While a struggle faced by French Canadians and
Canadians of ethnic origin other than English or French has been for official
recognition and appreciation of their cultures, a struggle faced by "mainstream"
Canadians has been to discover what their own culture is. Sociologists Alan
Anderson and James Frideres, in a study entitled Ethnicity in Canada, point out that
Canada's mainstream is not as culturally homogeneous as it is often said to be.[1]

[1]Anderson and Frideres, basing their position on a survey of sociological scholarship,
define ethnicity as, "first and foremost, a common cultural tradition and a sense of
identity as a traditionally distinct subgroup within a larger society; and possibly
possession of their own language, religion, and distinctive customs" (37). This definition
will be adopted for use throughout this paper and will conform with Anderson and

Although often lumped together under a single heading, English, Welsh, Irish and Scottish originators in fact display a variety of religious affiliations and cultural practices that erode any sense of ethnic solidarity. With a Canadian connection to Britain that "at best could be described as vague" (86), and with the disintegration of the British Empire following World War II, Anderson and Frideres argue that Canada's mainstream was in fact coloured by various differences that prevented it from forming a cohesive cultural centre:

> In sum, the British-Canadians are too widespread geographically, too similar to Americans, too diversified in terms of religion, and above all too unsure of how much or how little to emphasize their British heritage, to be a nation as the French-Canadians are. (84)

Of course, after over a century of immigration from an increasing variety of countries, and with the natural effects of cultural intermarriage, Canada's mainstream can no longer be said to be solely British in origin. While assimilationist federal policies, whether spoken or unspoken, have preferred throughout the bulk of Canadian post-colonial history to accept immigrants who could be "easily absorbed" into the extant population, the original pool of British candidates could not satisfy Canada's growing economic needs. More and more distant cousins from the United States, continental Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the West Indies were grudgingly admitted by "selective" policies geared "to reflect more closely contemporary concerns" of population and development (Manpower and Immigration

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Frideres's critique of "culture" as a more vague term denoting a variety of sub-groupings within a larger society that may or may not include ethnic groups.

1974, 6 and 7). Although seen up until the 1960s as perhaps a necessary evil, the growing ethnic diversity of the Canadian population was nevertheless a reality. By 1941, citizens of solely British ancestry had become a statistical minority (Anderson and Frideres 138). Today, of course, more liberal immigration policies no longer discriminate between geographic regions. But a prolonged and shifting preference for certain ethnic groups has gradually created an increasingly affluent mainstream of English and French speaking British and non-British originators. Consequently, those who today are considered mainstream are not necessarily homogeneous in terms of ethnic origin. And perhaps, along with such oft-quoted factors as colonial rule, American domination, geographic dispersal and divided linguistic loyalties, this diversity within Canada's mainstream has contributed to the crisis of national identity that Northrop Frye summed up in the now infamous question, "Where is here?" (1971, 220).

Frye has on several occasions described a certain existential unease felt by Canadians in general who, living in a country that has "never defined itself as a unified society," lack an overriding system of cultural values and orientations against which to define themselves (1982, 48). In contrast to Americans, whose revolution and constitution introduced an *a priori* pattern into their cultural life (1971, 218), and who are conditioned from birth to see themselves as citizens of one of the world's greatest powers, "Canadians are conditioned from infancy to think of themselves as citizens of a country of uncertain identity, a confusing past, and a hazardous future"

(1982, 57). Ironically, in recent decades this very uncertainty and diversity have been credited as the seeds of Canadian multiculturalism -- a banner of identity that benefits Canada's mainstream and marginal peoples alike.

In the absence of a strong cultural centre, *multi*-cultures have sprouted in localities across the nation. Anderson and Frideres describe a basic consideration for the growth and persistence of heterogeneity: "ethnic identity is likely to persist if conceptualization of *national* identity (i.e., Canadian identity) is relatively weak or confusing compared to subnational (regional or ethnic) identities" (107). In other words, a weak sense of national identity increased the strength of regional identities and an accompanying tolerance for ethnic loyalties. Howard Palmer's study of Anglo-Canadian views on multiculturalism corroborates this belief, and adds that ethnic tolerance was bolstered by such factors as the post-war revulsion toward racism and especially antisemitism, exposure to the United States' civil rights movement, and the cultural relativism taught by modern sociology and anthropology (99). English Canada, still seeking a room of their own, began to see themselves as the supporters of a multi-ethnic nation. The new "buzzword," writes Frye, was "multiculturalism." "Canada," he adds, became "the Switzerland of the twentieth century, surrounded by the great powers of the world and preserving its identity by having many identities" (1993, 169).

In federal policy multiculturalism arose perhaps primarily out of the need to answer to the question "Where is here?" Although a fact of Canadian colonial and

pre-colonial history, multiculturalism developed terminologically as recently as the 1960s debate over the status of the French language within Canada and was not used in official federal policy until the 1980s. The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, established by the Pearson government in 1963, led to the creation of the Official Languages Act in 1969. By legally sanctioning English and French as official languages, the Official Languages Act gave impetus to the definition of Canada as a bicultural nation and provided a concrete element of distinction between English Canadian and British or American society. Reacting against this trend toward official biculturalism, however, Canadians of ethnic origin other than British or French began to increase their demand for legal recognition and appreciation. Many individuals of what was simply termed "other ethnic origin" felt that the "equal partnership" between Canada's "two founding nations" implicitly condemned them to positions as second-class citizens (Palmer 171). Furthermore, the Canadian Bill of Rights (1960) had legally guaranteed Canadians the right to equal treatment regardless of language, sex, culture or race, thereby influencing the end of, among other things, a history of racially discriminatory federal immigration policies. The effect of these more affluent generations in the 1960s, combined with increasing international awareness of racism and an anglophone population threatened by an impersonal mass society, was the creation of a framework of national identity that still guides federal policy today: multiculturalism within bilingualism, or, bilingual multiculturalism.

The federal commitment to the pursuit of ethnic diversity marks a profound

shift in cultural thinking. Ethnic difference became valuable in and of itself. Before

the elimination in 1962 of overtly racist policies that limited Chinese immigration,

assimilationist ideology allowed only those ethnicities that could be easily absorbed

without making, in the 1947 post-war words of Mackenzie King, "a fundamental

alteration in the character of our population" (in Manpower and Immigration 1974,

206). The new attitude of the federal government and to a considerable extent the

Canadian people is one that is termed "pluralist," seeing within multiculturalism the

possibility for successful economic, social and political integration of differing ethnic

communities into Canadian society. Unlike advocates of the well known "melting

pot" metaphor, a pluralist hopes that these communities will conserve aspects of their

ethnic identities and collectively contribute to the creation of a unified, but

multicultural, nation (Palmer 172). The primary policy objectives outlined in the

Final Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism on The

Cultural Contribution of the Other Ethnic Groups adheres to the pluralist impulse of

unity within diversity: "preserving human rights, developing Canadian identity,

strengthening citizenship participation, reinforcing Canadian unity and encouraging

cultural diversification within a bilingual framework" (Canadian Consultative Council

on Multiculturalism 1975, v). These objectives remained firm even with the

transition during the next decade to Mulroney's Conservative government. The

Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed in July 1988 and, recognizing that "the

diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion is

a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society," was committed to "a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians" (in Hutcheon 1990b, 370). The Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship's 1991 document outlining the objectives of multiculturalism advocates that "[w]e can be proud of being Canadian and of our roots at the same time"; and although "[w]e all feel a strong attachment to different aspects of our identity . . . [a]s Canadians, the values we share . . . are more important than our differences" (23).

Federal policy, of course, is not a clear indication of the attitudes of the Canadian people themselves, nor does present-day legislation guarantee a trend toward increased legislative acceptance of ethnic diversity. Indeed, studies of Canadian policies on, and attitudes toward, immigration (Anderson and Frideres, Manpower and Immigration, Palmer, Porter) suggest that Canadians must eradicate a long history of racial discrimination during which government officials embraced either a spoken or unspoken ideology of English, white supremacy. Palmer writes that "one of the most pervasive fears of opinion leaders was that central, southern and eastern Europeans and Orientals would wash away Anglo-Saxon traditions of self-government in a sea of illiteracy and inexperience . . ." (88). The extent to which racism has diminished in recent decades is debatable, and one must consider -- aside from government policies and responses to surveys of the population -- important questions such as these: the continued applicability of the structural discrimination described in

John Porter's well known study The Vertical Mosaic; the degree of ethnic difference

that Canadians are willing to tolerate; the nature of this difference; the extent to

which pluralism relies on sustained immigration; and the extent to which globalization

may be creating an "assimilable" pool of foreigners whose important dissimilarities

are already eroded before they even arrive in Canada. It is certainly conceivable that

the "mosaic" of English, French, Irish, Welsh, Scottish and American colonizers

faced greater challenges in terms of social integration in the first half of the nineteenth

century than today's MTV generations. Susanna Moodie, immigrating to Canada in

1832, clearly felt her English sensibilities offended by the "motley crew" of Irish

bathers that confronted her upon debarking onto Canadian soil:

> The confusion of Babel was among them. All talkers and no hearers - each
> shouting and yelling in his or her uncouth dialect, and all accompanying their
> vociferations with violent and extraordinary gestures, quite incomprehensible
> to the uninitiated. We were literally stunned by the strife of tongues. I shrank,
> with feelings akin to fear, from the hard-featured, sun-burnt harpies, as they
> elbowed rudely past me. (Roughing It in the Bush 29)

Mrs. Moodie also describes the cultural disparity between her family and the "odious

Yankee squatters" that surrounded their farm in Upper Canada, and admits to

experiencing great difficulty in adapting to their "savage" and scheming ways (88).

In contrast, American immigrants today disappear comfortably into Canadian society,

the one-way information highway of American culture having spread its influence

throughout the world and especially in Canada. Add to globalization Canada's failure

to integrate its colonial and aboriginal peoples without destroying aboriginal culture,

and indeed the extinction of certain aboriginal tribes, and one might conclude that in fact Canada, reflecting a world wide phenomenon, has seen an overall *decrease* in genuine ethnic diversity.

