

THE CULTURAL AND LITERARY CONSTRUCTION OF TIME IN CANADA

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that social power relations in Canada are deeply tied to the cultural models of time that have been assumed and rejected throughout the country's history, and that Canadian literature and other arts serve a vital function in both witnessing and questioning these relationships. I begin by tracing the competing temporal frameworks that have taken hold in Canada, from the Gregorian calendar, to "standard" clock time, to immigration policies that cause people who are considered undesirable to wait longer periods of time for legal status. I suggest that the profound consequences temporal structures have on social relations necessitate a sustained study of how Canadian cultural and literary productions engage with the idea of time. After outlining the contested temporalities that serve broadly as sites of power, I turn to Canadian novels, poems, plays, and visual art to explore the difficult negotiations between individual and social experiences of time. These texts reveal that while broad cultural temporalities indeed shape the measuring out of individual lives, this shaping process functions differently for different people. In particular, I examine how forms of temporal agency and disempowerment are closely linked to the categories of age, class, gender, sexuality, race, and indigeneity. Finally, I examine texts that question existing temporal structures and explore alternative temporalities. While normative temporality is often depicted as unyielding, stories about catastrophic social disruptions portray normative time as a makeshift apparatus always on the verge of collapse. Such stories indicate that while the construction of new, more just models of time is always possible, no temporal structure is free from the politics of social power relations.

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For their enduring kindness and expert advice in helping me to ponder the above question, I am particularly indebted to Lorraine York, Daniel Coleman, and Roger Hyman. I could not have hoped for a more supportive supervisory committee. There are times in the dissertation when I mention each of you in order to highlight particular ideas of yours that have guided my thinking; these citations leave me deeply unsatisfied because they appear to suggest that your help has occurred only at particular moments

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Portions of this dissertation have appeared in other forms. An introduction to the topic drawing mainly from Chapter One, but with certain variations, appears as “Thoughts on Time-Based Readings of Canadian Literature and Culture” in *English Studies in Canada* 36.2-3 (2010). Brief commentary on the importance of slow reading drawn from Chapter Two appears in the introduction to *The Goose* 8 (Fall 2010).

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Chapter One: Cultural Constructions of Time in Canada

“Myth is an arrangement of the past, whether real or imagined, in patterns that resonate with a culture’s deepest values and aspirations. [...] They are the maps by which cultures navigate through time.”

Ronald Wright (5)

“Time is a measure of motion and of being moved.”

Aristotle (38)

Introduction: When is Now?

In Morris Panych’s play *7 Stories*, an unnamed man climbs to the seventh story of an apartment building and contemplates jumping. From his ledge he speaks with several of the building’s tenants, though most of them are too preoccupied with their own lives to ask about his dilemma. Only near the end of the play does an elderly woman, Lillian, lean out of a window to ask what is on his mind. He explains:

You see – my faith in the days of the week has been seriously undermined. When I woke up this morning, I wasn’t exactly sure what day it was. And for that brief moment – it was only a matter of seconds – I think it was seconds – I stood – or I should say I “lay” on very shaky ground. After all – how could I act with assuredness. How could I rise up and plunge headlong into Friday’s world, if it was actually Saturday? And so I lay completely still for a moment, pondering this question. That’s when I noticed my hands. I’d never noticed them before. How they moved with amazing dexterity. But this flexibility, this movement of hands, can never extend beyond the boundaries of its own flesh – can only reach as far as the fingertips and no further, much as the movement of time is restricted by the days of the week. [...] I saw in the mirror a condemned man,

serving a life sentence inside his body. (91)

There is nothing inherent in the flow of time – in the expansion of the universe, the cycle of seasons, or the earth’s rotation – to suggest that there is such a thing as a week, or days of the week. The concept of the week is a human invention, one of the cultural constructions by which we order our experience of time. Hellenistic scholars likely adopted Babylonian astrology to develop the seven-day week by dedicating a single day to each of the naked-eye celestial objects that move relative to the seemingly fixed background of stars (Zerubavel 14) – an origin that has blended over the centuries with the seven-day creation cycle of the Book of Genesis. And while this seven-day week has been firmly rooted in Canada since it sprung like an introduced species from European ships, all but extinguishing indigenous time scales, it is one of any number of possible weeks. Had Indonesians colonized North America, Panych’s unnamed man may have been subjected to a five-day week; if ancient Egyptians or the leaders of the French Revolution, a ten-day week (Zerubavel 55, 11, 28). All of these systems have practical difficulties, being unable, for instance, to fit evenly within the period of the earth’s revolution around the sun.

But despite the tenuous nature of the concept, the week holds incredible sway over people’s daily lives, and forms one of our most basic cultural assumptions. When Leonard Cohen sings in “Closing Time” that “the place is dead as Heaven on a Saturday night,” the relationship between society’s weekly holiday and debauched behaviour is immediately understood. Commenting on psychological studies of temporal orientation, William Friedman notes that the weekend holds a special cognitive weight, so that “as the

week goes on there is something of a shift from backward-looking thoughts to forward-looking thoughts” (73). The week is necessary not only for scheduling work and play, but for conducting affairs of all kinds, and the consequences of this dependency range from the trivial to the profound. For George Copway, an Ojibwe man whose nineteenth-century autobiography records his struggle to incorporate the contradictions of European settler culture into his own life, the days of the week become a matter of life and death. Faced with starvation during a prolonged voyage in the wilderness of Ontario, Copway and his party find themselves within reach of the settlement that can save them, but cannot bring themselves to approach. “Nothing to eat,” he writes, “and only tea to drink for breakfast, dinner and supper! and yet, only about fifteen miles from La Pointe ; indeed, we could *see* the place ; and had it not been that it was the Sabbath, feeble as we were, we would have proceeded. Here, then, we spent the Sabbath” (78). In the twenty-first century, environmental researchers at the University of Calgary have discovered that the five-day work week even holds a special significance for wild bears, cougars, and coyotes in Alberta’s Kananaskis Country. The animals are frequent users of hiking trails and backcountry roads, but tend to avoid the trails on weekends, when humans are more likely to be in the area. Environmental Science and Planning professor Mike Quinn says of the animals, “It seems that they know that when Friday night rolls around, it’s time to disappear, and on Monday morning they’re back” (qtd. in Semmens). Eviatar Zerubavel eloquently highlights the importance of the week as a foundational cultural concept:

Recalling what day today is is one of the first things we usually do upon waking, since it is indispensable for transcending our subjectivity and participating – at least mentally – in a social, rather than a merely personal, world. The uneasy feeling that accompanies our realization that

we have lost count of the days of the week is essentially the well-justified anxiety about being barred from full participation in our social environment. In other words, adhering to the week protects us from the dreadful prospect of practical exile from the social world. (2)

The predicament of Panych's unnamed man, then, while sensational, speaks to a concern of genuine importance. How indeed could we act with assuredness if we were to lose track of our culturally mandated patterns of time? Or perhaps more importantly, of what is it exactly that we are being assured when we take these culturally specific categorizations for granted? The unnamed man's fear that it may "actually" be Saturday indicates his absolute investment in – and, as he comes to see it, his enslavement to – the reality of a cultural construct. While his faith in the flexibility of the days of the week may have been shaken, his faith in their reality remains intact; he continues to experience time in terms of a categorization that is seemingly all-encompassing, yet is highly limited and limiting. And this dual function of opening and constricting our experience of time is one that the days of the week share with other temporal categorizations, from paleontological eras, periods of history, and the hours of the clock, to immigrant residency periods and the number of years a person must live before she can vote in elections or collect a pension.

Certain aspects of time remain generally outside of human control, such as the daily rotation and yearly revolution of the earth, seasonal transitions, mortality, aging, and causality; yet even those categories that have some basis in natural processes (the month, for instance, with its nominal if no longer strict basis in the orbit of the moon) are selected as categories of language and thought and as sites of cultural significance by and for human beings, and carry within them the weight of ideology. As Johannes Fabian

explains in his seminal work *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, the conceptualizations of time that are built, explicitly and implicitly, into language and other cultural practices are always political. And because language is inevitably temporalizing – because “we must necessarily express whatever knowledge we have of an object in terms of temporal categorization” (28) – the politics of time saturate all human affairs. “Time,” Fabian writes, “much like language or money, is a carrier of significance, a form through which we define the content of relations between the Self and the Other” (ix). Social psychologist Robert Levine goes so far as to say that “Time is power. There is no greater symbol of domination, since time is the only possession which can in no sense be replaced once it is gone” (118).

The difficulty of defining time is well known, for no single definition seems adequate to capture the multiplicity of experiences associated with temporality.

Friedman’s response to this dilemma is both obvious and brilliant:

Much of the history of the philosophy of time is a series of attempts to find time’s essence, whether in nature or in consciousness. Among those conceptions tying time to the physical world, time has been defined as motions, as the succession of events, and as an absolute, universal framework. Mentalist definitions refer to the perception of succession and simultaneity or the succession of ideas in consciousness. In the midst of all this diversity is a common tendency to treat time as a single thing. Psychologists too seem inclined to seek a single entity, as they write of “the concept,” “the notion,” or “the sense” of time. Perhaps the fact that we have a single word for time has seduced us into searching for its essence. (5)

He concludes that “it seems far more productive to consider the many things that time is in the world and the many ways in which humans experience it” (5). While distilling a singular definition for time may not be possible, this latter qualification – the matter of

human experience – appears inevitable in any human consideration of time, and highlights the degree to which time is always at least partially a cognitive construct shaped by culture. The *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, which offers more than a hundred meanings and idioms for “time,” appropriately begins its entry on the word by acknowledging the inevitable constructedness of the concept: time is “the indefinite and continuous duration of existence seen as a series of events progressing from the past through the present into the future.” What begins as a natural entity, albeit an “indefinite” one, is immediately cast through the lens of cultural association and figurative representation, into something “seen as.” Christopher Dewdney points out that “according to the Oxford English Corpus, *time* tops the list of the most common nouns in the English language” (95), relegating the word “person” to second place; and the words “year,” “day,” and “week” all make the top twenty (“The OEC”). And yet, the workings of time as a contested site of cultural power in Canada, the specifics by which we *see time as*, have often been overlooked.

Since there is no single construct or metaphor through which we understand time, but rather a cluster of overlapping, sometimes conflicting constructs, several questions arise. How do different structures of time come into existence, and why? Who decides upon the categories through which we plot our locations within social or personal frames of time? How do these patterns reinforce, or disrupt, power relations between individuals and groups, and between humanity and nature? In particular, how have these processes been shaped within Canada, and how do they shape Canada in turn? Or, to revise Northrop Frye’s famous question – “Where is here?” (*Bush* 68) – as a focal point for

examining Canadian identity, let us ask instead, “When is now?” This dissertation contends that while the politics and power relations that saturate Canada’s existence are indeed tied to the usual suspects of race, class, gender, place, and settler-indigene relations, their influence is also profoundly tied to the understandings of time that have been advanced, assumed, and rejected throughout the country’s history, and that Canadian literature and other arts are inevitably tangled up in these complex relationships and serve a vital function in both witnessing and questioning them. In what follows I will describe a framework for understanding the structures of time that have taken hold in Canada and will make a case for the importance of temporal criticism to literary and cultural studies in this country.

Cartographers of Time

“We are cartographers of time,” writes Christopher Dewdney. “Ever since the advent of language, storytellers have transported us to the past, and soothsayers, like reconnaissance scouts, have glimpsed the future” (117). While this statement, like most everyday language, seems to imply the existence of a single past and a single future – one timeline followed and agreed upon by all – temporal cartographies take many, often conflicting, forms. Which past do we mean when we refer to “the past?” Which present do we inhabit? The cartographic metaphor is a useful one in thinking through these questions, since the different models of time that affect concepts of identity and nationhood hold important similarities to representations of place. Don McKay’s theories

of wilderness and domestication are particularly useful in this context, and help to illustrate how human relationships with time and place are subject to similar choices, emphases, and exclusions. Wilderness, McKay suggests, is “the capacity of all things to elude the mind’s appropriations. [...] To what *degree* do we own our houses, hammers, dogs? Beyond that line lies wilderness” (*Vis à Vis* 21). Place, on the other hand, “is wilderness to which history has happened,” or, “land to which we have occurred” (*Deactivated* 17). Here, we see the suggestion that human presence itself can transform areas of wilderness into places by appropriating them into human consciousness. Charting a coastline on a map, recording the location of a mountain, or even walking through an unexplored plain incorporates the place into a human framework of understanding; where once was uncharted wilderness is now a structured portion of a larger human system, and the ideological aspects of domestication have to do with the particular cultural character of this system. Do explorers incorporate areas of wilderness into the western system of longitude that holds Greenwich, England as its centre? Or into a framework of knowledge according to the proximity of neighbouring indigenous groups? There is no single map of Canada today, but many maps that represent different features of the place, and all of these maps are open to question in terms of their specific assumptions and erasures (I spell the terms “indigenous” and “western” in the lower case to emphasize that these categories, too, are not monolithic but are subject to shifting overlaps and internal variations). Land, as W.H. New writes, “has to be seen as a verbal trope in Canadian writing, not simply as a neutral referent” (5). Consider, for instance, Samuel de Champlain’s seventeenth-century map of what is now Atlantic Canada

(Champlain, “Carte Geographiqve”). Emphasizing aspects of the land important to the colonial project, the map contains fish and seals drawn above the water along coastlines with no regard to scale, uniform trees dotted at neatly spaced intervals alongside barely larger mountains, and disproportionately enormous European ships with billowing sails. The very process of encountering wilderness and converting it to place contains ideological and appropriative dimensions, even while it remains always partial, never fully eliminating the wilderness’s capacity to exist beyond human imagination.

Likewise, just as our existence in a place inevitably involves a degree of representation and appropriation, in every moment that we exist we are colonizing time, appropriating the passing seconds into a particular human conceptual framework. The implications of this are just as significant when we consider the “domestication of time” by human culture in general – to use McKay’s phrase (*Deactivated* 30) – as they are when we consider the consequences of two or more cultures attempting to colonize overlapping timespans. *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*, for example, begins with a chronology of Canadian history, whose first two entries encompass nearly twelve thousand years – from the “earliest records of human habitation” to the “first European sighting of Baffin Island” (Kröller xv) – and whose last one hundred entries encompass a little more than a century, as though time itself were expanding to match the importance of events that are both recent and settler-centric, or to reflect the greater perceptual weight that tends generally to be attached to times closer to “now.”¹ We might compare this to a map of British Columbia that uses a large font for the word

¹ See Chapter Two for an illustration of how people tend to perceive times closer to the present as being larger or fuller than times in the more distant past or future.

“Vancouver” and smaller markers for the area’s Musqueam and Squamish lands. This is just to say that like any timeline, the *Cambridge Companion* timeline is not neutral; editors and historians must make choices, but they have access to limited information. Already here we can see the complex difficulties involved in resisting normative temporality, even for sensitive readers of cultural relations. Quoting Lévi-Strauss’s commentary on the inevitable shaping process behind any historical narrative, Hayden White writes that because of the “‘threat of an infinite regress’ that always lurks at the interior of every complex set of historical ‘facts,’” our ability to narrate the past requires “a decision to ‘give up’ one or more of the domains of facts offering themselves for inclusion in our accounts. Our *explanations* of historical structures and processes are thus determined more by what we leave out of our representations than by what we put in” (*Tropics* 90). White concludes that historical narratives ought to be read “as symbolic structures, extended metaphors, that ‘liken’ the events reported in them to some form with which we have already become familiar in our literary culture” (91). Seeing the past is always *seeing as*.

Aislinn Hunter explicitly connects cartography with temporal constructedness, describing the past as “those regions on maps / coloured in by the imagination” (11). Still, Fabian points out that representations of place are more widely acknowledged as sites of ideological contestation than representations of time:

It has long been recognized that imperialist claims to the right of occupying ‘empty,’ under-used, undeveloped space for the common good of mankind should be taken for what they really are: a monstrous lie perpetuated for the benefit of one part of humanity, for a few societies of that part, and, in the end, for one part of these societies, its dominant classes. But by and large, we remain under the spell of an equally

mendacious fiction: that interpersonal, intergroup, indeed, international Time is ‘public Time’ – there to be occupied, measured, and allotted by the powers that be. (144)

Fabian goes so far as to argue that because of the temporal framework of “progress, development, and modernity” upon which colonial society was predicated, “*geopolitics* has its ideological foundations in *chronopolitics*” (144).

Into what temporal frameworks has Canada been domesticated? Daniel Coleman identifies within Canadian culture four co-existing chronotopes or cognitive images that arrange our conceptualization of time’s passage on a broad social scale. These include Isochronic or Imperial Time, which underpins the Canadian invader-settler narrative and “understands everyone in the world to be on a single timeline, with some cultures being more advanced” (“Contented” 231); Nation-based Post-Colonial Time, which “marks its beginning as the moment when the colony cut its ties to its colonial parent” (232); Diasporic Displacement Time, in which “cultural groups retain their image of themselves in time by reference to the trauma of displacement” (233); and what Coleman tentatively calls Indigenous Concentric Time, in which time is shaped like the concentric circles of a tree trunk, and the past “is not placed in a line of progression where it is seen as superseded by the present,” but rather forms “the centre of ongoing life” (235). Wendat scholar Georges Sioui would appear to agree with this characterization when he writes that “the Circle is at the centre of our Aboriginal thinking [...]. We believe that the day, the lunar month, the year, even human life itself, are circular phenomena, and that there are cycles of many years, representing the circular reality” (124). Referring to European “linear thought” as a “spiritual and mental affliction” (83), Sioui suggests that “the thing

that is named ‘the past’ is a European construct and is not part of the Amerindian psyche” (278-79), a tension that I will examine in more detail in Chapter Four.

The dominance of Imperial time is closely tied to homogenizing metanarratives such as the near-ubiquitous idea of progress, which tends to disparage the past and fetishize the future. In his telling of the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, E.J. Pratt reproduces the dominant model of technological and cultural progress, taking as a given the idea that “A nation, like the world, could not stand still” (44). And other cultural figures implicitly, even unintentionally, endorse the progressive linear model by touting technological innovations or ironizing “backward” behaviour. George Copway is internally conflicted about the effect of progress on the Ojibwe people, writing at one point, “O ! tell me, ye ‘pale faces,’ tell, / Where have my proud ancestors gone ? [...] Whose wigwam stood where cities rise” (96), but later deciding that “Multitudes have left their wigwams, their woods, and the chase, and are now endeavoring to tread in the footsteps of worthy white men” (144).

While the idea of linear progress can apply to various aspects of culture, it is perhaps tied most closely to economic growth, leading to the remarkable conclusion that a period of time lacking in economic growth is in fact an absence of time. During the global financial crisis of 2008, Barack Obama warned that without government intervention the United States could experience a “lost decade” reminiscent of Japan’s economic stagnation of the 1990s (Meckler and Weisman). Canada’s *Maclean’s* magazine picked up on this language with the headline, “A Lost Decade of Growth: Many Real Indicators Put Us Back to Where We Were 10 Years Ago” (Kirby). The

article quotes consultant Roger Sauvé, whose use of a linear progressive metaphor to describe impoverished people as slow contestants in a race is typical: “For a lot of people, they just managed to keep up with inflation, but a lot of others have fallen behind.” Concluding the article, *Maclean’s* writer Jason Kirby casts doubt on the viability of perpetual economic growth, but retains the language of linear temporal progress: “Deep in their hearts, most economists know that exponential growth can’t go on forever, and eventually, the rate of growth, at least, has to slow down. Given that, by the measure of both the stock and job markets, we’ve just lost a decade, some fear that time has arrived.” Theorist Craig Ireland sees such disillusion as an increasing trend, though the long-term validity of his argument that “modern future-oriented temporality is either dead or dying or at the very least undergoing a fundamental mutation” (142) remains to be seen.

For his part, Coleman identifies linear Imperial time and the other chronotopes not as absolute categories but as indications that “a diverse civil society cannot establish any one of these chronotopes as its sole narrative” (“Contented” 237). Indeed, while the linear model of time and its associated notion of progress are pervasive, Zerubavel points out that the concept of the week itself involves “a *circular conception of time*” in that it “revolves around the experience of *recurrence*” (83). This leads him to conclude that linear and circular conceptions of time “are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and one can very well view time in both a linear and a circular fashion” (83-84); in Chapter Four I will further highlight how linear and circular models of time are deeply intertwined. Coleman suggests that one way to counteract the problematic dominance of Imperial Time, whose single timeline shape is in fact intrinsic to all but the Indigenous Concentric

model, is “to develop an awareness of contending, rather than single, civilities, and this awareness will involve cognizance of multiple, contemporaneous chronotopes” (231). This conclusion echoes Robert Levine’s comment on the contrasting approaches of clock-based time and event-based time, that “the person, or the culture, who combines both modes in a temporal repertoire – or even better, who can draw upon a multiplicity of modes – is more likely to be up to all occasions” (219). Levine uses the term “multitemporality” to describe this desired condition (217).

The attempt to build awareness of multiple understandings of time requires deep questioning of dominant timelines and is a difficult task, as we can see with Desmond Morton’s ambitious volume *A Short History of Canada*. Morton’s table of contents mentions no years or dates, starting instead with the intriguing heading “Different Histories.” On closer inspection, though, the book dedicates a mere five pages to First Nations history, where Morton remarks that written history

has little to contribute to the first millennia of Canada’s human past. [...] Without writing to give an apparent precision and durability to human memory, all history is what English law used to call ‘time out of mind,’ and a period that might seem like eternity may in fact have begun only a few dozen years before.

For pre-Contact America, all time is out of mind. (12)

Morton’s “Different Histories” turn out to be a single history predicated on linear Imperial time, as he traces exclusively written records of European colonization running the standard sequential path from Cartier through to Confederation and burgeoning multiculturalism. Morton’s attempt to embrace a kind of historical multitemporality reproduces the same ethnocentrism evident in David Thompson’s exploration journal from the turn of the eighteenth century. While Thompson admires indigenous

navigational knowledge, he dismisses indigenous temporality as narrow, fallible, and incapable of articulating the history of its own people: “The Natives are Nahathaway Indians, whose fathers from time, beyond any tradition, have hunted in these Lands. In conversing with them on their origin they appear never to have turned their minds to this subject; and the time of their great grandfathers is the extent of their actual knowledge of times past. [...] Let them be compared with those who are uneducated in Europe” (29). Morton’s approach is also unapologetically anthropocentric: Canada’s geologic and ecological histories do not receive even the cursory treatment afforded the First Nations. Levine’s assertion that “no beliefs are more ingrained and subsequently hidden than those about time” (xv) signals the difficulty inherent in embracing multitemporality, a problem I will discuss further in the concluding sections of this dissertation.

While alternative chronotopes are important for understanding Canada’s temporal existence, the specifics of how they interact have often been overlooked. And, as Coleman indicates, this single form of categorization cannot tell the whole story of the conflicting and overlapping temporal maps, both collective and personal, upon which Canadian identities are predicated. I would like to highlight some specific examples of the competing registers that are at stake in the cultural, and thus the literary, construction of time in this country.

Calendars and Clocks

When Cartier and other explorers mapped the New World terrain, they

domesticated the wilds of Canada not only in terms of a European spatial framework of latitude and longitude but also within a European framework of time. The temporality of this landscape had already been understood by its inhabitants in terms of creation myths about Raven or Sky Woman, but as the term “New World” suggests these histories were largely forgotten, and were then replaced by the Julian and Gregorian calendars. In his journal from 1534, Cartier quickly inscribes European temporality onto the Canadian landscape at Gaspé: “On [Friday] the twenty-fourth of the said month [July], we had a cross made thirty feet high, which was put together in the presence of a number of savages on the point at the entrance to this harbour” (26; bracketed clarifications by editor H.P. Biggar). Like Cartier’s calendar dates and the cross that he erects, the small notation at the edge of Champlain’s map, “1612,” carries within it the assumption of what Paul Ricoeur calls an “axial moment” in history (3: 106), the birth of Christ.

Here, David Landes’s comment on the practice of Chinese emperors who began their reign by revising the official calendar of their predecessor holds true: “The calendar was a prerequisite of sovereignty, like the right to mint coins. Knowledge of the right time and season was power, for it was this knowledge that governed both the acts of everyday life and decisions of state” (qtd. in Adam, *Time* 111). The centrality of the Christian era was, and is, reinscribed into the collective consciousness not only each New Year’s Eve but every time we refer to a year by its sequential number. Even the secular notation – which uses “Before Common Era” in place of “Before Christ,” and “Common Era” in place of “*Anno Domini*” – retains the same culturally specific frame of reference and imposes a particular set of meanings for the word “common,” casting other

nonwestern frameworks of time beyond the pale of normative experience. What is more, the number 1612 marks Canada's birth as a delayed one; given the relative starting point, the country is imagined into existence more than sixteen centuries "behind" Europe.²

Thomas King takes issue with a closely related problem in his critique of the term "post-colonial," a term which, he says, "reeks of unabashed ethnocentrism and well-meaning dismissal" in its assumption of the arrival of Europeans as the watershed moment against which contemporary culture – even indigenous literature – must be measured ("Godzilla" 242). "At the same time," he writes, "the term organizes the literature progressively suggesting that there is both progress and improvement [and] supposes that contemporary Native writing is largely a construct of oppression" (243). One could easily expand King's criticism to point to the Gregorian calendar itself and its assumption of a western, Christian framework situated within a path of progress. King suggests several other possible terms – tribal, interfusional, polemical, and associational – by which we might understand the various forms of contemporary indigenous literature, although it would take a daring critic indeed to propose viable alternatives to the entrenched Gregorian calendar; the sheer practical obstacles that the adoption of an

² The use of sequential dates in Canada's early history is complicated by the fact that France adopted the Gregorian calendar upon the calendar's creation in 1582, while England and its colonies did not follow suit until 1752. This switch from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar required making up the difference in dates that had accumulated over the previous centuries, with the result that within the British Empire September 2nd 1752 was followed immediately by September 14th 1752, an example of the arbitrariness of seemingly inevitable forms of temporal accounting. In England, the *Calendar (New Style) Act 1750* was drawn up to orchestrate the switch. Amidst fears that landlords would attempt to collect an entire month's rent for September 1752, the Act dictated that "Times of payment of rents, annuities, &c. or of delivery of goods, commencement or expiration of leases, &c. or of attaining the age of 21 years" would accrue according to "the true number of natural days" (provision 6).

alternative time scale would face indicate the degree to which we have invested our personal and national identities in the standard one.³ So ubiquitous is the Gregorian calendar that the name itself sounds unfamiliar; in standard parlance it is always simply “the calendar.” King’s protest that the term postcolonial “is an act of imagination and an act of imperialism that demands that I imagine myself as something I did not choose to be, as something I would not choose to become” (248), appears in a volume whose copyright is listed as “©1997 the authors”: a small example of the ironies that spring from the assumption of culturally specific time scales. In Chapters Four and Five I will examine the challenges that literary authors have posed to Gregorian time.

The period of time in which Canada was colonized also overlaps with the period of time in which mechanical clocks became accurate enough to measure minutes and seconds, and grew affordable for individuals. Building on Galileo’s knowledge of the temporal reliability of swinging pendulums, Christiaan Huygens developed the first pendulum clock around 1656, ushering in the era of timepieces that could measure seconds with reasonable precision (Sobel 38, Dewdney 43-44). As Levine writes, humanity “had made remarkable progress measuring the seasons, the weeks, and even the hours of night and day as early as thousands of years ago. But it was only at this point, in the last three centuries, that the pendulum clock offered the potential to live by the precise hour, let alone the minute and second” (57). Mariners followed later horological

³ The increasing visibility in Canada of events such as Chinese New Year may suggest that the Gregorian calendar’s dominance is not absolute, though even Chinese Canadian associations publicize Chinese New Year as beginning on, say, January 26th rather than on the first day of the traditional Chinese calendar. Also notable is the reversal, in 2008, of York University’s policy of cancelling classes on days marked as holidays in the Hebrew calendar, after a human rights complaint (see Louise Brown).

developments closely, since accurate timekeeping at sea would prove invaluable in pinpointing a ship's position; latitude could be measured by observing celestial markers such as the North Star, but accurate longitudinal measurements required knowing the vessel's east-west spatial distance, and thus daylight time differential, from a known observatory such as Greenwich. The lack of stable seafaring clocks during Cartier's and Champlain's voyages resulted in maps of Canada which today look skewed and misshapen, but in 1759, the same year as the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, the self-taught English horologist John Harrison completed his masterpiece chronometer watch, a highly reliable clock that could maintain its accuracy during rough intercontinental voyages (Sobel 106). Nautical mapping grew more precise, and the importing of clocks – the objects themselves as well as their increasingly profound cultural significance – went hand in hand with the development of European colonies in Canada and elsewhere. By the early nineteenth century affordable clocks for everyday use were being mass-produced in the United States, a process that, as Thomas Allen notes, served to replace “expensive, handcrafted items” with “affordable commodities available to all levels of American society” (60). These affordable clocks were soon sold throughout the Canadas.

This new prevalence of accurate clocks, Levine argues, led to a greatly accelerated pace of life in industrialized cultures, and was in fact the dawn of an entirely new way of inhabiting time. “Clock time,” he writes, “has revolutionized the cadence of daily life. It requires an uncompromising regularity in the passage of events” (52). Levine repeats Lewis Mumford's memorable assertion that “[t]he clock is not merely a means of keeping track of the hours, but of synchronizing the actions of men. The clock, not the

steam engine, is the key machine of the industrial age” (63). Allen, though, is more cautious in his estimation of the effects of commonplace clocks; while he notes that “temporal modernization” has resulted in “a world made over not only economically but also socially and culturally to suit first the exchange networks of mercantile capitalism and later the clockwork rationality of the free market” (8), he develops a more nuanced picture through analyses of various actual clocks as well as artistic representations of clocks, arguing that American clock culture did not supplant but instead entered into dialogue with cultural models of time based on nature, religion, and localities; “Clock time was, to be sure, understood as significantly different from natural and religious time, but it was also deeply intertwined with those other temporal modes” (2). Temporal theorist Barbara Adam, too, argues that clock time never assumes total significance, but exists in negotiation with other models of time: “While the existence of clock time facilitates context independence and global standardization, decisions about the timing of even the most habitual of actions are made on a one-off basis and with reference to a particular context”; thus, “clock time has not *replaced* the multiple social, biological, and physical sources of time; it has rather *changed* the meanings of the variable times, temporalities, timings, and tempos of bio-cultural origin” (“Perceptions” 510, 513). Still, Levine convincingly demonstrates that people within societies that adhere more closely to clock time work more hours per week and tend to be more pressed for time, suggesting that even if the social conversion to clock time is never absolute, clock-based cultures do disclose quantitative and qualitative differences in temporal experience.

Thomas Haliburton’s 1836 collection of humorous Nova Scotian political stories,

The Clockmaker, comments tellingly on the growing primacy of clock time in Canadian life, when the narrator declares that “the house of every substantial farmer had three substantial ornaments: a wooden clock, a tin reflector [oven], and a Polyglot Bible” (8). The titular clock salesman, an American named Sam Slick who peddles clocks throughout Nova Scotia, goes one step further. When someone tells him that Nova Scotia “ain’t a bread country,” he replies, “You might as well say it ain’t a clock country, when to my sartin knowledge, there are more clocks than Bibles in it” (103). The implication, that clock time has supplanted Christianity as society’s foundational source of knowledge, is driven home when a Catholic priest asks Sam, “What are you, Mr. Slick?” and Sam replies that he is a Clockmaker. The priest admits that “every man’s religion is his own,” though he, tellingly, has already bought a clock for himself (115). Adherence to the clock, then, is a form of religion, and an increasingly dominant one; the importance of clock time to everyday matters of social organization has become axiomatic. Kevin Kelly has suggested that “from the very beginning clocks were simulacra” (qtd. in S. Brand 66) – that is, they manufacture the very temporality they presume to measure – and while a hint of this is visible in the fact that early mechanical clocks in the fourteenth century were designed to help monks keep track of prayer schedules (Levine 56), Haliburton’s writing reflects the way that clock time eventually takes on a life of its own, becoming a simulacrum not only of time, but of the religious practice it was intended to facilitate. Instead of winding the clock so we will know what time to pray, we now wind the clock so we can follow the clock, a sentiment that carries over, with some degree of irony, into the late twentieth century when Leonard Cohen sings of going up “to the tower where the

blessed hours chime,” not the tower that points to heaven.

When Haliburton’s narrator asks Sam how it is “that you manage to sell such an immense number of clocks, which certainly cannot be called necessary articles, among a people with whom there seems to be so great a scarcity of money,” Sam explains that he relies on flattery and human nature (8). Leaving a clock behind at the house of a deacon, another religious figure, Sam confides his covert sales strategy to the narrator: the deacon will not learn “until I call for the clock, that having once indulged in the use of a superfluity, how difficult it is to give it up. We can do without any article of luxury we have never had, but when once obtained, it is not in ‘human natur’” to surrender it voluntarily” (11). A powerful device that exerts a curious influence over its possessor, the clock becomes a symbol along the lines of Frodo Baggins’s magical Ring. And, like Tolkien, Haliburton suggests that the desirable object carries with it a heavy ideological weight. Throughout *The Clockmaker* Sam admonishes Nova Scotians for being “behind the intelligence of the age” (13), unlike Americans, who “reckon hours and minutes to be dollars and cents” (8). “We ‘go ahead’; the Nova Scotians ‘go astarn’” (24). Beyond selling clocks, Sam wants to convince Nova Scotians to race along the same path of linear technological progress, and to adhere to the same principles of temporal accounting, that he sees the Americans as having perfected. In the United States, Sam says, the railroad “*is river, bridge, road, and canal, all in one. It saves what we hain’t got to spare, men, horses, carts, vessels, barges, and what’s all in all – time*” (27).

It comes as little surprise that by 1891, twenty-four years after Canada’s Confederation, the American Electric Signal Clock Company was marketing temporal

precision and punctuality as moral necessities: “If there is one virtue that should be cultivated more than any other by him who would succeed in life, it is punctuality; if there is one error to be avoided, it is being behind time” (qtd. in Levine 67). Dewdney also points out that as international telegraph wires became ubiquitous in the 1860s, “the concept of a global ‘now’ inserted itself into the average citizen’s consciousness, at least in Western nations” (64), a development quickly followed by the invention of the space-time-collapsing telephone. Canada was born into a world of heightening temporal precision, and while Haliburton frames the efficiency and monetization of clock time as an American imposition, Canada would soon make its own mark in the sometimes uneasy intensification of social and moral reliance on clock time and burgeoning global temporal connectivity.

The division of the globe into “standard” time zones is a normative categorization that provides insight into Canada’s temporal status, and was a technological development in which Canada played an important historical role. In 1848 England had become the first country to adhere to a national standardized time system, but North America posed a more difficult problem due to its enormous physical, and temporal, size. “When hours, rather than minutes, separate the population centers,” writes Clark Blaise, “practical as well as political considerations override the simple expedient of an act of Parliament” (86). Various proposals for standardized time in the United States emerged in the decades following England’s standardization, but most of these “had come from deep inside the American railroad industry and had applied themselves exclusively to the reform of North American railroad schedules” (Blaise 76). A version of railroad standard time did

come into use in North America in 1883, causing local jurisdictions to align their clocks with their common “time belts” rather than with the local position of the sun, but the system was plagued with problems: it did not take the rest of the world into account; its time belts were drawn to simplify scheduling processes for the railroad companies and thus fell under corporate, not public control; and incomplete adoption of the system meant that conflicting times continued to exist (Blaise 103).

Sandford Fleming, the Scottish-born Canadian best known for managing the surveying of the Canadian Pacific Railway, became integral to the global adoption of standard time. His proposal for a universal or “cosmic” time was radical in that, in Blaise’s words, he “paid no special attention to North America. He was a theorist of world time” (76). “We are now obliged,” Fleming wrote, “to take a comprehensive view of the globe in considering the question of time-reckoning. We should not confine our view to one limited horizon, to one country, or to one continent” (qtd. in Blaise 35). The concept of “local time,” he argued, “is entirely incorrect. There is no such thing. [...] Time remains uninfluenced by matter, by space, or by distance. It is universal and essentially non-local” (34-35). While Einstein’s theories of relativity would later refute the idea of time as a physical constant, Fleming was committed to time’s political neutrality, and his initial proposal for standard time was notable for its lack of a prime meridian. Clock time would be regulated by a “Standard Chronometer,” a notional clock located inside the centre of the earth “in order clearly to bring out the idea, that it is equally related to every point on the surface of the globe” (Blaise 130).

For Blaise, Fleming’s proposal to universalize time under government authority

“has Canada written all over it. [...] He saw time as a free, common resource, not as a privately held property on the order of the American railroads or the sold time signals from the Western Union Company. Fleming was always a government man” (188). The Canada that is “written all over” Fleming’s vision of cosmic time, though, is not entirely a genial one, for the idea discloses a highly political ideological underpinning beneath its rhetoric of universality and neutrality. Fleming’s system attempted to foist a particular brand of neutrality upon a disparate and unequal world. While his Standard Chronometer may have been equally related to every point on the globe, it was by no means equally related to every person or culture, most of whom would have had no say in its creation. By dismissing local time as “entirely incorrect,” Fleming dismissed any system of time reckoning that falls outside the particular system which was simultaneously cosmic and of his own invention; while brilliantly conceived, his comprehensive view of the globe may have inadvertently obscured the people who populate it.

Imre Szeman, building on work by Paul Smith and Johannes Fabian, has identified a similar phenomenon in the tendency of globalization discourse to promote “an image of a world that is *isochronic*, a world in which everything happens at the same time and thus in which the problems and contradictions produced by an earlier, imperialist capitalism are done away with just as surely as are the limitations of time and space” (191-92). What this discourse really accomplishes, Szeman suggests, is the reinforcing of the same political hierarchy established by imperialist capitalism in the first place, since the rules of the global playing field are created by the elite nations and corporations. This may help to explain the continued prevalence, even in a globalized

world, of the idea that Canada is a “belated” nation (to use Szeman’s term) forever failing to “catch up” to the more developed United States. The notion of Canada as a belated member of the globalized timescape is ironic insofar as global standard time was largely a Canadian invention, but appropriate in that Canada had little say in the concept’s actual implementation; Fleming attended the 1884 Prime Meridian Conference in Washington D.C. as an honorary British delegate, since the United States did not recognize the Dominion of Canada as a “civilized” (that is, independent) country (Blaise 194).

The global time system that has come into common use – a blend of Fleming’s envisioned system and concessions such as the adoption of the Greenwich prime meridian – contains its own biases and political impositions. “Local” time in any given place is now determined not by the position of the sun or a local observatory but according to that place’s categorization within the standard twenty-four time zones, imaginary constructs in which we have invested heavily, and which, like the days of the week for Panych’s unnamed man, both open and constrict our experience of time. For Canadians, clock time is set to a standard housed beyond our borders, resulting in uneasy tensions when the global system fails to accommodate local concerns.⁴ A quick glance at a map of the world’s time zones, with their jagged lines and isolated pockets, is enough to identify the clash between local and global time. Saskatchewan, for instance, officially

⁴ In a sense, Canada’s lack of control over clock time forms a parallel to the linguistic conundrum identified by Dennis Lee, that as inhabitants of a culturally subordinate colonial space, Canadians “have no terms in which to speak that do not issue from the space we are trying to speak against” (52). “No terms” was an exaggeration in the 1970s and is more so today as the existence of the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* attests, but just as our language’s historical and cultural centre lies closer to England and the United States than it does to Canada, so too does our temporal vocabulary.

observes Central Standard Time without daylight saving, sharing the same time as Alberta during the summer and Manitoba during the winter, with certain exceptions such as the town of Lloydminster which adheres to Alberta time year-round. The very global connectedness that Fleming saw as the destruction of local time in fact requires local idiosyncrasies to be agonized over. We can see similar tension at work in the fact that the Gregorian calendar, which was created by the Catholic Church mainly to regulate the scheduling of Easter, forms a strict template within which Canada has been able to make minor localized adjustments such as Canadian Thanksgiving and the gradual secularization of Sundays.

Today, the most prominent feature beneath the Canadian flag on Ottawa's Parliament Hill is the Peace Tower clock, an iconic symbol of the importance of clock time and global standard time to Canadian life. When the clock's mechanism failed on May 24th 2006, freezing the hands at 7:28 am, the event did not escape the attention of the CBC: "Dozens of tourists crowded around the Centennial Flame snapping photos of Parliament Hill were quick to notice the incorrect time on the clock and the sound of silence" ("Time Stands Still on Parliament Hill"). An American company was called in to make the repair, so that Canada's most prominent clock could resume its keeping of British time. The sense of temporal alterity that colonies around the world can hold in common is apparent in M.G. Vassanji's novel *No New Land* when Nurdin Lalani recalls his childhood in east Africa: "Big Ben says eighteen hours Greenwich mean time, and Father looks up, raises an eyebrow, if you please, and shush, everyone listens to perfect inflections from the BBC, you dare not scrape or cough at this holiest of hours at home

and you hold your water and your bowels and your wind, and if a giggle escapes, then the wrath of God, Haji Lalani's cane on your buttocks" (35-36).

Colonial alterity aside, the importance of clock time to the daily life of individuals is not to be overlooked. Levine argues that "one of the most significant differences in the pace of life is whether people use the hour on the clock to schedule the beginning and ending of activities, or whether the activities are allowed to transpire according to their own spontaneous schedule. These two approaches are known, respectively, as living by clock time and living by event time" (82). He has studied what he calls the pace of life in 31 countries by measuring three variables: "the average walking speed of randomly selected pedestrians over a distance of 60 feet," "the time it took postal clerks to fulfill a standard request for stamps," and "the accuracy of 15 randomly selected bank clocks in main downtown areas" (8-9). His results point to "five principal factors that determine the tempo of cultures around the world. People are prone to move faster in places with vital economies, a high degree of industrialization, larger populations, cooler climates, and a cultural orientation toward individualism" (9). His overall rankings indicate that the fastest-paced countries are those that run on clock time – Switzerland, Ireland, Germany, and Japan top the list – while the slowest-paced are event-time countries such as Brazil, Indonesia, and Mexico (131-32).⁵ The United States is listed at number 16, followed by Canada at 17. Levine argues that a country's pace of life has "vital consequences for the quality of life," but that these consequences are so mixed as to suggest that "a rapid pace

⁵ Various nuances are involved in these rankings. Ireland, for instance, placed first in walking speed, which Levine attributes to the cold climate, but 11th in clock accuracy (131, 133).

of life is neither inherently better nor worse than a slow one” (154, 159). People in faster places, for instance, are much more likely to die from heart disease, but are also “more likely to be satisfied with their lives” (155, 158). His ranking would appear to indicate that Canada and the United States embody a temporal compromise, avoiding the more extreme tempos on both sides of the scale.

As Levine admits, the methodology of his study suffers from various limitations, such as the fact that postal offices in different countries offer levels of service that vary in ways that are difficult to quantify. But perhaps the most problematic aspect of his survey, a constraint undoubtedly due more to funding limitations than oversight, is its tendency to group entire nations together into single temporal entities, uniform in time and space. The study, published in 1997, captures results at one particular moment near the end of the twentieth century, and gives little indication of how a society’s pace of life may change over time, a significant absence given the widely identified feeling within industrialized nations that the pace of life is continuously increasing. This sense of increasing rapidity may have something to do with the inevitability of aging and the tendency of early life memories to seemingly represent longer periods of time (I will further discuss perceptions of duration in Chapter Two). It also has to do with the many generalizations about the nature of “modern life,” like Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr’s rather alarmist comment from the late 1970s that “the shift from a slowly changing to a swiftly changing society [...] has stretched and snapped customary social restraints. It has rendered the experience of the elders irrelevant to the problems of the young. Children, knowing they will live in a vastly different world from the world of their parents, no longer look to their

parents as models and authorities” (270). Terms such as “the multitasking generation” and “the iGeneration” have been coined early in the twenty-first century to describe the perceived increase in society’s tempo.

To some degree, generalizations about the unique rapidity of contemporary life fail to account for the fact that people have felt overwhelmed, and excited, by the rapid pace of life for generations. Still, the subjective sense of an increasing pace of life is supported by analyses such as Statistics Canada’s *Overview of the Time Use of Canadians*, which was carried out in 1998 and again in 2005. Over those seven years, the average free time for Canadians aged 15 and over dropped from 5.8 to 5.5 hours per day, while the time spent on paid work increased by 0.3 hours, averaged over the seven-day week (see Table 1 in each study). Experimental filmmaker Michael Snow commented on his audience’s increasing pace of life with the 2003 rerelease of his 1967 film *Wavelength*. The original release, considered a seminal work of avant-garde film, is a 45-minute shot of the interior of a room, slowly zooming in to a photograph on the wall while human figures occasionally perform brief actions. Snow describes the film as “a time monument,” the attempt “to make a definitive statement of pure Film space and time” (“Michael Snow: Textures of Time”). The 2003 rerelease, *WVLNT (or Wavelength For Those Who Don’t Have the Time)*, consists of “simultaneities rather than the sequential progressions of the original work” (“WVLNT”). Ironic packaging material promotes the film as “Originally 45 minutes. Now 15!” Still, as I will discuss in Chapter Three, while the increasing pace of life in Canada may be a general trend, complex and fluctuating time pressures for different people reveal that it is not a simple linear trend.

Just as the pace of life is not uniform over time, it also varies across spatial distance. While Statistics Canada provides only national averages for its 1998 study, the 2005 study goes on to divide its results into provinces, revealing, for instance, that Prince Edward Islanders spend on average a little more time working, and a little less time sleeping, than British Columbians (information on the territories is curiously absent). Levine does not specify where his measurements for “Canada” were taken, but given his strategy of selecting a large metropolis in each country, it seems likely that his Canadian measurements were taken in Toronto, with Montreal, Ottawa, and Vancouver as alternative candidates. To what extent can such measurements accurately represent the temporal character of the nation? What deeper variations exist between regions of Canada, or between urban and rural areas of the same region, or even from one household to the next? Broad sociological surveys, like cultural chronotopes, are limited in their ability to capture or explain the temporal character of diverse regions and individual lives. This is an issue to which I will return in Chapters Two and Three, but for the moment I would like to offer some examples of the ways in which Canada’s dominant temporal constructs serve as frames to draw attention towards or away from particular issues, and function broadly as sites of social power.

Contested Boundaries of the Temporal Frame

While Fleming helped to free the measurement of time from corporate control, his work serves as an example not only that ostensibly neutral systems of time measurement

are inherently ideological but also that the ability *to set the clock* on a broad social scale – whether literally in terms of clock time or figuratively in terms of the framing of temporal concepts such as “first,” “new,” “original,” “now,” and “long-term” – goes hand in hand with other forms of dominance and control. Craig Ireland partially echoes Hayden White when he writes that narrativity “relates past, present, and future, not in order to recapture an actual or past state of affairs and still less in order to sequentialize empirical brute sense data into the conceptually intelligible, but instead in order to delimit the horizon from which selections will be made and complexity reduced, as well as to establish the threshold where expectations can be violated or disappointed” (133-34). The question of whose narrativity – whose temporal horizons and expectations – take precedence is an important one in Canadian history, as the imposition of particular time scales in various social contexts indicates that the use and ownership of time within Canada has been integral to many forms of power struggles and decision-making processes.

An extreme example of the material consequences of conflicting cultural time scales is found in the life of Maria Campbell, whose autobiography, *Halfbreed*, is intended “to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country,” to “tell you about the joys and sorrows, the oppressing poverty, the frustrations and the dreams” (2). Describing the newly confederated Canada’s treatment of her part-indigenous, part-white ancestors in Saskatchewan, Campbell writes:

They were squatters with no title to the land they lived on. They wanted assurance from Ottawa of their right to keep the land before the incoming white settlers encroached on them by using homestead laws. Our people believed the lands acts discriminated against them, stating that they had to live on the land and wait three years before filing a claim. They had lived on the lands for years before the lands acts had ever been thought of, and

didn't believe they should be treated like newcomers. (4)

Because legal ownership of the land is measured against a very recent moment in time – the creation of the lands acts – the long history of indigenous inhabitation, and even the shorter history of Métis inhabitation, are immaterial, erased from the land claims record. As a result, grievances escalated until the government engaged in a military battle against the Métis and Louis Riel, finally forcing the holdouts to relocate “to the empty pockets of North Saskatchewan” (6), where they claimed their own homesteads.

However, in addition to paying the purchase price of these homesteads, families were required to work the land to the government's satisfaction. “Ten acres had to be broken in three years, along with improvements, before title would be granted. Otherwise the land was confiscated by Land Improvement District authorities” (7-8). Unable to afford the necessary equipment, the Métis failed to meet these requirements and “gradually the homesteads were reclaimed by the authorities and offered to the immigrants,” thus forcing the Métis, now quite literally marginalized, to take up residence on the strips of land alongside roads (8). “So began a miserable life of poverty,” Campbell writes, “which held no hope for the future” (8). The mandate of progress, of “improvements” to the land, not only imposes a western ethic of land development that takes no account of longstanding indigenous forms of land use, but also initiates an arbitrary duration of responsibility, creating an unwinnable race against time. The rest of Campbell's autobiography, which recounts her years of poverty and instability, is largely a narrative of the consequences of this resetting of the clock.

Similarly asymmetrical waiting periods for citizenship have been implemented in

legal codes such as the 1952 Immigration Act. During this act's tenure, immigrants to Canada acquired "Canadian domicile" after a five-year wait, though any time spent in a prison or a "hospital for mental diseases" did not count towards the five years (4.1, 4.2.a). Meanwhile, admittance to Canada was denied altogether for those who had "been insane at any time," were "afflicted with epilepsy," had committed "any crime involving moral turpitude," were identified as prostitutes or homosexuals, or advocated subversion of the democratic process (5.a, d, e, m), effectively introducing an indefinite waiting period, which lasted until these conditions were loosened in 1976.

Confused understandings of when immigrants are considered to have become Canadian are visible today in the ambiguous meaning of the terms "first generation," which can refer either to foreign-born Canadians or to their Canadian-born children, and "second generation," which can refer either to a family's first Canadian-born children, or to *those* children's children.⁶ Who is first, and when does Canadianness occur? In *What We All Long For*, Dionne Brand takes a satirical jab at the capricious manner in which the dominant culture is able to offer and withdraw membership to minorities. Her character Oku, at a bar with some friends, tells a joke: "What's Canadian in 9.79 seconds and Jamaican in twenty-four hours? Ben Johnson" (214). Oku's reference to the infamous Olympic sprinter whose gold medal in 1988 was rescinded after an incriminating drug test suggests that popular opinion is pivotal in granting social inclusion to those whose status is questionable because of race, foreign birth, or other factors. Underneath the humour one senses an Orwellian tone in the ease with which society is effectively able to

⁶ I am grateful to Malissa Phung for pointing out this confusion to me.

claim, at advantageous moments, “Ben Johnson has always been Canadian,” or “Ben Johnson has always been Jamaican.” The gates of social membership are set to open and close on a timer that keeps desirable people inside the national collective, and keeps undesirable people – however defined at any given moment – out.

Labeling someone “first” is not a neutral act but a political one that indicates an investment in one particular starting point, one particular resetting of the clock. Perhaps this is nowhere more apparent than in Alan Lawson’s remark that there are “two First Worlds, two origins of authority and authenticity: the originating world of Europe, the imperium, as source of the Second World’s principal cultural authority; and that other First World, that of the First Nations, whose authority the settlers not only effaced and replaced but also desired” (29). Commenting on the Hudson’s Bay Company’s need for perceived legitimacy in the mid nineteenth century, Desmond Morton writes that “the Company’s prestige depended on an air of permanency, summed up by the rude version of the letters on its flag – “Here Before Christ” (82). Marie Clements resists this association in her play *Burning Vision*, where a Dene widow says, “the Hudson’s Bay Store [...] seemed like they been here before Christ but not before me. Not before me” (56). Firstness means primacy, and is a prized concept within many political arenas, from the nationalistic “Canada First” movement in the late nineteenth century; to Daniel Johnson’s Union Nationale slogan in the 1966 Quebec provincial election, “*Québec d’abord*,” which means “Quebec first,” but was “discreetly translated for English-speakers as ‘A better Quebec for all Quebecers’” (Morton 290); to Stephen Harper’s 2008 military initiative called the “Canada First Defence Strategy.” For forest

conservationists, the term “second growth” is a disparaging one.

Daniel MacIvor’s play *Never Swim Alone* comments hauntingly on the politics of firstness, as two nearly identical men engage in inane but increasingly violent competitions for the privilege of being “the first man.” While the play ends in a cold-war style stalemate between the two, a penultimate climax speaks to the dominance inherent in the claim of being “first”:

FRANK
The first man is the man
FRANK knees BILL in the chest. BILL goes down.

FRANK
who is guiltless beyond all circumstance
FRANK kicks BILL.

FRANK
and sure of his right
FRANK kicks BILL.

FRANK
to be first.
FRANK kicks BILL.

FRANK
The first man is the man
FRANK kicks BILL.

FRANK
who can recognize
the second man.
BILL lies motionless. (72-73)

The related idea of newness, as in the “New World,” is famously attractive and problematic, not only for English colonialists such as Catharine Parr Traill, who wrote in the 1830s that “Canada is the land of hope; here everything is new” (94), or for the early nineteenth-century Métis who saw themselves as a “New Nation” (Morton 79), but for contemporary immigrants as well, as Vassanji’s self-conscious title *No New Land* suggests. Like firstness, the concept of newness has an ambivalent history; in Milton’s

Paradise Lost, when the angel Abdiel insists that God created all heavenly beings, Satan refutes the argument with the words “strange point and new!” – the very claim that Abdiel’s idea is new casts it under suspicion and deflates the angel’s authority (5.855). In contemporary consumer culture, though, newness is perhaps the ultimate virtue. Car manufacturers and book publishers sell products stamped with the *upcoming* year’s date to make the items appear new that much longer, while consumers vie to be the first to own the new goods. The increasing rate of consumer consumption leads to what Craig Ireland calls a “culture of immediacy” (161), in which the new “becomes so prevalent that both past and future-orientedness end up collapsing into an extended present” (147).

And along with the virtue of newness comes the sin of oldness. While oldness can at times be strategically aligned with primacy, Fabian identifies the projection of oldness onto subaltern groups as a central tenet of mid twentieth century western ethnocentric anthropology. He sees rhetorical “distancing devices” at work “when we are told that certain elements in our culture are ‘neolithic’ or ‘archaic’; or when certain living societies are said to practice ‘stone age economics’; or when certain styles of thought are identified as ‘savage’ or ‘primitive’” (30). This list also includes the terms “developed” and “developing,” which suggest temporal accomplishment and incompleteness respectively. Such devices produce what Fabian calls “*denial of coevalness*,” or, “*a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse*” (31). Fabian muses that “it takes imagination and courage to picture what would happen to the West (and to anthropology) if its temporal fortress were suddenly invaded by the Time of its Other” (35). Chapter

Four will look more closely at the difficulties and possibilities of contemporaneousness.

The ability to decide when firstness or newness occurs, when units of time will begin to accumulate – whether these units are years of homesteading, residency periods leading towards citizenship, or so on – not only allows for the granting or denial of rights to particular people; it simultaneously relieves those in power of the responsibility to address injustices that occurred before the arbitrary starting point. One common response to indigenous land claims maintains that the people who now own the land, while descended from settlers whose appropriation of the land may have been questionable, did not themselves engage in this appropriation: any injustice that occurred in the past is not the fault of those now living. Dionne Brand objects to this view by saying that “people use these arguments as reasons for not doing what is right or just. It never occurs to them that they live on the cumulative hurt of others. They want to start the clock of social justice only when they arrived. But one is born into history, one isn’t born into a void” (*Map* 82). True, we are all born into history. But as Hayden White has demonstrated, “whether ‘history’ is considered simply as ‘the past,’ the documentary record of this past, or the body of reliable information about the past established by professional historians, there is no such thing as a distinctively ‘historical’ method by which to study this ‘history’” (“New Historicism” 295). The history that we are born into depends on who gets to define it, and discussions of temporality are saturated with the politics of alternate views of history, of alternate starting points and conflicting cultural time scales.

Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred, who advocates social and spiritual revolution with the aim of securing autonomy for Onkwehonwe – indigenous people – argues, like

Brand, that the clock of social justice started ticking earlier than is usually acknowledged, and that looking further into the past is vital for understanding ongoing cultural disputes:

Limited to a discussion of history that includes only the last five or ten years, the corporate media and general public focus on the billions of dollars handed out to the Onkwehonwe per year from federal treasuries and spent inefficiently. [...] Considering 100 or 300 years of interactions, it would become clear even to the Settlers that the real problem facing their country is that two nations are fighting over questions of conquest and survival. (152-53)

Even the idea that dominant models of time tend to look five or ten years into the past is an exaggeration in some contexts. News media outlets do not often trace the origins of current events back more than a few days or months. And stock market tracking websites – CTVglobemedia, TMX Group, and Yahoo! Canada – all chart on their homepages the progress of major trading indices over *the past six hours*. What sort of temporal perspective does this create?



Standard six-hour trading perspective (tmx.com)

Joseph Meeker sees digital time displays, which lack hands that move in synch with the earth's rotation and "are unable to comprehend more than one instant at a time," as symbolic of the "narrow visions" that are now commonplace (qtd. in Levine 80). Relatively narrow temporal vision is indeed necessary for many cultural institutions. In *Salt Fish Girl*, Larissa Lai comments ironically on the need for large corporations to disassociate themselves from the ongoing injustices that are intrinsic to the production of consumer goods. Her character Miranda, who has been learning about a "dreaming disease" that causes people to remember the past in great detail, proposes that the Pallas running shoe company "advertise shoes as protection against the dreaming disease. Memory-proof soles" (244). A successful consumer product, this scene bitterly suggests, is one that "cures" consumers of the pain of calling injustice to mind, of connecting past actions with future consequences; the pun on "memory-proof souls" is no accident.

Given the prevalence of narrow temporal vision, one wonders: when Governor General Michaëlle Jean commented on the relaunched Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission in October of 2009 by saying that "When the present does not recognize the wrongs of the past, the future takes its revenge" ("GG Relaunches"), how far into the past did she intend for Canadians to look? On the matter of colonial conflict, Alfred concludes that "without a substantial change in the circumstances of colonization, there is no basis for considering the injustice *historical*. The crime of colonialism is present today, as are its perpetrators" (157). In other words, several hundred years of historical perspective is necessary in order to see that injustice is

not historical. Sioui takes care to write with such a perspective, describing European colonists as “our newly arrived Relatives” (123), and writing that “we have suffered a very severe shock these past 503 years” (93). He portrays colonization as a comprehensible, measurable moment in time, a specific duration that increases by one digit each year rather than a vague notion of many centuries. North America’s “post-European history” becomes “no more than an accident” (207).

Still, the decision to look back three hundred years or longer, and to look at particular events that occurred at that time, is itself not neutral. In *Maria Chapdelaine*, Louis Hémon attempts to speak in the voice of the early twentieth-century province of Quebec itself, with all the “barbaric strength of this new land where an ancient race has again found its youth” (168). “Three hundred years ago we came, and we have remained,” the voice of Quebec says (168). “Strangers have surrounded us whom it is our pleasure to call foreigners; they have taken into their hands most of the rule, they have gathered to themselves much of the wealth; but in this land of Quebec nothing has changed. Nor shall anything change, for we are the pledge of it” (169). The claim of land ownership that Hémon’s Québécois people make by virtue of looking to their long tradition of inhabitation is silent on the indigenous claims to the land that exist by virtue of a much longer past. One could easily imagine the terms “stranger” and “foreigner” referring equally to French and English Canadians. Desmond Morton points out that seventeenth-century French settlers referred to themselves as *habitants*, implying permanent inhabitation “in distinction from the official term of *censitaire*, or ‘tenant’” (20). “People immigrating to Canada,” Morton writes, “have had an awkward tendency to

assume that nothing much worthwhile has happened before their arrival” (74).

Some of the most notable recognitions of uncomfortable pasts have occurred when the federal government has offered official apologies to Canadians of Chinese and Japanese descent, and to aboriginal peoples. Apologizing in 2008 for the Indian Residential Schools system, Stephen Harper began his speech with reference to federal government actions in the 1870s, looking back nearly 140 years. In a rather remarkable acknowledgement of broad temporal responsibility, he went on to connect longstanding past policies with the present, saying that “the legacy of Indian residential schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today” (“Statement”). As Matthew Dorrell points out, though, the apology also contained distancing language, relegating the abuses to a past “chapter” in Canadian history (32).

The troubling politics of selective awareness of the past also become apparent for Sioui, who takes issue with North American archaeological data pointing to the migratory arrival of indigenous people ten thousand years ago, “because we know that the Euro-Canadian society, in order to justify and rationalize its often discriminatory policies and laws in relation to First Nations, needs to cultivate the notion, in its social discourse, that First Nations people are ‘immigrants’ too” (101). And why stop at ten thousand years? What kind of perspective would we have on historical justice, on “indigenous” and “immigrant” inhabitants, if we looked back further, to the origin of the human species? For Dionne Brand in *Land to Light On*, the “history of the body” is situated not in Canada or Africa at all, but in the depths of primordial evolution: “here is the history of the body; / water perhaps darkness perhaps stars / bone then scales then wings then legs then arms

[...] then blood pouring, then eyes, then distance, only this, / all that has happened since is too painful, / too unimaginable” (34). This history not only starts with the pre-national and the pre-human, but actually stops there; all that comes later, all of what we normally consider to comprise “history,” is better left unthought.

Taiaiake Alfred also points out that looking to the past at all, no matter how far back, can be counterproductive: “However noble and necessary justice is to our struggles, its gaze will always be backward. By itself, the concept of justice is not capable of encompassing the broader transformations needed to ensure coexistence” (27). The concept of peace, on the other hand, “is hopeful, visionary, and forward-looking” (28): a valid point, perhaps, but one that risks treating as equals those who have been placed, historically, on uneven ground. Looking forward is susceptible to the same issues of temporal framing as looking to the past, and influential decision-making tends to be framed in terms of three-month business quarters and four-year political terms. Apparent exceptions occur mainly for the sake of rhetorical impact and immediate political gain, as when Sir Guy Carleton said in 1772 that “this country must, to the end of time, be peopled by the Canadian race” (qtd. in Morton 26), or when Wilfrid Laurier said in 1904 that “the twentieth century shall be the century of Canada and of Canadian development. For the next seventy-five years, nay for the next hundred years, Canada shall be the star towards which all men who love progress and freedom shall come” (Morton 158). Even Laurier’s ostensible appeal to a hundred-year mindset is short-sighted when compared to certain indigenous conceptualizations of time. Stewart Brand writes that “*Now* is the period in which people feel they live and act and have responsibility. For most of us *now*

is about a week, sometimes a year. For some traditional tribes in the American northeast and Australia *now* is seven generations back and forwards (175 years each direction)” (133). Only an Ontarian Methodist preacher, speaking on the eve of the 1896 election, revealed a broader sense of temporal accountability when he warned that a Liberal vote “would stare the voter in the face at Judgement Day and condemn him to eternal perdition” (qtd. in Morton 140).

Temporal framing discourses are equally present in our relationships with the natural world, and reveal further arbitrary hierarchies. Europeans brought purple loosestrife to North America around the same time, in evolutionary terms, as wheat, but because purple loosestrife is perceived as economically damaging it remains perpetually regarded as a foreign species. A single news release from the Office of the Auditor General in 2002 refers to purple loosestrife and other undesirable species introduced in the last few hundred years as “invaders,” a “destructive force,” “biological pollution,” and a “threat” to “Canada’s ecosystems” (“A Destructive Force”). Wheat, meanwhile, which has displaced millions of acres of native grasses, is honoured on the provincial flags of Alberta and Saskatchewan. As Michael Healey, Travis V. Mason, and Laurie Ricou conclude in their study of cultural attitudes toward various invasive species, “the actual roles these species play in nature are secondary to the role, or roles, we assign them. Given that the timeframe of the current proliferation of so many invasive species is relatively short, perhaps the future will tell a different tale, taking some species out of the ‘undesirable alien’ category and instead setting out for them a welcome mat” (294).

Looking at time and the environment in a broader sense, the anxiety that

motivates environmentalism could be described not just as the fear of destroying places but as the fear of destroying time: the time in which human civilization prospers in ways familiar to us. For at the heart of most conservationist impulses is the realization that our degradation of the biosphere inevitably involves dire consequences not only for polar bears and frogs but for us. This anxiety, which looks to the “long term” future of fifty or a hundred years from now, continues under Canada’s current socio-political circumstances to take second stage to the widely perceived importance of three-month business quarters and four-year political terms. The ideal of sustainability, which requires valuing what we normally think of as the distant future over the immediate future, cannot be realized while the deployment of resources with a view to the short term is seen as common sense. In this regard, little has changed since Catharine Parr Traill, writing in 1834, perceived as inevitable the selling and burning of Ontario’s trees for short-term gains: “Some years hence the timbers that are now burned up will be regretted. Yet it is impossible to preserve them” (106). While Traill was for the most part optimistic in envisioning the future – “I watch the progress of cultivation among these rugged and inhospitable regions with positive pleasure,” she wrote (17) – her confident musings take on a darker tone as we gradually awaken to the consequences of ecological collapse: “Some century hence how different will this spot appear! [...] All will be different” (115).

Margaret Atwood suggests that Canadians are especially prone to experiencing the future as a source of anxiety:

In my part of the world we have a ritual interchange that goes like this:
First person: “Lovely weather we’re having.”
Second person: “We’ll pay for it later.”
My part of the world being Canada, where there is a great deal of

weather, we always do pay for it later. [...] What this ritual interchange reveals is a larger habit of thinking about the more enjoyable things in life: they're only on loan or acquired on credit, and sooner or later the date when they must be paid for will roll around. (*Payback* 165)

While the claim that such anxiety is particular to Canada is suspect to say the least, the fact that Atwood associates a fear of the future, or a fear of impermanence, with Canadian life hints at a remaining trace of garrison mentality, at least in her own estimation. Or, as she goes on to argue, the fear of an approaching day of payback may in fact be a guilty acknowledgement of ecological unsustainability. Ultimately, fear of the future is tied to mortality itself; the concept of linear progress is always haunted by the spectre of death. "Are all fears, at bottom," Don McKay asks, "fears of endless uninflected time?" (*Deactivated* 46). The further we probe such anxieties, the further away we are taken from any indication that Atwood's "ritual interchange" is uniquely Canadian. But the questions of who gets to draw the boundaries of the temporal map, of who gets to set and reset the moral accounting clock, and for what purpose – the real questions at stake when we consider how far back, or forward, we ought to look – are closely tied in Canada to the issues we have been discussing. Canada's particular histories of indigeneity, colonialism, immigration, expansive territory, and variable ecologies do create a unique matrix of temporal framing patterns, even if some aspects of this matrix are universal.

Canadian Time

In 1904, the Arthur Pequegnat Company based in Berlin, Ontario (now Kitchener)

began to manufacture what has always been a fairly rare commodity, Canadian-made clocks. The company ceased production in World War II due to a shortage of brass, but its clocks remain among the best-known and most desirable for collectors of Canadian timepieces (“Canadian Makers”). One of their popular wall clocks, known as the “Canadian Time” model, is emblazoned with the words “Canadian Time” on the glass pane through which the swinging pendulum is visible (“Galleries”). The time that the clock keeps, of course, is the standard 12-hour time that has evolved for millennia and is recognizable around the world, but there is truth to the slogan in the sense that the particular histories, materials, and social meanings connected to this clock are tied to the unfolding complexity of time-reckoning within the Canadian nation. Canadian society itself has inherited various longstanding socio-temporal structures nested within homogenizing globalized patterns, yet the nation’s particular cultural and temporal situation is the product of a unique history of indigenous inhabitation, expansive northern territory, colonialism, and multiculturalism.

All of our systems for measuring time – our clocks, calendars, temporal framing devices, and personal and social narratives – are forms of language. They attempt to witness, describe, and model the world, yet can never complete the task; there will always be aspects of time, whether functions of physical relativity, personal subjectivity, or cross-cultural disparity, that these models fail to encompass. Canada has learned to speak particular temporal languages just as it has grown around English, French, and other verbal languages; we live immersed within them, adapt them to meet our particular needs, and sometimes struggle against them. Identifying the cultural construction of time

in Canada is not a question of locating a single factor that makes Canada different.

Canada's clocks do not contain an extra digit; our calendar does not use a special Canadian month. The degree to which Canadian temporality is unique is an emergent property of the complex combinations of cultural and ecological relationships that exist nowhere else. And while certain temporal languages are quite entrenched, Canada's temporal maps, like its spatial maps, inevitably shift over time.

As some of the above examples have indicated, the issues surrounding the cultural construction of time in Canada, like all issues of social concern, frequently manifest themselves overtly in literature, and some texts consciously critique dominant modes of time-reckoning. But even those texts that do not set out to engage such matters, or are not normally read as doing so, find themselves inextricably involved with them. Thus, reading the cultural construction of time as a backdrop to any piece of Canadian writing can prove illuminating. Authors who may have no particular interest in the politics of time often write stories in which dominant modes of time-reckoning enhance, or more often restrict, a character's physical or cognitive latitude. As I will show in Chapter Three, stories are also common in which the constraints that characters face in terms of gender, class, race, and so on translate into constraints on the way they inhabit time.

Whatever the particulars, the myriad opportunities for witnessing and manipulating the human experience of time arise because of our common immersion in time, a commonality that contains as much potential for solidarity as it does for exploitation. As Margaret Atwood writes, "time is a condition of the life of our physical bodies: without it we can't live – we'd be frozen, like statues, because we wouldn't be

able to change” (*Payback* 168). Or, in the words of time itself, as imagined by Brian Bartlett, “I am the space between heartbeat / and heartbeat [...] Yes, I am merciless, / but I’m mercy too” (116-17). The point is well taken by Panych’s unnamed man, still standing on his precarious seventh-story ledge, pondering his captivity in the days of the week. In the final moments of the play, with Lillian’s encouragement that he will “be an inspiration to others” (95), he does indeed leap into space. But he falls *up*, flying impossibly across to another building and, according to the stage directions, “through the stars” (98), metaphorically embodying the potential to disrupt normative understandings of time and other cultural categorizations. But, while liberating, overstepping the boundaries of normative time is also perilous; when the man returns to his ledge he finds that Lillian has disappeared, perhaps having fallen to the ground. The play ends as the man urges himself to “just wait for the wind again,” while a police megaphone orders the crowd (and the theatre audience) to “break it up now and go home. [...] The show’s over” (100-01). Temporal resistance, like other forms of resistance, is confined by personal limitations and voices of authority. But the image of the man flying through the stars remains vital in its suggestion that the constraints of temporal categories are partial and pliable. The next chapter will look at the relationship between time and personal subjectivity, and will make explicit the assertion that literature and other arts serve as vital sites for people to bear witness to, and sometimes attempt to recalibrate, the dominant figurative clocks that tick around and within them.

Chapter Two: Time, Subjectivity, and Literature

“Each character had his own time zone, his own lamp, otherwise they were just men from nowhere.”

Michael Ondaatje (*Skin* 143)

“The after is complicitous with the before.”

Smaro Kamboureli (48)

Margaret Atwood’s short story “Hack Wednesday” begins by juxtaposing personal and social concerns. The first paragraph introduces Marcia, who is dreaming about her conflicted desire to have another child, while the second paragraph begins, “Downstairs the news is on. Something extra has happened, she can tell by the announcer’s tone of voice, by the heightened energy. A disaster of some kind; that always peeps them up. She isn’t sure she’s ready for it” (*Wilderness* 257). The word “downstairs” triggers one of Atwood’s most frequently used metaphors, that of the cellar, and its associations with the dark recesses of the mind, the source of thoughts that are often suppressed but provide a necessary foundation for consciousness. Marcia’s uneasy task of deciding which concerns, the personal or the social, deserve the more prominent place in her mind goes on to form the crux of the story, and is expressed repeatedly in terms of her anxiety about the passage of time. She buys a piece of the Berlin Wall as a souvenir “not of a place [...] but of a time,” and in the next breath focuses on her family life, “squirreling away bits of time – a photo here, a letter there” (265). She works for a Toronto newspaper called *The World*, writing about contemporary social issues such as malnutrition, violence towards

women, and overcrowding in prisons, all the while believing “that life is something that happens to individuals, despite the current emphasis on statistics and trends” (269). She eats in her kitchen, while outside “the world shifts and crumbles and rearranges itself, and time goes on” (282).