However, the purpose of this study is not to be a sociological discussion of Canadian multiculturalism. It is important simply to be aware that the alleged expansion of multiculturalism and the perceived increase in acceptance of ethnic diversity are extremely complex issues. Any attempt to assign Canada a multicultural identity must bear these complexities in mind. The studies by Anderson/Frideres and Palmer agree that the traditional distinction between Canada as a cultural mosaic and the United States as a melting pot is tenuous. There is a tendency in both countries for ethnic groups to collect in certain pockets. Canada, say Anderson and Frideres, is at once unicultural, bicultural and multicultural: while at the national level every ethnic group is a minority, there are local majorities with differing attitudes toward pluralism (10 and 11). Several studies demonstrate that French Canadians, for example, feeling the protected status of the French language threatened by institutionalized multiculturalism, have consistently been less tolerant of ethnic diversity. The Reverend Father Léger Comeau's article in the 1976 study by the Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism quotes a feeling pervasive among francophones during the 1970s:

> (TRANSLATION)
> We cannot help but see this as an insidious and steady shift away from

> biculturalism toward a crushing of francophones' special needs under the
> political weight of "multiculture" - the new expression of the "Canadian
> mosaic," the seal of approval stamped on our national identity. (27)

The harassment perceived by Quebec's ethnic minority groups during the recent 1995

Referendum on Quebec's separation from Canada suggests that ethnic pluralism,

especially within Quebec, is far from guaranteed. Regardless of whether Quebec's

fears are real or imagined, the francophone resistance "to once again become the

losers in a worthy cause" (ibid 28) illustrates an important point, which is that

political motivations underlie the definition of Canada as either uni-, bi- or

multicultural. Even while recognizing ethnic diversity as worthwhile in many ways,

there are some who feel that institutionalized multiculturalism elides certain bicultural

problems that have plagued Canadian colonial history from its beginning, whether

these problems be between English and French Canada or between Native peoples and

colonizers. Moves toward creating "distinct societies" for Canada's French and

Native peoples suggest that pluralism is not always sought nor desired.

Two points remain "certain" from this debate: we cannot say with certainty

that pluralism is a Canadian social *reality*, nor can we say with certainty that

pluralism is inherently *good*. Many factors remain unclearly defined and researched,

such as the nature of ethnicity, the degree to which genuine difference exists and is in

fact desired by Canadians, and the extent to which we can realistically expect that an

appreciation for difference is here to stay. Although it seems that present federal

policy on immigration and multiculturalism espouses pluralism rather than

assimilation, it is also true that Canadian colonial (and, no doubt, pre-colonial history)

is marked by shifting attitudes and changes. For example, Makeda Silvera's book

Silenced records the struggles faced by Caribbean domestic workers in Canada who,

during the 1970s, faced sexist and racist immigration policies more interested in

appeasing fears about the state of the national economy than in respecting human

rights and valuing ethnic difference. Her studies reveal that work visas were readily

accessible when the demand for cheap domestic labour was high, but that when the

demand dropped, Caribbean domestics faced increased harrassment and threats of

deportation (vii). Anderson and Frideres agree that even the 1974 Green Paper on

Immigration and Population which led to the creation of the Immigration Act in 1976

still asked questions such as "how many" and "what kind" of immigrants to accept,

and implied a preference for "traditional sources" (176).

Furthermore, Anderson and Frideres add that even the definition of what

constitutes a certain ethnic group is subject to fluctuation: "the concept of ethnic

group must be viewed as a variable. That is, ethnic groups can emerge and dissipate,

depending upon the nature and intensity of the external and internal pressures" (51).

The study of ethnic identity, they argue, must be "situationally bound" and can

depend upon such pressures as the individual's willingness to adopt a certain identity,

the group's willingness to accept the individual, general social acceptance of a certain

group's definition of itself and ways in which this definition may conflict with

society's expectations, etc.. The fact that "Canadian" is not viewed as an ethnic

group is simply a matter of social convention (ibid 51). Linda Hutcheon, in order to

emphasize the power hierarchies underlying this social convention, pointedly avoids

using the term "ethnic": "The word 'ethnic' always has to do with the social

positioning of the 'other', and is thus never free of relations of power and value"

(1990b, 2). Her postmodern agenda attempts to disclose the ideology of Anglo-white

supremacy that has traditionally infected our implicit and explicit understanding of

multiculturalism, and to suggest an alternative understanding based on a cultural

exchange among equals.

b) Postmodern Configurations

Canadian postmodern theorist Linda Hutcheon has recently offered an alternative perspective on multiculturalism and identity that seems, potentially, to take cognizance of the many complexities of Canada's ethnic composition. Postmodernism, sharing with poststructuralism a distrust for all-encompassing master-narratives (those taken-for-granted systems of signification that claim to transcend discourse), contributed during the 1960s and onward to the deconstruction of the myth of white, male, English supremacy that partly explains the silencing of the Canadian voice within the English literary canon and of marginalized voices in general. It would seem to be Hutcheon's claim that Canadian federal policy on multiculturalism, with the implementation of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, has sanctioned the formulation of a Canadian identity ripe for accepting the valuation of ethnic diversity heralded by poststructural and postmodern theory. In her introduction to Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions, a collection of essays and interviews dedicated to promoting the work of writers whom she perceives as marginal, she states that official federal recognition of voices other than English and French has made "the multiracial, pluri-ethnic nature of Canada . . . an undeniable reality" (2):

> With the cultural diversity that twentieth-century immigration has brought to Canada have come both cultural riches and social tensions that move far beyond those of bilingualism and biculturalism. When, on 12 July 1988, the House of Commons passed Bill C-93, 'An Act for the preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada', it enshrined both an ideal and an ideology. (2)

The "ideal" and "ideology" that Hutcheon envisions are ones that she believes will provide "an innovative model for civic tolerance and the acceptance of diversity that is appropriate for our democratic pluralist society" (15). Hutcheon agrees that "Canada can in some ways be defined as a country whose articulation of its *national* identity has sprung from *regionalist* impulses: the ex-centric forces of Quebec, the Maritimes, the west" (1988a, 4); furthermore, she agrees that regionalist impulses, along with other historical and demographic factors, were set up "in such a way that the eventual formulation of something like multiculturalism might seem to have been inevitable" (1990b, 10).

However, where Hutcheon differs from the objectives of federal policy is in valuing "the 'different' and what has been considered marginal *over* what is deemed central" (1990, 10 my emphasis). The traditional pluralist response to cultural differences has been to isolate certain common cultural elements that might serve to create a sense of national unity. Hutcheon's postmodern pluralism focuses instead on the tensions between regionalism and nationalism that resist the construction of a stable identity at either level. What for Northrop Frye was "the tedium of a permanent identity crisis" is for Hutcheon an exciting arena of creation and recreation.

Hutcheon answers the question "Where is here?" by suggesting that Canadian identity lies in its very debate: what unites the Canadian people is their resistance to unification. The paradox of her position is part of the postmodern argument. She

believes that Canadian history is one of entities defining themselves against centres (1990a, 20), whether they be ethnic minorities against the mainstream, eastern Canada against central Ontario, or even, and especially, Canada itself against the influence of its colonial past and American present. She points out that while the United States rebelled against colonial rule Canada evolved within British structures. But because "you can assume selfhood ('character formation') or 'subjectivity' only when you have attained it" (1988a, 5), Canada found itself in the paradoxical position of having to critique dominant structures only from within those structures, to construct its identity while simultaneously deconstructing that which informed the terms of its construction: "*marginality* becomes the model or metaphor for internal subversion of that which presumes to be central" (1990a, 25).

That Canada, a marginal country on the international scene, is known for negotiation and compromise is no accident. Without what Frye has aptly called the *a priori* constitutional pattern of the American system, Canada did not develop what postmodernism calls "master narratives" of identity -- or, at least, master narratives secure enough to impede the spread of regionalism and multiculturalism. Hutcheon does not apologize for, or attempt to resolve, the contradictions that necessarily infect a postmodern formulation of Canadian identity. Contradictions "delight in each other" and create a "cognitive dissonance" (1990a, 20) that perpetuates the debate of who and what we are. The very tension between regionalism and nationalism that gave rise to the articulation of Canadian multiculturalism also, within a postmodern

system, prohibits closure of the question of national identity and thereby guarantees that marginalized groups, especially, can continue to contribute to the defining and redefining of Canadian identity. The search for unity within diversity, in contrast, is a search for endings; it necessarily, in order to resolve contradiction, excludes marginalized voices from the debate -- marginal because they are not part of the centralized culture. Although Frye attempts to distinguish "unity" from "uniformity," and by uniformity he means a state lacking human dignity where all are expected to act and think the same way (1971, vi), he fails to recognize the cultural imperialism of liberalism -- that a select and necessarily powerful group will define the terms of universality based on their own experiences and values. Hutcheon writes, "If the universal were undermined (were shown, in fact, to be very limited in terms of class, race, gender, and so on), then maybe it would not be a bad thing to ask, 'Where is here?'" (1994, 111). Postmodernism reveals that the very desire for unity, for something "universal," is an ideological position. Hutcheon's reformulation of Canadian multicultural identity asks that the absence of unity no longer be judged as negative but be recoded in terms of a postmodern challenge to social structures that presume to escape their grounding in the particular and speak for the whole nation.

By insisting that the development of identity remain grounded in the particular, Hutcheon's postmodernism complies with Anderson and Frideres's criterion that the study of ethnicity and culture be situationally bound. Too many factors affect how ethnic identity is perceived by the individual or the society for generalizations about

ethnic experience and awareness to hold much credibility. Hutcheon's introduction to

Other Solitudes agrees that "[t]here is no obvious place to start any investigation of

ethnocultural diversity that has created what we call 'multiculturalism' in Canada

today - or, indeed, what we call 'Canada' today" (5). She suggests that no list could

possibly exhaust the combinations of ethnicity, race and religion that have grown out

of Canada's pluralist society. Nor can generalizations be made about geographic

regions or those who find themselves under the same broader ethnic category in the

sense of "shared cultural, linguistic, racial, national, or religious background" (6).

She points out, for example, that "both the census category of 'British' and the

politically loaded, colloquial 'WASP' mask significant differences: Celtic vs. English,

types of Protestantism, historical enmities" (ibid). Remaining grounded in the

particular means recognizing that one's perspective is not only affected by culture and

ethnicity but also by the time and conditions of immigration, age, gender, class, race,

religion and education. And rather than try to resolve these differences, Hutcheon

foregrounds them in order "to help ourselves understand that there are ways of seeing

the world, and of writing in and about it, that may be different from our own ways . .

. and valuable because of that difference" (5).

However, if valuing difference is a premise of postmodernism, Hutcheon's

description of Canadian multiculturalism fails in some ways to stand up to her own

theory. Hutcheon does not consider, for example, the "differing" possibility that

multiculturalism might not exist at all, that perhaps Canada is unicultural or

bicultural, or that perhaps the very discussion of cultures, whether one or more than one, suggests a way of making sense of our country that has no relevance for some people whatsoever. The impulse to base identity on ethnicity developed during the 1960s partly in response to an increasingly mass and impersonal society (Palmer 1976, 101). This impulse is not necessarily natural and might in fact be rejected by some, one thinks of "visible minorities" in particular, who are assigned to an ethnic community against their wishes. It is possible that Hutcheon intends to invoke this sort of questioning of her stance by having placed herself, in Other Solitudes, within a debate about multiculturalism that seeks no solutions to contradictions. However, with statements such as "pluralism . . . is now guaranteed by Canadian law" (13) and "the pluri-ethnic nature of Canada is an undeniable reality" (2), Hutcheon seems to have forgotten that the only "realities" and "guarantees" of postmodernism are that what is meant by those terms is subject to change. What today is perceived as "multicultural" will undoubtedly evolve along with Canada's demographic, economic and intellectual profiles. Furthermore, her statement that despite cynical reactions to Bill C-93 (the 'Act for the preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada') "few would deny that its ideal is a worthy one," suggests that Hutcheon may be in danger of instituting a master narrative based on the superiority of cultural and ethnic pluralism. She fails to identify her own grounding in the particular -- that her appreciation for cultural exchange is provisionally based on who she is at a particular moment in time and space, and that pluralism benefits certain people at the expense of

others.

This momentary slippage does not necessarily disqualify postmodern theory from a discussion of multicultural identity. Perhaps a more self-conscious description of Canadian multiculturalism would talk instead about *multi cultures*, where multiculturalism would be only one manner of describing Canadian identity among several. Other identities might include uniculture and biculture, as well as the rejection of identity based on culture or ethnicity altogether. What seems particularly important to discuss, however, is that postmodernism offers no way of escaping difference. Uniformity and stability, which are traditionally understood as necessary aspects of identity, can only exist in a provisional sense and must, if they are truly postmodern, be recognized and foregrounded as such. While this provisionality allows postmodernism to capture the complexity of multicultural difference at the national level, an important question is whether postmodern multicultural identity benefits the individual.

Hutcheon treats both levels of identity, i.e. the national and the individual, as though what she considers to be "positive" effects had the same consequences for each. Indeed, her theoretical stance is based on premises that do not allow for this distinction to be made:

> Whether it is accurate or not, the perception of English Canada's dominant
> culture is that it is Euro- and Amero-centric, male, white, heterosexual,
> capitalist, and centrist (geographically and politically). In the light of the
> general postmodern questioning of any notion of coherent, stable, autonomous
> identity (be it individual or national), these positions are, almost by definition,

provisional and tentative - not because they are weak, but because they stand ideologically opposed to the mastery and presumption of dominant and dominating cultures. (1990a, 22)

Hutcheon's postmodernism is not, first and foremost, a theory of identity, but a theory of difference. Multiculturalism is valuable because, as with "coherence, stability and autonomy," it happens at the moment to stand "ideologically opposed" to traditional structures of identity and can therefore expand the present arenas of debate. Inheriting as it does from poststructuralism a rejection of any kind of transcendental signified, including, and especially, the primacy of a coherent subject position, postmodernism has what might be interpreted as alarming consequences for individual Canadians. While at the national level a postmodern framework prevents the construction of stable systems and symbols of cultural signification that might work to exclude marginalized groups, these stable systems of identity, by logical extension, are also denied the individual. Oddly, Hutcheon's postmodernism embraces what Palmer describes as one of the strongest arguments put forth *against* multiculturalism: "Perhaps the assimilationists' basic fear is, then, that multiculturalism will lead to a fragmentation of Canadian society" (1976, 103). Not only does postmodernism embrace a fragmented society, it also embraces a fragmented subject.

In contrast to Hutcheon's postmodernism, Charles Taylor's article "The Politics of Recognition" draws a clear relational line between the needs of the individual and the rise of national policies on multiculturalism. Multiculturalism, he believes, did not develop in the first place out of an appreciation for difference but

rather as a response to a shift in western thinking about human dignity: with the
disintegration of hierarchical societies during the nineteenth century came the belief
that human dignity consisted largely in autonomy, "in the ability of each person to
determine for himself or herself a view of the good life" (57). Identity within this
system of thought is not an *a priori* but something that must be won through social
exchange. If one's culture and race are not perceived as valuable by society, or, in
other words, if denegrating attitudes toward certain cultures are in circulation, then
requirements for autonomous determination of "the good life" are severely reduced.
Additions of texts by women and non-Europeans to humanities curricula, for example,
were made in an attempt to confirm the value of these identities and thus assist
women and non-Europeans in autonomous self-development:

> The reason for these proposed changes is not, or not mainly, that all students
> may be missing something important through the exclusion of a certain gender
> or certain races or cultures, but rather that women and students from the
> excluded groups are given, either directly or by omission, a demeaning picture
> of themselves, as though all creativity and worth inhered in males of European
> provenance. Enlarging and changing the curriculum is therefore essential not
> so much in the name of broader culture for everyone as in order to give due
> recognition to the hitherto excluded. The background premise of these
> demands is that recognition forges identity, particularly in its Fanonist
> application: dominant groups tend to entrench their hegemony by inculcating
> an image of inferiority in the subjugated. The struggle for freedom and
> equality must therefore pass through a revision of these images. Multicultural
> curricula are meant to help in this process of revision.

Multicultural "difference," in Taylor's opinion, is not valued as an end in itself. It is,
rather, a means to an end: healthy individual identity.

Taylor's outline of the relationship between individual identity and national

policy seems to parallel the motivations of federal politicians who promoted

multiculturalism. Prime Minister Trudeau's response in the House of Commons to

the Final Report on Bilingualism and Biculturalism indicates that a basic premise of

the Liberal multicultural policy is that an appreciation for difference grows first and

foremost out of a secure sense of self:

> "National Unity, if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must
> be founded on confidence in one's own individual identity; out of this can
> grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes and
> assumptions. A vigorous policy of Multiculturalism will help to create this
> initial confidence. It can form the base of a society which is based on fair play
> for all." (in Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism 1974, iii)

Trudeau's statement accepts a modernist understanding of subjectivity where

"confidence in one's own individual identity," although not always obviously attained,

is nevertheless possible. This confidence in the self is more profound than simply

being able to identify and celebrate one's ethnic roots; it is also knowing that,

somewhere, ethnic origin exists, and that that origin has developed along meaningful

structures toward the creation of an identity which, in turn, is capable of forming out

of those original structures a lasting and stable interpretation of its surroundings.

Postmodernism removes this *self*-confidence. It "profoundly disturbs and disperses

the notion of the individual, coherent subject and its relation to history, to social

formation, and even to its own unconscious. . ." (Hutcheon, 1988b, 166). A question

that must be asked is whether by removing self-confidence postmodernism offers a

more solid "base" for the appreciation of ethnic difference or simply makes it

impossible for appreciation of any sort to exist at all. Without the "I", is it possible to say "I value difference"?

Postmodern theory has its roots in Derridean deconstruction where the death of the subject and the birth of ethnic pluralism occur simultaneously. Jacques Derrida, in his famous essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," claims that a primary accomplishment of the metaphysical reduction of the sign was the simultaneous development of ethnology, the study of racial and ethnic groups that places all cultural systems on equal footing:

> One can in fact assume that ethnology could have been born as a science only at the moment when a de-centering had come about: at the moment when European culture - and, in consequence, the history of metaphysics and of its concepts - had been *dislocated*, driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference. (962B)

The "dislocation of the history and concepts of metaphysics" is a lot to unpack, but if metaphysics is understood as the philosophy pertaining to ultimate reality or basic knowledge, then presumably ethnology could only arise if basic ways of making sense of the world were brought into question. Not only would European culture need to "stop considering itself as the culture of reference," but it would also need at a more basic level to abandon its trust in hierarchical systems of signification that privilege certain terms of reference over others. In other words, in order to prove that the superiority of European culture over its colonial territories was an arbitrary distinction, Derrida advocates that the privileging of *any* referent is arbitrary. Among these dislocated referents, therefore, is the existence of "a subject who would

supposedly be the origin of his own discourse." The "engineer" who constructs

discourse "out of nothing" becomes simply "a myth produced by the *bricoleur*"

(965A). Subjectivity along with cultural identity becomes an arbitrary construct

provisionally based in time and space.

Derrida identifies "two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign,

of freeplay," one negative and the other positive: the one that sees the non-centre as

something other than a loss experiences "the joyous affirmation of the free-play of the

world and without truth, without origin, offered to an active imagination"; on the

other hand, the one that sees the non-centre as a loss "seeks to decipher, dreams of

deciphering, a truth or an origin which is free from freeplay and from the order of the

sign" (970A and B). In other words, one either responds to the dislocation of the

history of metaphysics by celebrating new systems of signification or by wallowing in

a nostalgia for lost origins. Clearly Hutcheon is among the former. She celebrates,

for example, the more diversified concept of experience based on difference that

helped create an audience for new forms of literature, particularly forms that reflected

the experiences of women, ethnicities and even Canadians in general who for quite a

long time led a futile search for Keatsian nightingales in dark cedar swamps. A

postmodernist hopes that "the loss of the modernist faith in fixed system, order, and

wholeness can make room for new models based on things once rejected:

contingency, multiplicity, fragmentation, discontinuity" (1988a, 19).

Clearly, too, the nostalgia for origins is a powerful force. Too many creation

myths abound, from Genesis to fables about how the porcupine got its quills to the *bricoleur's* fabrication of a subject position, to ignore the psychological importance of origins. Daisy Goodwill, the protagonist of Carol Shields's recent novel <u>The Stone Diaries</u>, is among those who lament the loss of origins. Daisy's experience of identity complies with the principles of Hutcheon's postmodernism: it is contingent, multiple, fragmented and discontinuous. Only occasionally does Daisy find the resultant instability liberating and, through metaphors that expose the complexity hidden within what appears to be common, arrive at a better understanding of her cultural heritage. However, Daisy's exploration of her heritage masks a more basic quest for the recuperation of the self. More often than not, Daisy finds her unstable and fragmented identity painfully limiting. <u>The Stone Diaries</u> is the fictional autobiography of an eighty-year-old woman struggling against a precarious belief in her own existence; as the self-conscious author of her own life, Daisy is a *bricoleur* who, rather than engaging in the joyous free-play of the world, dreams of deciphering those events of her life that might restore connection and meaning to her increasing isolation. Focusing on Daisy's experiences, the following chapter will explore the potential effects of defining identity within a postmodern framework in which multiplicity is valued over unity. While postmodernism offers the tools for de-constructing the apparently "natural" supremacy of cultural systems, it is important to remember, if we are considering adopting its principles for a national identity, that what they offer in terms of re-construction is limited. Indeed, it is not their

"liberated" aim to reconstruct. We must question, therefore, whether multicultural freedom gained at the national level is obtained at the expense of the Canadian individual. Furthermore, we may explore whether unstable individual identities tend to increase the intolerance of ethnic differences.

Do you know what the word "Daisy" means? It means "Day's Eye."

That's right. I used to know that. I'd forgotten.

A daisy really is a bit like an eye when you think about it, round and fringed with lashes, staring upward.

Opening, closing.

Hidden Multiplicities of the "Common White Daisy":
A Struggle for Identity

> Thou unassuming Common-place
> Of Nature with that homely face,
> And yet with something of a grace . . .