All of this culminates in Marcia’s reflections on passing time as she prepares to host her now grown-up children at Christmas:

She will cry because the children are no longer children, or because she herself is not a child anymore, or because there are children who have never been children, or because she can’t have a child anymore, ever again. Her body has gone past too quickly for her; she has not made herself ready.

It’s all this talk of babies, at Christmas. It’s all this hope. She gets distracted by it, and has trouble paying attention to the real news. (283-84)

This final sentence of the story leaves open the question of what constitutes “the real news.” Are the stories of unfolding social injustice the real news, or is the real news the day-to-day moments in time that slip by unnoticed, yet comprise Marcia’s actual life with her family?

This question is an important one for understanding the temporal structure of life in Canada, or anywhere. What is more “real,” the broad cultural chronotopes that shape the workings of social structures and historiography, or the experience of time’s passage on the level of the individual? How do we locate ourselves on our overlapping layers of temporal maps, since, as Christopher Dewdney writes, “our collective sense of the present, the one we all agree upon, is not the same as our private sense of ‘now’” (10). While the previous chapter offered an overview of Canadian cultural temporalities, this chapter will trace the importance of time to personal subjectivity, and will make the case

that while personal subjective temporalities tend to be more clearly driven by associative relationships, they are shaped by many of the same narrativizing concepts that allow for the creation of cultural chronotopes. Furthermore, literature and narrative structures of all kinds serve vital functions in comprehending personal chronotopes, and in negotiating the difficult relationship between individual and social temporalities. While this discussion serves largely to contextualize Canadian literary responses to contested temporalities, the matter of personal subjectivity is not unique to any nation. Portions of this chapter will highlight examples of personal chronotopes that speak to Canadian experiences, while other portions will necessarily leave the issue of national affiliation aside momentarily.

The Psychology of Time

When it comes to understanding how time functions on the level of the individual, experimental and cognitive psychology have usually been the disciplines to take up the task, and research into the psychology of time has led to many valuable insights, particularly on the physiology of temporal experience, on how people experience duration, and on how people tend to privilege the past, the present, or the future in their personal time perspectives. Studies contributing to this body of knowledge have examined how cultural variation, patterns of personality, and forms of psychopathology may influence the perception of time. They have taken the form of carefully crafted experimental research, involving painstaking measurements of subjects' oral counting of perceived 60-second intervals, asking subjects to agree or disagree with statements about

present or future orientation, or asking subjects to listen to beeping sounds of different tempos before estimating the duration of the noise.⁷

In the 1960s, Robert E. Ornstein challenged the notion that there is any singular “sense” of time along with the idea that a physiological “internal clock” is responsible for the perception of duration, arguing instead that a cognitive “storage size” metaphor more accurately reflects the experience of duration.⁸ He concluded that “anything which might alter the size of storage of the information in a given interval will also affect the experience of duration of that interval. As storage size increases, duration experience lengthens” (43). In 1991, David C. Klein, Robert Y. Moore, and Steven M. Reppert supplemented the work of “chronobiologists” with surveys of anatomical research to conclude that the cluster of cells at the base of the brain known as the suprachiasmatic

⁷ One famous study occurred in the 1930s when the physiologist Hudson Hoagland’s wife fell ill with influenza and misjudged the amount of time he took to return from the drugstore. “Suspecting that this time distortion might be due to some physiological process related to body temperature,” Friedman writes, “Hoagland asked his wife to make a series of judgments of 60 seconds, counting at the rate of one per second, at various times during her illness. He found that his wife’s counting rate was greater (that is, she produced 60 seconds in a shorter time) when her temperature was higher” (14). Friedman notes, though, that similar research “has not produced an entirely consistent picture” (14).

⁸ Ornstein notes that all of the candidates for a supposed “internal clock” – brain alpha rhythms, heart rate, breathing rate, brain cell metabolism, cellular metabolism, and so on – suffer from two problems. First, “there are almost an infinity of physiological processes which might alter their rate in response to psilocybin or to some other manipulation, but this is not sufficient to term them a sort of internal time keeper, and to relate them to *time experience*” (31). Second, these “clocks” do not run at the same rate (31). Michael Ondaatje offers a more conceptual approach to physiological time in his novel *Anil’s Ghost*, where the amygdala is described as that portion of the brain that holds “fearful memories.” It is “created and made by us, by our own histories,” and everyone’s is different “because we each have a different past” (134). Anil decides that the amygdala “governs everything. How we behave and make decisions, how we seek out safe marriages, how we build houses that we make secure” (135). We see here an example of how literary articulations of personal temporality tend to privilege the reality of human experience over the reality of objective data.

nucleus (SCN) serves as the primary internal clock of the human body; Klein goes so far as to call the SCN “the mind’s clock” (3). In his analysis of SCN tissue grafts in hamsters, Martin R. Ralph clarifies that the SCN is “essential for the overt expression of rhythmicity in mammals” and is “most likely the site of circadian pacemaker cells” (341), though other biological structures likely contribute to circadian activity as well (347-48). Studies in humans suggest that the daily rhythm of this internal body clock “has about a twenty-four-hour-and-eleven-minute day” (Zimbardo and Boyd 192), though this may be a separate function from actual experiences of duration.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Michael G. Flaherty articulated a generalized theory of duration experience that echoes Ornstein’s fairly closely: “protracted duration occurs when conscious information processing is high, synchronicity occurs when conscious information processing is moderate, and temporal compression occurs when conscious information processing is low” (138). Robert Levine argues more specifically that “[p]eople tend to perceive time passing more quickly when experiences are pleasant, carry little sense of urgency, when they are busy, when they experience variety, and during activities that engage right-hemisphere modes of thinking” (37), while neuroscientist David Eagleman suggests that human aging plays a large role in the sensation of increasing rapidity; his studies indicate that human brains use more energy to create memories of novel experiences than familiar experiences, with the result that early life memories seem to represent longer periods of time (Krulwich). Suffice it to say that the question of duration experience remains a contested one.

The question of “time memory,” which asks how people organize their memories

of the past, is also a topic of interest in psychological research. In his 1990 volume *About Time*, William Friedman distills the concepts that psychologists have used to try to explain time memory into five categories: the temporal sequence model (which hypothesizes that our memories are organized through a form of date-stamping); the sequential model (memories are organized based on order of occurrence); the strength model (recent memories seem “stronger” than older memories); the inference model (we reconstruct time in relation to known events and other anchors); and the reminding model (memories are organized into pairs and cognitively cross-referenced) (28-29). While Friedman tends to prefer the inference model, he concedes that no single model will suffice to explain how people retrieve different types of temporal information from their memories. “It seems to be our nature,” he writes, “to experience and remember time on different scales – in different cycles – or in isolated streams, not as an absolute, linear continuum” (45).

One last topic of particular interest in psychological research is the categorization of what Stanford psychologist Philip Zimbardo calls different “time perspectives.”⁹ Along with John Boyd, Zimbardo has identified six time perspectives that are prevalent within western populations: “past-negative,” “past-positive,” “present-fatalistic,” “present-hedonistic,” “future,” and “transcendental-future” (52). These perspectives

⁹ Bernard S. Gorman and Alden E. Wessman pursued a similar line of research in the 1970s, identifying various “factor analytic scales for assessing individual differences in temporal experiences” (239). Observing that people vary in their sense of pacing and in the degree to which they feel a sense of control over time, Gorman and Wessman highlighted the importance of such factors as “*optimism versus pessimism, scheduling and planning abilities, change seeking, punctuality, sad versus happy past experiences, memory of the past, boredom and disinterest, preferences for slow and leisurely pace, and feelings of involvement and absorption*” (239).

describe the tendency of an individual to focus on negative or positive memories of past events, to privilege present enjoyment over future goal-planning, or to look beyond the “mundane” future towards immortality in an afterlife.¹⁰ Zimbardo and Boyd have developed a multiple-choice questionnaire that is intended to assign participants a rating for each time perspective. Participants are asked to agree or disagree with such statements as “Painful past experiences keep being replayed in my mind”; “I prefer friends who are spontaneous rather than predictable”; “It upsets me to be late for appointments”; “I like family rituals and traditions that are regularly repeated”; and “Spending what I earn on pleasures today is better than saving for tomorrow’s security” (56-59).¹¹ Understanding people’s time perspectives, Zimbardo and Boyd argue, can help explain everything from school drop-out rates and the prevalence of credit card debt to marital disagreements, drug addictions, and suicide attacks.¹² What is more, their research indicates that a

¹⁰ Zimbardo and Boyd identify an additional present-oriented perspective that they call the “Holistic Present,” which “involves training to live one’s life in the present moment and to include past and future in an expanded state of focus on the present” (53). While this time perspective “is central to Zen Buddhism” it is apparently not common enough in western cultures to be included in the primary classification scheme (53).

¹¹ The full survey and personalized results are available at thetimeparadox.com. While I consider myself a largely future-oriented person, I was astonished upon completing Zimbardo’s survey to find myself rated in the 99th percentile for future-orientedness, and off the bottom of the chart for present hedonism. In an effort to develop a more balanced time perspective I have begun to experiment with focusing more on the present, reducing my anxious awareness of future plans and clock-based scheduling. My stress level has gone down slightly, though it is easy to see how present-orientedness can lead to problems such as lateness for appointments. While my personal time orientation remains a work in progress, my unscientific experimenting appears to lend credence to Zimbardo’s and Boyd’s thesis.

¹² Zimbardo and Boyd write that “[s]een from a transcendental-future perspective, a suicide bomber’s act is not crazy, fanatical, hate-filled, or hopeless, but an act committed by a religious person who may have had little hope for his future in this life but has abundant hope in the transcendental future” (178).

person's time perspective can intentionally be changed – temporarily through hypnotherapy or in a sustained way through the everyday effort of “time-perspective reconstruction therapy” (118, 304) – meaning that “our time perspectives are not determined by nature or by some cosmic clock setter, but are learned ways of relating to our physical, biological, social, and cultural environments” (119). Advocating for “a balanced, flexible time perspective that allows you to choose the time perspective most appropriate for each situation” (297), Zimbardo and Boyd conclude that “[t]he single most important thing that you can do to enhance the quality of your life is to trade in an old, biased time perspective for a new, optimally balanced one” (311).

Throughout this history of inquiry into temporal experience, the researchers themselves have often been eloquent in highlighting the limitations of their results. Gorman and Wessman point out that while studies of the experience of duration tend to produce contradictory results and may be too closely linked to particular methodologies, a more serious limitation of laboratory research

seems to be in the lack of relationships between the artificially constricted laboratory studies of “microtime” and the personally relevant and meaningful experiences of time that have often been called “lived time” by the existentialists. For example, how does the knowledge of how accurately a subject judges an interval of a second, a minute, or an hour help us in understanding how the same person will plan his future, reminisce about his past, or experience his present? In the realm of “lived time,” we would expect to find rich and complex variables that are very different from the limited psychophysical judgments of simultaneity and duration. (228)

John A. Michon agrees that “there appears to be quite a lot more in everyday experience than just *now* and *flow*” (24). Friedman similarly laments that experiments on the

experience of time distortion “involve asking subjects to make time estimates of one sort or another under conditions controlled by the researcher” (20), and that “there is no constant metric against which people of different ages can compare their experience of long intervals like months or years” (21), concluding that in some cases “the best evidence we have now comes simply from questionnaires” (22). He also feels that the five models of “time memory” highlight “the serious limits of the methods we have at our disposal – we have no direct measures of trace strengths, a biological time-tagging mechanism, or the organization of memory. We must conduct experiments and observations that only indirectly tell us what we want to know – in effect tricking the mind into giving up its secrets” (30). While Zimbardo’s and Boyd’s questionnaire is intended to speak more directly to “lived time,” they also caution that while their generalized categorizations of time perspectives provide a useful theoretical terminology, “no two people’s attitudes toward time are identical” (50). Perhaps the best illustration of the possibilities and limits of the scientific study of temporal experience comes from E.A.C. Thomas’s ambitious attempt in 1975 to articulate “a formal model of time estimation,” which resulted in the equation $t_{est} = \alpha f(t, I) + (1 - \alpha)g^*(I, t)$, stating that “the judged duration of an interval is a weighted function (with weighting parameter α) of the directly encoded temporal information $f(t, I)$, and the remembered temporal information $g^*(I, t)$ ” (Michon 36-37). Simply put, the experience of duration depends on a particular combination of perception and memory. But *what* perceptions? *Which* memories?

Gorman and Wessman offer the following call to action for future research:

“Hopefully, we can accept a relativistic viewpoint in which we can examine how

temporal experiences are components of larger networks of ongoing processes. Such a stance is not easy to adopt because it means that we have to rely less upon the concepts of ‘objective’ time and the use of psychophysical methodologies” (257).¹³ Michon also discusses the necessity of moving beyond the sciences to understand experiences of time, singling out the work of “time artists” as potent sources:

Time is thoroughly anchored in art, not only in the so called temporal arts – music, dance and cinematography – but also in painting [...] and literature (Ricoeur, 1983). The significance of the time artists resides in their attempts to *manipulate* time in their self-created universes in ways that are internally consistent and that, consequently, appear plausible to the spectator or the reader. Thus, the appreciation of a work of art resembles the thought experiments [...] in science, and the requirement of internal consistency qualifies the genuine work of temporal art as an expurgated variety of intentional theory. (24)

Michon refers to writers who consciously manipulate temporality as “time novelists,” and while his statement is intriguing in its description of particular “genuine” works of art as neglected contributions to theoretical knowledge, we may push the sentiment a little further by suggesting that even those works of art that may not self-consciously manipulate temporality still serve as valuable reflections of time’s meaning and influence in human life. As Paul Ricoeur says, “[a]ll fictional narratives are ‘tales of time,’” even if “only a few are ‘tales about time’” (2: 101). Or, in Mark Currie’s formulation, which

¹³ One of Gorman’s and Wessman’s experiments asked subjects “to delineate certain time periods on two 10-inch lines,” the end points of one line having been marked “birth” and “now,” and the other “now” and “death” (235). They found that “periods close to the ‘now’ point were represented as disproportionately larger than the more remote points on both the past and the future line tasks,” and that “the more anxious, impulsive, and undisciplined subjects drew larger representations of the present than the calm, controlled, and responsible subjects” (235). This study serves as a good example of one that was designed in an attempt to learn about “lived time” rather than objectivist time, yet remains fairly abstract, relying on a carefully devised task whose conditions would not likely occur outside of the laboratory.

avoids the thorny matter of deciding which stories are “primarily” concerned with time, every story *knows* something about time (111).

Flaherty’s book, *A Watched Pot: How We Experience Time*, discloses a less explicit but equally revealing reliance on narrative as a site of temporal meaning. To understand why people sometimes experience objectively identical durations as compressed or protracted, Flaherty analyzes recorded anecdotes from athletes, students, police officers, victims of concentration camps, people who have seen UFOs, and so on, all containing references to perceived duration. A nautical rescue crew member, for instance, describes parachuting into the sea at night as a 30-second event that “seemed like an eternity” (72). Interestingly, though, some of Flaherty’s chosen narratives are taken from works of *fiction* – Virginia Woolf describes how Orlando perceives each present moment to be coloured by the past; Joseph Heller describes the experience of boredom in *Catch-22* – and Flaherty treats these passages identically to the personal anecdotes, drawing lessons about “human beings” from the experiences of fictional characters (74). The broad theory that Flaherty develops on the experience of duration seeks to explain the real people along with the invented ones.

So, the general trajectory of psychological research appears to lead in two directions: towards an improved understanding of the cognitive processes underlying the experience of duration, the mechanics of memory-formation, and differences in time orientation; and towards an acknowledgement that other avenues of inquiry, such as those provided by art and literature, are necessary to understand the broader associative qualities of temporal existence. I offer this look at psychological research not because the

study of literature requires justification from other disciplines – the indispensability of literature for understanding time becomes clear when discussed independently from science – but as an example of the necessity of multidisciplinary approaches to any broad question of human meaning, and also to indicate how the vocabulary of literary criticism can be of use not only in reading fiction, but in reading our own everyday, psychological, or philosophical experiences of time. For instance, in his study of how fiction teaches us in particular about our everyday awareness of the future as a time that will later become the past, Mark Currie notes that “the reading of fictional narratives is a kind of preparation for and repetition of the continuous anticipation that takes place in non-fictional life” (6). Narratology, then, equips us to understand the “*anticipation of retrospection*” as a temporal structure “at the heart of narrative, both in its mode of fictional storytelling and as a more general mode of making sense of the world” (29). While literary analysis has its limits in that it is unlikely to produce controlled, easily quantifiable data separating the experience of duration from other variables, it offers complementary, and in some cases unparalleled insight into the inherently temporal nature of subjectivity, and makes visible the powerful links between temporality and other domains of human concern.

Paul Ricoeur writes that “[t]he modern novel [...] has constituted for at least three centuries now a prodigious workshop for experiments in the domains of composition and the expression of time” (2: 8), and that, going beyond chronological time, “fiction has its own resources for inventing temporal measurements proper to it” (2: 25). These resources, which I will examine in more detail soon, Ricoeur sees as necessary in order to

“encounter expectations in the reader concerning time that are infinitely more subtle than rectilinear succession” (2: 25). While the limitations that I see in psychological research have mainly to do with the inability of science to articulate some of the more personal and imaginative aspects of lived experiences of time, Ricoeur believes that the central aporia of a purely psychological or phenomenological approach – he groups the two together since they both approach time “by way of the mind” (3: 14) – is its failure to take into account those aspects of time revealed by cosmological inquiry. At the same time, a purely physical or cosmological approach is blind to the psychological realities of time experience. Inevitably, Ricoeur writes, “we cannot think about cosmological time (the instant) without surreptitiously appealing to phenomenological time and vice versa” (3: 96). The resulting impasse, “that a psychological theory and a cosmological theory mutually occlude each other to the very extent they imply each other” (3: 14), can be responded to only through narrative, which contains the means to complete “a refiguration of temporal experience” (3: 3). The central thesis of Ricoeur’s seminal three-volume work, *Time and Narrative*, is that “time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative” (1: 3).

Whether we find psychological research to be limited because it is too human-centred (unable to account for cosmological time), or not human-centred enough (unable to account for individual or imaginative experiences), narrative appears necessary to give voice to the complexities of human temporal experience. “*That’s what fiction is about, isn’t it,*” asks Yann Martel; “*the selective transforming of reality? The twisting of it to bring out its essence?*” (*Life* vi). With reference to certain Canadian literary texts, I would

like to discuss how literature can work to articulate and interrogate personal experiences of time, first by highlighting some of the important issues at stake in understanding the subjectivity of temporality, and the temporality of subjectivity.

Articulating Subjective Temporality

Perhaps the most profound aspects of temporality facing individual people are causality and mortality. While nations and cultural collectives are inevitably temporary entities subject to the apparent one-way trip along time's arrow, the constraints of time upon individuals tend to be more immediate and visible.¹⁴ For a living being, time is always bound up with mortality, not only in the sense that all people live for a period of time and then die, but also in the sense that all change, all movement through time, is both birth and death; every moment in time brings about the demise of certain circumstances that held true in the previous moment along with the creation of new circumstances. The Death card in a Tarot deck emphasizes this association. The card depicts the skeletal personified figure of Death amidst dying people from all levels of social status; the significance of the card for divination, though, has less to do with literal death than with the imminence of change, with transition and transformation. Even a change for the better involves a kind of death. As Margaret Atwood's sardonic oracle

¹⁴ The constraints of mortality on cultural collectives may become particularly pronounced during times of war, revolution, or genocide. The Quebec motto *Je me souviens* is especially eloquent in articulating a sense of triumph over cultural mortality. For further discussion of the relationship between catastrophic events and cultural models of time, see Chapter Five.

says in her “Circe/Mud Poems,” “To know the future / there must be a death. / Hand me the axe” (*You Are Happy* 66).

In his poetry volume *The Watchmaker’s Table*, Brian Bartlett gives voice to the frustrations involved in time’s dominion over human affairs. In “Damn Clock,” he writes of “a loud clock / a clock that beat out time like a migraine / pulse [...] counting out seconds / like bent galley slaves” (112). “I banished it to the hall closet,” he says. “I did not want silence / punctuated so, did not want my morning / measured out by a metronome, cut up into its / 14,440 seconds.” And yet, that night the clock returns; it is “stationed / on the bathroom counter,” and by the following morning it sits on the kitchen windowsill “while the day chant[s] / its soundless mantra.” His unsuccessful attempt to rid himself of the “damn clock” echoes Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth, who cries “Out, damned spot!” while furiously scrubbing her hands (*Macbeth* 5.1.33). Just as the irreversibility of murder creates the impression for Lady Macbeth of permanent bloodstains, the inevitable presence of time means that Bartlett’s clock will always be close at hand. Locking a timepiece in the hall closet has no hope of stopping the day’s soundless mantra. In “Travels of the Watch,” Bartlett writes,

Even the watch
grows tired of time and wishes it could
unstrap itself,
 cast itself off,
sustained by some other heartbeat. (110)

The uneasy coexistence of scientific and subjective time – the ticking watch and the ticking heart – is the central theme of W.H. New’s long poem *Along a Snake Fence Riding*, which, according to New’s note to the reader, contains the voices of “the

Newtonian Clock (which is constant throughout), and six others” (6). The six “others,” which appear to be human characters (though the wording above suggests that they may also be clocks of a kind) speak in numbered sections “which appear non-sequentially, by association—like the process of memory or recognition—as the book moves forward into story” (6).¹⁵ The result is a pastiche of voices and narrative fragments; while the Newtonian Clock chants short rhythmic phrases in block capital letters on the bottom of each page, the human voices along the top of the page speak in no clear order, often on unrelated topics. There are several ways of reading the book: starting on the first page, one can read the human fragment and the Newtonian fragment, then turn to the second page and so on until the end; or, one can read across the top of each page to hear the human voices without interruption, then return to the beginning and set out again with the Newtonian voice; or, making note of the relative positions of the 66 nonsequential numbered sections, one can flip maddeningly forwards and backwards in an attempt to sequentialize the narrative.

However one turns the pages, various revelations about the human experience of time come to light. The nonsequential sections, by mirroring the workings of “memory or recognition,” indicate that subjective time operates in a fundamentally different way from the regular forward beat of absolute clock time. An epigraph taken from Australian writer Tim Winton’s short story “Aquifer” articulates a possible basis for this theme: “*When a wave breaks, the water is not moving. The swell has travelled great distances but only the*

¹⁵ The six voices are perhaps reminiscent of the “characters” in Luigi Pirandello’s 1922 play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, which interrogates the concepts of art, life, authority, and relativistic experience. The play begins and ends with characters looking at their watches, arguing over the appropriate action for the present time of day.

energy is moving, not the water. Perhaps time moves through us and not us through it . . . the past is in us, and not behind us. Things are never over” (qtd. in New 7). This reading sees consciousness as the medium within which time takes shape; the associative quality of memory serves to produce ripples of temporality in different directions, so that a person’s experience of the present moment is always coloured by the simultaneous presence of certain pasts. Time in this sense is a product of subjectivity more than it is a separate dimension of the world, an echo of Flaherty’s view that “human beings make time by sifting the fragmentary dynamics of experience through the reflexive ‘unity of consciousness’” (2). The associations that subjective experience creates between different moments of time function in a similar way to metaphorical thought processes by which counterlogical relationships are formed between different domains of reality; the jumps between nonsequential moments in the story are a form of metaphor. As one of New’s voices says in section 39 (in between sections 10 and 23):

collections, right? match covers, baseball
cards, unclear photographs and stone eggs—
souvenirs, *yes*—of living, or having lived—
old books and older tales:
it is the difference, the space between,
that shapes the telling (17)

Seeing time as a series of metaphors highlights the creative potential involved in the subjective experience of time, but New is careful to draw attention as well to the constraints inherent in the inevitable forging of sometimes unwelcome relationships between the past and the present. One such image describes the prying apart of a section of the serpentine fence bordering a field:

tricky, using a crowbar on the line:

easy enough to pry the wood apart, but then—
then can strike back, flick splinters, hit
hard, bloody, full in the teeth:
like *no*, like laughter, like
murder in trees (18)

While New foregrounds the nonsequential, associative qualities of subjective time to a remarkable extent, this type of temporal relationship-making plays an important role in countless works of literature. For novelists, it is often standard practice to begin a story with a protagonist who exists in the “present,” but soon takes the reader deep into her personal past through associative recollections, gradually following chosen events back up to the present moment which is then understood fully in relation to its formative histories.¹⁶ This method of storytelling not only mirrors the subjective process by which the present is always already shaped by an awareness of the past, but also articulates the restrictions that time’s flow has placed upon the character, and often emphasizes the triumph associated with overcoming, or at least accepting, the past.

Whether the subjective process of association-making between past and present is creative or restrictive, it results in the same narrativizing tendency that is at work in historical narratives. Recalling Hayden White’s comment that historical narratives are in

¹⁶ In an interview, Joseph Boyden notes that while early drafts of his novel *Three Day Road* were narrated chronologically, he found this ordering of events unsatisfying: “[I]t struck me that I was applying a Western style of storytelling to an Aboriginal story. And so I thought about what is important to the Cree and Ojibwe. Life evolves around a circle. The earth, the sun, the moon are all round, and we live our days according to their dictation. The seasons travel through spring, summer, autumn, winter, and back to spring again. [...] And so I decided to begin this story near the chronological end and then trace through the circle around to where I started” (344). The fact that the same circular narrative technique is actually common to novelists of many different cultural backgrounds suggests both that the associative ordering of subjective time is universal, and that indigenous and western forms of ordering experience may reveal deeper similarities than are usually acknowledged. I explore this overlap further in Chapter Four.

fact “symbolic structures, extended metaphors, that ‘liken’ the events reported in them to some form with which we have already become familiar in our literary culture” (91), New’s description of the past as a “makeshift territory, / the one we learned later / to call time—” (22) frames subjective time, like historical narrative, as a product of fluid symbols shaped and selected retroactively (even if the “retro” in question is no further than the slippery instant when the present becomes the past). New’s “Narrator,” another distinct voice whose sections of text are independent from the numbered sections, likens the emphases and filtering processes that produce a sense of temporality, of chronology, to a perpetual sorting act that consciousness imposes upon the continuous “now” of direct experience:

we write chronologies, we do not live them,
except in the family photographs we carry with us:
[...]

how much we took for granted:
after, and therefore *owing to*: one of time's grammars—
yet only the moment NOW *lives* in the mind:

image, and image—pulsing—
no *then* intrudes, no *after later before*,
they're for the sorting bin:

for instance, not the hour fixed at 3:59,
but opening the glass door on the grandfather clock,
no-one else around, to touch the *tick* of the pendulum— (63)

But while the image of the grandfather clock suggests that sensory experience takes place *now* in the instantaneous present, and that more formalized measurements articulate the sorting of sequence and causality, the Narrator goes on to create the impression that experiencing and sorting processes in fact interpenetrate one another. Subjectivity is the process by which “we gather possibilities” and

compose them into maps of time

(before-and-after when), collapse them into story
(where once because a traveller began)—
concurrence: sorting *then*

while hearing the clock tick *now* into the
next dance on: watching the rocks and eddying pools,
while listening close to the river— (113)

Like the juxtaposition of associative human voices with the regular Newtonian voice, the apparently dual roles – experiencer of *now* and sorter of *then* – assigned to both subjective time and clock time indicate that the two modes of temporal experience are inevitably intertwined and perform complementary if not overlapping functions. Subjective experiences of time involve taking sequential regularity into account, while the Newtonian voice notices that time is not rigid and singular. “TIME / STRETCHES / TIME SHRINKS,” it says (35); and later it seems unable to fix temporality into any one register, asking not just *what time*, but “WHICH TIME / SUMMERTIME / WINTERTIME / WHICH TIME / DINNERTIME / WHICH TIME” (109).

The interrelatedness of clock time and personal time is perhaps most profoundly realized insofar as even the ostensibly inhuman objectivity of absolute time is tied to the mortality of the human beings who measure it. Early mechanical clocks emphasized this association using images of Death. Prague’s famous astronomical clock, which was built in various stages starting from the fourteenth century, includes an elaborate mechanized figure of Death. At the top of every hour Death tolls his bell and nods over his hourglass, reminding those assembled in the town square that their own hours are counted.



Prague's astronomical clock (photo: P. Huebener)

The Newtonian voice in *Along a Snake Fence Riding* articulates this connection:

IN LESS THAN
NO TIME
THE TICK OF
CLOCK TIME
THE TICKING
LIFETIME
THE TIME OF A
CLOCK TIME
THE TIME OF
LIFE (13)

Describing time as having not only “HANDS” and a “FACE” but also “LIPS,”

“TONGUE,” and “TEETH,” the Newtonian voice uses the phrase “CONSUMING

TIME” (88), a wording that describes time as that which consumes life, but also describes

the definitive act of lived experience as one of using up moments of time. The line recalls

Cronus, the Greek god of time who devours his children. It also echoes Milton's phrase "eating death" in *Paradise Lost* (9.792), used at the moment when Eve eats the fruit; the words describe her consuming of that which will bring death into the world, and describe death as that which consumes. In New's case, the ostensible separation, but continuous intertwining, of absolute time and the personal experience of time suggests that while the two may appear to carry out separate existences one cannot exist without the other; throughout *Along a Snake Fence Riding* neither the human voices nor the Newtonian voice ever speak without the other also speaking on the same page. Psychologist Klaus F. Reigel uses the term "dialectical time" to describe the same principle. He argues that like a polyphonic musical composition, dialectical time "indicates that any experience of time involves the interaction of at least two event-sequences, for example, the phenomena observed and the measurement taken" (101).

Ricoeur argues that the opposition between clock time and "internal time" must not be seen as a simplistic binary, since the relations between the two are multiplicitous. "The variations on the theme of this relation," he writes, "lead fiction well beyond the abstract opposition we have just referred to and make of it, for the reader, a powerful means of detecting the infinitely varied way of combining the perspectives of time that speculation by itself fails to mediate" (2: 108). This powerful perspective afforded by fiction (fiction here being a broad enough term to include poetry) is made clear in *Along a Snake Fence Riding* by the very form of the text; while the human and Newtonian voices never speak alone, the Narrator-with-a-capital-N is given the occasional solo performance without the simultaneous presence of other voices on the same page, and it

often takes the relationship between personal and absolute time as its subject. “It was there with us, of course, all along,” the Narrator says, “the time of the clocks: / we saw the hands passing in front of our eyes” (31). The tendency of clock time to distract human beings from the nonsequential fluidity of lived experience even while it reveals truths about the nature of temporality is captured in the phrase “passing in front of our eyes,” which suggests both an obscuring and a clearing of vision.

“We entered a time shop once,” the Narrator continues, “[...] recognized the faces on the wall” (31). Northrop Frye argues that “we can objectify our own existence in time and space only by looking at the face of a clock or at our own face in a mirror” (*Words* 267); the anthropomorphization of a clock’s “face” here turns the mechanical-temporal measuring tool into a mirror in which humanity is revealed. In his commentary on the concept of “the Face” as a human element bestowed onto an otherwise faceless “other,” Don McKay understands the gesture as “an address to the other with an acknowledgement of our human-centredness built in, a salutary and humbling reminder” (*Vis à Vis* 99). The idea of clocks having faces is double-edged in that it projects a human quality onto the objective measurement of absolute time, yet also accurately acknowledges that a human-based and metaphorical understanding of time’s workings is inevitable. Perhaps the reading of clocks should, like nature poetry, “not be taken to be *avoiding* anthropocentrism, but to be enacting it, thoughtfully” (McKay, *Vis à Vis* 29). In any case, New’s Narrator’s ability to speak alone on such matters without the page being divided into polyphonic fragments implies that while the human and Newtonian voices depend on one another for their own existence, the ideal of Story carries its own weight

in the articulation of temporality.

The importance of story for articulating human-scale temporalities is tied up with contested notions of individual subjectivity itself; along with the very concept of “individual,” “personal,” or “subjective” experiences of time, New’s suggestion that human (we might say, internal) and absolute (external) temporalities are inseparable brings to mind broader questions about what constitutes an individual. Recent decades have seen an increase in understandings of identity that shift focus away from essentialized characteristics and towards temporality and relationships, as with ecological theorist Neil Evernden’s suggestion that “we might more closely approximate the facts of existence by regarding ourselves less as objects than as sets of relationships, or as processes in time” (40). An individual, he argues, “is not a thing at all, but a sequence of ways of relating: a panorama of views of the world” (133). Likewise, studies of human identity as a dialogical phenomenon – as a persistently transforming product of ongoing interactions, or dialogue, with other people – such as those proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin and Charles Taylor, emphasize the ways in which identity is a function of negotiation, of relationships that unfold over time. If cognitive and physical existence emerge out of continuous interactions with other human beings and one’s surroundings, then there is a real sense in which a person is made of the moments in which she exists.

Interdisciplinary critic Craig Ireland is wary of theories of identity formation which imply that relational or experiential subjectivity is a universal human trait. Rather, he argues that the prevalence of experience as a site of temporal meaning for identity formation is the product of a particular historical and socioeconomic context tied to the

rise of cultural modernity. The modern era casts aside rigid eschatological temporality and privileges an evolving sense of “change through unexpectedness” involving “the reintegration of the unexpected within renewed but modified narratives of the self” (129). Ireland’s study adds a welcome historical complexity to theories of relational identity-formation, though questions remain about the degree to which cultural chronotopes can radically reorient experiences of time and self. Still, two significant lessons emerge from Ireland’s work. First, we see an indication that a conceptual separation of cultural from personal chronotopes, as well as cultural and personal identity, may not be possible. The experience of temporality, like other forms of meaning-making, is continuously negotiated between individual practice and social modes, which are themselves subject to those aspects of time that lie beyond human control. While studies of personal temporality can be revealing, it is neither possible nor desirable to envision a clear distinction between personal and social experience. Second, Ireland reveals that insofar as experience figures in self-formation, some concept of temporality is necessary in order to articulate both the occurrence of experience and its effected shifts in identity. And the very act of connecting the present conceptually with the past and the future requires, or creates, the concept of narrative. Experience, Ireland writes, “can be said to be *both the occasion for and the result of* narrative emplotment” (134), a bidirectional connection that echoes Ricoeur’s commentary and returns us to a consideration of the intimate relationship between temporal experience and narrative, a connection that New, Ireland, and Ricoeur are by no means alone in identifying.

Narrative and Temporality

Because an understanding of time's passage and its meaning for human life requires the use of narrative concepts like sequence, duration, and consequence, story is a tool for making time comprehensible. Christopher Dewdney, like Ireland, connects temporal experience with identity, writing, "although we only really exist in the present, all of the experience that forms our identity comes from the past, which is why time and memory have such an intimate relationship. We can't be who we are unless we *remember* who we were" (134). The process of memory-making itself, involving a drawing of connections between different moments in time, shares its essence with that of narrativity, so that the formation of identity – whether based on memories of personal experience or memories of eschatological mythology – is inseparable from the articulation of narrative. Don McKay's definition of memory as "the momentary domestication of time" (*Deactivated* 30) emphasizes how the conversion of pure duration into particular comprehensible sequences is a broad human necessity for understanding both ourselves and our world. If we wish to understand how time operates not only on the level of "the individual" in a conceptual sense, but for *particular* individuals, we can listen to the stories that people tell about their own lives; we can become students of personal historiography, of the personalized domestication of time. As Rudy Wiebe's fictionalized RCMP officer Spike Millen says about the notoriously silent man known as the Mad Trapper, "He's got a lifetime inside himself; hidden from us" (129). Bringing a human life-time to light requires the telling of stories.