Flowers are said to have a language and culture of their own. The daisy is

April's flower and traditionally symbolizes, although there seems to be some

disagreement, innocence and beauty, or innocence and gentleness (Lombard 17 and

Lehner 114). The bolder double daisy, on the other hand, such as the white and

yellow flower commonly seen in Canadian road-side ditches and fields, symbolizes

participation and was worn on knights' shields during the Middle Ages as public

avowals of their ladies' reciprocated affection (Powell 67). But none of these

qualities -- innocence, beauty, gentleness or participation -- seem to characterize

Daisy Goodwill strongly (who, incidentally, is born in July). Twice married and with

a brief liaison with her editor at The Recorder, Daisy is not particularly innocent.

Nor might she be called participatory, whether in marriage or otherwise, as she often

suffers from a failure to participate in meaningful exchange. Her isolation,

furthermore, overshadows the gentleness that she demonstrates at times toward her

husband and children. Her efforts to nurture are infected with a high degree of self-

repression. Rather than gentle, Daisy describes herself as a woman who was "almost

unfailingly courteous to others" but who, unable to express her own needs, "missed

the point, the point of it all . . ." (354). Even her beauty remains elusive.

Photographs of Daisy are conspicuously absent from those displayed at the centre of

the diaries, and Daisy supplies few details of her appearance over the course of her

narrative. A letter from Clarentine to Cuyler did at one time, apparently, contain a

photograph of young Daisy. But Clarentine's complimentary description of Daisy's

"exceptionally curly" and "very pretty" (51) strawberry coloured hair is undermined

by Cuyler's more ascetic and dissociated interest in her "spare body" and "obedient"

demeanour (59). Beauty, it would seem, is in the eye of the beholder, and for some

it is simply irrelevant.

It is not surprising that the rather simplistic symbolism of "flower culture"

fails to capture Daisy's essential nature, for it is a nature that, like the Canadian

identity(ies), eludes a single cultural reference. Many may be surprised to learn that

the "common white daisy," as the flower is often called, is not native to Canadian

soil. The daisy is a European flower that, once imported, spread rapidly through the

fields and pastures of most of Canada and the United States. The same might be said

of the "common white man": once the European colonialists had firmly taken root on

the continent, their succeeding generations spread like weeds from coast to coast,

leaving untouched, finally, only those Arctic regions too cold to suit their more

temperate sensibilities. But with daisies and European colonizers alike, abundance

and a simple appearance mask what are in fact relatively complex internal structures.

Daisies are members of the "Composites," a highly developed and widely distributed

family of flowering plants, containing some twenty thousand species that evolved

naturally over time. Interestingly, the yellow "centre" of a single white daisy is no

centre at all, but a multitude of "ex-centrics," each tiny yellow and white flower

containing its own reproductive members. Like the daisy, today's Canadians are of a

composite family with an elusive cultural centre. We tend to forget that people too

are subject to the mutations and transformations of evolution. As I illustrated in the

previous chapter, in Canada the natural evolutionary process of cultural and racial

intermingling intensified as officials looked further and further abroad for settlers to

populate the country. On the one hand, Canada evolved as a nation with a relatively

rich cultural variety. On the other, in the words of Victoria Flett, who witnesses her

great-aunt Daisy's quest for cultural substance, it is not uncommon to see Canadians

"tramping through cemeteries" or "huddled over library tables in the university's

records room," hoping that their ancestors' lives "will push up against, and perhaps

pardon, the contemporary plagues of displacement and disaffection" (265-6).

Daisy Goodwill, born in 1905 into an English speaking and 'white' family on

"a hot July afternoon in the middle of Manitoba, in the middle of the Dominion of

Canada" (2), is a decided member of Canada's mainstream. Her father's work at the

Garson quarry near Tyndall brings in enough money for the young family to rent a

respectable home along the quarry road with the other workers, and for Daisy's

mother, Mercy Stone Goodwill (one could not imagine a more solid name), to sprinkle Vestizza currants into her puddings as an extra special treat at Christmas. Tyndall itself, as might be imagined -- and, indeed, Daisy *does* imagine, having left Tyndall at the age of two months in the care of her neighbour -- is a typical Manitoban village in the early years of the century, with "half a dozen unpaved streets, a store, a hotel, a Methodist Church, the Canadian Pacific Railway Station, and a boarding house on the corner of Bishop Road for the unmarried men" (7). A few "Galician" families keep to the outskirts of the village, and French and Icelandic settlements in the surrounding countryside (near Arborg and Lac de Bonnet) are sufficiently remote as to be unthreatening to what otherwise seems a homogeneous community. In short, there is nothing "on what is, after all, an ordinary Monday evening in high summer in the year 1905" (9) to destabilize what should be a smooth birth into a society ready and willing to receive such an obviously suitable candidate as Daisy Goodwill. On the other hand, there is no talisman on this ordinary day and in this ordinary village to offer itself up to a woman in her eightieth year trying to understand why there should be such emptiness at the centre of her life. Despite her mainstream heritage, Daisy is a woman of uncertain identity. The social harmony with which she invests the local of her birth represents a deliberate effort to reconstruct circumstances that she believes were in fact disrupted by the shock of her mother's death and the confusion of her mother's apparent failure to prepare for her arrival. Chance and not maternal inspiration marks her birth. While Daisy at times

appreciates a certain freedom that comes with being left "originless," a freedom

which leads her to resist, for example, the constraints of cultural homogeneity and

patriarchy, she ultimately seeks a frame of reference external to herself with which to

invest her life with meaning. However, her "postmodern" self-awareness of the

hermeneutic impulse to impose meaning places the security of her identity forever

beyond her reach. Like the daisy flower, postmodern identity bears a false centrality

that leaves Daisy with the single option of portraying herself as, paradoxically, a

person absent from her own diaries.

The formative years of Daisy's life seem on the surface to offer the security of

cultural stability. Daisy enjoys more and more the advantages of the mainstream,

beginning with a move from rural to urban living. Although Barker is at first

reluctant to have his bachelor's home in Winnipeg invaded by his mother and her

infant ward, a photograph of the three picnicking on a grassy river bank, Daisy

sandwiched comfortably between Barker and Clarentine, suggests a stable, middle

class family unit: "the family at ease, the family in love with itself, no trace of

disharmony" (60). In contrast to the quiet regularity of Tyndall, Winnipeg presents

the eventful world of the university where Daisy becomes a conspirator in the web of

mystery surrounding her much admired "Uncle Barker"; it is also a world where

exotic flower gardens replace serviceable vegetable gardens and where Daisy learns to

rhyme off the names of every kind of flower as quickly as she can recite the Lord's

Prayer and "A Sailor's Lament" (52-53). The train that carries her southward, "an

arrow of silver cutting through the uncaring landscape" (88), directs Daisy even

further away from her peripheral roots. As she and Cuyler approach Indiana,

"[t]owns [spring] up, one after the other, the spaces between them startlingly short"

(87). Winnipeg's comparatively rustic placidity is replaced by an increasingly dense

network of "paved roads," "fenced fields" and "electric wires" that slash "the bright

air like razors" (88). The hype of modernity completes their journey. Cuyler's high-

profile position with the Indiana Limestone Company during the 1920s places him and

his daughter at the heart of economic and cultural prosperity, and even, as the myth

goes, at the height of human history itself: "'at this very point in history the

remarkable profile of a great building is about to rise in the Empire State of our

nation - as noble a testimony to the powers of Salem limestone and to human

ingenuity as any of us would have dreamed. From this moment we can only go

forward'" (82).

Their American home is not only a site of economic activity but of cultural

homogeneity. The "beautiful white Salem stone," in contrast to the more humble

"tapestry" (25) of Tyndall's pink and grey mottled stone, symbolizes an era of

structural, white supremacy. The "powers of Salem limestone" during the early part

of the century belong to an elect few, and while American companies import white

foreigners to strengthen their hold on economic production, the country exports what

might be called 'expendable' citizens, such as Orren Milltown (the son of the

Goodwill's black housekeeper), to uphold, ironically, the cause of human rights in

European wars (255). Even Cuyler's new Italian wife, Maria, is an unwelcome "aberration" walking along the "polite, leafy streets of Bloomington" (128). After Cuyler's death she loses her protected status and is permitted to disappear quietly into the melting pot of middle-class American society. Daisy, on the other hand, with her Anglo-Saxon heritage, is among those "favored by time and chance" (82). In 1927, a graduate of Long College for Women, she is Bloomington's "bride-elect" engaged to be married to one Harold A. Hoad whose considerable economic advantages are marked by the Hoad family castle on East First Street, another imposing structure of "solid stone" (108). A ritual "'white' dinner" thrown in Daisy and Harold's honour, with such dishes as fillet of Dover sole, supreme of chicken and vanilla chantilly ice, confirms their initiation into the "homogeneous," elite community (79-80). Multiculturalism is not something one experiences in Bloomington, Indiana in the early part of the twentieth century but something one travels abroad to sample -- the Eiffel Tower, for example, or the Roman Coliseum.

Reflecting what Hutcheon describes as the difficulty of essentializing the migrant experience, Cuyler and Daisy respond differently to this intensification of their cultural and economic status. Cuyler thinks little of his humble origins. Although his marriage to Maria and his frank conversations with Cora-Mae suggest that he is either blissfully oblivious or openly defiant of racial and class tensions, he also slides easily into the persona of an influential businessman, insisting on tailor-made suits of "dazzling white" English broadcloth (83) and proclaiming, in his

booming charismatic voice, the virtues of white Salem limestone. His frequent

statements "about 'living in a progressive country' or 'being a citizen of a proud, free

nation' [refer] to the United States of America and not to the Dominion of Canada,

where he was born and where he grew to manhood" (92-3). Daisy's conversion,

however, is not as complete. Despite her obvious participation within the community

(as indicated by various lists of social engagements and wedding gifts), and despite

the strong friendships she forms with cohorts 'Beans' and Fraidy, she develops a

certain longing to escape the claustrophobia of her tightly defined cultural identity. A

militant monologue delivered by her prospective mother-in-law, who dresses

"casually" for the occasion in a floral printed porch dress and white reindeer-skin

pumps (the visit obviously occurring sometime between Memorial Day and Labour

Day), reveals the strict codes of conduct affecting a young lady of Daisy's social

standing: a college education, although no doubt beneficial in some ways, should not

"impinge on normal marital harmony"; knives should be turned inward when setting

the table, and salad forks placed outside dinner forks; "death" is preferable to

"passing on" or "passing away," except when referring to Harold's father's demise,

which should not be referred to at all, etc. (102-3). During this exchange, a single

pink peony floats quietly before Daisy in its little glass bowl, symbolizing, perhaps,

the limitations that homogeneity forces upon identity.

Canada's marginal position vis à vis the United States appears to offer Daisy

cultural release. In contrast to its southern neighbour, Daisy believes that Canada is a

country "where nothing seems to ever happen. A country you wouldn't ask to dance a second waltz. Clean. Christian. Dull. Quiescent" (93). And if one were to believe certain "educated Bloomingtonians," it is a country that does not exist at all: "They think that Ottawa is a town in south-central Illinois, and that Toronto lies somewhere in the northern counties of Ohio. It's as though a huge eraser wiped out the top of the continent" (ibid). But in this absence is the possibility of difference and, for Daisy, of change. A country without an assertive identity leaves its citizens with greater freedom to carve their own identities, or so Daisy, like Hutcheon, imagines. She believes herself to be one of hundreds of "motley" settlers who arrive weekly, mere "grain[s] of sand added to a desert" (94), attracted by what she believes is a vast nation of cultural anonymity. Crossing the Michigan State line into Canada, it seemed to her "that she had arrived at a healing nation. No one here could guess at her situation. No one here knew her story" (133). She strokes out of her travel journal a statement about "home," for home would imply a return to something already defined; she writes instead: "I feel something might happen to me in Canada" (132). Canada offers Daisy what Hutcheon refers to as "liminal space" (1990a, 25), a place created by tension between the margin (Canada) and the centre (the United States), a place of action and affirmation of difference. The sun and wind streaming through the train window transform her hair into "a kind of halo or else a hat made of burnt fur"(150), suggesting not only a shift in identity 'from white to rosy red,' but even within red a whole range of possibilities.

Daisy's symbolic return to Canada confirms the hybrid composition of her heritage. A hybrid is "anything derived from heterogeneous sources, or composed of different or incongruous elements" (OED). Few branches need be drawn on her family tree before different cultural elements reveal themselves: Flett, a Scottish name particularly common in the Orkneys; Goodwill, an English name predating the Norman Conquest; and Alvera, Roy and Mazurkiewich, the obviously contrasting names of the younger generations. In addition, Daisy suspects that her mother's fine hair and fair colouring indicate Ukrainian or Icelandic lineage. In Bloomington, the subtle differences in racial colouring of her background were prized for their ability to merge into a solid shade of "white." In Canada, with "the relatively low-temperature setting of its melting pot" (93), difference seems to claim a more permanent hold, or, at least, it does so with Daisy who emphasizes the various cultural "ingredients" that composed her birth. She imagines that her mother, at the moment of going into labour, was in the process of making a Malvern pudding from an old recipe book given to her by Clarentine. "The book is an old one, printed in England more than thirty years ago," and is one of many gifts, including also currants from her garden for the pudding, "momentarily ringed with light" as they symbolically change hands from one woman to the other (10). The raspberries Mercy has picked herself along the roadside south of the village, and the stone with which she weights the pudding is a gift from Cuyler who has brought it home so that his wife might admire the "three fused fossils of an extremely rare type, so rare that they

have never to this day been properly classified" (25). The pudding, of course, is

Daisy herself, a "warm sponge soaking up colour" in an old tinware jelly mold (2)

and absorbing the triple influences of her father, mother and adoptive mother. The

result is a heterogeneous mix of old world and new world, wild and domestic, and

cultural and natural that defies traditional classification.

The hybrid composition of Daisy's heritage is one that she imagines was

carved out of a similarly hybrid national identity. Canadian immigrants and their

descendants, whom she refers to as "grains of sand" sifting through the country,

participate in a process akin to sedimentary evolution as contact between different

cultures gives rise to novel configurations of identity. Daisy takes pains to describe

the prized fossils embedded in the mottled texture of the limestone that attracted

stoneworkers such as her father's family to Canada:

> The stone itself, a dolomitic limestone, is more beautiful and easier to handle
> than that which my father knew growing up in Stonewall, Manitoba. Natural
> chemical alterations give it its unique lacy look. It comes in two colours, a
> light buff mixed with brown, and (my favorite) a pale grey with darker
> mottles. Some folks call it tapestry stone, and they prize especially, its random
> fossils: gastropods, brachiopods, trilobites, corals and snails. (25)[1]

The quarrymen of Tyndall spend their days picking away at "the stone face" of the

Canadian prairie and transform the landscape into "an open air arena" (24 and 25): a

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[1]McGraw-Hill defines a "hybrid" rock as one formed by the assimilation of two
magmas (1978, 772), "magma" being the molten rock material from which igneous
rocks are formed (959). "Dolomite" is commonly found in igneous rocks, and,
because it usually forms out of preexisting limestone, often preserves fossils, relict
grains and sedimentary structures (1976, 383-4).

stage offering countless performances. Clarentine and the old Jew, for example, the one a "light buff" like her rose-coloured Royal Albert tea cups and the other a wrinkly walnut "brown" from spending his days on the road, see their lives transformed by contact with the other as they symbolically join hands and "run together toward the open doorway, awkwardly, bumping up against each other" (23). The postmodern celebration of multicultural identity as process and change is embodied by Cuyler "kicking up dust with his work boots" and "slapping at the sandflies" on his way home from the quarry (24); rather than try to stabilize events, he accepts, like the stone rolling along at his feet, that "one thing leads to the next, that's life" (92).

However, either Daisy's romanticization of Canada is essentially mistaken, and, in reality, Canada offers no such space for developing myriad identities, or something within Daisy herself prevents her from taking advantage of cultural freedom, for, despite her hopeful outlook, Daisy simply exchanges one smothering story for another: she becomes the devoted housewife whose sole aspiration is to recreate the perfection of Ladies Home Journal. (Betty Friedan is still a few years in coming.) On hot July days she dutifully slaves over the stove to create "Cooling Meals" for the family (158) and, on nights when her husband displays an urge for lovemaking, masks her unease by following advice from the latest issue of McCalls for simultaneously expressing "ardor and surrender . . . through a single subtle gesturing of the body" (191). Having escaped the racism and the economic austerity

of Bloomington, Daisy finds herself imprisoned once again, in Ottawa this time, in

the centre of the nation, by the "ugly limestone foundation" (194) of patriarchy.

Again she escapes to the periphery, to the "nest of green" surrounding their home:

"She lives for the summer, for the heat of the sun - for her garden, if the truth were

known. And what a garden!" (194). Daisy creates a space where individual

expression is not only possible, but valued. There among her sisters her identity is

enriched by the differences of colour, shape and texture that each flower brings to the

ensemble:

> then there are the windowboxes, vibrant with color, and, in addition, Mrs.
> Flett has cunningly obscured the house's ugly limestone foundation with
> plantings of Japanese yew, juniper, mugho pine, dwarf spruce, and the new
> Korean box. And her lilacs! Some people, you know, will go out and buy any
> old lilac and just poke it in the ground, but Mrs. Flett has given thought to
> overall plant size and blossom color, mixing the white "Madame Lemoine"
> lilac with soft pink Persian lilac and slatey blue "President Lincoln." These
> different varieties are "grouped," not "plopped." At the side of the house a
> border of blue sweet william has been given a sprinkling of bright yellow
> coreopsis, and this combination, without exaggeration, is a true artist's touch.
> (194-5)

Her garden, "her dearest child" (196), expresses not only "artistry," "charm" and at

times "wit," but a desire for community, a community that, with its "English

charm," "French orderliness" and "Japanese economy," is multicultural in flavour

(195). It is no longer difference within anonymity that she desires, but difference

within community -- unity within diversity.

Daisy's ability to create unity out of diversity, unfortunately, does not move

beyond a symbolic level. Within her own mind she remains unable to gather

elements of her disparate self into a strong, cohesive centre that would enable her to withstand the conformity of restrictive cultural structures. There is no doubt more than one reason for Daisy's inability to escape controlling narratives. Patriarchal control, capitalist oppression and religious domination, symbolized simultaneously by that infamous cornerstone of the Royal Bank Building, can seriously limit personal autonomy. Daisy, living during the first half of the century under the umbrella of white, male supremacy that denies the importance and often even existence of cultural and gender differences, faces an uphill battle. However, on the train coming to Canada Daisy offers a more profoundly disturbing reason for which she no longer asks herself "what is possible, but rather what possibilities remain." She angrily rejects her father's "freestone metaphor" describing the freedom of people's choice to carve their lives in one direction or another: "no such choices are available to her at this time in her life, a woman on the verge of middle age - or so she thinks. A person arbitrarily named. A person accidentally misplaced. How did this happen? She's caught in a version of her life, pinned there" (147). The "story" in which Daisy is caught is one that threatens the very essence of her identity. A person arbitrarily named, Daisy has a weak sense of self that increases her vulnerability toward oppressive social systems. What is no doubt confusing for Daisy is that the very circumstances that reveal to her the value of creative self-expression, i.e. the hybrid make-up of her identity, also limit her ability to engage in this activity.

A hybrid identity has, as Derrida suggests, both positive and negative

implications. Unlike Cuyler's acceptance of change, Magnus is one who seeks final meaning for his life in the "loose beds of stone from his native Orkney" (67). He interprets the excavation of the Garson mines not as an arena of possibility but rather as an absence of cultural substance, "a hole in the earth's crust" that he falls through in his effort to reclaim his lost origins (137). Magnus seeks that essential "home," driven by a faith that "comes out of a vacuum, an absence of recollection. . . . Dust to dust" (95). Dust to dust is the curse of humankind. It is also, for those who fear the instability of lost origins, the gift of order through the promise of endings.

Barker shares a similar desire for order. His work with hybrid grains reveals that hybrids are without origins and without a final essence. They are, rather, in a state of process, developing out of a combination of elements or organisms and evolving, in turn, in response to environmental changes: having "helped perfect the new improved 'Marquis' hybrid, a hearty red spring wheat . . . he is now attempting to cross [it] with the remarkable 'Garnet' strain that can be harvested a full ten days earlier, thus avoiding damage wrought by early frost" (43). Thus, Barker's attempt to chart the development of hybrid grains extends, theoretically speaking, forward and backward *ad infinitum*, an unruly process that his "neat and logical" mind finds oddly disturbing. He would much rather continue delimiting the parts of the exotic lady's slipper, work that involves him in the more personally satisfying role of creator: planning, constructing and then, 'on the seventh day,' admiring the end result of his labour.

> He loved this flower. (The "lady," of course, was Venus.) He could have
> drawn its sensuous shape even in his dreams. Dorsal sepal, column, lateral
> sepal, sheath, sheathing bract, eye, and root. A common plant, yes, but
> belonging to the exotic orchid family. This delicate, frilled blossom was his.
> He had worked on it (her) for months, and now he possessed the whole of its
> folded silken parts and the pure, classic regenerative mechanics that lift it out
> of the humble mid-continental clay and open its full beauty to the eye of
> mankind - and to his eye in particular. (45-6)

One might add "control" and "ownership" to the obviously patriarchal aspect of

Barker's activities. And, indeed, patriarchy is often associated with the point I would

like to make, which is that creation implies a beginning, a middle and an end, a

fixing of time and space -- or, in Derrida's words, the positing of a transcendental

signified. All of its parts pinned into Barker's notebook, the lady's slipper stands as a

point of reference against which other flowers can be measured, including the daisy,

also a common flower but without the exotic appeal of the orchid. Hybrids are not

points of reference. Their "essence" is one of change and instability, characteristics

that are not easily pinned down. What is perhaps disturbing is that the two patterns

of development seem to be mutually exclusive. In recognizing the multiple origins of

artificial evolution one is forced to acknowledge a similar pattern in natural evolution

which simply takes place over a longer period of time. For Barker, who longs for

structure and order "even in his dreams," fixed origins are more satisfying than

instability, which is not a necessarily negative preference even if somewhat

unrealistic. Before his marriage, for example, Daisy, representing his "most human"

longings, remained beyond the reach of his ordering impulse: she "sits far out at the

end of one of the branches, laughing, calling to him" (143). Barker's preference becomes negative when his insistence upon a certain order implicates him in patriarchal forms of oppression. More simply, the establishment of origins involves a certain structuring of experience that risks forcing others into patterns of behaviour that reinforce that structure. On the other hand, the loss of origins exposes the individual to a host of seemingly arbitrary forces that rob life of any transcendent purpose.