Of course, we are limited by time, space, and opportunity in the life stories we are able to hear, and even those personal narratives that we do come across are limited by the circumstances of fact and perspective. Describing the novel as “a complex gloss upon the word ‘meanwhile’” (25), Benedict Anderson explains that readers of a work of fiction understand more about the characters’ temporally overlapping actions than the characters themselves, who “may be largely unaware of one another” (26). Readers of fiction take on a degree of omniscience in their relation to the story, accessing truths about what it means to bear witness to human existence that may not be available to individuals who speak from a limited point of view. While factual forms can produce a similar effect – Anderson likens a newspaper to “a novel whose author has abandoned any thought of a coherent plot” (33) – they remain in the grasp of actual occurrences and partial knowledge. Ricoeur writes that “from the epic to the novel, by way of tragedy and the ancient and modern forms of comedy, the time of fictional narrative has been freed from the constraints requiring it to be referred back to the time of the universe,” a freedom that results in “the independence of fiction in exploring the resources of phenomenological time that are left unexploited or are inhibited by historical narrative” (3: 128).

The ability of art to escape the constraints of factuality is of course not particular to literature; Christiane Pflug’s 1966 painting *Kitchen Door with Ursula* exemplifies the capacity of art to highlight the associative aspects of human temporality, to tell a very human story even in a single image. The portrayal of a neighbourhood in wintertime seen from the inside of a house is made counterlogical by the reflection of a spring scene in the glass door. The simultaneous presence of objectively discrete temporal moments

speaks to the inevitable circumvention in the human mind of the absolute flow of time – whether through memory, longing, or imagination – as well as the ability of art to “mirror” subjectivity. In other words, the painting does not misrepresent reality so much as it truthfully reflects subjective experience. Pflug said of her work, “I would like to reach a certain clarity which does not exist in life” (qtd. in Newlands 247).



Christiane Pflug, *Kitchen Door with Ursula* (Newlands 247)

Dewdney writes, “It is our ability to time-travel like this, within our minds, that makes us the creatures we are. Without this ability there would be no art, no dreams, no

cities or buildings” (27). Literature and other arts allow us not only to “talk” to one another across time and space, but also to use what Ricoeur calls “imaginative variations” (2: 101) to probe the meaning of time’s role in human affairs without the restrictions associated with the historiographic sorting of actual events. Just as Flaherty’s matter-of-fact treatment of passages of fiction in his study of the experience of duration reminds us that character is a deeply ingrained metaphor for identity, we can also say that plot is a metaphor for temporality, and like all metaphors it allows us to draw connections that speak to the associative linkages of the mind. Literary representations of personal temporality consistently reveal various facets of individual experiences of time, sometimes overlapping with the categorizations identified in psychological research; these include the weight of the past or the future in ordering the articulation of present experience, the conceptual gravity of particular remembered moments, the perception of differences in the rate or shape of time’s flow, the process of negotiation between personal and social temporalities, the importance of the choice between different tenses, and the physical existence of narrative within the actual passage of time.

In her short story “Tricks,” Alice Munro comments memorably on the ways in which personal temporalities can flow at different rates as people experience what we might call time dilation effects around events of great personal gravity. She also highlights how this process is inextricably connected to narrative. The story follows the life of Robin, who lives in an Ontario town looking after an older sister who, due to severe childhood asthma, is “stunted halfway between childhood and female maturity” (*Runaway* 237). Once each year, Robin takes the train to Stratford, attends a matinee

performance of Shakespearean theatre, eats a sandwich, and then catches the train back home. “That was all,” we are told. “Yet those few hours filled her with an assurance that the life she was going back to, which seemed so makeshift and unsatisfactory, was only temporary and could easily be put up with” (239). The centrality of time to the story is hinted at in these descriptions, but becomes more explicit when Robin meets Daniel, who lives in Stratford and runs a small clock repair shop. He invites Robin in for dinner, where she finds that “the place was full of clocks. Dark wood and light wood, painted figures and gilded domes. They sat on shelves and on the floor and even on the counter across which business could be transacted. Beyond that, some sat on benches with their insides exposed” (244). Like the ubiquity of time-reckoning in human life – within the “shelves” of memory, upon the “floor” of foundational cultural assumptions or consciousness itself, along the support structures of everyday transactions – Daniel’s clocks fill every corner of the shop.

And yet, the fact that some of the clocks have their broken insides exposed suggests, like W.H. New’s poetry, that the human attempt to regulate time as an undifferentiated progress of objectively measured minutes sometimes fails. The image ambiguously suggests that objectivist constructions of time sometimes cease to function, and that this failure prompts us to crack open and examine the faulty workings upon which we have grown to rely; or that the act of such examination itself disrupts the systematic measurement of time. Daniel inhabits the precarious, even ominous position of the quantum physicist who eliminates the potential movements of a subatomic particle simply through the act of observing it, or that of the biologist who, intending to learn how

an animal works, begins dissection only to find himself observing a nonfunctioning animal. The very possibility of a breakdown in the objective measure of time suggests that time involves processes that cannot be converted into a string of sequential digits and still retain their identity. Specifically, the human experience of time does not follow an undifferentiated flow of minutes and hours, but rather holds particular moments as significant; only a mock person, like the painted figures on the clocks, would fail to experience time's subjective dimensions. (Are the "figures" toy people, or numerical digits? The ambiguity is telling.) A crucial or watershed moment – Dewdney uses the term "cardinal memory" (133) – is one in which the clock of subjective experience stops, and upon which a person's ongoing present experience centres itself. For Robin, her meeting with Daniel is such a moment. She promises to meet him again the following year, and returns home to continue her life. Now, however, "he remained with her. The thought of him was there when she woke up, and in lulls at work. [...] She had something now to carry around with her all the time" (254-55).

The following summer Robin returns to Stratford for a performance of *As You Like It*. She leaves the play early, preoccupied with the thought that "within a few minutes now, her life would be changed" (258). Arriving at the shop, she sees Daniel through the door, but he appears perturbed, looking away from her and "around the shop [...] at the array of clocks, as if they might give him some information or some support" (259). Finally he shuts the door in front of her without a word. Robin returns home in tears, vowing never to go to Stratford again.

The second part of the story picks up Robin's life forty years later; she is near

retirement, working in a local psychiatric ward. She is struck one day to recognize a sleeping elderly patient as Daniel, but upon reading his admittance information she learns that he is Alexander, Daniel's twin. Alexander, she reads, "apparently has been deaf-mute since birth or from illness shortly after," and had been under Daniel's care until the latter's recent death (267). "I.Q. never determined," the admittance sheet reveals, "but he was trained to work at clock repairs" (267). Robin realizes that the man who spurned her forty years ago was not Daniel at all, but his twin. "Shakespeare should have prepared her," Munro's narrator says. "Twins are often the reason for mix-ups and disasters in Shakespeare" (268). Reflecting back on the disastrous moment in the clock shop, Robin thinks: "It was all spoiled in one day, in a couple of minutes, not by fits and starts, struggles, hopes and losses, in the long-drawn-out way that such things are more often spoiled" (268). "She wished she could tell somebody," the story ends. "Him" (269).

The danger of mistaken identities, though, is just one of the lessons Robin had the chance to learn from Shakespeare. In Act Two of *As You Like It*, Jaques tells about his encounter with the fool, Touchstone, who

drew a dial from his poke,
And, looking on it with lack-lustre eye
Says very wisely 'It is ten o'clock.'
'Thus may we see,' quoth he, 'how the world wags.
'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine,
And after one hour more 'twill be eleven.
And so, from hour to hour we ripe and ripe,
And then from hour to hour we rot and rot;
And thereby hangs a tale.' (2.7.20-28)¹⁷

¹⁷ Commentators have pointed out that Touchstone can be interpreted to pun "hour" with "whore," and to imply "penis" with the slang "tale" ("tail"), adding a typically (for him) vulgar tone to the speech (see Brissenden's comments in Shakespeare p.144). Whether

As Touchstone realizes, the existence of story itself critically depends on a conceptualization of time, and of how past events relate to future events. His conclusion about his clock's reckoning of passing time – “thereby hangs a tale” – is a vital one for Munro, whose writing here implies that time is the mechanism through which story functions.

Beyond Touchstone's suggestion that time can be interpreted variously as a measure of ripening or of rotting, the slipperiness of time is a prominent theme as well for other characters in *As You Like It*, who discuss the relationships between objective clock time and subjective perceived time. As Rosalind points out to Orlando, “Time travels in divers paces / with divers persons” (3.2.290-91). Just as story (or “tale”) functions differently for different people, or even for the same person at different moments, time itself travels in different ways. If time is the mechanism of story, there is also a sense in which story is the mechanism of time; the particular experiences that carry weight within a life-narrative give shape to the perceived flow of time, and this shape is often twisted back upon itself as the present cannot escape the pull of past events. The physical relativity of time made famous through Einstein's assertion that “every reference body has its own particular time” – that the universe contains no single correct clock, but “as many clocks as we like” (qtd. in Kern 19) – finds its human counterpart in the notion that the variations of subjective temporality are as infinite and as relative as the variations of personal stories.

the topic of the speech is read as the transmission of venereal disease through prostitution or the more innocent “rot” of natural human aging, the importance of time's passage to human experience remains central.

For Robin, the disastrous encounter with Daniel's twin – those couple of minutes that spoil everything – overrides the initial meeting to become the new and permanent watershed moment in her life, and the crux of her life story for the next forty years. In the end she is more similar than she realizes to her sister, now thematically her twin, who is "stunted halfway" along the progress of her life. It is fully appropriate that Robin's fateful moment takes place in a clock shop among the broken-down and exposed mechanisms for reckoning time, and it is no coincidence that her brief attempt, after first meeting Daniel, to teach herself clock construction, is a failure (254). She is unable to take charge of her experience of time, to restart her subjective clock, and this temporal blockage becomes the central concern around which her life narrative is organized. Margaret Laurence has said that an author's treatments of time and narrative voice are "inextricably bound together," that it is effectively "the character who chooses which parts of the personal past, the family past and the ancestral past have to be revealed in order for the present to be realized and the future to happen" (126, 130), a view that coincides with Ricoeur's belief that "there are as many temporal 'experiences' as poets, even as poems" (2: 81). What is true of any narrator, then, is particularly true of Robin: her experience of time *is* her story.

Likewise, Alexander's experience of time is his story, or lack thereof. Ricoeur's thesis that "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative" (1: 3) – that human time "is nothing other than narrated time" (3: 102) – is relevant here in its implication that the *failure* to construct a narrative coincides with the failure to conceptualize time in a human way. While skilled at understanding clock

mechanics, Alexander has no language through which to construct a life narrative in subjective terms and is unable to tell his own story, looking instead ineffectually to the clocks in the workshop for whatever support they may be able to give him. While his own sense of time remains difficult to assess because Munro's narration never enters his perspective, his final pose, as he sleeps in the psychiatric hospital bed, suggests that he is ultimately unreceptive to time's subjective dimensions. He appears very much like we would imagine the clocks' painted figures, frozen with his mouth open but speaking no words (264), a stark reminder of Ricoeur's comment that narrative itself is "a guarding of time, insofar as there can be no thought about time without narrated time" (3: 241). Robin's final wish in the story, to be able to "tell somebody," suggests, too, that the desire to narrate and share experience is a human response to, and an attempt to reshape, personal time dilation. Her wish is fulfilled insofar as Munro narrates the story on her behalf, while Alexander's temporality remains unnarrativized and not fully human.

The use of a pivotal moment – usually a negative one, such as Robin's encounter with Daniel's twin – as the defining feature of a character's life story is common in literature, reflecting broadly perceived anxieties about the perpetual influence of past events. Munro's short story "Post and Beam" offers a similarly vivid portrayal of such anxiety when the character Lorna convinces herself that her older sister has likely committed suicide. This is "the time before," she tells herself. But once she finds the dead body everything will be "the time after" (*Hateship* 212). In another story, "Trespasses," prickly burrs that stick to Lauren's ankles while she helps to bury her adopted sister's ashes – an event mired in secrecy and trauma – become a metaphor for thorny pasts that

cannot be detached. She tries to pull the burrs from her legs, only to find them stuck to some of her fingers, and then more fingers. “She was so sick of these burrs that she wanted to beat her hands and yell out loud, but she knew that the only thing she could do was just sit and wait” (*Runaway* 235). Occasionally, though, Munro grants her characters some leeway in shaping the past to fit their needs, articulating the useful imaginative potential of the ability to reconceptualize the flow of time from past to future and back again. In “What is Remembered,” the protagonist Meriel remembers only particular aspects of her one-time lover, realizing years later that if she had been unable to suppress her suspicion of his infidelity, “Her life might have been different” (*Hateship* 244). She begins now to remember him in this new light, wondering “if he’d stay that way, or if she had some new role waiting for him, some use still to put him to in her mind, during the time ahead” (245).

The oppressive weight of the past in the ongoing formation of identity is a central motif as well in Dionne Brand’s body of work. Describing the life of slave plantation workers in *In Another Place, Not Here*, she writes: “And the living, they lived in the past or had no past but a present that was filled, peopled with the past. No matter their whims and flights into the future some old face or old look, some old pain would appear” (44). Any woman, she writes, is “full of all the things that had happened to her [...]. One way or the other, a woman was always pregnant” (233). In *What We All Long For*, Brand describes the grief of a couple who lost their young son while fleeing Vietnam several decades earlier. The remaining daughters become reminders “of their parents’ past, their other life; the life that was cut in half one night on a boat to Hong Kong” (59). Cam, the

mother, rarely sleeps, obsessively imagining “over again and again the scene at the bay when they both lost sight of Quy [...], trying to alter the sequence of events so that she would arrive at herself in the present with her family and her mind intact. [...] Why couldn’t she reclaim the time?” (113). In her poetry collection *Land to Light On*, Brand describes being pulled over, along with two other black friends, by a police officer whose gaze constrains them, forcing their pasts upon them, fastening their identities as members of a subjugated race: “The snow-blue laser of a cop’s eyes fixes us / in this unbearable archaeology” (73). For people of African descent in the Americas, “History is already seated in the chair in the empty room when one arrives” (*Map* 25).

These examples suggest that a past event can be a defining feature of a person’s identity because she perceives it to be so, or because it is imposed as such by some form of authority. While either possibility could be construed as a failure of dialogic identity-making, the two can more usefully be articulated in terms of dialogism by saying that the past event or characteristic continues to make its presence felt in perpetuity; the past event remains a present participant in the ongoing dialogue through which identity is constructed. Ricoeur expands this idea by quoting Saint Augustine’s description of a threefold present: “The present of past things is the memory; the present of present things is direct perception [...]; and the present of future things is expectation” (1: 11).¹⁸ And as Ricoeur later goes on to suggest with reference to Heidegger, the profound unity of the past, the present, and the future in human experience may “require that the very terms

¹⁸ Freud’s concept of melancholia, of the persistent shadow of a lost love object over a person’s ego, is another way to articulate the negative aspects of “the present of past things.”

‘future,’ ‘past,’ and ‘present’ be abandoned, terms that Augustine never felt obliged to question, out of respect for ordinary language, despite his audacity in speaking of the present *of* the future, the present *of* the past, and the present *of* the present” (3: 68).¹⁹ Like Augustine, Heidegger, and Ricoeur, literature often seeks to articulate the deep, inevitable connections in human experience between the past, the present, and the future, all of which points to an apparent limitation in psychological treatises that understand time perspectives to be malleable. While Zimbardo and Boyd find inspiration in Holocaust survivors such as Edie Eger, a woman who emphasizes the positive aspects of her past and “exude[s] a joy for life” (90), there is a danger in framing Eger’s approach as a model for all to follow. The time-perspective reconstruction therapy that Zimbardo and Boyd advocate has very real practical benefits because perspectives can indeed be adaptable, but understanding Eger’s story as “a testament to the power that each of us has to reconstruct and reinterpret the past” (91) risks casting Brand’s “unbearable archaeology” as a form of psychopathology, a deficiency on the part of the sufferer, rather than an exemplary articulation of human experience.²⁰

¹⁹ While justification exists for abandoning the terms “past,” “present,” and “future,” the words carry enough of a practical distinction that their continued use is in little doubt. Heidegger’s difficult quest to construct new language that better represents phenomenological experience results, Ricoeur says, in the belief that “[t]emporality is then the articulated unity of coming-towards, having-been, and making-present, which are thereby given to be thought of together” (3: 70). This alternative vocabulary appears to maintain a threefold temporal distinction, yet privileges the present as the phenomenological vantage point for human experience.

²⁰ As Freud’s diagnosis of melancholia suggests, social codes exist that prescribe general durations of time appropriate for mourning. Robert Levine notes that a typical sanctioned bereavement period for widows in the United States in the 1920s was three years, but by the late twentieth century most corporations allowed three days (144). Traditional Mi’kmaq wakes, on the other hand, are structured by event time rather than external

We also see, particularly in *Land to Light On*, an example of the potential conflict between personal and broader cultural conceptualizations of time-reckoning, since perception (the present), along with memory and expectation (the past and future), can be shaped by unequal social interactions. Daniel Coleman describes this as a negotiation of chronotopes: “We construct chronotopes in an ongoing dialogue between individual and collective experience, and much of our personal sense of belonging has to do with the fit between our individual time-space maps and those of the communities in which we live” (“Contented” 231). Not only can grand cultural concepts like linear progress fail to hold for all members of society, but even for individuals who in some respects subscribe to them these narratives will almost certainly fail to articulate particular aspects of the actual lived experience of time. Likewise, therapeutic forms of temporal reconstruction must negotiate not only the rehearsed timelines belonging to the individuals in question, but also the social concepts of time aligned with cultural hierarchies of privilege.

Two different images of circularity are useful in understanding the relationship between time and narrative. First, a concentric image of time like the one that Coleman associates with indigenous temporality can indicate how stories as well as time build outwards in layers so that the past forms “the centre of ongoing life” (“Contented” 235). Second, the relationship between time and narrative involves a type of circular logic in

measurement, and while “the wake can be clearly divided into gathering time, prayer time, singing time, intermission, and mealtime [...] none of these times are directly related to clock time. The mourners simply move from one time to another by mutual consensus. When do they begin and end each episode? When the time is ripe and no sooner” (Levine 92). Brand’s poetry, meanwhile, describes a trauma that, while ancient, is continuously recreated and cannot be put to rest. Much of the difficulty discussed in Chapter One about public apologies and the duration of social responsibility to the past has to do with the precarious balance between public and personal experiences of trauma.

that each appears necessary to formulate the other. This problem is a central focus for Ricoeur, whose claim that time becomes human time through narrative is mirrored by the claim that “narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience” (1: 3). He argues that this relationship is best understood not as a vicious circle, but rather as “an endless spiral that would carry the meditation past the same point a number of times, but at different altitudes” (1: 72). The coherence of temporality and narrative build continuously upon one another. Recalling the entry for “time” in the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* discussed in Chapter One – “the indefinite and continuous duration of existence seen as a series of events progressing from the past through the present into the future” – we may notice a striking similarity to the definition of “narrative” as “a spoken or written account of connected events in order of happening.”²¹ Both processes involve the defining of relationships between events, the *seeing as* of particular moments; the significant difference appears to be that we do not expect time to have an ending (though, as I will discuss in Chapter Five, apocalyptic stories may envision the end of a particular social model of time). I have already suggested that the politics of time are too often neglected in cultural studies, but given the inseparability of time from narrative it is also surprising that temporal power is not more commonly seen as a foundational rubric in literary analysis. While narratological studies have developed a vocabulary for identifying the temporal dimensions of narrative and plot, such studies tend to emphasize the technical or philosophical aspects of narrative

²¹ Ricoeur’s definition of narrative emphasizes the same characteristics but centres on the importance of story-creation rather than the potentially simpler accounting of connected events. For him, the necessary condition of narrative is that it “tells a story, otherwise it would not be a narrative” (2: 82).

temporality rather than the politics of conflicting chronotopes and social-temporal power relations that inevitably exist in linguistic articulations. Not all language is narrative in the sense of a portrayal of sequence in the service of a story, but necessary to all language is the same sense of temporal coherence that lends narrative its character, even to the point that the letters of a printed word tell the “story” of that word. J.M. Coetzee’s statement that the novel, like history, is “an exercise in making the past coherent” (qtd. in Weir 1), can be expanded to say that language is at least partially an exercise in making time coherent, and the character of this coherence has to do with the particular relationships at stake during the linguistic act. As I will continue to show in the next chapters, because articulations of time inevitably speak to power relations, political insights are central to the literary applications of critical time studies. Of particular interest in bridging the gap between studies of narrative temporality and studies of social-temporal power structures are texts that deliberately trouble, resist, and reshape traditional forms of narrative and plot. In Chapter Three I will examine how experimental works by Daphne Marlatt, Kristjana Gunnars, and Yann Martel articulate and resist gender-based hierarchies of social power through such formal manipulation.

Literary authors, of course, tend to be highly cognizant of the politics of narrative not only within large formal conventions but also within the minutiae of language, and it is worth highlighting a few examples of how power relations can be shaped by temporal indicators as innocuous as verb tenses. Ricoeur notes that the structuring of verb tenses “varies from one language to another,” forming intricate cultural apparatuses that “cannot be derived from the phenomenological experience of time and from its intuitive

distinction between present, past, and future” (2: 62). While the tense system of a given language “allow[s] the structuring of the time appropriate for the activity of narrative configuration” (2: 73), it also prescribes and delineates this time. But even though authors are bound to the restrictions of linguistic temporal indicators, they can construct narratives that reflexively question these restrictions or foreground the assumed connotations of different verb forms.

In another of her short stories, “Powers,” Alice Munro describes a conversation between Nancy, whose husband Wilf is suffering from dementia, and her estranged friend Tessa. Tessa mentions a deceased mutual friend, whose death comes as a surprise to Nancy:

“Ollie? You mean Ollie’s dead?” [...] “I thought you would’ve known. Didn’t Wilf know?” “Doesn’t Wilf know,” said Nancy in an automatic way, defending her husband by placing him amongst the living. (*Runaway* 308)

Brad Fraser’s character Shannon, in his play *Poor Super Man*, also attaches the weight of life and death to verb tenses. As Shannon nears death, succumbing to AIDS and cancer, she says, “I’ve already started thinking of myself in the past tense. [...] Everything’s then. Nothing’s now” (159). For the narrator in Yann Martel’s *Self*, events of great personal significance refuse to be relegated to the past tense, signaling their undying importance: “In my memory the past and present tenses do not measure out temporal sequence, but emotional weight. What I cannot forget repeats itself in the present tense” (267). Margaret Atwood, meanwhile, in her short story “The Age of Lead,” recounts her character Jane’s confusion over a television documentary about the Franklin Expedition to the supposed Northwest Passage. John Torrington, a victim of the doomed expedition,

has been excavated from the ice after 150 years, looking nearly the same as when he was buried. Atwood writes: “The man they’ve dug up and melted was a young man. Or still is: it’s difficult to know what tense should be applied to him, he is so insistently present” (*Wilderness* 183). By choosing one verb tense over another, a speaker can accommodate a subject within the ongoing present, or slot it, him, or her categorically into the past, to be entrapped in the deathly realm that Atwood refers to as “previous layers of time” (*Negotiating* 178). While I hold that thematic concerns of contested temporalities in literature are vital for reflecting cultural-temporal issues, Karen Newman, Jay Clayton, and Marianne Hirsch go so far as to argue in *Time and the Literary* that “[t]he systematic grammatical contrasts that express time in language are perhaps the most fundamental way the literary continues to structure thinking about time” (1).

Other components of language shape the human experience of temporality in less obvious ways, and important differences exist in this regard between different languages. Commenting on their own English translations of two Mi’kmaq stories that had been recorded in their original language in the nineteenth century, Elizabeth Paul and Peter Sanger note:

there is one great absence in the English translations which cannot be remedied by literality or any other solution. Mi’kmaq categorizes nouns not only by gender and number but also in terms of animate and inanimate. Animate nouns include growing trees, stars, household goods and hunting weapons. The consequent play within the Mi’kmaq language of life and death cannot be reproduced by the neutrality of tree, star and arrow in English. (64)

Dewdney agrees that while verbs “mediate the influence of time on our lives,” English nouns “are almost entirely timeless, except when they refer to *elements* of time such as

sundials, hours, schedules or seasons” (95). Taiaiake Alfred, following Leroy Little Bear, identifies a similar differentiation as a systemic one within larger language groups. European languages, he says, “centre on nouns and are concerned with naming things, ascribing traits, and making judgments. Onkwehonwe [i.e. indigenous] languages are structured on verbs; they communicate through descriptions of movement and activity” (32). Alfred concludes that “the European way is to see the world organized in a system of names and titles that formalize their being. Onkwehonwe recall relationships and responsibilities through languages that symbolize doing” (32).²² While such a broad generalization is troubling – is there really a “European way”? – it is intriguing to consider the ways in which the English language can serve to essentialize subjects, to regard people or other things as static in time rather than as ongoing processes being continuously enacted.

Such tendencies have been countered somewhat by the theories of relational identity discussed earlier, which hold that identity is not essential and stable but rather performed and negotiated – not permanent but momentary. Charles Taylor describes this as the “fundamentally dialogical character” of human life (102). He writes: “My discovering my own identity doesn’t mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others. [...] My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others” (111). This approach focuses more on theoretical knowledge than it does on the structure of English itself, but

²² Alfred Metallic, the first PhD candidate at York University to write and defend his dissertation in an indigenous language, similarly observes that “in the Mi’gmaq language, the action comes first, then the person. It’s the opposite with the English language” (qtd. in McLean).

it resists the idea of the world as a formalized system of names and titles, investing instead in the transformative power of ongoing relationships.

However, theories of dialogical identity notwithstanding, the weight of often traumatic histories in literature indicates that while the past may be partially revisable in the sense that ongoing experiences allow for altered perspectives on past events, pervasive understandings of identity remain ensnared by essentialization, centering on past events and “permanent” characteristics such as race or gender. Entire novels may follow a character’s struggle to “move on” from the continuous present of an unwanted past, and even when such a story ends, as is often the case, with some degree of success, the intensity of the struggle itself signals the oppressive weight of essentialized pasts.

There is one more way, beyond the selective portrayal of non-present events through time, in which narrative embodies temporality: the cognitive processes of reading, writing, and storytelling require us to interact with time by engaging in a physical process that takes place in and through time as the words occur in sequence. The sense of temporal differentiation and continuity that is necessary to reading, to forming cognitive relationships between one word and the next, mirrors the sense of temporal sequence by which we construct a sense of personal coherence through time. As Ricoeur asks, “What justifies our taking the subject of an action, so designated by his, her, or its proper name, as the same throughout a life that stretches from birth to death? The answer has to be narrative. [...] Without the recourse to narration, the problem of personal identity would in fact be condemned to an antinomy with no solution” (3: 246). The

perception of any constant relationship is possible only through the perception of continuity, the perception that past events are related to present and future events, and that one moment in time can be understood in terms of another. The word “continuous” etymologically means “hold together,” and it is through the impression of a continuous world that particular moments in time, like individual words or people, hold meaning. The act of reading, then, allows us to rehearse, anticipate, and question the processes by which we understand our very subjectivity. As we comprehend thousands of words temporally from beginning to end in order to construct a reading of a character in a novel, we gain a sense of the precariousness and necessity of the construction of a life project.

The necessity of temporal engagement during reading – the fact that reading a book *takes time* – not only “joins immediacy and the instantaneous with their opposite, duration and critique” (Newman, Clayton, and Hirsch 1), but contributes to the customary description of books as a type of sanctuary, with all the positive and negative associations that go along with the idea of escape. Poetry, a literary form whose meticulous placement of words tends to require extraordinarily slow readings, has a dual reputation as both the exemplary literary form and the most difficult, self-indulgent one. “[T]he song,” writes Roy Kiyooka – and we can read this as a reference to poetry itself – “is / about tortoise // and not the hare” (7). In other words, the very slowness that complex texts require is necessary to the benefits of engaged reading. Ecocritic Greg Garrard laments the tendency of university course reading lists to squeeze as many books as possible into a term, writing that “like a high-speed train through gorgeous countryside, a novel a week turns the lovely hinterland of literature into a meaningless blur. [...] Slow reading, like

slow food, is about savouring rather than gobbling.” And Daniel Coleman elaborates on the necessity of slowness, explaining that “[t]he conversion of thoughtful citizens into impatient consumers requires that we live in constant distraction, that our restlessness be fuelled by a sense of present dissatisfaction and endlessly deferred fulfillment” (*Bed* 26). Reading, therefore, “is counter-cultural mainly because it requires quiet time, being slow and meditative, and it is active rather than passive, being imaginative and dialogical. These qualities run in the opposite direction from the one in which Western commodity culture is heading” (26). If commodity culture is tied to neoliberal individualism – to the elision of social commitments and the reduction of empathic recognition of other forms of subjectivity in favour of a purely competitive marketplace – then literature’s thoughtful engagement with and implicit validation of alternative subjective temporalities offers a powerful form of resistance. Such engagement, surely, can and must take considerable time; like storytelling itself it must be an ongoing process that is continually reenacted. Putting time aside specifically for reading is often difficult, but is facilitated by designating particular *places* for reading – libraries, bookshops, even a chair. Richard Bachmann, the longtime owner of A Different Drummer bookstore in Burlington, Ontario, says that “in addition to selling books, we’re here to slow the world down. Books – like thinking, like love – require time and attention. That is why, as we frequently hear, the bookshop is considered to be a place of refuge” (qtd. in Strecker 7).

Gaspereau Press co-founder Andrew Steeves expands the politics of book temporality to the business side when he denounces the wastefulness involved in large-scale book publication. Massive inventories are overproduced and widely distributed

amongst wholesalers with the result that many books are printed, shipped, and then pulped without ever being read. “These problems are hidden from the consumer, of course,” he explains, “who only knows that they can order a book through a major online storefront and get it quickly. What they don’t understand is that the distribution and wholesale system of mainstream publishing privileges the instant gratification of the consumer over sustainable economics and ecology.” While Gaspereau’s smaller scale means that books are assembled as needed and are not always immediately available for customers, Steeves argues that “our manufacturing process ought [to] match the cultural and intellectual integrity of our wares.” The publishing industry’s direct reliance on dead trees and fossil fuels is shifting to complicity in the manufacturing of disposable electronic devices as text is increasingly digitized, but whatever form this shift takes, the slowness of reading, the separation of contemplative interpretive practice from the continuous buzz of electronic media, may become increasingly difficult to achieve. To remain critically engaged readers – interpreters, in the broad sense – we must learn and relearn how to make time *just* for reading.



I will close this chapter with a final case study. Catherine Bush’s novel *Minus Time* (1993) offers a nuanced investigation of the interactions between several of the issues important to the discussion of time, subjectivity, and narrative: the ways in which personal identity is shaped by past events; the fragmentation and internal conflict to

which an individual's sense of time is often susceptible; the problematic negotiation between personal and collective chronotopes and the impossibility of separating one from the other; the difficult but important feat of aligning one's temporal maps with those of one's family and peer groups; and the consequences of conflicting visions of temporality for people and the rest of the biosphere.

The novel tells the story of Helen Urie, a young adult in Toronto whose mother Barbara is famous not only for being a Canadian female astronaut, but for attempting to set a new record for the amount of time spent living in space. The title *Minus Time* refers to the anxious duration of the countdown before the space shuttle launch (as in the phrase “T minus three minutes”), but also takes on a figurative association with the intense temporal anxiety and sense of loss surrounding Helen's realization that her mother “had left the planet and they had no idea when she was coming back again. [...] The time and space that lay between was not traversable. She was speeding into the future” (6).

Looking up at the overwhelming Florida sky into which the spacecraft has disappeared, Helen experiences a mixture of elation and panic: “She had concentrated so hard on the launch and now she'd surged beyond it. In that instant, everything had changed. Her life, too, split into before the launch and after. She wanted to reach for the sky and howl out loud like a wolf – *what now?*” (6). The liftoff itself becomes a watershed moment of the kind articulated in many works of literature, figuratively launching the emotional arc of the story. Helen feels that “Something had been set in motion. Everything needed to be redefined” (22); she becomes transfixed, wondering “How could you anticipate any of this, the sameness and the chasm from the moment before?” (92). For critic John E.

MacKinnon, the novel's title refers to "an interval in Helen's life" that holds "her future in abeyance, as if suspending her in time" (107).

This sense of trauma causes Helen to look for meaning in the events leading up to and following the launch, and to single out those whom she sees as complicit in forming the temporal chasm. She comes to identify as antagonists everything from her mother, whose life ambition to become an astronaut has interfered with her ability to spend time with her children; to her father, who copes with family stresses by spending years in distant countries helping the victims of natural disasters; to the alienating socio-technological infrastructure that carries her mother indefinitely into space even while gradually poisoning her home through chemical spills, species loss, and interpersonal fragmentation. "You've got these video screens all around you," Helen's brother Paul explains about watching the shuttle launch, "and the launchpad almost looks like it's balanced right on top of the digital clock on the ground in front of you, the clock that shows the countdown. It *is* scary, in a way" (41). As a metaphor for pervasive technoscience, the countdown clock forms the unstable ground upon which the key moments of the family's lives precariously sit. The clock's starts, stops, pace, and authority are outside the family's control, yet it governs the creation of personal temporal chasms and leads seemingly towards widespread ecological apocalypse. Helen decides to collaborate with Elena, an animal rights activist who wants to construct a "huge clock or some kind of timer that would count out each time another species disappeared" (214), a project that emblemizes the fraught relationship between technoscientific tools and the actual people whose use of such tools both causes and condemns ecological destruction.

In a sense, the alienating aspects of technology and mass media create a degree of precarious solidarity among the individuals who jointly feel a sense of impending chaos and personal insignificance. The Urie family collectively becomes an object of scrutiny in television and newspaper stories when a press release confirms Barbara's selection for space flight, but almost immediately a catastrophic earthquake hits the Los Angeles area, marking the end of the Uries' public significance. Helen arrives home to find that "a small pile of newspapers with articles about my mother in them lay at the foot of the stairs: out of date. We were old news already; gone" (132). She realizes that the earthquake had happened at the same time that she had been meeting secretly with her boyfriend at a golf course: "How little time it took: I'd been lying on the ground with Trig. You could count in seconds while the walls fell down" (133). The scene reveals how a distant event of great social magnitude can occur within a small and seemingly unrelated subjective moment, only to come crashing home through technological media, affecting daily life even for people far removed from the catastrophe. Events of great *personal* magnitude, though – a memorable afternoon with a lover, or a traumatic family dispute – have no temporal reverberations on the broader social stage. And even those events such as earthquakes that become social watershed moments are soon enough forgotten by the mass media, leaving people who are personally connected to the event to struggle through their own long-term recovery process. "*Cities take years to rebuild after earthquakes,*" Helen's father David explains in a letter. "*As soon as they're out of the news, everyone forgets*" (187, original emphasis).

So while the consequences of technologically mediated temporality may affect

everyone, they do not do so even-handedly; and contested temporalities within familial groups are susceptible to similar imbalances. Despite being subjected to the same brief media spotlight as the rest of her family, Helen's feeling of alienation from her parents continues to grow: "Time itself seemed suddenly compressed and uncontrollable. Faster, faster. Didn't everyone feel it? Was I the only one whose stomach was being turned inside out?" (137). She accuses her mother of having "hurled us with you into the dangerous future" (178). Paul describes their relationship with their perpetually absent father as an asymptotic line graph: "It's like these waves on a graph and they keep getting closer and closer as they run toward infinity but they never touch. That's what it feels like" (231). Shocked by her father's brief return into her life, Helen likens the experience to "stepping without warning into some realm of imaginary time" (187). The space agency, meanwhile, warns Helen that because astronauts and their families inevitably change over the duration of their separation, she should expect a traumatic experience when her mother eventually returns to earth: "Only it wasn't exactly a return: The woman who left did not come back. Those she'd left behind were not the people who came to greet her" (322).

The tension culminates in Helen's angry confrontation with her mother – a conversation which is both intensely personal and mediated by the technology of the space station videophone hookup. "You want to prove that people can live in space [...]," Helen says. "We always had to live with the expectation of people leaving, and you left. You both did" (274). When Barbara insists that it will remain "possible to be close to you, even from here," Helen replies, "What if I don't see the future the way you do? [...]"

I *do* have some sense of the future – but what if I see it being here, right here? [...] We have to change things here, the whole way we think about things here. I don't think it's good to act as if everything might get better by being someplace else" (276). Growing desperate, Barbara says "I would give you a whole new world if I could," but Helen shouts back, "I don't want a whole new world [...]. Don't you see? I want this one. I want a future here" (277). For Helen, the anxieties of increasing technological alienation, looming ecological collapse, skewed social chronotopes that treat individual people as momentary objects of interest, and discordant familial visions of temporality have culminated in a personal temporal crisis. Attempting later on to catch a glimpse of the space station as its orbit passes above her, Helen walks "through a wilderness of satellite beams and radio waves, somewhere beyond Sudbury, through a world that seemed to her like a map of voices in the darkness, lost voices [...]. Time itself seemed vaporous, lapping in small waves around her" (326).

Despite this sense of conflict and fragmentation, the concluding scenes of the novel emphasize the potential for stability, reconciliation, and solidarity. This shift occurs partially on a personal level, as Helen locates a stable sense of self emerging from her own past, a past that trails behind her "like comet trails, vaporous and filled with detritus. In the present, receding into the future, she still multiplied and divided, seeing through several eyes, longing for too many things at once, but in the past she was singular; her past made her singular, it was hers and no one else's, and whatever else happened, she still carried it with her, like a portable home" (308). But the most meaningful shifts towards solace occur on a social level within Helen's immediate family, and Bush

accomplishes this transition through images of synchronization. Growing accustomed to her father's presence after his unexpected return, Helen feels that "already something like habit was binding itself between them, dissolving the time that separated them into almost nothing" (282). Sharing an intimate moment with her lover, Foster, Helen's "skin grew as springy as moss, as if touch itself could redefine the two of them, hurl them into the present, clear some space and time for them" (313). Barbara makes the metaphor explicit when she asks Helen to look up towards the night sky that evening and locate the space station, promising to return the gesture: "Whatever happens, I'll look down tonight. Your night. We'll synchronize our watches" (334). The intentional unification of the watches marks a deep alignment in temporality and purpose, even while the phrase "Your night" acknowledges that the two people inevitably remain partially absorbed in asynchronous registers of time. The fact that they can experience precisely the same minute even while occupying different portions of the day-night cycle – a cycle so disrupted by space travel that Barbara experiences sixteen sunrises each day (55) – indicates that temporalities, like other aspects of identity, are always partial, and that meaningful alignments can occur even while some aspects of temporal identity remain divergent. Borrowing the term "synchronous nonsynchronicity" from Ernst Bloch, Rita Felski suggests that the phrase may offer "the most promising way of approaching the cultural politics of time. Quite simply, it acknowledges that we inhabit both the same time and different times: individuals coexist at the same historical moment, yet often make sense of this moment in strikingly disparate ways" (3). The concept of synchronous nonsynchronicity is central to understanding Helen's experience and her musing that "It

was as if they were all still walking through their own version of minus time, toward the moment of cumulative choice” (334).²³

The final scene has Helen arriving at the lake that has been selected as the family meeting point, while Barbara floats overhead: “The dark lake and dark sky shone before her like a doorway, shimmering in time. [...] *A small step into tomorrow*” (338). Paul and David arrive to join her, and the novel ends: “She held out her hands to them, and stepped through the doorway” (338). The triumph suggested in the story’s conclusion is a result of all four family members finally inhabiting the same subjective moment, sharing a sense of companionship, purpose, and movement into the future. While temporal alignment on a broad social scale remains elusive, synchronization is achieved, even if only momentarily, within the familial circle. While *Minus Time* contends with temporal relativity in ways that were unforeseen in past eras, the novel supports Ricoeur’s view that “the major contribution of fiction to philosophy does not lie in the range of solutions it proposes for the discordance between the time of the world and lived time but in the exploration of the nonlinear features of phenomenological time that historical time conceals” (3: 132). More than this, the novel articulates how phenomenological time and historical time themselves are internally contested and unstable, bearing witness to the

²³ Commenting on the iconic sound of Big Ben in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, Ricoeur asks whether we can say of the characters, at the moment the clock strikes, “that the hour is the same for all? Yes, from outside; no, from inside. Only fiction, precisely, can explore and bring to language this divorce between worldviews and their irreconcilable perspectives on time, a divorce that undermines public time” (2: 107). As Bush’s novel shows, though, the proliferation of global travel and digital communication makes apparent the fact that people inhabit different hours even from the “outside.” The divorce between personal temporalities is compounded by the relativity of time itself, and while the visible impact of such relativity on human affairs is a fairly recent development, fiction’s toolbox appears up to the task of articulating these complications.

difficulty, and the importance, of enacting fleeting moments of synchronization.

From the Cultural to the Personal and Back Again

Through investigating some of the issues at stake in personal temporalities, I have argued that because a sense of narrative is necessary for conceptualizing both time and identity, literary arts are particularly well-suited to serve as exemplary modes for thinking about how time configures, and is configured by, subjectivity. At the same time, the examples that I have discussed here indicate that in trying to understand how individuals experience time we are led inevitably back to considerations of social relations and cultural power configurations. The next chapter will survey Canadian works of literature to examine how experiences of time are connected to particular socially defined categories of identity formation.

Chapter Three: Structuring Time Around Categories of Identity

“They weren’t the same people who had taken that train to Toronto fifteen years ago. Well, no one ever is, but they weren’t those two people much more so than they’d imagined. They weren’t the people they were going to be or had set out to be, the people they had envisioned. Look, okay, they hadn’t *envisioned*. Who does, except rich people?”

Dionne Brand (*Long For* 264)

“Unrolling the past through her mind, she knew very well how much of her life had been a matter of waiting upon others, waiting for their decisions, adapting to their plans and days.”

Rachel Wyatt (104)

“Over the millennia,” writes Christopher Dewdney, “our penchant for technology and abstract thought has helped us to construct an empire of time, a chronological culture within which our lives are scheduled and measured out” (15). While Dewdney’s reference to “our” chronological culture appears to reflect a singular social entity, his use of the phrase “empire of time” also hints at the unequal and divisive nature of normative temporality; like all empires, an empire of time inevitably contains deeply entrenched biases and power divisions. I have discussed some of the ways in which human culture colonizes time, and in particular the ways in which the European colonization of Canada involves the construction and perpetuation of ideological frameworks whose foundational principles are just as much temporal as they are spatial. I have also looked at how

personal experiences of time both depart from, and remain inevitably tied to, broader chronological cultures. What I would like to do now is examine how particular works of literature take up the complex relationships between personal and social temporalities in Canada. Diverse literary texts in Canada make abundantly clear that while broad cultural chronotopes indeed shape the scheduling and measuring out of individual lives, this shaping process functions differently for different people. I suggest that these differences can productively be understood in terms of several categories of subject positions; in particular, I will examine how the relationships between time and power in Canada revolve around the categories of age, class, gender, sexuality, race, and, in the next chapter, indigeneity.

Categorization always comes at the risk of oversimplification, and my approach involves at least two limitations. First, the categories that I have chosen are by no means the only subject positions by which individuals or groups may identify themselves or be identified by others. People may belong to, negotiate, or resist being associated with many categorizations of identity, including religion, physical appearance, occupation or organizational membership, city or region, consumer habits, various types of kinship ties, different forms of ableness, and so on. Because I cannot hope to account for all the complexities of subjectivity, I have tried to identify those categories that appear most prominently, or are represented as having the greatest importance for social existence, in Canadian texts. A second limitation of my method is that, by discussing each text under a particular heading – race, class, and so on – I risk creating the impression that each work speaks to just one category of social existence. The texts that I am discussing are works

of great complexity, and it would be a disservice to reduce them to the confines of a single rubric. While the purpose of dividing my analysis into categories is to identify prominent areas of concern, and to try to understand why particular subject positions appear again and again as sites of preoccupation, I will attempt to do justice to the fact that these works could be discussed within alternative or multiple frameworks; in some cases I will examine how different categories like race and class can overlap, and at times I will discuss a particular text under more than one heading. To emphasize the importance of seeing different categories of identity as correlated, before breaking Canadian literary representations of time into prominent clusters I will offer one case study to indicate how a single work of literature can speak to temporal experiences associated with many different subject positions.

Marie Clements's play *Burning Vision* (2003) is a polyphonic, fragmented story that examines the social disruptions surrounding radium mining and atomic weapons manufacturing. Women who are hired to paint glowing radium faces on military equipment dials encounter unexpected health consequences, as do the Dene and white men who are hired to mine the radium from the ground in the Northwest Territories, having been told that the radium will be used to cure cancer. The atomic bombs called Fat Man and Little Boy are personified, respectively, as an atomic test dummy and a "beautiful Native boy," the latter also representing "the darkest uranium found at the center of the earth" (13). The different characters exist in different time periods – the late nineteenth century, the 1930s, the Second World War, the Cold War era – yet are present during the same scenes, and at certain moments actually interact with one another,

blurring past and present, race and class, language and origin, into the common frame of shared consequences.

In the first scene, a “*scared and huddled*” Little Boy speaks to competing claims of firstness and priority, while uranium prospectors close in on him:

Every child is scared of the dark, not because it is dark but because they know sooner, or later, they will be discovered. It is only a matter of time...

The radio footsteps and laboured breath get closer.

... before someone discovers you and claims you for themselves. Claims you are you because they found you. Claims you are theirs because they were the first to find you, and lay claims on you ...

The radio footsteps and laboured breath get closer and closer. The two beams of light circle towards him.

... Not knowing you’ve known yourself for thousands of years. Not knowing *you* are not the monster. (20-21, ellipses in original)

Rose, a Métis woman, experiences a similar conflict between contested temporalities when her white father, frustrated by her opinions, “gave me the blue eye and said, ‘Things are different in the Old country.’ My mother would say, ‘We are the old country’” (26). By having Dene and Métis characters broaden the temporal frame in the above scenes, Clements questions colonial claims to primacy. At the same time, though, the Dene widow of a uranium ore carrier indicates that her social conceptualization of time has been severely disrupted by the colonial logic of progress and capitalism. She recalls her husband explaining that he must take the uranium job, because “Times are changing my girl. Times are changing and we have to change with them or be left behind. It is for our family” (71). The widow laments the loss of her earlier life, in which time was measured by a different framework: “We used to be able to tell where we were by the seasons, the way the sun placed itself or didn’t, the migration patterns of the caribou.

Time” (44).

Temporal disruption and subalternity are not limited to Dene or Métis characters. Captain Mike, the Icelandic captain of a barge that transports radium towards the atomic bomb research facilities, complains, “Why’d I have to work in da only goddamn part of da country where da daylight hours in da day is da hol’ goddamn day and nit. Twenty-four goddamn hours a day we gotta keep dis boat goin’ and dose poor assholes gotta haul dose sacks. I’m sittin’ in da pilot house of dis goddamn *Radium Prince* and if we don’t go nowhere in a goddamn hurry we won’t be goin’ anywhere goddamn soon” (81). The “captain” turns out to be a working class labourer just like the miners, a slave to the time clock which takes cruel advantage of the long periods of Arctic daylight, and whose confused but irrefutable logic is reflected in the temporal incoherence of the last sentence.

Fat Man, the American bomb test dummy who speaks with the voice of normative power, advocates a fast pace of atomic weapons deployment even though the process will mean the destruction of his own house in the test site: “We don’t want studies. We want tests. We don’t want thinking, we want reaction. Highly skilled unthinking reaction” (29). “I mean let’s get real,” he adds, “it’s just about making yourself feel better in the now” (34). This short-term-oriented temporality – Philip Zimbardo would call it present hedonism – accompanies an anxiety-ridden survivalist mentality that casts the earlier discussion of firstness under an even more ominous light. “If you can imagine the end of the world,” Fat Man says, “you can imagine making the world end for someone else first” (84). As the representative of hegemonic power, Fat Man is the only character in the play who appears to have control over the management of time, and he manipulates

temporality to his own ruthless and short-sighted advantage.

For Frances, the radium painter, the sense of time running out is captured by the clock dials that she paints “so that men at war can see the face of their watches when it’s dark” (92). She places the radium-painted clocks in a circle so that “*they all begin to tick loudly. / The sound of a heart beating*” (109). “Tick ... tick ... tick ...” she says. “Time can be ugly but your face is beautiful. I made you beautiful and what will you do for me?” (110). Clements’s historical timeline at the beginning of the script makes clear what the clocks will do; from 1925 to 1930, “Radium watch-dial painters, all women, were encouraged by their employers to lick their paint brushes to give them a sharp point for better application of the luminous paint. The ingestion of radium resulted in severe anemia, ‘radium’ jaw and bone cancer” (16). While the beautiful clock faces obscure the injustices surrounding their creation, a foreboding sense of inevitability emerges as Frances ineffectually asks the clocks to “Slow down ... please slow down” (112).

In this final scene of the play, the stage notes indicate that the course of events “*starts out slowly and begins to escalate in fear as characters and worlds collide*” (109). The sounds of the radium clocks ticking, the miners’ Geiger counters clicking as they approach the radium, an atomic bomb radar target beeping as it draws near, and the beating human heart, all overlap until “*A huge white light whites out their world into blackness*” (119). The scene indicates that each character is both cause and victim of impending apocalypse; the various subject positions to which we might assign the characters – Dene, Métis, white, male, female, working class, privileged, child, adult, nineteenth-century or Cold War era, in the centre of America or geographically

marginalized from power – are represented as intensely important in the determination of agency, yet also blend into a single scene, a single temporal moment of common failure and consequence. As the Dene See-er says, “Can you look through time and see the future? Can you hear through the walls of the world? Maybe we are all talking at the same time because we are answering each other over time and space. Like a wave that washes over everything and doesn’t care how long it takes to get there because it always ends up on the same shore” (75). The categories by which we divide people into groups are indeed vital for understanding the flow of power and temporal agency, yet can never be absolute divisions in the ongoing shared conversation of social existence and mortality.

Age

Age is an important rubric for understanding people’s relationship to time in two senses: it can classify the phases of an individual’s life measured in numerical years or social status categories from infancy to old age, or it can refer to the social era in which a person exists, whether a longer-term category like “the industrial age” or a shorter-term one like “the 1950s” or “the Trudeau years.” Both types of age affect a person’s experiences of time, but caution is necessary in understanding these effects since both types of age are frequently subjected to temporal stereotyping (“Old people live in the past”; “Nineteenth-century life was primitive”).²⁴ Identifying the personal aspects of age

²⁴ The notion that certain cultures are more “developed” than others is closely related to

as “an undertheorized site of difference in cultural studies,” Amelia DeFalco points out that “if aging can be regarded as a manifestation of human time, narrative and aging are intrinsically, if not constitutively, bound” (xv, 13). She argues that the importance of age for thinking through identity and time becomes especially pronounced in narratives of old age, since the “uncanniness of aging into old age can teach us that the self is always other than it was, other, even, than it is” (19). Margaret Laurence’s protagonist Hagar in *The Stone Angel*, for instance, enacts a typical “life review” narrative centred on the attempt to reconcile an entire lifetime of subjective experiences into a coherent whole, but “[d]espite her desire to discover, even enforce, a singular, authentic identity, divergent, even contradictory narratives thwart her efforts, exposing the mutability and multiplicity concomitant with temporal identity” (DeFalco 30). Old age serves to heighten the complex and shifting ties between time, subjectivity, and narrative that I discussed in Chapter Two. And while DeFalco focuses mainly on questions of subjective experience, her study also usefully highlights the politics of “popular media representational practices, in which aging functions as a dangerous villain that must be battled at every opportunity, with the various providers of anti-aging products and services promising effective weapons of defense” (xii-xiii). The desire to stop time, a desire sold through the commercial idealization of youth, simultaneously marginalizes and profits from old age.

On the other end of the spectrum, important insights into the social politics of normative temporality become visible in narratives of youth. Philip Zimbardo and John

concepts of age, leading to cases where dominant representations tend to infantilize or portray as antiquated people belonging to “backward” cultures. I will discuss contested ideas of social and biological maturity in this chapter’s section on race, as well as in Chapter Four.

Boyd point out that many children's stories serve as time socialization stories, since the process of aging from childhood into adulthood is figured socially as the acquisition of time management skills and future orientation. "The Three Little Pigs" is "a story about the need to prepare for the future," since only the third pig has the foresight to build a durable house (44), while *Peter Pan* "is a story about the magic of the present and a boy who refuses to grow up. By not growing up, Peter avoids the future orientation that is necessary to cope with the demands and responsibilities of adulthood. [...] In the end, Peter's refusal to grow up prevents him from leading a normal life" (45-46). While the category of children's literature is a contested one, certain youth-centred works of Canadian literature have indeed taken future orientation as a dominant theme. Robert Munsch's classic *Love You Forever* (1986) follows the life of a child from the troublemaking of toddlerhood all the way to the adult responsibilities of caregiving for an elderly parent and raising a baby of the next generation. The book is a profound demonstration of the notions that aging and death occur naturally through time, that human life renews itself through slow generational cycles, and that familial relationships must be nurtured for an entire lifetime. Like many similar works, though, *Love You Forever* also takes genuine delight in the immediate present-oriented joys of childhood, prompting a sort of pre-emptive nostalgia at the thought that adult maturity risks dampening such pleasures.

L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) provides insight into the role of normative temporality in a particular cultural age – Maritime settler culture at the turn of the twentieth century – but speaks especially to the social roles assigned to, and

sometimes resisted by, people of different chronological ages from youth to adulthood. The book tells the story of the orphan Anne Shirley's adoption into a Prince Edward Island family, and her subsequent rocky but progressive indoctrination into normative early twentieth-century social existence. Montgomery makes clear from the outset that one of the most vital conceptual frameworks existing in the village of Avonlea is the normative temporal framework that structures and reinforces patterns of work, religion, ethics, and relationships. The first chapter opens with a description of Rachel Lynde, a busybody Avonlea matriarch who immediately discerns that something unusual is happening at Green Gables, the Cuthbert homestead, because "Matthew Cuthbert ought to have been sowing his [turnip seed...]. And yet here was Matthew Cuthbert, at half-past three on the afternoon of a busy day, placidly driving over the hollow and up the hill" (2). The cause of this interruption to Matthew's usual timetable is Anne's arrival at the train station, and Anne soon reveals herself to be at odds with many foundational principles of social decorum, a conflict repeatedly expressed in temporal terms.

Montgomery uses Anne's relationship with Marilla Cuthbert in particular to construct a distinction between the child's emphasis on idle dreaming and imagination, and the adult world of schedules and timetables. The distinction appears clearly upon Anne's waking up after her first night at Green Gables:

Anne dropped on her knees and gazed out into the June morning, her eyes glistening with delight. Oh, wasn't it beautiful? Wasn't it a lovely place? Suppose she wasn't really going to stay here! She would imagine she was. There was scope for imagination here. [...]

She knelt there, lost to everything but the loveliness around her, until she was startled by a hand on her shoulder. Marilla had come in unheard by the small dreamer.

"It's time you were dressed," she said curtly. (30-31)

The Green Gables house contains, among the other usual fixtures, a “clock shelf” (139), and the centrality of clock time to Avonlea life forms a gravity that repeatedly pulls the young Anne back to earth from her “raptured voyages of exploration [...] made in the odd half hours which she was allowed for play” (63). Marilla continuously reminds Anne of her temporal obligations, warning that “You’re not going to play all the time nor most of it. You’ll have your work to do and it’ll have to be done first” (89). When Anne is late to return home after playing with her friend Diana “more than half an hour more’n I gave her leave to” (90), Marilla is emphatic about enforcing the rule of clock time:

“Just look at the clock, if you please, Anne. What time did I tell you to come in?”

“Two o’clock—but isn’t it splendid about the picnic, Marilla? Please can I go? Oh, I’ve never been to a picnic—I’ve dreamed of picnics, but I’ve never—”

“Yes, I told you to come at two o’clock. And it’s a quarter to three. I’d like to know why you didn’t obey me, Anne.”

“Why, I meant to, Marilla, as much as could be. But you have no idea how fascinating Idlewild is. And then, of course, I had to tell Matthew about the picnic. Matthew is such a sympathetic listener. Please can I go?”

“You’ll have to learn to resist the fascination of Idle-whatever-you-call-it. When I tell you to come in at a certain time I mean that time and not half an hour later. And you needn’t stop to discourse with sympathetic listeners on your way, either.” (90-91)

Anne, in Marilla’s view, “never think[s] once about the time or her duties. [...] She may be bright and sweet enough, but her head is full of nonsense and there’s never any knowing what shape it’ll break out in next” (214). Anne likewise has difficulty with the concept of school hours, and her teacher reprimands her for tardiness (114). The clock becomes a particularly potent enemy when, after Anne accidentally inebriates Diana, Diana’s mother forbids their friendship. Diana comes to say a final goodbye, her mother

having said “I was only to stay ten minutes and she’s timing me by the clock.” ““Ten minutes isn’t very long to say an eternal farewell in,’ said Anne tearfully” (131).

As the story progresses and Anne grows from the age of eleven into her teens, she begins to undergo a subtle transformation, gradually internalizing the normative principles of temporality. “I had such an interesting talk with Mrs. Allan about besetting sins last Sunday afternoon,” Anne tells Marilla. “There are just a few things it’s proper to talk about on Sundays and that is one of them” (207). After her first trip to a larger town, she decides “that I wasn’t born for city life and that I was glad of it. It’s nice to be eating ice cream at brilliant restaurants at eleven o’clock at night once in awhile; but as a regular thing I’d rather be in the east gable at eleven, sound asleep” (235). Returning to Green Gables, she declares, “it’s so good to be back [...]. I could kiss everything, even to the clock” (237). She begins to repeat the teachings that have been impressed upon her, commenting that she and Diana

feel that we are so much older than we used to be that it isn’t becoming to talk of childish matters. It’s such a solemn thing to be almost fourteen, Marilla. Miss Stacy took all us girls who are in our teens down to the brook last Wednesday, and talked to us about it. She said we couldn’t be too careful what habits we formed and what ideals we acquired in our teens, because by the time we were twenty our characters would be developed and the foundation laid for our whole future life. (239-40)

While Anne had initially operated under a form of event time in which present experiences carried total significance, she has gradually learned to adopt the principles of clock time and the related concepts of punctuality, scheduling, and future orientation. Zimbardo and Boyd note that while every human baby is a “present-oriented hedonist,” education in general “makes a student more future-oriented. Schools teach delay of

gratification, goal-setting, cost-benefit analysis, and abstract thought” (99, 141).

Zimbardo and Boyd are well aware, too, that this programmatic structuring is designed largely to inculcate respect for authority as well as the “remarkable tolerance for monotony and boredom” necessary for holding repetitive jobs (141, 288). School presents standard weekdays and long working hours as pre-existing and inevitable.

By this point in the novel, Marilla and Mrs. Rachel begin to approve of Anne’s behaviour, declaring her for the first time to be “a real smart girl,” “real steady and reliable now” (248). Anne sounds more and more like Marilla herself, remarking that “There’s so much to learn and do and think that there isn’t time for big words. [...] The story club isn’t in existence any longer. We hadn’t time for it” (255). She dedicates herself to studying for her secondary school entrance exams, thinking seriously about her future life and career options.

One of the novel’s more surprising features is that at the same time that Anne begins largely to accept normative adult temporality, chinks of imaginative contemplation begin to appear in Marilla’s psychological armour of temporal discipline. “Dear me,” Marilla says to Matthew after witnessing one of Anne’s typical early excited monologues, “it’s only three weeks since she came, and it seems as if she’d been here always. I can’t imagine the place without her” (89). A few years later, we are told that Marilla “felt a queer regret over Anne’s inches. The child she had learned to love had vanished somehow and here was this tall, serious-eyed girl of fifteen” (252). Marilla finally admits her feelings to Anne, crying out, “I was wishing you could have stayed a little girl” (276). By entertaining thoughts of imagined and emotionally driven timelines,

Marilla echoes the child's inventive, often counterlogical framing of the world. To an extent Montgomery is taking advantage of ageist stereotyping to tug at her readers' heartstrings, yet Anne's gradual temporal socialization reflects the importance of deeply rooted social values necessary for workaday settler existence, even while the possibility of escape from the confines of wholly practical temporality – an escape associated with not-yet-fully-socialized youthfulness – offers a gentle critique, suggesting that the adult world of clocks and schedules can never be totalizing, and that seeing it as such risks denying certain facets of human emotional existence.

A century later, we find that the distinction between youthful imaginative freedom and adult scheduling and timetabling remains firmly entrenched, and that the socialization of young people into normative temporality remains a process of vital importance to society, yet one that is often tinged with regret over, as Anne would say, reduced scope for imagination. Rachel Wyatt's novel *Time's Reach* offers a look at an early twenty-first century version of childhood temporal socialization, when Greg, the protagonist's grandson, overhears his parents arguing, and worries that his life may be split traumatically into two recurring temporal fragments. If his parents separate, he will have to "live like half his friends: Couldn't do my homework, the books are at my dad's place. I'm with my mom Wednesday to Saturday. Those guys survived but their lives were cut in half" (166).

Perhaps the most memorable commentary on the confluence of personal age and cultural age is Douglas Coupland's 1991 novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, which popularized the term Generation X as a name for the post-baby-boom

generation born in the 1960s and 70s. The main characters, Andy, Dag, and Claire, are three friends approaching the age of 30, living in the late 1980s or early 90s. As they share stories about their lives they reveal a deep sense of malaise, “futurelessness” (86), and resentment towards their parents’ generation. Andy opens the novel by recalling a solar eclipse that he witnessed as a child. The sight of the sun being extinguished, an interruption of its predictable daily path that fills him with “a mood of darkness and inevitability and fascination” (3), becomes a metaphor for the perceived lack of future prospects for young adults of his age. Like Andy, Dag both envies and despises the baby boomers, accusing his “embittered ex-hippie boss, Martin” of having won his million-dollar home “in a genetic lottery [...] sheerly by dint of your having been born at the right time in history” (20, 21). When Dag vandalizes a car whose bumper sticker reads “WE’RE SPENDING OUR CHILDREN’S INHERITANCE” [sic], Andy supposes that Dag “was bored and cranky after eight hours of working his McJob (‘Low pay, low prestige, low benefits, low future’)” (5).

While the three friends appear to feel that things may improve in some vaguely-imagined future – they tell themselves “that the only time worth living in is the past and that the only time that may ever be interesting again is the future” (41) – they also suffer from a sense of impending doom, characterized in particular by fears of nuclear war and toxic environments. One result of their malaise is a susceptibility to “terminal wanderlust,” described as “a condition common to people of transient middle-class upbringings. Unable to feel rooted in any one environment, they move continually in the hopes of finding an idealized sense of community in the next location” (171). Sure

enough, the final chapter sees Andy leaving his temporary apartment in California to follow his friends in their attempt to start a hotel business in Mexico. While an earlier chapter describing an imagined nuclear doomsday scenario had been titled “December 31, 1999” (61), the final chapter is titled “Jan. 01, 2000” (175), suggesting the possibility of new beginnings after a traumatic endpoint. Andy stops at the side of the road to see a burned field promising renewed growth, “now that so many new and wonderful tropisms had been activated by fire” (177). Yet this hopeful ending gives way to a darker appendix called “Numbers,” in which Coupland offers sobering statistics on the precarious future of Social Security benefits, the increasing percentage of income required for a down payment on a first home in the 1980s compared to the 1960s, and so on (181-82).

Generation X has been celebrated for offering a clear picture of a generation that is often considered to be highly distinct from the baby boomers, yet Coupland later resisted the use of the titular phrase, apparently growing uncomfortable with the delineation of generational categories altogether. Upon the publication in 2009 of *Generation A*, a novel that uses the same broad structure as *Generation X* but follows the lives of early twenty-first century youths, Coupland claimed in an interview that “Neither of the books is about a generation per se, as they are more tombstones to the notion of generations” (“Generation A”). The concept of generation here becomes a cultural construction along the lines of race, in that it names categories that are not objectively distinct but are subject to shifting and contradictory social forces. Does *Generation X* end with people born after the mid-1970s, or does it include those born up until the early 1980s? Has the twenty-first century created a culture where, as *New York Times* writer

Brad Stone suggests, “the ever-accelerating pace of technological change may be minting a series of mini-generation gaps, with each group of children uniquely influenced by the tech tools available in their formative stages of development”? Contested generational definitions abound, with partially overlapping categories vying for popularity including the Net Generation, the iGeneration, Generation Next, the Millennials, Generation Y, Generation Z, and so on. One can see how the very concept of generations is limited by a lack of objective delineation, and is limiting in the conceptual boundaries it risks imposing on individuals. Paul Ricoeur notes that theoretical understandings of generational divisions have centred on locating particular influences and events to which all members of a generation are thought to have been exposed, or on identifying, as Karl Mannheim does, “disinclinations as well as propensities to act, feel, and think in a certain way” (Ricoeur 3: 111). Ricoeur is quick to point out that such theories remain troubled by the fact that all contemporary persons “are not submitted to the same influences nor do they all exercise the same influence” (3: 111).

Still, the cultural events and changing technologies that inspire generational terms are very real, and social factors such as economic depressions, wars, and changing demographics have often led to changes in cultural habits of all kinds. Even Anne Shirley, whose story Montgomery continued to tell through various sequels, sees her own children encounter very different circumstances from those of her youth. In *Rilla of Ingleside* (1920), Anne’s daughter Rilla watches anxiously while her brothers and her love interest leave to fight in the Great War, a far cry from the young Anne’s preoccupation with picnics and schoolroom insults. Gorman and Wessman note that

“[t]he problem of separating age-related variance from generation-related variance is especially critical in time research. [...] Thus, a statement of the form ‘Elderly people are less oriented toward the future and more oriented toward the past than younger people’ may have to be modified by considerations of when the people were ‘elderly’ or ‘young’” (234). Perhaps, like racial categories, generational divisions should be understood as constructs that do not represent essential differences, but do correspond with actual sociological consequences, both in the sense that they label patterns of cultural thought, and that for better or worse they create perceptual distinctions that cause people to see themselves and others in a certain way.

As far as the study of temporality in Canada is concerned, the potential exists to organize an entire such project by cultural ages, tracing how social constructions of time shift along the chronological route from pre-colonization to World War I to the era of official multiculturalism. I have not used a chronological model as my primary system of classification for several reasons. First, a purely chronological study of time in Canada would in some ways mirror the work of countless historical studies, and I wish to show that the critical study of temporality – which investigates relationships between power structures and experiences of time – is distinct from historiography, which investigates the representation of historical events and therefore emphasizes shifting power relations over the actual course of time. Second, a study that uses chronological divisions as its primary model would risk suggesting that populations are best understood as being split categorically into different time periods, and that some sense of progress emerges along this timeline, when in fact many experiences associated with social constructions of

temporality resonate across long periods of time. Finally, such a study would risk obscuring the importance of various other subject positions, to which I will now turn.

Class

Various scholars have observed that hierarchies of income and social status correlate with differences in the experience of temporality, such that materially impoverished people are perceived to have less influence over their own use of time, and to be more present-oriented than future-oriented. In *The Spectrum of Social Time* (1964), French sociologist Georges Gurvitch writes, “The social classes are exceedingly complex and are of major importance as social frameworks for the study of the multiple manifestations of social time and their hierarchized time scales. More ostensibly than any other partial collective unity, each class possesses its own dynamic and its own time scale” (87). He argues that the “bourgeois ideology of progress” creates the illusion of time “leaping forward,” but that because “the bourgeois class must, in order to persist, partially subordinate the proletarian and peasant classes,” any supposed social advance “is realized only for a narrow, privileged stratum. The other classes have to wait patiently for a long period of time for the questionable benefits of this advance” (94-95). Jeremy Rifkin makes the related observation – perhaps a self-evident one given the prevalence of the “time is money” metaphor – that “in industrial cultures, the poor are temporally poor as well as materially poor” (qtd. in Levine 188).

Scholars have disagreed, though, over what lines of causality may exist in the

relationship between class and temporality. Gurvitch writes, “let us say bluntly, the passive masses are not capable of becoming conscious of time in the proper meaning of the term, nor do they make the least attempt to master their time. They produce a specific time and move in this time, but they do not take account of the time in which they live” (59). And Edward Banfield similarly finds fault with the poor: “Extreme present-orientedness, not lack of income or wealth, is the principal cause of poverty in the sense of ‘the culture of poverty’” (qtd. in Levine 188). William Friedman comments on psychological studies which have found that “income was strongly related to temporal attitudes. People with the lowest incomes showed the highest levels of Present Hedonism and Present Fatalism, whereas the high-income respondents believed most strongly that the future statements were characteristic of them” (115). Friedman is cautious, though, about locating causality in this relationship, writing with a more neutral tone than Banfield that “perseverance and planning are clearly associated with higher levels of achievement in our society, whereas a sense of the futility of trying to influence the future and a greater commitment to short-term rewards are characteristic of poorer people” (115). Friedman is much more willing than Gurvitch and Banfield to admit that broad social distinctions cannot hold in all cases, though certain questions inevitably remain unanswered; for instance, how might impoverished immigrants who foster a powerful vision of futurity for their children fit within this model? Zimbardo and Boyd, too, hedge their bets by suggesting that “[s]ocial class is both a contributor to and a consequence of time perspective” (101). Still, they argue that future orientedness “is a prerequisite for membership in the middle class. Ambition and need for achievement drive a future

orientation that focuses on work, savings, and planning for a continually better life through one's efforts" (101).²⁵

Far from condemning people with low incomes for their present-orientedness, Craig Ireland locates a historical basis for the belief that class privilege actually fosters future-orientedness. "We have earlier seen," he writes, "that modern future-oriented temporality [...] is not only a historical phenomenon that surfaces with consistency at the turn of the eighteenth century – it is also a phenomenon that initially manifests itself within a very limited segment of the population, namely, the rising late-eighteenth-century industrial bourgeoisie" (170). Looking at sociological trends at the turn of the twenty-first century, Ireland concludes that

as predictable long-term wage-based employment shifts, as it has been exponentially doing since the 1970s, to precarious contractual work or disposable part-time labour, the exigencies of immediate economic survival literally absorb the time of increasing sectors of the general population, thereby compromising the ability to allocate resources beyond

²⁵ Zygmunt Bauman differs in his assessment of the relationship between class and time perspectives, arguing that "inhabitants of the first world live in a perpetual present, going through a succession of epochs hygienically insulated from their past as well as their future. These people are constantly busy and perpetually 'short of time', since each moment of time is non-extensive – an experience identical with that of time 'full to the brim'" (88). The impoverished, meanwhile, "are crushed under the burden of abundant, redundant and useless time they have nothing to fill with. In their time 'nothing ever happens'" (88). Going on to label the first group "tourists" and the second group "vagabonds," Bauman manages to articulate the polarizing consequences of globalization in terms of these drastically different temporal experiences, and accurately concludes that wealthy investors are increasingly able to enjoy a "disconnection of power from obligations [...] towards yet unborn generations and towards the self-reproduction of the living conditions of all" (9). By focusing so heavily on this polarization, though, he may lose sight of some of the complexities of temporal experience for the wealthy, whose consciousness of at least a personal future is necessary to ensure that wealth is extended and retained, and for the poor, who on one hand may indeed spend time on productive and enjoyable pursuits, and on the other hand may still be "subject to the faceless rhythm of factory time" that Bauman sees as a relic of the past (88).

the short term and the immediate and, in so doing, ultimately wreaking havoc on an extended sense of self – a situation recently diagnosed by Richard Sennett as a “corrosion of character.” (158)

For people belonging to the working classes, the necessity of bowing to “the exigencies of immediate economic survival” is of course traceable further back than the 1970s.