Each of these symbols of hybrid identity, fossil (stone) and flour (grain), is present at Daisy's birth, and they offer her the same choice of either celebrating or lamenting the loss of origins and essences. The plate that presses into the Malvern pudding under the weight of Cuyler's stone has, as it happens, a pattern of flowers. Thus, Daisy depicts herself undergoing a process of fossilization and, fighting the simultaneous "burning" and "freezing" of the Manitoban spring, rebirth: her fragile petals heeding the call to "open, open" (40). Daisy explains that "[a]ccident, not history" has called her to life (39). In a sense, the creator's work was abandoned midway through the process of creation; Mercy's labour pains, unexpected and completely incomprehensible to her, interrupt her baking and cause her to leave the Malvern pudding, which requires a "cool place" to set, exposed to the July heat. Daisy, like those whom chance has assembled to witness her birth, is "borne up by an ancient shelf of limestone, gleaming whitely just inches beneath the floorboards, yet . . . [feeling] unanchored, rattling loose in the world between the clout of death and the

squirming foolishness of birth" (39-41). Flour, for its part, is absorbed in mass

quantities by Mercy during pregnancy as she attempts to line her painful "bloated

vessel" with "enormous slabs" of buttered bread. She produces a child, finally, that

Abram Skutari describes as "a lump of dough left by mistake" (260). The unformed

dough suggests both hope and dejection, something to be moulded into infinite shapes

or something to be discarded as an incompleted, meaningless mass. In poststructural

terms, Daisy has two choices at this point: to become that person who engages in "the

joyous affirmation of the free-play of the world," or to become that person who, on

the other hand, "seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin which

is free from freeplay."

Daisy's answer is the diaries themselves. She struggles in her eightieth year to

"keep things straight in her head. To keep the weight of her memories evenly

distributed. To hold the chapters of her life in order" (340). Although she recognizes

and at times benefits from the freedom of identity based on process and instability,

she longs, to a much greater degree, for a transcendental frame of reference for

interpreting her life. She is finally driven to seek this frame of reference not on the

streets of Bloomington or the pages of Ladies Home Journal, but at a more basic

level, in a modernist belief in a unified and centred subjectivity:

> She let herself fall backward, her arms straight out, trustingly, and at once the
> complications of branches, fences and houses, so dense and tangled together,
> burst with a cartoon pop into the spare singularity of sky, the primary
> abruptness of blue. That's all there was. Herself suspended in a glass sphere.
> You could go back and back to that true and steadfast picture, hold it in your

head for the rest of your life. (339)

Such an image, like the peony floating in the glass bowl back in Bloomington, seems painfully limiting; yet, to Daisy's weary mind, it is the desired resting place of her final analysis.

Consolidating her identity, however, has not proven an easy task. Daisy displays, in Hutcheon's terms, "[t]he metafictional self-consciousness about the hermeneutic power actually to constitute subjectivity" (1988b, 172). She recognizes her desperate need to assign symmetry and meaning to the earlier years of her life and cannot therefore trust in the truth of this image of herself suspended in a glass sphere, this certainty about the existence of centred subjectivity. She writes that "a childhood is what anyone wants to remember of it. It leaves behind no fossils, except perhaps in fiction. Which is why you want to take Daisy's representation of events with a grain of salt, a bushel of salt" (148). More generally speaking, she adds in parentheses that "[b]iography, even autobiography, is full of systematic error, of holes that connect like a tangle of underground streams" (196). Like Magnus, Daisy is someone who has fallen through the holes, unsettled by the belief that life is some arbitrary combination of "lies" and "truths," a meeting ground between probability and conjecture that can only exist in some "hybrid version" (283).

Hybridity, finally, defines not only Daisy's cultural origins but also, in keeping with the rippling effect of postmodern difference, the very category of identity itself. That Daisy is the subject of her own diary(ies), for example, is not

immediately obvious. The enigmatic title suggests a collection of life writing about

one or more people who presumably share the name Stone. The opening line seems

to confirm this expectation: "My mother's name is Mercy Stone Goodwill." Further

reading forces a reconsideration of this initial, and what seems like a perfectly

natural, presumption. To begin with, in a chapter where the title, "Birth," announces

the beginning of a narrative chain, the death of the subject seems an unlikely event.

Furthermore, a set of diaries about the Stone family line would be as short-lived as

the single branch it occupies on the family tree in the opening pages (a tree with no

obvious trunk). Stone, we soon learn, is not really Mercy's name at all but a name

assigned, "out of an impulse for order or perhaps democratization" (29), to all

constituents of the Stonewall Orphans Home who arrive lacking family names of their

own. Stone seems an obvious choice given the name of the home which, incidentally,

is also the name of the town, and has the added advantage of attributing a certain

weightiness to the elusive lineages of these children. In Mercy's case, unfortunately,

this effort to stabilize seems to have failed -- or so Daisy imagines. Daisy's

description of her mother as a woman who "knows only that she stands apart from

any coherent history, separated from the ordinary consolation of blood ties" (7),

applies just as easily to herself.

Significantly, Daisy is not named in this opening chapter. She does not

become a "subject," so to speak, until she is adopted more than two months after her

birth by her neighbour, Clarentine Flett, who undertakes the task of naming more out

of necessity than anything else: "I am writing at once to assure you that Daisy, as I have taken to calling her, is well looked after . . ." (49). Cuyler, for his part, admits that Daisy is not a name he would have chosen, "but the child had to be called something, and he was in no fit state after [its] birth to turn his mind to names" (61). Both Mercy and Daisy are "arbitrarily named" and "accidentally misplaced." The "stone" in the title of the diaries reveals Daisy's frustrated kinship with her mother and perhaps, as with the children of Stonewall Orphan's Home, reveals Daisy's attempt to assign order to her origins. Although not an entirely adequate image, stone "is, at the very least, contained" (359).

Naming is not only a means of establishing order, but also identity. As Daisy points out, "you can't enter this country and become a citizen without a name" (22). Daisy knows very little about her mother, an orphan who suffers an early death and who, furthermore, seems either to have been ignorant of her pregnancy or for some reason to have kept the fact a secret from her husband. Cuyler, in one of his more generous moods, imagines that perhaps Mercy "loved [the child] so deeply she was unable to speak its name, to share its existence or plan for its arrival" (61). Daisy is not as forgiving. Only much later, "during the long, thin, uneventful sleep that preceded her death," does she consider the injustice of never having heard the words "I love you Daisy" uttered aloud (345), of never having had her identity confirmed by this simple human equation. Perhaps as an effort to compensate for her creator's physical absence, and perhaps too as an expression of anger at her spiritual absence,

Daisy depicts Mercy as an "extraordinarily obese woman," and cruelly describes her "jellylike features" and thighs "like soft white meat (veal or chicken or fatty pork come to mind)" (8). Even a quick glance at the photograph of Mercy and Cuyler in the centre of the diaries reveals that Daisy's complete misrepresentation could not simply be called an exaggeration. But, as with the fact of her mother's final breath, she must "insist upon . . . literal volume" (40) in order to recuperate "that filament of matter we struggle to catch hold of at birth" (39). Her open mouth, "a wrinkled ring of thread," knows instinctively that this filament of matter -- or *mater* -- will be "out of reach" for her.

The image of the ring, an absent centre seeking fulfilment, becomes the central metaphor of the diaries: "Somewhere along the line she made the decision to live outside of events; or else that decision was made for her" (262). Her mother's apparent neglect and subsequent death are "events" too difficult to bear, and only by absenting herself, by living on the periphery, can Daisy combat "the old unmediated terror of abandonment." Her terror was no doubt exacerbated by her aunt Clarentine's sudden death which left her, at age eleven, in the hands of "a parent she had never known, a parent who had surrendered her to the care of others when she was barely two months old" (90). Before Clarentine's death Cuyler had been simply the mysterious author of monthly cheques who might, from time to time, politely inquire about her health or progress in school. Understandably, his sudden appearance would be an event not easily trusted, an event which might, like the

limestone tower she conjures-up during her period of convalescence as testimony of his existence, disintegrate into nothing more than "a slight doughnut-shaped depression in the ground" (267). In self-defence, therefore, she avoids focusing on her father when he arrives to fetch her: "the print of sunlight on her bare arm. The cool sweet drink sliding down her throat. The buttons on her father's shirt, glittering there like a trail of tears" -- "These, at least, were things she might believe in . . ." (78).

Daisy is also the absent centre of her own diaries. The pluralization of the word "diary" when clearly there is only one book, only one life being traced from "Birth, 1905" to "Death," suggests that there is not one central account written into these pages, but many accounts. Daisy is also Daisy Goodwill, Mrs. Harold A. Hoad, Mrs. Barker Flett, Grandma Flett, Mother, Mrs. Green Thumb, Daze, etc.. She exists in relation to each of her friends and family, and, in order to draw an accurate picture of herself, she must also describe those who define her. For example, a significant section of the opening chapter describes not only Daisy's birth, but Clarentine's birth, or rebirth. Like the empty wash tub at her feet, Clarentine is "an old wooden vessel sitting there on a piece of outcropping rock" (16), waiting for the "tidal wave" and "flood" (5) of Mercy's contractions to set her loose again. Daisy relates that flowers, and more specifically Michaelmas daisies (a likely flower given the time of year), assist Clarentine in journeying forward: "She would step from the train into the busy street in front of the Canadian Pacific Station in Winnipeg

and offer her flowers to passers-by; city folks were fools for fresh flowers, even flowers as common as these that grew wild in every wasteland of the region" (49). Of course, it is Daisy herself who offers Clarentine the opportunity for a new life -- a life as guardian of a newborn, motherless child. Perhaps Clarentine names Daisy after this armload of Michaelmas daisies. It is more likely, however, that Daisy imagines the existence of the flowers in an effort to invest her arbitrary naming with some sort of symbolic intentionality and to somehow assert the primacy of her own story over that of her aunt. But because her sense of identity is already weak, Daisy risks being "crowded out of her own life" (190). Her fear of "events" prevents her from gathering bits and pieces of her story into a homogeneous centre of self-hood, of making an "event" out of her identity: behind "Daisy Goodwill" is not some assembly of Mrs. Flett, Mrs. Green Thumb, mother, etc., but "something else, something nameless" (321).