Alfred Laliberté’s sculpture *The Slave to Machinery* (c. 1929-34) exemplifies the all-consuming urgency of the worker’s relationship to backbreaking labour.



Alfred Laliberté, *The Slave to Machinery* (Newlands 181)

Anne Newlands writes that “Laliberté employs the mythological figure of Ixion (whose punishment by Zeus was to be forever bound to a fiery wheel) as a fitting metaphor for his view of society’s relationship to industrialization. The weary figure of the nearly naked man slumps against the winged wheel, his independence sacrificed to its mechanical revolutions” (181). The hopeful wings become a bitter symbol for the human toll taken by an ideology of unrelenting progress, while the worker’s agonized posture lends credence to the view that future-orientedness is an unattainable luxury for people trapped within merciless socioeconomic conditions. Though he spent most of his life in Montreal, Laliberté was born into a Québécois farming family, and it is perhaps this rural origin that causes Newlands to comment that “his attachment to the old ways made it difficult for him to accept the pace of modern life” (181).²⁶

Robert Levine has studied the “pace of life” across different cultures, and finds that modern industrialization indeed goes hand in hand with a faster social tempo, as measured by such factors as strict adherence to clock time, and the speed with which people walk along sidewalks. It is somewhat of a paradox that as industrial progress ostensibly increases the total wealth of a society, individuals find themselves increasingly strapped for time, so that while, as Zimbardo and Boyd suggest, “the rich or upper class can afford to take any time perspective they want” (101), people in general tend to become increasingly busy. People in nonindustrialized societies regularly work 15-hour

²⁶ Laliberté’s *The Slave to Machinery* is roughly contemporary with Charlie Chaplin’s film *Modern Times* (1936), which opens with the face of a clock signalling the start of the workday, followed by a running flock of sheep juxtaposed against the rush of workers arriving at the factory. Chaplin’s character soon finds himself being pulled through the enormous gears of a relentless machine.

weeks, while “the shift to plow cultivation, which requires feeding and caring for draft animals, pushes the work week of men to 25 to 30 hours” (Levine 14). “The single most crucial watershed event in the acceleration of the tempo of the Western world,” Levine writes, “was the Industrial Revolution” (12). Workplace punch clocks were developed in New York in the 1880s, and “efficiency engineering” led to factory consultants “filming a worker’s every movement, with the dual goals of breaking down a company’s tasks into their component parts and establishing standard times for each bodily motion” (Levine 68, 70). Levine explains the increasing tempo of industrialized society by observing that “almost every technical advance seems to be accompanied by a rise in expectations” – for instance, the availability of vacuum cleaners raises people’s cleanliness standards, causing individuals to “invest the time needed to propel these products against the suddenly defeatable household grit” (12-13). And Allen Johnson links this trend to consumer culture in particular, noting that “as a result of producing and consuming more, we are experiencing an increasing scarcity of time. [...] Free time gets converted into consumption time because time spent neither producing nor consuming comes increasingly to be viewed as wasted” (qtd. in Levine 13).

The standard work week in Canada at confederation – a time of rapid industrialization and increasing reliance on clock time – measured in at sixty hours: ten hours a day for six days a week (Morton 7). Within five years, though, citizens exhausted by long working hours had begun to organize a series of protests that became known as “The Nine-Hour Movement.” A commemorative sign in Victoria Park in Hamilton, Ontario reads: “Inspired by British and American examples, Hamilton unionists launched

a crusade for a shorter workday in January of 1872. The workingman, they argued, needed more time for family, leisure, education and civic life. Soon the Nine-Hour Movement had branches across central Canada.” “The issue of shorter hours,” Levine writes, “was at the heart of the labor movement from the beginning [...]. ‘Eight hours for work, eight hours for sleep, eight hours for what we will,’ was the cry of turn-of-the-century unionists” (141). In the United States in 1930, W. K. Kellogg of breakfast cereal fame was widely celebrated for introducing a six-hour working day in his plant. But while the trend towards increasing leisure time has remained somewhat steadier in Europe, the North American postwar consumer bonanza saw a marked reversal: people demanded *more* working hours (Levine 141-43). This desire, of course, is a deeply conflicted one; in the late twentieth century Levine notes that two-thirds of Americans, if given the choice, would opt for salary cuts in exchange for more time off work (103).

In Canada, as in the United States, the standard work week hovers at 40 hours over five days, and even while both countries celebrate Labo(u)r Day each September to honour the unionist movements that ended the 60-hour week, the desire for increased leisure time remains in conflict with the desire for new consumer experiences. Statistics Canada measures the total average working hours per day for Canadians over the age of 15 – including paid work, unpaid work, and education, averaged over a *seven*-day week – as 7.8 hours in 1998, and 7.9 hours in 2005, the increase being reported mainly by women (*Overview of the Time Use of Canadians*, Table 1). These responses vary by region, with the fewest hours of work in 2005 reported in Quebec (7.6 hours), and the most in Alberta (8.5 hours) (Tables 1.6, 1.10). They also vary by age, with working hours

increasing from 7.3 between the ages of 15 to 24, to a maximum of 9.6 between the ages of 35 to 44, down to 4.5 hours for those aged 65 and over (Table 2). The Canadian Index of Wellbeing notes that in 2005, 16.6% of men and 22.7% of women experienced high levels of “time crunch,” or pressure to meet competing temporal demands; the CBC reported this news under the headline “More Canadians Pressed for Time,” citing such causes as “greater consumer demand for services outside weekday hours, urban sprawl and workplace technologies such as email and smartphones that increasingly demand employees be ‘perpetually on call.’” Like vacuum cleaners, internet connectivity seems to increase expectations rather than freeing up people’s time. Interestingly, the CBC report disregards the fact that the statistics actually indicate a slight decrease in time pressure from the 1998 peak, apparently seeing steadily increasing time pressure as a foregone conclusion.

Of course, such measurements offer only a broad stroke in portraying socioeconomic temporal demands. Yann Martel’s unnamed narrator in his novel *Self* gives an indication of what the statistical split between paid work, unpaid work, and free time can actually look like for an individual. The narrator, who is writing a novel, spends much of her free time with her lover Tito, and supports herself with a waitressing job that she refers to as Slave Work: “I had a schedule in my life now, time imperatives that I had to contend with. There was Slave-Work Time, Novel-Work Time, Miscellaneous-Things Time and Tito Time” (266). In her mind, the moments that comprise her life are inevitably divided into categories associated with necessity or pleasure.

For an exemplary portrayal, though, of the psychological cost of the industrialized

obsession with precise, controlled temporal units of work, we must turn to Tom

Wayman's sardonic poem "Factory Time" (1977):

The day divides neatly into four parts
marked off by the breaks. The first quarter
is a full two hours, 7:30 to 9:30, but that's okay
in theory, because I'm supposed to be fresh, but in fact
after some evenings it's a long first two hours.
Then, a ten-minute break. Which is good
another way, too: the second quarter
thus has ten minutes knocked off, 9:40 to 11:30
which is only 110 minutes, or
to put it another way, if I look at my watch
and it says 11:10

I can cheer up because if I had still been in the first quarter
and had worked for 90 minutes there would be
30 minutes to go, but now there is only
20. If it had been the first quarter, I could expect
the same feeling at 9 o'clock as here I have
when it is already ten minutes after 11.

Then it's lunch: a stretch, and maybe a little walk around.
And at 12 sharp the endless quarter begins: a full two afternoon hours. And it's
only the start
of the afternoon. Nothing to hope for the whole time.
Come to think of it, today
is probably only Tuesday. Or worse, Monday,
with the week barely begun and the day
only just half over, four hours down
and 36 to go this week
(if the foreman doesn't come padding by about 3
some afternoon and ask us all to work overtime).

[...]

But even when I quit
the numbers of the minutes and hours from this shift
stick with me: I can look at a clock some morning
months afterwards, and see it is 20 minutes to 9
—that is, if I'm ever out of bed that early—
and the automatic computer in my head
starts to type out: *20 minutes to 9, that means
30 minutes to work after 9: you are*

*50 minutes from the break; 50 minutes
of work, and it is only morning, and it is only
Monday, you poor dumb bastard....*

And that's how it goes, round the clock, until a new time
from another job bores its way into my brain. (11-14)

By portraying the human employee as a type of reluctant cyborg driven to madness by an obsession with the clock, Wayman satirizes the dominance of a socio-temporal structure designed around inhuman principles of pure efficiency. We are not told what goods this factory is actually producing, for clearly its central purpose from the employee's point of view is to manufacture time itself, metering out hours and minutes to exacting specifications. Eventually the employee himself has become a time factory, "typing out" the temporal allotments whose fragility of meaning is heightened when they are removed from the context of the workplace. The dominant sensation in the poem is one of mind-numbing, purposeless duration and the endless performance of repetitive, anonymous work. The factory itself is both a form of hell that traps wretched souls for all eternity, and a kind of clock that chimes regularly with rigidly defined break whistles throughout the day. The robot-like sequences echoing through Wayman's head recall the inflectionless yet accelerating voice of the "Newtonian Clock" in W.H. New's long poem *Along a Snake Fence Riding*, which declares: "THESE ARE THE TIMES / WORK TIME / THAT TRY MEN'S SPIRIT / BROKEN TIME / TIME CARD / WORK TIME / TIME CARD / DO IT AGAIN" (85). But while Wayman's poetic speaker is indeed temporally poor, he is by no means incapable of becoming conscious of time; he reveals through his obsessiveness that his consciousness of time has actually been *heightened* by the strict time pressures that control his every waking moment. His options for resistance

appear limited, but the scathing satire of the poem itself serves as a highly conscious articulation of, and a form of resistance against, industrialized time.

Despite the onset of a postindustrial era, Wayman's agonizing portrayal of the endless work necessary for eking out a living has only increased in poignancy over the decades since it was written, as wealth is increasingly concentrated in the hands of the few. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) reports that in 2009, a year of deep recession, the top-paid CEOs in the country each made more than 330 times the annual income of the average minimum wage worker, a figure that has increased dramatically since the 1990s (Mackenzie 3, 4). A person making minimum wage would have to work for 330 years to earn what a top CEO makes in twelve months, not taking into account stock option tax subsidies that boost the total amount of take-home pay for the wealthy. As Hugh Mackenzie of the CCPA points out, this means that "Canada's best paid 100 CEOs earn a year's worth of minimum wage work by 3:15 p.m. on New Years Day" (3). For shift workers, the taxing and often inflexible timing of work "days" can not only interrupt basic social and family schedules, but can lead to a chronic lack of sleep. Calling sleep deprivation a "national epidemic," *Globe and Mail* writer Ian Brown laments "the growing popularity of night shifts, early starts and extended hours," all of which are intended to save costs. The phenomenon does not escape Wayman, who, in his poem "Overtime," gets into his car after an overtime shift and realizes that "There are 12 hours / until I have to be out of bed for more" (20). Brown notes that sleep loss has been linked to "hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, memory loss, bipolar disorder, reduced immunity, mood swings, impaired carbohydrate metabolism and increased heart-

rate variability,” as well as impairment of “the ability to make moral judgments.”

While temporal disempowerment may be especially pronounced for wage workers, the middle classes are by no means exempt. Gurvitch argues that the middle classes, as a result of being the least conscious of their class groupings, “do not produce their own time scales. They are tossed between diverse social times and are unsuccessful in finding even a tenuous cohesion” (100). In *Generation X*, Coupland’s character Andy agrees, in a sense, that middle class life involves to some degree an *absence* of distinction. And yet, contrary to Gurvitch, Andy clearly feels that this negation contributes towards a very particular middle class character and temporality:

You see, when you’re middle class, you have to live with the fact that history will ignore you. You have to live with the fact that history can never champion your causes and that history will never feel sorry for you. It is the price that is paid for day-to-day comfort and silence. And because of this price, all happinesses are sterile; all sadnesses go unpitied.

And any small moments of intense, flaring beauty such as this morning’s will be utterly forgotten, dissolved by time like a super-8 film left out in the rain, without sound, and quickly replaced by thousands of silently growing trees. (147)

Of course, as this passage ironically attests, literature is one form through which history is made to *remember* the hopes and anxieties that authors perceive within the diverse members of society, middle class or otherwise.

Class divisions often overlap with other social divisions, and the connection between class and race is particularly prominent. M.G. Vassanji’s novel *No New Land* follows the protagonist Nurdin Lalani, a man of Indian descent whose family moves to east Africa; when Nurdin then immigrates to Canada, he marvels at the opportunities that await him. His age of 46 years is “about the average life expectancy where he was born,

but here in Canada you got an extended lease on life” (85). And yet, because Nurdin’s potential employers in Canada are reluctant to hire him – his race, of course, being the unspoken reason – the “extended lease on life” turns out to mean that Nurdin has more time to spend in menial, unsatisfying jobs. Hours of undesirable work, which provide a basic living, become a kind of currency in and of themselves, as Nurdin learns that by giving his first week’s salary to his supervisor at a subway car cleaning job, he will be allowed to spend most of his shift playing cards with the other workers (88) – a lowly but attainable temporal victory.

Shani Mootoo’s novel *Cereus Blooms at Night*, which takes place on a fictional island probably based on Trinidad, expresses in temporal terms the class divisions that accompany racialization and spatial distance from the colonial centre. Chandin’s father, an indentured labourer from India, obsesses over the relationship between time and personal finance:

The old man kept himself awake by worrying about the future of his only child. He had been turning mathematical estimations this way and that, inside out and upside down in his head. He had, as usual, whipped himself up a headache with his obsessive predictions of what the state of his finances could be if he and his wife, Janaki, were to work one hour more, or even two hours more per day, so that enough funds might be accrued to send Chandin to a college in the capital, or even abroad to study a profession. [He...] calculated how many years it would be before Chandin were eligible for enrollment in a college, how many extra hours there were in that many years – times two if his wife were also to work the extra time, factoring in a possible raise in their salaries – and he even went so far as to do a little division and addition to account for the inevitable rise in the cost of living. (26)²⁷

²⁷ Eviatar Zerubavel highlights how the “lack of synchrony between the week and the month” can be a particularly problematic temporal feature for workers attempting to calculate their budgets: “Consider, for example, how inconvenient it is for employees paid by the month to budget their expenses on a regular weekly basis, when, out of the

As with Tom Wayman in “Factory Time,” Chandin’s father obsesses over both the minutiae and the expansiveness of his work time. Here, though, religion is also at stake in the financial predicament. When a reverend from the “Shivering Northern Wetlands” – England – adopts Chandin into his seminary, news quickly spreads that Chandin’s parents have converted to Christianity in order for the adoption to proceed. As one person in the village puts it, “If it is the only way for your child to get education and not have to work like a horse sweating and breaking back in the hot sun for hardly nothing, you wouldn’t convert?” (28). Conversion to Christianity becomes a way for people of Indian descent to excise, at least partially, their racialization and corresponding financial and temporal poverty – a tempting option for Chandin’s parents, and one that converts religion itself into a matter of sheer practicality. But while Chandin’s father’s obsession with time does open the door to a kind of escape from temporal poverty, this escape remains partial and problematic. Many years later Chandin becomes horribly abusive to his own family, raping his daughter Mala who succumbs to madness and becomes lost in time, being unable to tell the difference between the past and the present.²⁸ It is as though Chandin’s father’s valiant attempt to escape temporal impoverishment results ultimately in the destruction of coherent temporal existence for his descendants. Like many other authors, Mootoo is sensitive towards the temporal power of individual decisions, yet resists the notion that temporal impoverishment is a simple vice, suggesting instead that

very same paycheck, they have to make four weekly trips to the supermarket on some months yet five on others. Employees paid by the week, however, do not have an easier time having to pay their monthly telephone, gas, and electric bills sometimes out of five paychecks yet sometimes out of only four” (61).

²⁸ I discuss this scene in the Gender and Sexuality section of this chapter.

complex entrenched social factors of race, religion, and unequal wealth are weighted towards maintaining existing patterns of financial and temporal poverty.

One of the dominant assertions across many works of literature is that, despite apparent opportunities for escape such as the problematic conversion outlined above, members of the working classes tend to find themselves in a frustrating rut or cycle, a temporal whirlpool of poverty. Mordecai Richler's Duddy Kravitz is a powerful example of a working class character who believes in idealized linear progress, who wants to experience time as a series of achievements escalating towards wealth and fame, yet even after repeated failures cannot bring himself to critically examine the linear model. Despite his plans to become wealthy through savvy land purchasing and developing deals, Duddy finds himself betrayed by the linear model as he spirals again and again into financial and psychological ruin. "Time," Richler writes, "became an obsession with him and he was soon trying to do two and even three things at once. He kept self-improvement books beside him in the car to glance at when he stopped for a red light. He did exercises while he listened to his records and in bed with Yvette he memorized stuff from *How to Increase Your Word Power*" (204-05). All of this results in a nervous breakdown, but Duddy musters his strength and takes on even more entrepreneurial projects. "You are looking at the man," he says near the end of the novel, "who is going to build a town where only bugs and bullshit was before. [...] I have to do everything alone. I can see that now. I can trust nobody" (285). By the final scene Duddy has made a rural land purchase, achieving some degree of material wealth, but the victory is precarious and comes at the expense of his moral centre and personal relationships. Still

penniless despite the land title, Duddy is thrilled when a restaurant waiter agrees to take his lunch bill on credit. This final accomplishment is such a minor one that it serves as an effective parody of the classic capitalist success story; even if Duddy fails to learn from his own history, Richler's readers are left with the distinct impression that linear temporal progress towards wealth may largely be an illusory concept. While the novel is partially an indictment of ruthless ambition, Richler is also interested in questioning the linear model of time by showing that no amount of future-oriented time consciousness can circumvent the essential cruelty of a socioeconomic system whose existence actually requires that most people will lose out on temporal and economic wealth.

David Fennario affords an entire cast of temporally constricted characters in his bilingual play *Balconville*, which follows the lives of poor working-class neighbours in a run-down area of Montreal. Metaphors of physical immobility, such as Thibault's delivery bicycle with the perpetually flat tire, create an equally powerful sense of temporal immobility, as the neighbours complain endlessly about dead-end jobs, hopelessness, and familial poverty cycles. Johnny, like many of *Balconville*'s characters, claims to have plans for the future – “Yeah,” he says. “I’m gonna call up some people, try to get something together, as soon as I get my first cheque” (35) – but instead embodies a class-based temporal paralysis as he spends the entire play waiting for the cheque that never arrives. Gurvitch, despite his accusatory attitude towards the impoverished, is perhaps accurate when he writes that “the consciousness of time in the working class often takes the form of fatigue, expectation, or hope” (99). Visible in portrayals like Fennario's is the perversion, the apparently inevitable failure, of the grand model of

progress; Johnny thinks in terms of society's dominant linear model, but actual progress in terms of an improved quality of life never materializes and he wakes up each day only to repeat the cycle of dashed hopes. While models of time that intentionally emphasize circularity (such as the indigenous models I will discuss in Chapter Four) offer a positive conceptualization of recurrence and cyclicity, the experience of time for a working class character like Johnny is *accidentally* cyclical – it is a negative experience, the inward collapse of the desired linear model.

If these texts are any guide, Canadian authors have had a stake in questioning the notion that economic impoverishment is the result of, or even corresponds with, a lack of time consciousness. They reveal a deep desire to resist and challenge explanations of poverty that rely on the assumption of personal temporal failures, suggesting instead that poverty is an inherent part of the socioeconomic system and is tied to cultural structures of value and power. These works argue that just as poverty can force people to obsess over money it can also heighten people's consciousness of time, even while it tends to mold the experience of temporality into a fatiguing cycle. As with many of the works discussed in this chapter, such texts can teach us to recognize time itself as a category of domination, a socially constructed site where power is enacted and agency negotiated. By questioning the inequitable distribution of temporal wealth, such works help us to articulate the possibilities and limits of temporal resistance.

Gender and Sexuality

In her book *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture*, Rita Felski asks whether it is reasonable to conceive of women as inhabiting a fundamentally different temporality from men, whether it is possible to “talk meaningfully about men’s time and women’s time” (1). In this project, Felski is building partially on the work of Julia Kristeva, who notes that “the feminist movement both inherits and modifies” normative understandings of time (861).²⁹ To break the question down into specific components, Felski envisions “a tentative distinction between three temporal levels”: everyday time (the day-to-day phenomenological experience of time), life time (“the process of understanding one’s life as a project that encompasses and connects the random segments of daily experience”), and large-scale time (processes of history and myth that “transcend the limits of our personal existence”) (17-18).

First, Felski notes that women have often been linked to cyclical or repetitive modes of time, contrasted with the masculine associations of linear progressive time. This notion, Felski argues, emerges partially from the cultural phenomenon that while “[b]iorhythmic cycles affect various aspects of male and female behavior, [...] menstruation and pregnancy become the preeminent, indeed the only, examples of human subordination to natural time and a certain feminine resistance to the project of civilization” (82). Perhaps even more significantly, the linking of women with repetitive

²⁹ For Kristeva, first-wave feminism, “as the struggle of suffragists and of existential feminists, aspired to gain a place in linear time as the time of project and history” (864), while the second phase in the 1960s and 70s is one in which “linear temporality has been almost totally refused, and as a consequence there has arisen an exacerbated distrust of the entire political dimension” (864). While Kristeva, writing in 1979, can only speculate on the emergence of a “third attitude” that is more interested in questioning binary thinking, Felski, writing two decades later, in many ways both validates and extends Kristeva’s line of inquiry.

time emerges from the everyday temporal experiences that have traditionally been associated, through social constructions of gender, with the two sexes: “women are primarily responsible for the repetitive tasks of social reproduction: cleaning, preparing meals, caring for children. While much paid work is equally repetitive, only the domestic sphere is deemed to exist outside the dynamic of history and change” (82). Felski suggests that while the oppressiveness of these repetitive tasks has contributed to the idea that women are removed from the linear pace of progressive history, it may also reveal an *increased* reliance on strict temporal accounting:

Rather than being elemental creatures attuned to natural rhythms, many women nowadays are, if anything, even more preoccupied with time measurement than men. Caught between the conflicting demands of home and work, often juggling child care and frantic about their lack of time, it is women who are clock watchers, who obsess about appointments and deadlines, who view time as a precious commodity to hoard or to spend.
(20)

Despite the apparent “dramatic contrast between the grand narratives of male historical time and the repetitive everyday time of women” (20), the complexities of everyday time for both women and men complicate the assumption that this contrast reflects any essential difference.³⁰

³⁰ Felski notes that “There is something very familiar about this division between linear and cyclical time. It is also the way we often distinguish between industrial and agricultural societies” (18). Following Barbara Adam and Akhil Gupta, Felski argues that this kind of stereotypical cultural division of temporal modes, like the division of temporal modes between men and women, cannot hold up under detailed analysis: “Western culture, in spite of its strong reliance on linear time, is also saturated with time cycles, from the boom-bust rhythms of economics to the annual rites of Christmas, Hanukkah, and Thanksgiving, to the small-scale routines of everyday life. On the other hand, the non-Western world cannot simply be seen as dwelling in archaic, non-linear time” (19). In the next chapter I will more closely examine the interdependent nature of cyclical and linear time.

On the level of “life time,” too, Felski notes that “[t]raditionally men (or rather, white men of the middle class) were encouraged to think of their lives in linear terms [as] a project,” whereas women “did not for the most part have the luxury of imagining a self-directed future” and instead experienced life as “a series of fragments, not a carefully choreographed upward ascent” (21). Still, she says, it would be a mistake “to conclude that women never think of their lives in developmental terms and to oppose female formlessness to male linearity” (21). Seeing contemporary self-help manuals as an example of a genre “aimed primarily at women” that “presents female lives as a movement through a series of stages toward ever greater self-knowledge,” she suggests that women “are knitted ever more deeply into the rhetoric of self-development and are encouraged to view their lives as a meaningful and coherent story” (21). Finally, on the level of large-scale narratives of time, Felski resists the notion “that women are essentially at odds with such narratives. On the contrary, they have often been passionate believers in national progress, racial uplift, women’s growing freedom, and many other big historical stories” (21). The feminist movement itself “is clearly indebted to forms of historical thinking made possible by modernity”; because it “aspires to a better future,” feminism is “a *project*, requiring a purposeful and hopeful relationship toward future time” (21-22).

Felski concludes that “it is hard to argue for a distinctive ‘women’s time’ without oversimplifying the links between gender and temporality” (22). Given that many apparently feminine temporal associations are the result of culturally assigned and unstable gender roles, and that women have both adopted and challenged large historical

narratives like modernism, “[w]omen can neither be subsumed within conventional periods nor segregated within a separate ‘women’s time’” (3). Only through taking into account the “dense entanglements and disjunctures within and between specific male and female experiences of history and time” can we do justice to the relationship between gender and temporality (26). In this way Felski’s work concurs with the idea that I have been developing throughout this project, that grand cultural chronotopes are limited by their inability to account for the complications and idiosyncrasies of specific temporal experiences. Still, bearing witness to the effects that cultural constructions of time and gender have had on women’s experiences, and vice versa, allows for a larger and more nuanced picture to emerge. Julia Kristeva argues that “it is in the aspiration toward artistic and, in particular, literary creation that woman’s desire for affirmation now manifests itself” (873), and while literature can indeed serve as a site of outright assertion, it can also reflect in more subtle ways the complex relationships between experiences of gender and time.

Catharine Parr Traill’s experience upon her ship’s arrival in the Saint Lawrence is emblematic of the complex relationship that Felski and Kristeva identify between gender and temporality. Commenting on the villages and logging operations visible on either side of the ship, Traill writes, “I watch the progress of cultivation among these rugged and inhospitable regions with positive pleasure” (17). Yet despite her enthusiasm for the grand cultural notion of progress, by the very next page she has been denied equal participation in the project of exploring and cultivating the terrain: “I felt a longing desire to set my foot on Canadian ground, and must own I was a little disappointed when the

captain advised me to remain on board, and not attempt to make one of the party that were preparing to go on shore: my husband seconded the captain's wish" (18). Traill continues to watch and *wait* throughout the extended passage towards Montreal, pleading in vain to be let off the ship. Margaret Atwood describes a similar experience in her *Journals of Susanna Moodie*, a collection of historical-fiction poems that explores the life and thoughts of Traill's sister. Atwood's Moodie sits anxiously in her small cabin, surrounded by dangerous wilderness, "waiting / for my shadowy husband" ("Further Arrivals" lines 17-18).

The experience of waiting, of being left out of the linear progressive project, while significant, is part of a more complex temporal position. As Traill takes up residence in her own pioneering cabin she becomes an expert autodidact, learning to produce maple-sugar, vinegar, soap, candles, and pickles: tasks that are repetitive, surely, but not necessarily any more repetitive than the male-gendered tasks of chopping wood or trading for supplies. What is more, Traill's domestic chores are an essential part of the progress-oriented project, gradually drawing her household forward along the path of civility through the accumulation of desirable everyday amenities. Such "comforts," Traill writes, "are the reward and the slow gleaning-up of many years of toil" (121) – toil that is shared in different ways across both genders, even if, as Felski suggests, "the domestic sphere is deemed to exist outside the dynamic of history and change" (82).

One component of the exclusion of women from full participation in higher cultural pursuits is the male focus of educational systems. Commenting on how education in general tends to foster an increased future orientation, Zimbardo and Boyd write that

“[s]ocieties that offer less opportunity for education are likely to have more citizens whose focus is limited to the present. This is especially the case where even minimal educational resources are unavailable for women; when women’s educational level advances, their children and social class also advance” (101).³¹ Here we can recall the young Anne Shirley’s socialization, in *Anne of Green Gables*, from an insubordinate present hedonism towards a community-sanctioned future orientation; her basic social education under the tutelage of schoolteachers, community members, and especially her adoptive parents stretches her time perspective until her behaviour meets with approval from her elders. However, once Anne has attained this required level of socialization and has gained enough of a future-oriented work ethic to take up her designated place in the perpetual maintenance of the social order, the community *resists* the idea of educating her any further. Near the end of the novel the neighbourhood matriarch Rachel Lynde visits Green Gables and says, “Well, Anne, I hear you’ve given up your notion of going to college. I was real glad to hear it. You’ve got as much education now as a woman can be comfortable with. I don’t believe in girls going to college with the men and cramming their heads full of Latin and Greek and all that nonsense” (304). While Anne’s education and expanded time perspective, up to a certain point, were unequivocal requirements of her acceptance into the community, she faces a backlash against pursuing the higher

³¹ Analyzing the results of their long-running time perspective survey, Zimbardo and Boyd also claim that “on average, men tend to be more present-hedonistic and women more future-oriented. Generations ago, this difference undoubtedly carried a survival advantage” (248). Such a claim is difficult to analyze: is the primary responsibility for child rearing an inherent difference that causes women in general to act more with a view to future consequences? What role do changing educational, social, or family structures play in these survey results? Isolating cultural and generational variables in such a study would be very difficult.

forms of education associated with male-dominated grand cultural achievements. Anne's defiant resolve to study college material after all – which causes Mrs. Lynde to lift her hands “in holy horror” (304) – is tempered with her agreement to take up the more conventional day job of teaching at the Avonlea school; she will study the college texts only from home, on her own time as it were.

Interestingly, when Anne runs down towards Diana's house to share the news, Mrs. Lynde muses that “There's a good deal of the child about her yet in some ways” (305), suggesting that Anne's stubborn and contrary desire to continue her education sends her backwards, not forwards, along the normative linear measurement of maturity (meanwhile, no such judgment is made of Anne's male friend Gilbert who also plans to study at college). Marilla takes issue with this assessment, replying, “There's a good deal more of the woman about her in other [ways]” (306). All of this reveals that the perceived correct amount of education and participation beyond the domestic arena for women remains a contested topic within the Green Gables community; Anne is both progressive and regressive for testing the boundaries. In the closing lines of the novel Montgomery leaves Anne entirely satisfied with the domestic restrictions that have come to define her life options: “if the path set before her feet was to be narrow she knew that flowers of quiet happiness would bloom along it. The joys of sincere work and worthy aspiration and congenial friendship were to be hers” (307). These lines can be read as an acknowledgement of the genuine pleasures that daily life can afford regardless of any grand cultural project, or as the final domestication of Anne's rebellious spirit as she fully internalizes the circumscription of her life project.

The gendered infantilization hinted at in Anne's experiences is central to the cultural link between masculinity and advancement, maturity, and progress. If men are seen as the drivers of cultural development, then women are necessarily underdeveloped and childlike, perpetually located further back along the linear model of time. In her short story "What is Remembered," Alice Munro describes a young couple, Meriel and Pierre, as they try to adjust to married life in the mid twentieth century. The narrative reveals how normative gender roles direct women into an adulthood of perpetual perceived underdevelopment, but Munro is also sensitive to the stark repetitiveness and temporal restraints to which men are subject:

Young husbands were stern, in those days. Just a short time before, they had been suitors, almost figures of fun, knock-kneed and desperate in their sexual agonies. Now, bedded down, they turned resolute and disapproving. Off to work every morning, clean-shaven, youthful necks in knotted ties, days spent in unknown labors [...]. What a lot they had to learn, so quickly. How to kowtow to bosses and how to manage wives. How to be authoritative about mortgages, retaining walls, lawn grass, drains, politics, as well as about the jobs that had to maintain their families for the next quarter of a century. It was the women, then, who could slip back—during the daytime hours, and always allowing for the stunning responsibility that had been landed on them, in the matter of the children—into a kind of second adolescence. A lightening of spirits when the husbands departed. Dreamy rebellion, subversive get-togethers, laughing fits that were a throwback to high school, mushrooming between the walls that the husband was paying for, in the hours when he wasn't there. (*Hateship* 224)

Earlier in the twentieth century the German writer Sigmund von Radecki declared the wristwatch "the handcuff of our time" (qtd. in Levine 58), and the strict temporal regulation facing Pierre and his contemporaries takes on an equally ominous tone in the image of the "youthful necks in knotted ties"; the restrictive garment, reminiscent of a noose, must be tightened onto the body every morning with precise punctuality. No one

else pulls the tie around Pierre's neck, or drags him out of bed early in the morning; he internalizes the necessity of these actions and regulates his own life around them in order to meet the future-oriented responsibility of securing his family's long-term finances. But while Pierre is flung forward into this intensively regulated adulthood responsibility, Meriel appears to move in two temporal directions at once: she travels forward into the responsibility of motherhood and simultaneously "slips back" into childhood, much how Anne Shirley is seen as both progressive and regressive, both adult and child. Normative gender roles cause men and women to age at apparently different and even internally contradictory rates, but neither gender is free from culturally imposed temporal restraints.

Texts that question the linear shape of narrative itself can be particularly adept at challenging the dominance of masculinist assumptions of linear progress. The concept of *le nouveau roman* advanced by the French writer Alain Robbe-Grillet in the 1950s and 60s served as a manifesto for experimenting with alternative forms of narrative centred on objects rather than plot, and while the difficulties of this type of experimentation can serve partially to reinforce the inevitability of narrative concepts like sequence, the impulse to question dominant narrative forms has also opened up vital methods of resistance against entrenched structures of power. In Canada, Daphne Marlatt and Kristjana Gunnars have been especially notable for enacting political resistance through formal manipulations of narrative. Marlatt's 1988 novel *Ana Historic* self-consciously probes the limits of objectivist history, telling the story of a woman who questions official records of the past and figures the flow of events as a shifting, multi-layered composition – "a tangle of hair" as the epigraph's phrasing has it. Echoing this tangled

shape, the novel itself weaves Annie's present day reflections with the recollected and imagined history of Ana, a resident of pioneer era Vancouver. Meanwhile, individual sentences begin with lower-case letters, suggesting that far from being a new beginning stamped with a declaration of official (i.e. masculine) historiography, each moment in time is always already underway, flowing in a slippery continuity from what came before. Through the story's framing of linear competitiveness as a masculine enterprise that women can resist through cooperative practices, and through its own form that weaves past and present, history and imagination, poetry and prose, the novel constructs a temporality modelled after the principles of complexity, solidarity, renewal, and multiple times, emphasizing coexisting truths rather than a victorious singular truth.

Kristjana Gunnars's 1989 novel *The Prowler* enacts a similar interrogation of temporally linear plot, but also seeks to question the binding of particular temporalities to different genders. *The Prowler* is told from the perspective of a girl growing up in Cold-War era Iceland, where trade monopolies and foreign military occupations have left the population impoverished and malnourished. The narrative is broken into short fragments told through a logic of subjective experience and memory rather than through the linear trajectory of chronological order, and the fact that these fragments are numbered while the pages themselves are not seems to suggest that the conceptual experiences of the mind form a more meaningful sequence than the arbitrary and uniform page divisions of a text leading from beginning to end. As the narrator says, "I have sometimes thought: it is possible there is no such thing as chronological time. That the past resembles a deck of cards. Certain scenes are given. They are not scenes the rememberer chooses, but simply

a deck that is given. The cards are shuffled whenever a game is played” (section 81). In this sense, *The Prowler*’s perspective on subjective temporality is similar to W.H. New’s perspective in *Along a Snake Fence Riding*, though Gunnars’s narrator pays special attention to the connection between linear time and masculinity. “I have read treatises on male writing,” she says. “The male line. The masculine story. That men have to be going somewhere. Men are always shooting something somewhere. And that women do not. That women can grow all things in one place. That the female story is an unfolding of layers” (25). Immediately after this comment, though, the narrator adds, “I do not know if this is true. It is incidental” (25). In other words, linear time must be interrogated because of the constraints it imposes on perception and subjectivity; these constraints remain significant even if the gender associations through which they are sometimes understood turn out to be tenuous. Instead of envisioning her own story as a linear, chronological line, the narrator allows her narrative to circle back upon itself so that the teller and the listener alike experience an unfolding process of discovery in which gender associations begin to fade into the background. Like Marlatt, Gunnars is highly conscious of the ties between patriarchal power and linear time, but while Marlatt highlights the masculinity of linear time in order to locate resistance within women’s multiplicitous narratives, Gunnars shows that experiences of time are always multiple, suggesting that pure linearity fails to articulate temporal experience for men as well as women. Like the ungendered reader, “The writer is a prowler in a given story that emerges in time” (120).

Among the most eloquent literary articulations of the relationship between gender roles and experiences of time is Margaret Atwood’s 1988 novel *Cat’s Eye*. The novel

follows Elaine Risley, an artist who reflects back on her childhood in 1940s Toronto as she prepares to attend a retrospective of her own career in the present day. The opening lines of the novel introduce a thematic concern with time:

Time is not a line but a dimension, like the dimensions of space. If you can bend space you can bend time also, and if you knew enough and could move faster than light you could travel backward in time and exist in two places at once.

It was my brother Stephen who told me that, when he wore his raveling maroon sweater to study in and spent a lot of time standing on his head so that the blood would run down into his brain and nourish it. I didn't understand what he meant, but maybe he didn't explain it very well. He was already moving away from the imprecision of words.

But I began then to think of time as having a shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You don't look back along time but down through it, like water. Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing. Nothing goes away. (3)

While Stephen is interested in physics and cosmology, his comments on the nature of time resonate for decades with Elaine, whose reflections shift the meaning of time bending, time travel, and time sedimentation away from scientific knowledge and towards an understanding of human relationships and subjectivity. This focus is visible in some of her paintings where, for instance, the mother of her childhood friend Grace is captured “flying heavily through the air” in a way that warps the laws of time and space in recognition of the discontinuities of subjective experience (302). One of the central assertions of the novel is that through the everyday workings of memory and experience we all exist in multiple times at once. Human experiences in time are continuously layered upon one another so that each contributes to the overall vision of the present moment, and no absolute distinction is possible between the past and the present. A degree of critical self-knowledge is necessary, though, in order to understand with any

clarity the particular relationships between past experiences and present identity. By crafting a detailed study of Elaine's life and reflections, the novel investigates how such time layering is influenced by various social relations, many of which are centred on the power of normative gender roles.

An early hint of this occurs when Elaine recalls being perplexed, as a young girl, over the fact that girls and boys are required to enter the school through separate, gendered doorways, a division that expands into other aspects of life; Stephen relates easily to Elaine when they are alone, but during school hours he takes on a separate existence, separating himself from his sister through snowball fights with loud groups of boys. Adults, too, are separated through gender roles in time and space. For adult women, spending one's time at home as a mother is the acceptable plan, while men are expected to disappear from the home during daylight hours, taking on a shadowy and mysterious existence; "daytime is ruled by mothers. But fathers come out at night. Darkness brings home the fathers, with their real, unspeakable power" (222-23). Even in the unusual Risley household Elaine's father enjoys a grandiose vision of time, musing over the eventual fate of the human species and the polar ice caps, while Elaine's mother attends to immediate household needs, serving "coffee soufflé for dessert" (292).

As a young adult Elaine finds that the very act of painting serves as a form of resistance against the expected uses of her time. With her daytime Art and Archaeology course serving as a cover for her "real life," which "takes place at night" (382), she enrolls in an evening Life Drawing course where instead of observing other people's art she creates her own. She keeps this night life secret from the Art and Archaeology world,

where “my botched attempts at drawing naked women would be seen as a waste of time. Art has been accomplished, elsewhere. All that remains to be done with it is the memory work” (371). Her nighttime painting resists not only the mandated uses of women’s time, but also the view of meaningful art as something belonging to a previous era.

When she becomes pregnant, Elaine worries that she is losing control of her ability to control time – “My body is a separate thing. It ticks like a clock; time is inside it. It has betrayed me, and I am disgusted with it” (453) – and, sure enough, while raising her infant daughter her efforts to resist normative temporality become a central point of tension in her arguments with her partner, Jon. As she spends her days at a new job to pay the bills, Elaine takes to painting at night or early in the morning when the baby is asleep, causing Jon to complain:

Jon does not like me painting at night. “When else can I do it?” I say. “You tell me.” There is only one answer, one that would not involve the loss of his own time: *Don’t do it at all*. But he doesn’t say this. (463)

Elaine soon discovers that Jon has been sleeping with another woman, and she bitterly recalls the advice that would have been offered “in women’s magazines, of a decade ago: wait it out” (498). But the passive feminine temporality envisioned in such magazines is inadequate. She accuses Jon of cheating, and when he accuses her right back, she replies, “Me? [...] I don’t have the time. I don’t have time to think, I don’t have time to paint, I barely have time to shit. I’m too busy paying the goddamn rent” (500). As her relationship implodes she has to give up painting altogether and focus exclusively on day-to-day necessities: “I push myself through time, to work, to the bank to get money, to the supermarket to buy food” (501). Gradually Elaine begins to associate with a group of

feminist artists and activists, who argue that “What is wrong with us the way we are is men. [...] They are violent, wage wars, commit murders. They do less work and make more money. They shove the housework off on women” (460-61). The unequal valuing and distribution of time between work and leisure, which Elaine has experienced firsthand, is a central driver of these women’s politics.³²

While Atwood is clearly interested in the impacts that patriarchal social structures have on women’s experiences of time, *Cat’s Eye* also contains a more prominent theme centred on the temporal consequences of relationships between women. Elaine’s childhood friends, Grace, Carol, and especially Cordelia, subject her to endless cruelties and psychological tortures, constantly watching over her and telling her that everything she does is wrong. At one point Cordelia digs a hole in her backyard and the three girls lure Elaine inside, trapping her. “When I remember back to this time in the hole,” the adult Elaine says, “[...] I have no image of myself in the hole; only a black square filled with nothing, a square like a door. Perhaps the square is empty; perhaps it’s only a

³² Statistics Canada reports that in 1998 men in Canada had an average of 6.0 hours of free time per day (averaged over the seven-day week) compared with 5.6 hours for women (Table 1). By 2005 this number had decreased equally across both genders, with men having 5.7 hours and women having 5.3 hours of free time. Greater disparity is visible in the number of hours spent on paid work (4.7 for men and 3.1 for women in 2005) and unpaid work (2.7 for men and 4.2 for women), revealing that while total working hours are only slightly skewed across genders, men earn significantly more money for their work, even assuming that paid hours are paid equally, which they are not. Also of interest is the fact that the fewer hours of free time available to women appear to reflect a greater amount of time spent not on total work, which again is roughly equal across genders, but on what Statistics Canada calls “personal care,” a category that includes sleep, meals, washing, and dressing. Is this an indication that the pressures of cultural beauty standards compel women to spend more time on personal body care? If so, the distinction between “personal care” and “unpaid work” may not be as clear-cut as it appears.

marker, a time marker that separates the time before it from the time after. The point at which I lost power” (143). The experience becomes a watershed moment, dividing Elaine’s life in two, and she perceives the time afterward as “the endless time when Cordelia had such power over me” (153).

As the daily tortures continue, Elaine forms a habit of obsessively peeling the skin from her own feet, and contemplates burning her hand in the toaster: “All of these are ways of delaying time, slowing it down, so I won’t have to go out through the kitchen door” (161). On the radio she listens to “the Dominion Observatory Official Time Signal: first a series of outer space beeps, then silence, then a long dash. The long dash means one o’clock. Time is passing; in the silence before the long dash the future is taking shape. I turn my head into the pillow. I don’t want to hear it” (188). Time itself has become a slow torture, as the unfolding of each day inevitably brings unbearable new forms of abuse. Eventually Elaine learns a new skill, fainting at will, which allows her to escape some of the worst encounters with the girls: “Fainting is like stepping sideways, out of your own body, out of time or into another time. When you wake up it’s later. Time has gone on without you” (231). The relief of dissociation afforded by fainting soon creeps into the waking moments of Elaine’s life: “I begin to spend time outside my body without falling over. At these times I feel blurred, as if there are two of me, one superimposed on the other, but imperfectly” (234).

Longer-term consequences of this phenomenon are visible in the adult Elaine’s narrative, where she occasionally experiences disconnected temporal skips. “I find myself standing in the middle of the main room, not knowing exactly how I got in here from the

kitchenette. A little time jump” (22); “I get on the escalator, but suddenly I’m going up. This is bad, confusing directions like that, or am I jumping time, did I go down already?” (152). The effect is compounded by brief but increasingly prevalent narrative moments whose temporal setting is ambiguous; do Elaine’s comments about walking through Toronto or arguing with Jon refer to the “present” of her adult life, or are they recollections from decades ago? Aside from vague anxieties about Alzheimer’s and other “diseases of the memory” (353), the adult Elaine has no awareness of where her tendency to experience temporal fragmentation comes from; her childhood traumas have a profound effect on her life, yet remain unavailable to her conscious mind.

If the experience of being trapped in Cordelia’s backyard dungeon is the moment when Elaine loses power, Cordelia’s most dangerous act of torture becomes, paradoxically, the moment when Elaine gains control. In the depths of winter Cordelia throws Elaine’s hat over the edge of a wooden footbridge into the ravine below, and insists that Elaine climb down to retrieve it. Abandoned in the icy water, Elaine nearly freezes to death and has a hallucinatory, detached experience. After recovering over the subsequent days, though, she discovers that she is no longer bound to obey Cordelia’s demands. She stops listening to the taunting voices of the girls and gradually goes on to forget her entire tortured childhood. When she reflects on Cordelia, Grace, and Carol, she finds that “[t]here is no emotion attached to these names. They’re like the names of distant cousins, people who live far away, people I hardly know. Time is missing” (270). Her childhood traumas run so deep that Elaine has taught herself to disconnect her life into separate temporal existences. It is only decades later, while helping her dying mother

clean out the cellar, that Elaine recovers her lost time. She stumbles across a cat's eye marble that she had hidden away as a girl, a marble that, during her torture, she had endowed with a symbolic and hopeful power of protection. "I look into it," she says, "and see my life entire" (537). The inevitable temporal connectedness of human subjectivity, the fact that all of a person's life moments build upon one another and contribute to the full character of ongoing existence, now becomes as clear to Elaine as it has been within the narrative structure all along.

In a lecture titled "The First Picoseconds and the Quest for a Unified Field Theory: Some Minor Speculations," the adult Stephen explains that all the stars we can see in the night sky are "fragments of the past [...] everything up there and indeed everything down here is a fossil, a leftover from the first picoseconds of creation, when the universe crystallized out from the primal homogeneous plasma" (444-45). His unintentional analogy for human subjectivity echoes the novel's assertion that human beings are formed of their earlier experiences. Like the stars, of course, people are never fully "crystallized," but continue to change as each present moment becomes the past of future moments. *Cat's Eye* is a speculation on the idea of a unified field theory of human identity over time, and asserts that relationships both across and within gender categories can profoundly influence the connectedness or dislocation, the empowerment or disempowerment, of temporal experience.

Like gender categories, sexualities carry deeply rooted cultural associations that tend to reinforce hierarchies of privilege. In his 1993 play *The Stillborn Lover*, Timothy

Findley frames the Japanese board game “Go” as a metaphor for human agency through time; once the game’s stone pieces have been set in place, “they cannot be withdrawn. Their positions are locked, irrevocable. Like the moves and gestures we make with our lives” (1). The past is laid out in an unalterable configuration, and this locks the circumstances of the present into place, confining future possibilities as well. For Harry, the Canadian Ambassador to Moscow who has been framed for a crime because his homosexuality is politically embarrassing, agency is constrained by a figurative playing field whose pieces have been arranged in accordance with systemic homophobia. Michael, the Minister of External Affairs, explains that Harry has two choices: return to Moscow and face unjust punishment, or stay in Canada and confess to crimes of which he is innocent. As the deadline for a decision draws near, Harry’s wife Marian hands him a stone and says, “Here. It’s your move” (150), implying that Harry has the power to choose and create his own future. But the two futures that he has to choose from are unreasonable products of sexual regulation, and the power is illusory. His influence over the direction of his life is metaphorically no greater than that of a stillborn baby, his agency having effectively been extinguished before he has a chance to exercise it.

Findley’s representation of temporal disempowerment tied to minority sexual identities brings to mind various aspects of Canada’s historical treatment of same-sex relationships. In 1965 Everett George Klippert of the Northwest Territories admitted to police that he had engaged in homosexual sex on various occasions; he was deemed a dangerous sex offender and was sent to prison to serve an *indefinite* sentence – temporal disempowerment indeed. Partially as a result of this case, Pierre Elliott Trudeau soon

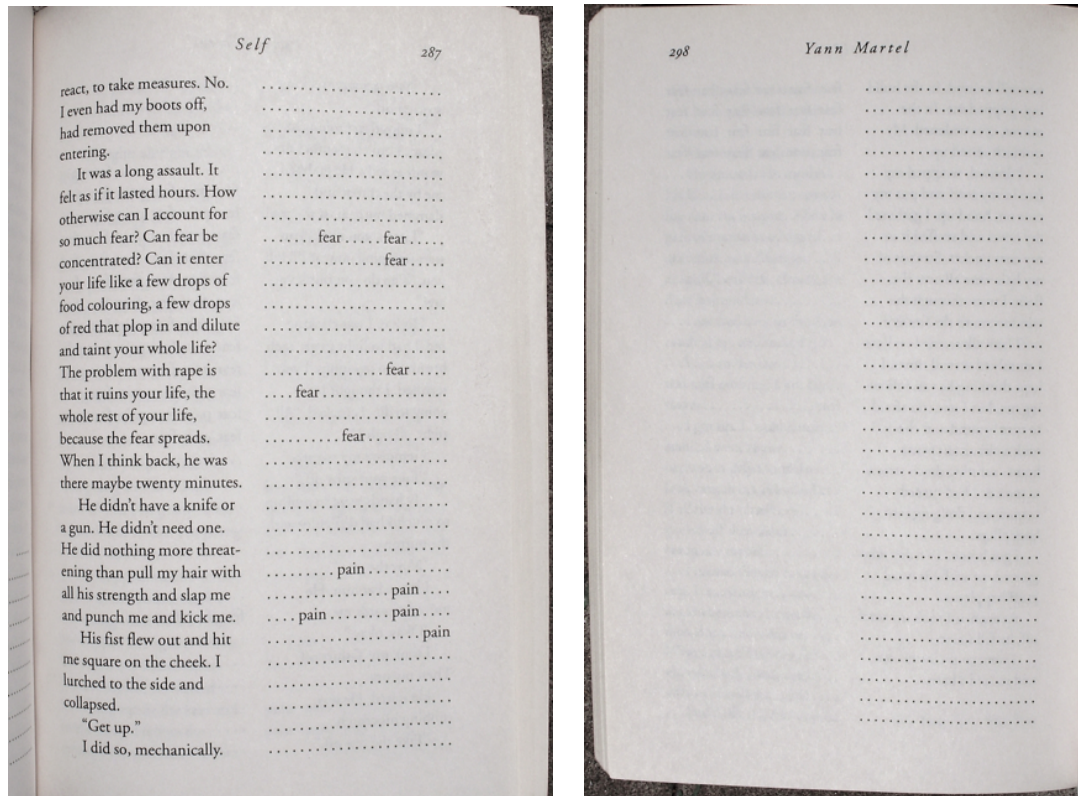
passed legislation decriminalizing homosexuality, and Klippert was released in 1971 (“Same-Sex Rights”). Long legal and parliamentary struggles through the 1980s and beyond have gradually led to the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, to the ability of same-sex partners to collect spousal pensions under the Old Age Security Act, and to the legalization of same-sex marriage. The questions of when such rights are acquired, and how much time elapses during the various rulings and appeals are of no small concern to those affected. The matter of retroactive rights is also complex; the 2003 granting of spousal pension payments to same-sex partners retroactive to 1985 (the date when equality rights were established in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, or, as comedian Rick Mercer jokes, the date when “gayness was invented”) led to an appeal by the federal government which argued “that it needs to be able to make laws and set its own payment dates” (“Same-Sex Rights”).

Discrimination against people of minority sexualities tends to rely on the claim that heterosexuality is a normal, stable, natural identity, relegating other sexualities to the status of deviation. The word “deviate” itself etymologically means “turned out of the way,” suggesting a distortion of some expected linear path. In his 1996 novel *Self*, Yann Martel questions the very existence of such a linear path, disrupting the notion that sex identities and sexualities are ever constant over time. Following the model of Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*, the landmark fictional treatment of the constructedness of social gender roles, Martel has his protagonist spontaneously switch sexes at different times in the narrative, from unspecified to male to female and back again. From the protagonist’s childhood point of view human metamorphosis is completely natural: “I had already

gathered evidence on the metamorphosis of day and night, of weather, of the seasons, of food and excrement, even of life and death, to name but a few [...]. I envisioned life as a series of metamorphic changes, one after another, to no end” (9). Upon being told that sex identities, far from being fluid and various, are in fact limited to precisely two – male and female, husband and wife – the protagonist states “I became an indubitable boy” (22). Years later, though, on his 18th birthday, he wakes up a woman (108). If sex identities must exist in the form of a binary opposition, a notion the protagonist deeply resists, then the possibility of inhabiting multiple or fluid identities simultaneously is precluded, and fluidity must be realized in transformations that occur *over time*. The occasional sex metamorphoses that the protagonist experiences are both unremarkable, barely more surprising than putting on a new set of clothing, and also revolutionary, defying the notion that binary sex identities themselves are natural and permanent.

Temporal disempowerment, however, consumes Martel’s protagonist in the final act of the novel. While Findley’s character Harry finds his temporal agency thwarted by systemic homophobia, Martel’s protagonist, who has developed a keen desire for temporal empowerment and enjoyment, finds this preoccupation devastated by the catastrophe of brutal sexual assault. When the protagonist encounters a neighbour who enters her rented office space and refuses to leave, the narrative splits into two columns: her first-person account of the attack runs down the left, while her fragmented feelings of pain, fear, and shock run down the right. “Things went from normal to terribly wrong in a fraction of a second,” she says as the man begins his attack (286). This fraction of a second becomes a watershed moment that opens into an extended duration, a lifetime, of

terror: “It was a long assault. It felt as if it lasted hours. How otherwise can I account for so much fear? [...] The problem with rape is that it ruins your life, the whole rest of your life, because the fear spreads. When I think back, he was there maybe twenty minutes” (287). The chaotic temporal expansion that she experiences during the attack is mirrored in the intense sparsity of those few pages that are left almost or entirely blank, as well as the right-hand column where time is measured only by the recurrence of fear and pain.



Yann Martel, *Self* (287, 298)

The split-column narration, a technique that Martel uses briefly at different moments throughout the novel to represent the internal experience of simultaneous

thought processes or language translation, continues in this scene for an agonizing thirty pages during which the protagonist falls into a temporal vacuum, causing the reader, too, to lose any clear sense of passing narrative time – at one point during the sequence the protagonist realizes that she has not fed her dog in two days. Early in the novel the protagonist spends one night as a male child in bed with a girl named Marisa, and upon being kissed, he says, “I wanted time to stop, I wanted the night never to end, I wanted the sun to be gutted” (40). Later, as a woman, she similarly describes slow-motion film as “that cinematic elixir of life that allows a second to live for twenty” (190). The rape scene serves as a bitter perversion of these romantic sentiments, a slow-motion elixir of death in which the stopping of time is a poisoned, shattering experience.

The novel’s remaining pages see the narrator painfully becoming male once more, contemplating suicide, and eventually meeting a female lover, this last event suggesting an initial gesture towards healing. The final four lines, a list of banal autobiographical details titled “Chapter Two,” form an abrupt end to the story – “I am thirty years old. I weigh 139 pounds. [...] I am Canadian. I speak English and French” (331) – with no reference to gender. That this sole chapter division occurs on page 331 out of 331 suggests that the protagonist has at long last succeeded in embarking on a new stage of life no longer dominated by the shadow of the attack, but also indicates that the first chapter, which encompasses her entire lifetime up to this point, remains dominant, unsurmounted, and inevitably complicit in what comes after.

Self has generally not fared well with critics, who have been put off by the novel’s apparent aimlessness; the strange weighting of trauma near the end of the story indeed

frames the majority of the narrative as a protracted rising action in such a way that the novel as a whole appears not to attain a satisfactory degree of coherence. It is as though the narrative has not found its true shape, or has taken on the form of a monstrously distended short story in that the opening stages – here nearly 300 pages – are understood primarily in terms of a late revelation. This may be a failure on Martel's part, but the peculiar narrative shape can also be read as a carefully crafted formal manipulation of plot, a recognition of sexual assault as an explosive and devastating temporal disruption.

The temporal dislocation that Martel's protagonist experiences as a result of the attack echoes that of Robert Ross, Timothy Findley's protagonist in his 1977 novel *The Wars*. When Robert is sexually assaulted and beaten by fellow military soldiers in a pitch-dark room near the battlefields of World War I France, he loses consciousness and along with it his sense of time: "After a while – (it might have been an hour or a minute) – he could feel the others retreating" (193). A chapter division occurs at this point and the narrative picks up with Robert standing in a room; we do not know how much time has elapsed, and the ongoing passage of time remains obscure as each fragment of thought is broken into lines of sparse, disconnected prose:

Robert stood in the centre of the room.
He wanted a clean shirt.
He wanted a clean pair of underwear.
He wanted his pistol.
He looked behind the door.
He looked underneath the bed.
He pulled out the drawers of the dresser one by one.
He dumped them on the floor. [...]
He knelt beside the bed and ripped at the mattress, pulling out
great loops of horsehair and dropping them onto the floor.

He tore the ticking off the pillows and the air filled up with

feathers.

Gun. Gun. He wanted his gun.

Somebody knocked at the door. (193-94)

Because the basic maintenance of human subjectivity requires continuously reinforced connections between past and present experience, the division of Robert's thoughts into repetitive disconnected fragments indicates that the very core of his identity – his temporal coherence – has been mangled.

Earlier in the novel a group of fellow soldiers in training had taken Robert with them to a brothel outside of Lethbridge, Alberta. When Robert first sees the prostitutes, Findley writes that "The women – (or girls: they were really both) – at first appeared to be dressed like actresses in a play" (37). Like the young soldiers who must take on the adult burden of military service emblemized by the official garb they wear while on duty, the prostitutes in their own garb are simultaneously young and old, children and adults. Findley is suggesting that the dangerous roles these young people find themselves in actually disrupt the normal flow of aging and time, a notion that is heightened later on in the attack – both military and sexual – that leaves Robert, and Findley's readers, dislocated in time.³³

In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Shani Mootoo also associates the trauma of rape with temporal dislocation. After she is raped by her father Chandin, Mala watches as her companion Ambrose runs away in terror; at that moment Mala recalls watching her mother, also terrified of Chandin, run away with no time to save her daughter, an event

³³ As I will show in Chapter Five, Findley goes even further in identifying the violence of the battlefield itself as a site of devastating temporal dislocation.

that happened “Long ago. Today” (228). With these words Mootoo indicates that Mala’s sense of time, her ability to differentiate the past from the present, has been shattered; Mala disconnects from the ongoing present and perpetually inhabits a remembered past. For the rest of her life Mala remains unable to piece the fragments of her experience into a coherent temporal order. Growing old, “[s]he did not ascribe activities to specific times. When doziness pawed at her, she responded regardless of the time of day or night, curling up in the yard or on the verandah” (127). When the morning light in her backyard mimics the appearance of the day her mother ran away, “Time would collapse,” throwing her into renewed paroxysms of terror (132).

The spectre in the late twentieth century of HIV, whose threat of severely reduced lifespans appeared at first to target gay men in particular, has at times served as a focal point for artistic representations of sexuality. A styrene and fibreglass art installation called *One Year of AZT/One Day of AZT* displayed in the National Gallery of Canada in 1991 portrays the antiretroviral drug AZT as a temporal monument, a statement on the way that HIV-positive status requires patients to remain perpetually hyper-conscious of their remaining days and their ties to the healthcare system. General Idea, the artist collective behind the installation, was a collaborative project of three Toronto-based artists working under the pseudonyms AA Bronson, Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal (Newlands 120). Anne Newlands writes that the installation “fills a large room, lining its walls with shiny white capsules that symbolize a year’s dose of AZT, the drug alleged to impede the spread of HIV. On the floor, five giant capsules (a day’s dose) evoke futuristic coffins that vacillate between clinical innocence and the macabre” (120).



General Idea, *One Year of AZT/One Day of AZT* (Newlands 120)

Time in this installation is measured solely through the required daily dosage of drug capsules (whose blue bands along the wall appear to shift against the line of sight, curving like the phases of the moon), reducing each passing day to the repetitive act of consuming the medicine – medicine that effectively creates its own painful illness in the form of wide-ranging side effects. The capsules are oppressive in their insistence on absolute temporal regularity, staring the viewer down in larger-than-life form, even while they hold out the hope of allowing the person who swallows them to survive for some

precious number of additional days. General Idea itself persisted as a group until 1994, when “Partz and Zontal died of AIDS-related illnesses” (Newlands 120). Life expectancies for persons who test positive for HIV and have access to adequate healthcare have increased significantly over the last two decades, though HIV-positive status still ties patients to a close lifelong relationship with the healthcare system.

Brad Fraser’s 1995 play *Poor Super Man* comments on the personal consequences of widespread social homophobia as well as the toll of HIV on infected individuals. The figure of Superman, a hero who must conceal his identity every day in order to enjoy some semblance of ordinary life, comes to represent the experience of gay and lesbian people who feel compelled to put on an everyday performance of heteronormativity. Shannon, a man in the process of becoming a woman, is especially sensitive to the limits of the normative social framework in which gender and sexuality are seen as permanent, essentialized identities. Commenting on a male acquaintance who is married to a woman but attracted to another man, Shannon says, “Maybe fag and lesbian aren’t nouns. Maybe they’re verbs” (122). This brief statement radically deconstructs the normative essentialization of sexuality, arguing that sexuality is a shifting, flexible form of identity best understood within the temporal pools of specific acts rather than as a permanently fixed binary. By the end of the play Shannon has died of complications from AIDS, and her companions have suffered losses of friends and personal relationships. Even Superman himself, in a newly published comic, has been killed by a monster that appears almost to be a symbol for HIV: a “nameless unknown killer with no origin and no apparent purpose except to kill Superman” (172). In the

play's final moments the phrase "The Future" is projected onto the stage, prompting Shannon's friend David to say "Goodbye" (179). As soon as the sorrow of permanent loss is acknowledged, though, one final projected caption appears before the stage fades to black: "Beginning" (179). Just as Superman's death is inevitably followed by his rebirth and reinvention, Fraser too signals a flickering hope in the idea that even while the dual crises of AIDS and homophobia are irrevocably devastating for those affected, new stories of some kind remain to be told.

The power of story itself as a method of articulating and reshaping temporal experience is central to many of the representations of gender and sexuality discussed here. Thoughtful portrayals of the consequences and complexities of such experiences reveal that while temporality is often closely tied to gender and sexuality, such connections inevitably shift along with changing social configurations over time. These portrayals also reveal that challenges to gender inequality can productively take the form of challenges to normative temporality. And by showing that discrimination can cause temporal disempowerment – a form of disempowerment with which all mortal people are in some way familiar – they also remind audiences of the deeply shared humanity that is at stake in structures of hierarchization.

Race

In *White Civility*, Daniel Coleman traces how the concept of civility functions historically in Canada to combine "*the temporal notion of civilization as progress*" with

“*the moral-ethical concept* of a (relatively) peaceful order” (10). He discusses the prominent belief in Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that “some societies were farther ahead on the single timeline of civilization, while others were ‘backward’ or delayed,” and finds that racialization was closely linked to this distinction, as “the idea of progress itself is deeply informed by a central value of whiteness” (11, 12). As Coleman points out with reference to Imre Szeman’s research on time and globalization, “this dense interweaving of White enterprise and civility as progress insists upon an isochronous temporality (i.e., a single timeline); it does not consider the possibilities of ‘allochrony,’ that different civilizations might operate on different temporal scales of progress, ingress, or regress” (12).³⁴ The alignment of whiteness with progress and non-whiteness with backwardness is a central problem in the ongoing history of settler-indigene relations in Canada, and one that I will examine in the next chapter; for the moment, though, I will investigate how dominant Canadian ideologies have reinforced temporal disempowerment for non-indigenous racialized minorities.

Lawrence Hill’s *The Book of Negroes* illustrates how the eighteenth-century slave

³⁴ As Fabian points out, the concept of allochrony carries its own dangers; the tendency of twentieth century anthropologists to deny coevalness (the sharing of a common time) to other cultures is established through “*a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse*” (31). Referring to “the denial of coevalness as the *allochronism* of anthropology” (32), Fabian notes that such allochronism has been complicit in “placing the Now of the primitive in the Then of the Western adult” (63). The intention of Coleman’s argument, though, is to recognize that a single linear scale cannot adequately assess the “development” of different cultures, a notion that is largely compatible with Fabian’s insistence that different cultures exist in the same moment. In a sense, Fabian and Coleman are simply using different metaphors to resist the same problematic vision of primitive cultures as delayed travellers on the dominant timeline; Fabian promotes an image in which all cultures exist at the same “now” within actual time, while Coleman promotes the recognition of multiple coexisting timelines.

trade aligns the dominance of western models of time with hierarchies of racialization. Aminata Diallo is born in the village of Bayo in West Africa, but as a child she is captured, sold to white slave traders, and sent to North America where she gradually internalizes the English model of time, using Gregorian numerical years in place of her earlier temporal concept of “rains.” Her description of the physical layout of an American town mirrors the way in which western linear time imposes a rigidly progressive structure over cyclical seasonal changes: “In my homeland, the towns I knew were set up in a circle so everybody could be together. In this place, people walked off in all directions, taking dusty roads running either side by side or at sharp angles to one another. I didn’t believe I could ever find my way in such a place” (111). She grows to understand western temporal and spatial concepts, but also becomes trapped within them, as symbolized by the badge she must wear in public stamped with her Anglicized name, Meena, and the Gregorian year, 1762 (206). Upon running away from her captor during the chaos of erupting violence between American rebels and the British, Aminata declares, “It was late in the afternoon of April 23, 1775, and I had taken back my freedom” (255), her internalization of the English language and Gregorian time casting an ironic light on this assertion. Her oppressive experiences as a “free” person in Nova Scotia, where the wait for restitution and equality appears endless, reinforce the fact that the obstacles to freedom are not just legal, but deeply social, and are highly resistant to change even over the period of a lifetime. Slave traders themselves, meanwhile, justify their profession by venerating the linear model of cultural progress, arguing that the civilizing influence of

the slave trade “saves Africans from barbarity” (409).³⁵

During her time in slavery, Aminata’s questioning of the nature of enslavement is often expressed in temporal terms; she wonders if her captor “owned me at all times, or only when I was working for him. Did he own me when I slept? When I dreamed?” (134). She comes to describe slavery itself as a condition of temporal impoverishment: “That, I decided, was what it meant to be a slave: your past didn’t matter; in the present you were invisible and you had no claim on the future” (189), a statement that resonates with Northrop Frye’s comment that “[t]he deeper forms of human dignity and self-respect are bound up with whatever seems to connect the past with the future” (*Words* 255). Aminata’s vow, in the face of this oppression, to remember her past, becomes a potent form of resistance, perhaps the only one available to her during much of her enslavement. Her eventual autobiographical act, then, in which she has the authority to narrativize and publicize her own personal timeline, is a symbolic reclamation of temporal authority, even while it is written, inevitably, in the English language.

The temporal-racial categorizations that allowed for the justification of slavery have of course evolved in various ways over the centuries. Examining social discourse of the early twentieth century, Daniel Coleman and Donald Goellnicht understand the social

³⁵ While Aminata enters the country after her emancipation, Canada has its own often silenced history of slavery. Quoting an unnamed “standard history of the country” which says that Canadians can “claim the proud distinction for their flag ... that it has never floated over legalized slavery,” George Elliott Clarke points out that this interpretation involves its own sly manipulation of temporal accountability: “The claim is literally true, but only because Canada did not yet exist when the enslavement of Natives and Africans flourished on what is now Canadian soil” (103). Clarke goes on to note that a “1995 poll conducted by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association found that 83 percent of Canadian adults did not know that slavery was practiced in pre-Confederation Canada until 1834, when Britain abolished the institution throughout its empire” (103).

Darwinist method of hierarchization as a system of knowledge that “allowed turn-of-the-century Canadian nationalists to advocate racist immigration and Indian policies without considering them racist” (4). E.W. MacBride’s 1902 article in the *McGill University Magazine*, for instance, divides humanity into apparently natural racialized categories ranging from primitive to advanced, making unequal treatment appear not only acceptable, but necessary:

The primitive type of man at present existing is the Negro, who, like the Apes most nearly allied to Man, is essentially a tropical animal, and does not flourish in cold countries. . . . As the Negro race, however, spread, it gradually reached the temperate regions, and here the struggle with Nature became fiercer and the whole civilization underwent development and a higher type of man – the yellow or Mongolian race was evolved. . . . [Eventually] the highest type of man was evolved – the Nordic type or white man. (qtd. in Coleman and Goellnicht 4)

Recalling his childhood in Vancouver’s Chinatown during the Second World War, Wayson Choy highlights the anti-Chinese practices that were implicit in Canadian social structures, as well as those explicitly enforced by the Head Tax (which demanded a large financial penalty from Chinese immigrants to Canada from 1885 to 1923) and the Exclusion Act (which denied such immigration altogether, with few exceptions, from 1923 to 1947). Choy’s descriptions of Chinatown life reveal that significant temporal inequalities are intertwined with these legal and social race-based exclusions; the timing of the Head Tax itself marks the end of a specific period of time in which Chinese immigrant labour was considered desirable for the dangerous work of building the Canadian Pacific Railway. “After the ‘Last Spike’ of 1885,” Choy writes, “[...] the pioneer Chinese labourers’ usefulness ended. Instead of finding themselves returned to China, as many had been promised, thousands of railway labourers, and some women

who worked as prostitutes, were betrayed and abandoned in near-poverty” (72-73). While immigrants from Britain were granted Canadian domicile after three years, the time that Chinese immigrants invested in building Canadian infrastructure did not result in equal status. “Until after the Second World War,” Choy writes, “no Chinese, even those born in Canada, like me, were given citizenship: I was a *Resident Alien*, forbidden to vote or to enter any profession, including law, teaching, medicine and engineering” (74).³⁶

Wayson’s father, Toy, whose Chineseness severely restricts his employment options, finds work on a steamship carrying goods between Vancouver and other ports along the west coast; throughout Wayson’s childhood, Toy’s work schedule requires that he be away from home for weeks at a time. “When Father came home,” Choy writes, “he seemed more a visitor to me than a parent” (246). The transience of Toy’s presence in his own household goes hand in hand with exceptionally long work days, and Choy recalls that “[t]he combination of twelve- to fourteen-hour shifts, cramped working conditions and the superior attitudes of his white supervisors created in him a bursting rage that he had to struggle hard to contain” (243). Still, Choy points out, “[m]any Chinatown fathers were away for long periods, earning money in lumbering and fishing camps, so I didn’t feel too deprived” (247). The separation of family members over long periods of time becomes, for Chinese immigrants, a normal state of affairs.

These labour-based separations are themselves fleeting compared with the longer-

³⁶ *The Immigration Act* of 1910, for instance, states that “Canadian domicile is acquired for the purposes of this Act by a person having his domicile for at least three years in Canada after having been landed therein within the meaning of this Act” (2.d.). This statement is modified, though, near the very end of the Act, where provision 79 clarifies that “All provisions of this Act not repugnant to the provisions of *The Chinese Immigration Act* shall apply as well to persons of Chinese origin as to other persons.”

term segregation of Chinatown's inhabitants from those family members who remain in China. Recalling his various "uncles" – men who have left their families behind in the hopes of earning enough money in Canada to finance their collective futures – Choy describes the years of loneliness these men faced. People in Chinatown

spoke of the day when they would be reunited with their families. Tragically, the passing of the 1890s Chinese Head Tax, a tax raised from fifty dollars to five hundred dollars by 1904, had proved prohibitive for those who earned seasonal wages of twenty-five cents an hour. After Parliament's passing of the Exclusion Act of 1923, which forbade any Chinese from immigrating to Canada, except for a few merchants or scholars, Vancouver's Chinatown entered what historian David C. Lai has called 'the withering stage.' (74)

Recalling his "Third Uncle" in particular, Choy notes that this man had not seen his wife and son in Hong Kong for seven years, and that "It would be another ten before they would reunite" (75).