Neither can Daisy privilege her interpretation of her life over the interpretations offered by others; her theory regarding her great "sorrow" is no more valid than the theories offered by friends and relatives, and her advice for self-recovery, consequently, no more helpful. The stone (Stone?) diaries, therefore, bearing Daisy's name by not bearing it, are an assemblage of photographs, letters (none written by her), theories, fictions, articles, conversations, etc. behind which the "real" face of Daisy Goodwill is barely visible. Indeed, the absence of her photograph from among those at the centre of the diaries suggests that, at least for

her, invisibility is the most accurate self-portrait.

Absence seems to be Daisy's only assurance of stability. And yet Daisy finds herself caught in a paradox of her own making, a paradox that places stability even further from her reach. Daisy is both the centred and decentred subject of her diaries, doomed to vacillate between the contrary impulses of being and non-being. The "mysterious suffering core" (229) that overwhelms her during mid-life becomes, in Joan's words, an illness with "a certain majesty in it. Nothing in her life has delivered her to such a pitch of intensity - why wouldn't she love it, this exquisite wounding, the salt of perfect pain?" (253). But Daisy cannot simply "rage on," as Joan advises, for her pain is undermined by its very cause. Daisy recovers not through any momentous effort but simply because "she distrusts the sincerity of her own salt tears" (262), that watershed that accompanies the moment of creation. The mistrustful events of her birth and present anguish, hidden somewhere within that absent suffering core, force her to return to the un-eventful problem "of how to get through a thousand ordinary days" (263). She offers this cynical interpretation: "In a sense I see her as one of life's fortunates, a woman born with a voice that lacks a tragic register. Someone who's learned to dig a hole in her own life story." The dark underside of this statement is that Daisy is able to avoid suicide (for example) simply because she is unable to take her suffering seriously; death would confirm the event of her birth. But neither is she able to rise above her suffering:

I have said that Mrs. Flett recovered from the nervous torment she suffered

some years ago, and yet a kind of rancor underlies her existence still: the recognition that she belongs to no one. Even her dreams release potent fumes of absence. She has three grown children, it's true, but she wonders if these three will look back on her with anything other than tender forbearance. And her eight grandchildren are so far away, so diminished by age and distance, so consecrated to the blur of the future. Perhaps that's why she is forever "ruminating" about her past life, those two lost fathers of hers, and hurling herself at the emptiness she was handed at birth. In the void she finds connection, and in the connection another void - a pattern of infinite regress which is heartbreaking to think of - and yet it pushes her forward, it keeps her alive. She feeds the seagulls, doesn't she? (281)

The pattern of infinite regress that Daisy experiences is the postmodern paradox: Daisy is someone who distrusts the meta-narrative of her own identity but who, in distrusting, corners herself into a process of self-creation and self-obliteration from which she cannot escape.

Daisy's experience is one expression of postmodern identity "as process": the "heartbreaking" instability caused by the loss of origins. Origins offer a point of reference for interpreting the present, for establishing causal links between the chapters of one's life. But Daisy sees herself as a woman "who went down, went down and down and down, who missed the point, the point of it all . . ." (354). At age eighty she cannot identify the cause of her distress. It is that mysterious suffering core that, like her mother's wedding ring forgotten inside Cuyler's time capsule, lies buried like "a glittering joke" (251) under the very human effort to make a monument out of life. It is perhaps Daisy's son, Warren, who best describes the fragile psyche of someone even as "common" and as "white" as Daisy:

My mother is a middle-aged woman, a middle-class woman, a woman of

moderate intelligence and medium-sized ego and average good luck, so that you would expect her to land somewhere near the middle of the world. Instead she's over there at the edge. The least vibration could knock her off. (252)

In Daisy's case, living according to the principles of postmodern theory creates too many vibrations. While an appreciation for "difference" makes her uncomfortable with discourses that limit personal autonomy, the sacrifice that it requires does not leave her with sufficient self-confidence to break away from these discourses and assert her own interests. She escapes one master-narrative only to find herself seeking another that might somehow draw together the loose and obscure strands of her birth. Douglas Hill's study of stones in mythology argues that "it must be an overwhelming, all-consuming myth-making urge that puts spirits in mossy old boulders, magical power in a handful of gravel" (2706). Daisy's diaries, a final and desperate effort to "carve in stone" the essence of her faltering spirit, fail to bridge the gaps that infect her identity. Her final decision, and her only available option, *"After Torment / With Misgivings With Difficulty With Apologies With / Determination,"* is to *"Lie Alone"* -- in difference.

Individual Versus National: Honouring Differences

An important similarity between Daisy's identity and the Canadian identity is their absent centres. In my opening chapter I outlined several reasons why many feel that Canada failed to develop a cultural centre that would strengthen national unity and offer symbols of reference for the development of individual identities. I also stated that Hutcheon's postmodernism does not consider the absence of a cultural centre to be a failure. Hutcheon reconfigures the fear of absence into a celebration of difference, a celebration made possible precisely because there is not one cultural centre that asserts itself over and above any other. When Hutcheon speaks of a Canadian multicultural identity, it is not, therefore, an identity that seeks unity in diversity; because unity necessarily privileges certain cultural goals and symbols over others, it threatens the principle of difference upon which multiculturalism is based. What I have tried to suggest in my second chapter is that this guarantee of difference seems to have contradictory results when presented to the individual who is, after all, the beneficiary of national culture(s). Like Hutcheon, Daisy recognizes a greater degree of personal freedom within more loosely defined cultural structures. Bloomington offers little room for autonomous self-development, forcing the individual to conform, rather, to limited patterns of social behaviour. But Daisy finds herself strangely unable to enjoy the freedom of cultural laxity that she believes

defines Canada. The same principle of difference that makes multiple structures available to her also prevents her from engaging in a process of meaningful self-development. That is not to suggest that Daisy is confused or alienated by her multicultural heritage. Rather, at a more fundamental level, the hybrid composition of her subjectivity prevents her from *constructing* identity out of the multicultural structures available to her. I would like to conclude by suggesting that perhaps the process of creating identity and what I will call the "systems" of identity available to this process need to be treated separately. Postmodernism is unable to make this distinction. Postmodern identity *is* process itself, and it offers a principle of difference that affects both national and individual identity in the same way. On the one hand, postmodern difference at the national level seems helpful in understanding the dual or multiple loyalties of Canada's hybrid population and the ongoing dialogue that is a consequence of multicultural interaction; as Siemerling points out, any notion of ethnicity as "organic unity . . . would predict havoc for the writer who lives at the intersection of two cultures (rather than be rooted exclusively in one)" (16-7). On the other hand, postmodern difference at the individual level seems to threaten identity as much as assist it. As with national multicultural identity, postmodern theory precludes the possibility that individual multicultural identity consist of the drawing together of elements from different cultures into a unified centre. Daisy's sense of isolation and meaninglessness suggests that, at least for some, a stable and centred sense of self are necessary precursors to social engagement, whether cultural or

otherwise. There is no doubt that the process of constructing identity and the systems of identity available for internalization interact at so many levels that it would be difficult to distinguish between them and to identify an original impulse (whether faith in the ability to construct identity precedes social influences or vice versa). What is important to realize, however, is that postmodernism recognizes no such distinction; it neither recognizes cultural origins, a startling proposition for understanding multicultural identity which seems closely connected to origins, nor assists the individual in consolidating cultural elements that are personally meaningful.

Taylor's understanding of multiculturalism and identity recognizes a need to treat each differently. Multicultural "difference," to reiterate, is valuable from Taylor's perspective because it makes a greater variety of cultural systems available to society and thereby increases individuals' ability to determine for themselves an idea of "the good life." Postmodernism's appreciation for difference and its resistance to the creation of one dominant culture is helpful in understanding and promoting this variety. What Taylor's analysis implies, however, is that within the individuals' minds some level of comprehension of, or trust in, a process for creating identity precedes the actual creation: whether consciously or unconsciously, individuals engage in a game of social exchange whereby they attempt to "win" for themselves a sense of "inwardly derived personal identity" (34). Infants, for example, begin to create identity by mimicking their parents. As self-awareness and self-confidence grow, adolescents self-consciously assert distinguishing values and attitudes that conform

more to a sense of their unique impulses and needs. But the attempt to create

inwardly derived personal identity can fail. Daisy points to the disaffection of the

"documentary age," an age where "we can never, never get enough facts" (330), as

one reason for possible failure during our century. The documentary age has little

tolerance for elderly people such as Daisy who have relived memories and day

dreams so often they've "lost track of what's real and what isn't" (329) and no longer

really believe in the value of making a distinction. An age of facts also limits the

importance of traditional religious structures and no doubt encourages Daisy's belief

that her religious heritage is "wholesome and uplifting, but not to be taken seriously"

(320), not to be milked as a source of interpretive myths. Of course, having probably

inherited Clarentine's "mild dislike for the God of Genesis, God the petulant father

blundering about in the garden, trampling on all her favorite flowers" (113), Daisy's

rejection of this patriarchal expression of Christianity also helps to liberate her from

stereotypical dichotomizations of women. In short, the attempt to create inwardly

derived personal identity is both encouraged and limited by the social structures

(including economic, political, cultural, religious, etc.) that define where each person

lives. Daisy, like everyone else, must navigate rough waters, impeded at various

points in her life by patriarchy, weak religious and cultural ties, ethnic stereotyping,

and condescension toward the aging, and encouraged at other points by a college

education, financial security, a devoted husband and devoted friends, a rewarding

(albeit brief) career, and a poetic imagination.

Why is it then that Daisy sees her life as one coloured by absence, isolation and meaninglessness? A second reason for failure to create inwardly derived personal identity is simply the inability to engage in the game. Daisy's "postmodern" subjectivity offers multiple systems of identity that she can assemble on a symbolic level, as was seen in her multicultural garden, but that she cannot assemble within her own self. Her failure to do so reveals a certain danger in attempting to be our own gardeners, a certain pride in believing that we can construct meaning with only the terms of our own discourse. Faith in the ability to create identity cannot come only from ourselves because it will, as postmodernism clearly shows (and celebrates), be undermined by our consciousness of the need to have this faith.

In more theoretical terms, faith in a process for creating identity conflicts with postmodernism on several levels. First, it assumes progress toward stable units of identity, considering that each individual has one ego working toward one identity that in some way confirms an essential sense of self. Postmodernism argues that there is not one ego orchestrating development, but many egos (I, me, daughter, mother, wife, colleague, citizen, etc.) just as there are many cultures affecting national development. The expectations and desires of each "ego" are not necessarily harmonious, nor are they necessarily understood in the same terms. The person as *I*, for example, seeks satisfaction for certain selfish needs that might contradict the selfless impulses of *mother*. The effect of these "multiple points of view" is the prevention of "any totalizing concept of the protagonist's subjectivity" (Hutcheon

1988b, 169) both within the mind of the reader and the mind of the protagonist.

Subjectivity and, consequently, identity are viewed as processes and as sites of

contradiction. Daisy is self-consciously aware of internal contradiction and the

uncertainty it produces especially over time: "The long days of isolation, of silence,

the torment of boredom - all these pressed down on *me*, on *young Daisy Goodwill* and

emptied *her* out" (75 my emphasis). The intrusion of "me" into a predominantly third

person narrative reminds Daisy and her listener that she is describing her younger self

through eighty-year-old eyes, seeking an explanation for her present isolation, silence

and boredom. Consequently, Daisy has difficulty trusting the truth of this memory,

knowing that "she imposes the voice of the future on the events of the past, causing

all manner of wavy distortion" (148). Hutcheon writes that the "perceiving subject is

no longer assumed to be a coherent, meaning-generating entity. Narrators in

[postmodern] fiction become either disconcertingly multiple and hard to locate . . . or

resolutely provisional and limited - often undermining their own seeming

omniscience" (1988b, 11).

Without omniscience there can be no sense of causal development. Awareness

of conflicting inner voices undermines any attempt to locate a single origin for, and

meaningful connections between, the events of one's life. In trying to identify the

cause of her mid-life depression, for example, Daisy runs through in her mind what

she believes each of her friends and family, reflecting aspects of herself, would

describe as her "real existence": a woman obsessed with her work, a woman yearning

for sexual release, a woman seeking her lost mother, etc.. While Hutcheon (quoting

Foucault) believes that an entangled account of ourselves, full of "error and

phantasm," "'confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark

or a point of reference'" (ibid 162), I demonstrated in my earlier chapter that Daisy

for one does not experience this confirmation. Rather than clarify her feelings, the

conflicting accounts of her identity leave her so "emptied out and lost in her mind she

can't summon sufficient energy to brush her hair, let alone organize a theory" of her

own (261). Simon and Leahy argue that the 1980s, years characterized by

postnationalism, feminism and ethnoculturalism, are wary of certainty of identity;

they are years of *révisionnisme* where Québécois writing expresses the difficulty of

creating identity rather than the end result of the struggle (393-4). They write that

"[o]ur postmodern fascination with, and distrust of, categories of difference throws

suspicion on ethnicity, just as it does on gender, race, and nationality" (388). Daisy

is someone who is unable to enjoy the freeplay of the world and who needs to trust in

a "landmark" or a "point of reference" in order to establish meaningful living. But

what is first and foremost damning for Daisy is not so much her inability to construct

identity as it is her lack of faith in the very process of construction, after which there

is no hope for causal development. While she would like to believe that "[t]he acts of

her life form a sequence of events," she recognizes that that is merely "what she tells

herself" -- that, in poststructural terms, the engineer who constructs discourse out of

nothing is nothing more than a myth produced by the *bricoleur*. I acknowledge that

postmodern and poststructural alternative configurations of identity, identity based on

process and multiplicity, have helped certain people for whom traditional notions of

identity have not reflected a social reality (women and immigrants, for example). But

in Daisy's case, and perhaps this may be generalized, process and multiplicity

accurately describe an uncomfortable situation without offering a cure for the malaise.

Thus, postmodernism challenges faith in a process for creating inwardly

derived personal identity on two levels: first by destabilizing the coherence of the

subject, and second by making subjectivity itself a construct of identity. (One might

well ask where the mind is behind the thinking, but such a philosophical question

would extend very much beyond the scope of this thesis.)[1] Although Hutcheon would

have us accept that the "decentred" subject is not gone but merely relocated in

discourse (1988b, 159), the conviction that subjectivity is an ideological construct

(aside from being paradoxical) significantly alters its effect on both the individual and

society. Hutcheon argues that to locate the subject in discourse "is to recognize

differences - of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and so on" (ibid 159); it

involves a shift from "I" to "eye" that forces individuals to recognize that a particular

time and place influences the way they "see" the world and themselves. Daisy's

outlook, for example, stems simultaneously from her position as a powerful member

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[1]

Hutcheon agrees with Emile Benveniste's line of argument that subjectivity is a
fundamental property of language (1988b, 168). Because the subject is constituted in
and by language, he or she is constrained by the rules that govern language and is
therefore not completely in control of the shape that subjectivity will take.

of a predominantly "white" community, enjoying as she does the comfort of a private hospital room and the attention of a team of medical aides, as well as from her position as an elderly victim powerless to assert herself before a younger, healthier nurse: "This girl with her rolling cart of apple juice, milk, iced tea, and lukewarm cocoa is eighteen years old, black-faced, purple-lipped, with a high, tight, one-note laugh: oppression" (310). Depending on the "location" emphasized, Daisy is either the oppressed or the oppressor, one of those contradictions of identity that Hutcheon hopes will open up new vistas of self-understanding and empathy. Perhaps this can be hoped for at the national level. However, that Daisy in her confusion resorts to racist slurs also suggests that too much emphasis on "location" generates a certain insecurity within the individual that can also limit an appreciation for difference.

Daisy's self-consciousness about her contradictory identity does not, finally, increase her tolerance for difference. She shows no interest in staying in contact with her overly zealous Italian stepmother and is uncomfortable with "this Jamaican business" regarding her doctor (326). She prefers in her final years to surround herself with "four old white women" (318) -- herself, Glad, Lily and Myrtle -- the flowers delivered to the hospital which she imaginatively invests with personalities identical to her own. Strictly speaking, a postmodern subject could not in fact *develop* greater tolerance for difference, because development implies causal relationships that simply are nonexistent within the mind of someone who denies the "truth" of the modernist ideology of the subject, i.e. the desire and the attempt to

create connections between the events of one's life. Rather, cultural and ethnic difference creeps into the gaps of Daisy's weakened identity: Cora-Mae Milltown's description of "the poor motherless thing" fills the absence left by Daisy's mother (255-7); Abram Skutari's blessing over the "incurably lonely" infant compensates for the early neglect by her father (260), etc.. Unfortunately, Daisy remains unable to appreciate these differences fully in the sense of entering into a cultural dialogue that would help her to strengthen her sense of self. She lacks "the kernel of authenticity, that precious interior ore that everyone around her seemed to possess," that would allow her "to register and reflect the world" (75).

It would seem, consequently, that the ability to appreciate difference, at least for some, requires beforehand the ability to engage in a process of meaningful construction of identity. Ironically, the shift from "I" to "eye" decreases Daisy's ability to "see"; because "no one remembered to open the curtains or provide a light" (74), the dark room of Daisy's early convalescence becomes a primary symbolic determinant of her identity, preventing her from perceiving and reflecting her cultural environment. The daisy, which Daisy describes as "round and fringed with lashes, staring upward" (339), is named from the Anglo Saxon word for "day's eye" because of the flower's tendency to close at night and on dark rainy days. Daisy imitates this opening and closing -- the simultaneous impulses toward presence and absence, being and non-being. She would "blink her eyes," her children explain, as if to avoid issues that would force her "to look inside herself" and confront the paradoxical

absence that forms the centre of her identity (355-6). Perhaps had she dared to look she would have shared Cora-Mae's faith that, although you can "blink and miss" the story of your mother, "you can't make it go away. Your mama's inside you. You can feel her moving and breathing and sometimes you can hear her talking to you, saying the same things over and over, like watch out now, be careful, be good . . ." (257).

The mother's "story" is a symbolic meta-narrative, existing independently of Cora-Mae and giving direction to the course of her life. More profoundly, it offers the security of self-hood and the conviction that meaningful development of identity is possible. Postmodernism, of course, argues that such a story only *appears* to precede her, that it is in reality the mythical engineer attempting to construct discourse without using the terms of discourse. Daisy's extreme self-consciousness forces her to comply with postmodern principles even though she longs desperately to live otherwise, so desperately, in fact, that she imagines the "Stone" diaries in an attempt to recreate her own mother's story and to reinvest herself with the guiding principle she feels she was denied at birth; "And she needs someone - anyone - to listen" (340), the "you" that confirms the fact of "I." Daisy's attempt inevitably fails. Postmodern self-consciousness refuses to admit the real existence of anyone who is not first filtered through a person's senses and discredited by that person's need to impose meaning. "A flash of distortion" reveals that "Mrs. Flett has given birth to her mother, and not the other way around" (191). She is an "orphan" who, without any form of external confirmation, lies "stranded, genderless, ageless, alone" (189).

Isolation seems to await those who cannot enjoy the freeplay of the world. Multiculturalism cannot grow out of isolation. Without commonality, multicultural heritage disintegrates like Cuyler's miniature pyramid: that "mocking piece of foolishness" that he had attempted to build with stones imported from all over the world (276). Perhaps the answer to Daisy's question, "what is the story of a life" (340), resembles this pyramid. Her narrative, progressive chapters from birth to death, attempts in vain to assemble events, impressions, fictions and facts into a coherent whole. Crippled by her postmodern awareness of the hermeneutic power to create subjectivity, her narrative falls, like the builders of the tower of Babel, into the chaos that proves the limitations of our discourse. Babel means literally "gate of God," and it is toward such a gate that Daisy steers herself: "rising up at the edge of the shining, slippery stone terraces was the famous God's Gate which Victoria had described to her aunt, an immense natural archway through which every seventh or eighth wave came loudly crashing" (300). Frye writes that the ladder, which might also be presented in the form of a pyramid or terraces, "is a symbol of a connection between earth and heaven, but the story [of Jacob's ladder] emphasizes that the real connection is made only by God, and the human response to it is a correspondingly modest one" (1993, 38). Cuyler's original pyramid, the limestone tower that he raises above Mercy's grave, gains its strength through religious inspiration. Daisy relates that, with "the hand of God on his head, the Holy Ghost entering his body with a glad shout," Cuyler is the medium through which a power greater than himself

creates harmony out of diversity: "Cupids, mermaids, snakes, leaves, feathers, vines, bees, cattle, the curve of a rainbow, a texturing like skin - the tower is a museum of writhing forms . . ." (64-5).

Perhaps, then, Daisy senses that identity too is held together not by ourselves but by faith in a process that lies external to our own discourse. Religion, like the mother's story, gives shape to this process. Without it Daisy cannot journey forward even unto death: "I'm still here, inside the (powdery, splintery) bones, ankles, the sockets of my eyes, shoulder, hip, teeth, I'm still here, oh, oh" (352). The final image that Daisy presents of herself is as a spiritual wanderer without a homeland -- unable in death to trust the event of her ending just as she had been unable in life to trust the event of her origin. Her conclusion captures the paradoxical tragedy of her story: "There's nothing to see from this window" (324). If we conceive of our identity as nothing we remain without the tools to create. Nothing comes of nothing; perhaps we had better speak again.

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