Regardless of the families they may have left behind in China, these Chinatown men are referred to perpetually as "bachelor men"; impoverished wages and ongoing restrictions on immigration prevent the arrival of existing or potential wives, effectively freezing the men within a stage of life normally considered temporary. Choy recalls that "[w]hen they weren't labouring, many of the bachelor men gambled, socialized, drank and fought, kept women or kept to themselves – did what men might do to keep their sexual and mental sanity, separated these five, ten, twenty years from their wives and children" (75-76). One way for the men to cope with "the empty hours they faced in cell-like tenement rooms" is to entertain neighbourhood children like Wayson, hence their status as "uncles" (76). All the while, a sense of what Coleman calls Diasporic Displacement Time – in which "cultural groups retain their image of themselves in time

by reference to the trauma of displacement” (“Contented” 233) – pervades the experience of Chinatown’s immigrant inhabitants, whose wish to return to China remains potent throughout their lives, and even after death. “Spirits wait for the war to end,” Wayson’s aunt explains. “Wait to go back to family” (75).

Intertwined with these descriptions of immigrant life is the story of Choy’s remembered childhood, which itself is framed against the discovery many years later that his parents are in fact adoptive, not biological. “The past, as I knew it, began to shift,” he writes upon being told that his mother is not his “real” mother (5). Reacting to the person who has broken this news to him, he asks “Where should I begin?” (5), a question that could be called the central inquiry of the book, as it highlights the thematic suggestion that despite the constraints of mortality, a human life has no clear beginning or end but extends into ranges of complex relationships with ancestors, descendants, and other ghostly presences. This theme finds its material incarnation in the tassel that the young Wayson recovers from a discarded Chinatown wind chime; the tassel has “a beautiful knotted design in the middle of it,” which Fifth Aunty describes as the traditional Chinese icon of “the endless knot” (248). When Wayson asks why it has no end, she replies, “Oh, stupid boy. [...] Life like that! Love like that! Everything like that!” (248) Later on, at the end of his reminiscences, Choy writes:

All lives are ten *times* ten thousand secrets. Even those who are quite sure of themselves, they, too, are made up of mystery, defined by secrets told and untold.

Whose life, I wonder, is not an endless knot? (338)

Choy’s life story is wrapped up in the secrets of false family names acquired for immigration purposes, his own adoption kept silent by his entire Chinatown community,

and unspoken encounters with various kinds of ghosts – yet his concluding thought indicates that all lives involve concealed relationships and hauntings whose consequences reverberate forwards and backwards through time. His memoir, then, is a narrative of how every life is an endless temporal knot, even while it tells the particular story of how racist exclusions have fractured the experience of time for many Chinese Canadians.

Racist categorizations not only fracture temporal experience for individuals, but are themselves subject to ruptures and mutations over time. Following theorists such as Stuart Hall, Coleman notes that racial and ethnic terminology “floats, changing in salience with the context. One day you’re a Canadian citizen, after Pearl Harbour you’re an Enemy Alien Japanese; you’ve long been considered Black Irish, but when you compete for a job with African Americans, suddenly you’re White; one day you’re a Canadian citizen, after September 11, 2001 you’re an Islamic terrorist” (“Contented” 225). The grounding for the selection of racial categories changes over time “from genetic ancestry to national heritage to religious history to political form – all within a generalized, assumed discourse of civility” (225).

The sudden identification, during World War II, of Japanese Canadians as Enemy Aliens is portrayed most memorably in Joy Kogawa’s novel *Obasan*. Like *Paper Shadows*, *Obasan* affords a central position to the temporal disjunctures and disempowerments associated with racist exclusions, but, more intensely than Choy, Kogawa emphasizes the lasting damage of traumatic events that reverberate through time. Naomi, who narrates from her present in the 1970s, establishes a frame narrative through which she remembers the persecution of her family during the war. Reading through her

Aunt Emily's journal entries from 1942, Naomi recalls the rapid imposition of social policies limiting the freedom of Canadians of Japanese descent. While the most notorious policies eventually called for Japanese Canadians to be dispossessed of their homes and relocated to distant camps, one of the first signals of these looming exclusions is the initiation of a decidedly temporal restriction. "A curfew that applies only to us was started a few days ago," Emily writes. "If we're caught out after sundown, we're thrown in jail. People who have been fired – and there's a scramble on to be the first to kick us out of jobs – sit at home without even being able to go out for a consoling cup of coffee. [...] We look in the papers for the time of next morning's sunrise when we may venture forth" (92, 95). Strict temporal limits on the activity of Japanese Canadians work in concert with the enforcing of strict spatial limits during internment, and the two types of restrictions are mutually amplifying. Naomi recalls a newspaper article from 1948 announcing that the House of Commons has voted to extend the duration of the spatial restriction by one more year, emphasizing the malleable temporal nature of place-based policy (218). The article quotes one member of parliament as saying that "the government was wise in giving the old sores another year to heal" (219). "Another year?" Naomi thinks to herself. "Which year should we choose for our healing? Restrictions against us are removed on April Fool's Day, 1949. But the 'old sores' remain" (219). Highlighting the temporally unstable nature of racist anxiety itself, Naomi comments that "In one breath we are damned for being 'inassimilable' and the next there's fear that we'll assimilate" (94).

As Naomi describes the traumatic events that occurred during her childhood – the

forced evacuation of her family from Vancouver, as well as the agonizing death of her mother in the aftermath of the atomic bombing in Nagasaki – the central problem of the novel comes to light: how can Naomi and her family learn to cope with a devastating past that cannot be erased? “Life is so short, [...] the past so long. Shouldn’t we turn the page and move on?” Naomi asks Emily. “The past is the future,” Emily replies (45). Naomi herself is haunted by a dream in which she and her unnamed companions “toil together in the timelessness,” in a mysterious place where “the endlessness of labour has entered our limbs” (29). Significantly, Kogawa never offers a clear resolution to Naomi’s temporal entrapment; the act of narration itself, though, creates some degree of solace, as the process of recalling the past works gradually towards the idea, if not the complete realization, of acceptance. “You have to remember,” Aunt Emily says. “You are your history. If you cut any of it off you’re an amputee. Don’t deny the past. Remember everything” (54).³⁷

As they continue to trace Canada’s vacillating history of racialization, Coleman and Goellnicht note that

³⁷ Helena Grice writes that the contrasts, in *Obasan*, “between Naomi’s personal ruminations and recollections and the various reported accounts of that history reflect the juxtaposition of private and public temporalities” (95). While Naomi and her aunt Obasan measure time subjectively with reference to the events of their own lives, “Aunt Emily’s letters, reports and newspaper articles represent the public, verbalised chronology of Japanese Canadian history” (95). Grice concludes that critical readings of *Obasan* need to acknowledge the alternative forms of knowledge and communication that Kogawa emphasizes – body language, sensory perception, and alternative models of space and time – and that these often nonverbal forms must not be mistaken for mere silence (93). Grice eloquently highlights the importance of Naomi’s resistance of normative temporality; still, though, this partial resistance serves also to emphasize and reinforce her dependence on normative time. Naomi’s narrative begins, for instance, with the time stamp, “9:05 p.m. August 9, 1972” (1).

With the defeat of Nazism and the discrediting of eugenics in the postwar period, Canada in the midcentury decades of the 1950s and 1960s turned gradually away from race-based legislation and policy. [...] All discriminatory laws against Asian immigrants were repealed by midcentury, and the 1967 Immigration Act “liberalized” immigration from Third World countries, thus leading to a rapid increase in racialized minority populations, especially in Canada’s large urban centres, during the next decade. (7)

Canada became well-known in the late twentieth century for its official endorsement of multiculturalism, a policy that has served as a source of national pride even while it has been criticized, ironically, for homogenizing the differences between the cultural groups under its purview. Racialized divisions, both longstanding and evolving, remain potent sites of contested power relations. In M.G. Vassanji’s novel *No New Land*, the Lalanis, a family of Indian descent, reflect on having moved to Canada three years previously. “The children were well on their way,” Vassanji writes, ““Canadians’ now, or almost” (116). The structure of this simple statement – the hesitancy of the quotation marks around “Canadians,” the backpedalling of the “almost” – reveals that the process of transcending racial divisions is exactly that: a process, a continuous negotiation of obstructions.

Dionne Brand’s work is among the most eloquent recent writing in bearing witness to experiences of racialization, and as a member of the African-Caribbean diaspora she is particularly conscious of the disconnections – spatial, social, and temporal – associated with being cut off from one’s origins. Like some of the other figures discussed here, Brand experiences a form of Diasporic Displacement Time in which her present is always informed by the remembered trauma of displacement, yet in Brand’s case the memory is inaccessible and therefore unavoidably imaginative. The moment in which her African ancestors boarded slave trading ships, she writes, initiates “a rupture in

history, a rupture in the quality of being” (*Map 5*). She recalls asking her grandfather the name of the people in Africa from whom they are descended, and being deeply disappointed by his inability to extend his memory back to the time before the rupture. “Having no name to call on,” she writes, “was having no past; having no past pointed to the fissure between the past and the present. That fissure is represented in the Door of No Return” (5). Of course, *every* moment in time is a door of no return; there is always an irrevocable fissure between past and present. The difference, for Brand, is that as an unwilling diasporan she has been cut off violently even from *looking* back. For Brand, this door “signifies the historical moment which colours all moments in the Diaspora” (24); the watershed moment upon which her experience of time centres itself is a direct product of racist colonialism, and continues to resonate long after the institutionalization, in her adopted home, of official multiculturalism. Her comments are strikingly similar to those of M. NourbeSe Philip, in her essay “Taming Our Tomorrows,” where she writes:

For us Africans in the New World tomorrow is a constant problem. We are the only group brought forcibly and unwillingly to the New World, this touted utopia, to help create utopias for others. Cut off from our yesterdays – in fact told that we had no yesterdays, no history – forbidden to live out the promise of the tomorrows of progress of which the New World boasted, we were and still are condemned to a today in which we are intended to be nothing but hewers of wood and drawers of water.

In an odd and disturbing way, time stands still for us Africans. Sometimes it even repeats itself. The promise of tomorrow never comes. Consequently time and its representations present a constant challenge. This is all the more ironic for the fact that African cultures understand in profound ways the fluidity and non-linearity of time. (271)

The problem of time and its representations – of past disconnections that continue to shape the present – remains a relentless one for Brand and Philip.

Brand’s first novel, *In Another Place, Not Here*, takes up the relationships

between racialization, diasporic displacement, and temporal fragmentation; like her poetry collection *Land to Light On*, the title of the novel portrays connection to place as inevitably fragile and temporary. The first section of the novel follows Elizete, an indentured plantation worker in the Caribbean who has been cut off from her African ancestry. “Nobody here can remember when they wasn’t here,” Elizete says, her experience of temporal dislocation resembling that of Brand herself (8). A person in this position, Elizete tells us, “needed history, something before this place, something that this place cut off” (41); she inhabits the paradoxical position of centering her experience on a past that cannot be remembered. Her oppressors, meanwhile, “who measured time in the future only and who discarded memory like useless news” (43), are invested in ensuring that the past remains cut off, since a progress-oriented legacy of wealth built on racist colonialism can sustain itself only through a willful denial of past injustice. The lack of belonging that Elizete experiences as a result of this temporal dislocation finds its symbolic counterpart in the chewed paths of wood lice etched into the wall of her temporary dwelling place: “She tried to trace them home, yet perhaps home was these paths, she thought, or their way of not being seen, waiting and listening” (32). The drawn-out experience of a lack of belonging gradually becomes its own form of belonging, yet one centred on watchfulness and anxiety.

The second half of *In Another Place, Not Here* follows Elizete’s lover Verlia, who, not held in slavery herself, tries to convince the plantation workers to stage a revolution. Frustrated by her companions’ obsession with the irrecoverable past, Verlia wishes to escape the constraints of temporal existence altogether, a contradictory desire

that threatens to tear her apart. She “fears that any mortal self is heavy and persistent, full of presentness, which jostles the air and is unpleasant. [...] She’d like to live, exist or be herself in some other place, less confining, less pinned down, less tortuous, less fleshy to tell the truth” (126-27). While Elizete’s feeling of disconnection causes her endlessly to seek “another place” so that the wandering itself becomes a kind of uneasy home, Verlia’s “other place” lies beyond the temporal confines of mortal existence itself. The present for Verlia is “a waiting room,” a temporary stopover on the way to somewhere else (131). When Verlia spends time in Toronto trying to advance the cause of the revolutionary struggle for racial justice, we see that her ambitions are twofold: she aims to turn the slave plantation into a cooperative organization, and to promote self-determination for black North Americans. Her personal desire to be “less pinned down” mirrors her political philosophy, which holds “that it was possible to leap, it had to be, out of the compulsion of things as they are or things as you might have met them” (159).

This image of leaping becomes a prominent theme in the narrative, and signals Verlia’s desire to escape the long history of racist exploitation by which present reality is constrained. When Abena, Verlia’s lover and fellow activist, warns that the revolutionary struggle must proceed at a slower pace, that “You can’t be ahead of the people,” Verlia responds, “It’s never going to be the time. [...] When the hell is the time? You have to leap sometimes don’t you? Sometimes you have to be ahead?” (185-86). Tormented by her inability to pull time forward into a moment when her politics will be fulfilled, Verlia repeatedly expresses her frustration in terms of temporal blockages. Recalling Macbeth’s tirade against the futility of human temporal existence, Brand writes, “She didn’t want to

wake up tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow feeling the same, in the same spot” (190). For racial injustice to be extinguished, Verlia admits, “[s]o much would have to have not happened. It’s like a life sentence. Call it what we want – colonialism, imperialism – it’s a fucking life sentence. Nobody I come from knows these words but they do the time. You can’t catch five fucking minutes of sleep without it, you can’t drink a beer, some fucking breeze passes over your lips smelling of molasses” (215).³⁸

It is perhaps this realization that motivates Verlia’s final act in the novel, an act that embraces her own capacity to “leap” into a different time and place even while it gruesomely accentuates her failure to halt the broader historical time of racial injustice. Caught up in an American bombing raid on Grenada, being driven back by gunfire, Verlia runs at the edge of a cliff and leaps towards the sea. The novel ends: “She’s

³⁸ Verlia’s comment about “doing time,” like Jackie’s parents’ comment in Brand’s *What We All Long For* that life in Toronto is “hard time” (179), alludes to the disproportionate representation of racial minorities in actual correctional facilities. While the overrepresentation of African Americans in the United States prison system has often been discussed, Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) notes that “relatively little research has been conducted on visible minority offenders under the supervision of the correctional system in Canada” (Trevethan and Rastin). In a 2004 report, the CSC finds that “in comparison to their proportion in the Canadian population, Caucasian and Asian offenders are under-represented, while Black offenders are disproportionately represented” – this despite the fact that “visible minority offenders seem to be less ‘entrenched’ in a criminal lifestyle than Caucasian offenders.” The report indicates that while Black Canadians represent 2% of the general population, they represent 6% of the incarcerated population, and that while Aboriginal persons comprise 3% of the general population, they represent a stunning 18% of the incarcerated population (Figure 3). Caucasian Canadians, who make up 84% of the general population, account for only 71% of the incarcerated population. In other words, despite the fact that average aggregate sentences for Black inmates are actually slightly shorter than for Caucasians (Tableau 3-A), proportionally speaking, Black and Aboriginal persons in Canada *do more time*. Of course, other factors are also involved; the majority of inmates are young, male, and unemployed at the time of arrest (Figure 6).

leaping. [...] Her body has fallen away, is just a line, an electric current, the sign of lightning left after lightning, a faultless arc to the deep turquoise deep. She doesn't need air. She's in some other place already, less tortuous, less fleshy" (246-47). The leap takes Verlia beyond the physical and temporal constraints of her own existence, but comes at the cost of her life. This event recalls the ending of Morris Panych's play *7 Stories*, in which the unnamed man, lamenting his imprisonment in the days of the week, jumps from the seventh story of an apartment building. But while Panych's character falls *up*, embodying the potential to escape the constraints of social time, Verlia remains caught in the literal and figurative gravity of her world and its longstanding histories, even while the tone of triumph with which her death is narrated highlights the elation of her control, however limited, over her own temporal destiny. As she admits to herself in a diary entry, "five-hundred years is a long time to undo" (213).

Reading Time and Social Relations Critically

The works considered in this chapter show that the ties between social power structures and temporal experiences run profoundly deep; that forms of social hierarchization focused on age, class, race, gender, sexuality, and other categories are complicit in the reduction of temporal agency for individuals; and that time itself is a socially constructed site where power is enacted and agency is negotiated. These works give insight into the possibilities of temporal resistance, whether through the delight that Anne Shirley takes in transgressing the confines of the adult world of clocks and

schedules, through the mockery that Tom Wayman makes of purely efficient industrialized time, or through the bitter but triumphant leap that Verlia takes to escape a present shaped by long histories of exploitation. As Verlia's leap makes clear, though, even those authors who find promise in temporal resistance have often been highly conscious of the constraints such resistance faces in the form of past events, social discord, categories of identity, voices of authority, and the inevitable passage of time itself. Temporal resistance both responds to and highlights the existence of temporal discrimination, a concept that will become especially relevant in the next chapter.

Many Canadian authors – in fact, all authors – have borne witness to, if not attempted to recalibrate, the dominant cultural clocks that tick around and within them. But whether texts are speaking from within unexamined temporal structures or explicitly questioning the role of time in subjectivity and social relations, temporal criticism equips us to ask questions such as “What does this text assume (and what do we assume) about how time functions in society?” or “How does this text question (and how can we question) the way that dominant structures of time reflect power relations?” Exemplary texts such as those discussed here are particularly useful in teaching us how to read time critically through social relations, and to read social relations critically through time. In Chapter Five I will examine Marlene NourbeSe Philip's attempt to imagine a reconstruction of the history that prompts Verlia's leap. First, though, I will turn to the temporal issues surrounding indigenous identities in Canada.

Chapter Four: Indigeneity and Temporality

“The Elvis clock says the time is seven-thirty, but it’s always either an hour ahead or an hour behind. We always joke that it’s on Indian time.”

Eden Robinson (2)

“I have provable identity in case clan membership expires annually”

Annharte (15)

In Chapter One I briefly traced the idea that indigenous representations of time tend to emphasize the circular or concentric shape of temporal existence. In the words of Wendat scholar Georges Sioui,

The Circle is at the centre of our Aboriginal thinking [...]. We believe that the day, the lunar month, the year, even human life itself, are circular phenomena, and that there are cycles of many years, representing the circular reality. We also believe that all circular phenomena have four parts, or movements: spring, summer, fall and winter; morning, noon hour, evening and nighttime; infancy, youth, maturity and old age. Also, most things in nature are round, or rounded: the sun, the earth, the moon; the rocks, after prolonged action of the elements; plants, trees, fruits, seeds, vegetables, the bodies of humans and animals, the nests of birds, their eggs – in brief, almost everything is round. (124)

There is something compelling about Sioui’s sense of conviction, but part of the danger in speaking about “the” or “our” Aboriginal way of thinking is that such language homogenizes diverse individuals associated with many different First Nations, Inuit, or Métis identities. As Daniel Heath Justice says, indigenous literary traditions speak through many voices, and “insistence on artificial purity erases the real and valid life

experiences of many Indigenous people throughout the Americas, and it assumes a static, monolithic Native identity that belies the diversity of history and experience of the thousands of Indigenous Nations in this hemisphere” (52). Still, Sioui’s claim that “[a]ll along, our societies have faced an ideological impasse because of our different understanding of time, of history, therefore, of life” (279), has much to offer in a consideration of how contested temporalities have functioned in settler-indigene relations; indeed, if Sioui is correct, divergent representations of time are in fact central to the long history of settler-indigene conflict and misunderstanding. But it is important to remember that no single “understanding” of time is adequate to represent the views of all people of indigenous (or European) descent. Bearing this limitation in mind I will trace some of the differing representations of time, and contested visions of the place of indigenous peoples within time, that have been advanced in what is now called Canada. My aims here are to show how these models have both informed and resisted the embattled history of settler-indigene relations, to identify how temporal discrimination is closely tied to the ongoing colonialist project, to recognize indigenous representations of time as meaningful in their own right and not merely as “others” to the western norms, to illustrate the important structural overlaps between circular and linear models of time, and to identify literary works that have questioned and reshaped representations of indigenous temporality.

Circular and Linear Modes

Inuit artist Kenojuak Ashevak's lithograph titled *Nunavut (Our Land)* offers a striking visual representation of cyclical time. Anne Newlands writes that Ashevak

was commissioned in 1992 by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to produce a work to commemorate the signing ceremony for the Tungavik Federation of Nunavut Settlement Agreement in Iqaluit in 1993. Unusual for its narrative structure, *Nunavut (Our Land)* is a round lithograph. In the centre of the Inuit universe, the sun and the moon reign eternal throughout the changing seasons, overseeing the cycle of life on the land, where igloos give way to snow tents and ice melts to water for kayaking and fishing. The distant mountains circle the land, declaring the homeland for Inuit of the eastern Arctic. (21)



Kenojuak Ashevak, *Nunavut (Our Land)* (Newlands 21)

While the image is indeed structured as a form of narrative, the circularity of the sequence confounds those who may expect the traditional western narrative shape of beginning, middle, and end. Instead of offering a single starting point, the image reveals that the entire story is always already being enacted. Every point along the outside lies at an equal distance from the point of orientation at the centre, and no “moment” in the narrative fades into the past, even if viewers may focus on one particular area at a time. Consciously or not, viewers may find themselves rotating their heads in a circular motion to try to orient themselves to the elements that appear upside down, or wishing that they could rotate the lithograph itself. Sioui’s belief that European linear thought is foreign to indigenous representations of circular time and reality finds an eloquent expression here in the absence of straight lines and corners.

Poet and editor Peter Sanger has also described the circular form of narrative that is central to traditionally oral cultures, a feature that is especially significant when we recall Paul Ricoeur’s belief that the construction of narrative is inextricably connected to the human experience of temporality. In 2007, Sanger, along with Elizabeth Paul, released a volume called *The Stone Canoe*, which contains Mi’kmaq and English transcriptions of two “lost” Mi’kmaq stories from the nineteenth century. The first of these stories, told in 1847 by Mi’kmaq storyteller Susan Barss, and recorded on paper by the missionary Silas Tertius Rand, tells about Little Thunder’s quest to find a wife with exuberant help from the figure whom Elizabeth Paul translates as “Wolverine.” This story, Sanger notes, “is probably the earliest piece of indigenous Canadian literature

recorded in its original language” (“Looking” 17). Sanger explains that various aspects of the story may appear odd to Anglophone readers, not only because of the quirks of translation that inevitably run through the English version of the text, but because of the very shape of the narrative. Storytellers within an oral culture would not conceptualize a story as a linear narrative running from left to right, leading the reader down the page towards a conclusion; instead, Sanger suggests, such storytellers would shape their narratives by drawing on other forms of human interaction with the world – forms based on the idea of *process*. Such a narrative should not be approached with the assumption that a series of rising actions will progress towards a climax, but rather should be thought of as taking the form of a continuous or circular process such as the weaving of a basket (Guest lecture). In the case of the 1847 story, while Anglophone readers may expect the story to conclude after Little Thunder acquires his new bride, Barss’s narration continues beyond this event, relating how Little Thunder retraces the steps of his journey, staying overnight at all of the places where he had stayed during the first half of his quest before finally arriving back home. The story ends where it begins.

Sanger also suggests that the mythical time in which Barss’s story takes place is connected, through the traditional Mi’kmaq storytelling mode, to the literal present time in which the story is spoken. The words with which Barss begins her story – *Wikijik kisiku’k* – become, through Elizabeth Paul’s English translation, “The old people are encamped” (Paul 68, 69). By figuring the live audience of the storytelling performance – the listeners assembled around the storyteller – into the narrative itself, this “formulaic beginning for a Mi’kmaq legend” (Paul 69) highlights what Sanger calls the “immediate

presence” of the mythic time of the story (“Riding” 149). The temporal structure of the myth, then, does not relegate it to a linear “past” that is over and done with; rather, the events of the story and the “literal” present moment are mutually enacted within one another. Sanger compares this perpetual making-present of mythological events to the framework of Christian belief within which the figure of Christ is “eternally present” (“Riding” 149) – a fascinating comment that highlights one way in which structural similarities may exist between the mythic forms of different cultures. These mythic temporalities, though, still allow and require sequences of events that occur one after another: at first Little Thunder does not have a wife, but later he does. All of this suggests that while indigenous and western models of time may emphasize different aspects of circularity or linearity, structural similarities run deep within these modes so that each culture inhabits a time that is *simultaneously* circular and linear.

These different emphases come to light in various ways, but one of the most interesting accounts comes from the early twentieth-century American anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell, who attempted at various times to immerse himself in indigenous culture. In the summer of 1932 he spent several months living with residents of the Pikangikum or Sauteaux nation, a branch of the Ojibwe people, on the Berens River east of Lake Winnipeg. While anthropologists, in Anne Fausto-Sterling’s words, “must invent categories into which they can sort collected information” – a process that inevitably draws from “the anthropologists’ own unquestioned axioms of life” (15) – Hallowell is remarkably sensitive to the legitimacy of cultural structures different from his own. While we would not want to consider his outsider’s account to be a definitive description

of what he calls “Saulteaux” culture – the word itself is a European ethnographic marker – we can see within his remarks an attempt to transcend the ethnocentric racism that has plagued many other such accounts. “These contrasting differences in the temporal orientation of Saulteaux culture and of western civilization,” he writes, “undoubtedly imply profound differences in the psychological outlook which is constituted by them. Such differences are not functions of primitive mentality or racial make-up. They are a function of culturally constituted experience” (670).

While many Pikangikum people had converted to Christianity and adopted other western cultural practices in Hallowell’s time, he notes that communities situated further away from colonial settlements relied more heavily on traditional cultural frameworks and temporalities. Attempting to understand the Pikangikum temporal vocabulary, Hallowell learns that while the period of daylight is not divided into hours or minutes, a precise terminology serves to differentiate between different stages of the day:

When streaks of light, distinguishable in the east, announce the first signs of coming day, although darkness still reigns on the earth, this is *pi-tában*, dawn. When darkness is dispelled so that one can discern terrestrial objects at some distance, but the sun has not yet risen above the tree tops, it is *tcí-bwaságàtik*, “before coming out from the trees (the sun).” Soon the light from the rising sun reddens the treetops. This point of time in the new day is called *miskwánagáte*, “red shining (reflected) light.” In addition, there are two other expressions that refer to the position of the sun before it emerges into full view. One of these connotes the point in time when the sun is still behind the tree-tops, literally, “beneath trees when hangs (the) sun,” *änämatikèpi-‘ágotcinggí-zis*; the other, when it reaches the tops of the trees, “tops of trees when hangs (the) sun,” *ékwánákak épi-‘ágotcinggí-zis*. (654)

These divisions become broader as the sun approaches its zenith; but even with the use of these concepts Hallowell finds it difficult to arrange appointments with residents of the

area. He would ask one acquaintance to come to his tent in the “morning,” and another to come in the “afternoon,” but the two would sometimes arrive within a few minutes of one another. “The lack of common reference points,” Hallowell writes, “made it difficult to coordinate our activities efficiently” (656). Eventually he learns to ask the first visitor to arrive “as soon as you have lifted your nets,” this being a consistent early-morning activity (656).

Hallowell also learns the Pikangikum divisions of the annual sequence of the moon’s phases; each lunar cycle is named according to “such non-celestial phenomena as the appearance in the country of certain birds, the condition of plant life, the rutting of animals, human economic activities,” and so on (660). Meanwhile, the divisions of the year that correspond roughly with the western concept of seasons are six in number, not four (662). So while the western models of time divide the daylight period into uniform numbered hours, and name the months, or “moons,” after Roman gods, emperors, or numerical sequence (March is for Mars, July is for Julius Caesar, and September, which used to be the seventh month of the year, comes from the Latin for seven), the essential concepts of days, moons, and seasons, all of which derive initially from obvious *recurring* changes in sunlight, lunar brightness, or climate, are at least recognizable across both cultures.

One of the most obvious differences, for Hallowell, between Pikangikum and western models of time is the absence of weeks and fixed dates in his hosts’ system. “I lost track of the days of the month,” he writes, “since I did not have a calendar with me; the days of the week became meaningless” (650). Likewise, when his watch stops

running he can no longer count the hours of the day. Still, he does not find these changes entirely disconcerting:

My “disorientation,” of course was only such relative to the reference points of western civilization to which I was habituated. Once the usual mechanical and institutional aids to these were removed, the relativity and provinciality of western time concepts became obvious. But the significant fact is that since I remained associated with human beings it was a very simple matter to make their temporal reference points my own. (651)

Where Hallowell identifies more significant differences is in the apparent disinclination of the Pikangikum to count years in a formal linear chronology, or at least a numerical one. Events that would have occurred many years in the past are described not through a numbered sequence, but in relation to the relative ages of the people in question, significant events such as local marriages or World War I (several Pikangikum enlisted in the military), or the lifespans of deceased relatives. Hallowell finds this genealogical history to be accurate, and while he claims that this method is incapable of recuperating more than the past 150 years (666-67), the stories that he describes as mythology may articulate a deeper sense of the past; the precise extent of Pikangikum historical consciousness is difficult to assess through his limited records. The ages of people themselves, meanwhile, are counted not numerically, but in terms of transitions between different stages of life roughly aligned with childhood, puberty, young adulthood, marriage, and old age (665-66). While the Pikangikum chronologies, then, appear to function without an abstract numerical counting system, the essential concepts of sequence – *before*, *after*, and *no longer* – are easily identifiable in the relationships between past events and present circumstances. We might say that numerical and relational chronologies are both successful in articulating the concept of sequence, but

that a numerical chronology, while potentially affording greater precision in recording the timing of past events, is more likely to conceal the cyclical patterns at work within sequences of events. Naming a past moment by assigning it a numerical marker far removed from the present moment's numerical marker can serve to *disassociate* past from present events even while connecting events along a linear representation, compared with chronologies that emphasize recurring patterns of birth, aging, and death.

The structures of Pikangikum mythology, as Hallowell understands them, also emphasize a temporality similar to that which Peter Sanger understands as the “eternally present” aspects of Mi'kmaq mythology. Hallowell writes that

the most prominent anthropomorphic characters of mythology like *wisakedjak* and *tcakábec* are not only living beings, they are conceived as immortal. They were alive when the earth was young and they assisted the Indians then. They are still alive today and continue to aid mankind, this latter fact receiving empirical demonstration in dreams and by the manifestation of the presence of such beings in the conjuring lodge. The conventional pattern of dream revelation and the conjuring lodge are, then, institutional means of keeping mythological beings and spiritual entities of other classes constantly contemporary with each new generation of individuals, despite the passage of “time.” (667)

Significantly, though, at the same time that the beings from mythological time are “constantly contemporary,” Hallowell also argues that “a temporal distinction is recognized between those days and the present” (668). Certain “monster species” such as “Great Snake” and “Great Mosquito” that existed in mythological times are “now only represented by smaller varieties of their kind,” and particular myths suggest that at one time “all human beings were covered with hair” and “winter lasted all the year round” (668). A conception of time, then, that emphasizes recurrence and identifies deep structural connections between past and present does not preclude the notion that certain

past circumstances no longer hold in the present moment.

In his 1990 study on the psychology of time, William Friedman comments on Hallowell's experiences, and sees the apparent coexistence of cyclical and linear temporality in Pikangikum culture as a lesson in resisting simplistic characterizations of indigenous or western models of time. There is a temptation, Friedman writes, to claim "that people in traditional cultures have no way of conceptualizing series of unique, nonrecurrent events, and that people in modern cultures cannot appreciate repetitive temporal patterns. This is clearly not the case" (110). He concludes that "[a]ttributing either a linear or cyclic view of time to a culture ignores the fact that time is understood by many representations" (111). To the extent that they exist, then, structural similarities between indigenous and western models of time-reckoning reveal a key insight: indigenous cultures and western cultures may employ both circular *and* linear models of time, so that instead of identifying indigenous time as purely circular and western time as purely linear, it makes more sense to say that indigenous temporality may emphasize circularity while western temporality emphasizes linearity. Or to push the notion a little further, the very difficulty of categorizing temporal models as either linear or circular suggests that, like other binary structures, the linear-circular dualism obscures important complexities. As Barbara Adam writes, "It is essential to appreciate that all social processes display aspects of both linearity and cyclicity, and that we recognize a cyclical structure when we focus on events that repeat themselves and unidirectional linearity when our attention is on the process of the repeating action. Whether we 'see' linearity or cyclicity depends upon the framework of observation and interpretation" ("Perceptions"

519).

While there are occasions when a focus on one particular linear or circular representation can be necessary, there may still be a way to conceive of diverse models of time within a framework that allows for a greater degree of complexity. Because cultural models of temporality, as well as personal experiences, can rarely be understood either as a straight line with no recurrences or as a circle in which the notion of sequence is obscured, a more viable image for time's motion may be found in the helix. The shape that a wire takes when wound around a cylinder carries both the sequential and circular aspects of temporality, and it remains possible to focus one's attention on either of these characteristics at any given moment. More precisely, we might say that time is a *fractal* helix: a helix that loops back upon itself in such a way that larger and larger cycles emerge out of the linear structure (imagine that the cylinder itself takes the shape of a helix rather than a straight line, and that the wire in turn is wrapped around this already curved form). This image is useful in demonstrating how different emphases can exist within a model that incorporates both linear and circular shapes; it helps us recognize that elements of recurrence exist within apparently linear processes, and that, as Adam explains, "cyclical processes *by definition* involve the combination of repetition with variation, linearity and progression" ("Perceptions" 519). Of course, the attempt to envision a common framework of temporality carries its own precarious assumptions of universality, so while I propose the fractal helix as a tool for introducing a greater degree of complexity into the dualistic linear-circular models, I caution against the characterization of any single representation of time as complete or universal.

Keeping this model in mind, when Georges Sioui, for instance, writes that European settlers “had forgotten about the Circle and had come to believe that life is a linear, evolutionary process, in which they, the European and Christian, are to lead the rest of humanity and nature itself in a certain enlightened direction” (104), we are led to understand European linear thought as a deeply biased perspective that endows the linear progression of the fractal helix with total significance while neglecting its cyclical patterns. At the same time, though, we can recognize that Sioui’s language serves to conceal the fact that cyclical patterns of days, weeks, months, years, and generations remain potent sources of knowledge within western traditions. Christian rituals themselves are deeply invested in the recurring patterns of the Sabbath, Easter, and Christmas; even the development of mechanical clocks, with their endlessly recurring hours, is tied to the regulation of European prayer schedules.

Of course, the ability of western scholars to identify apparently linear sequences of events within indigenous models of time does not entail the existence of progress in the western sense of advancement towards a more theoretically ideal condition. In this regard, Sioui’s identification of a peculiar western belief in linear movement *towards* an enlightened state carries more weight; whatever circular patterns may exist in western models of time become effectively flattened out, carrying meaning only insofar as they contribute towards the linear motion. Tracing the “view of Indigenous people as delayed in the race of civilizations” that was central to the institutionalization of European settler culture in Canada, Daniel Coleman discusses what he calls “the racialized concept of time, which equated whiteness with modernity and the administration of industrial

development and non-whiteness with pre-modern backwardness and manual labour. The simple sequence of racialized time meant that it was impossible to weave First Nations culture into the progressive narrative of Canadian development” (*White Civility* 14, 30). The word “primitive,” for example, which comes from the Latin *primus*, essentially means “first” or “original,” yet the connotation of backwardness, of a lack of civility and progress, has turned the word into a pejorative that reinforces racial-temporal divisions. The consequences of such segregations are vast; the dual notions of backwardness and development have coloured the orientation of settler culture towards First Nations since the groups’ first contacts, justifying reductions in land and resource rights as well as the creation of the residential schools system, and indigenous cultures themselves have often struggled to determine their place within, or without, the notion of temporal progress.

Following the model of critical race studies that work to resist racist discrimination, we may find value in developing a vocabulary for identifying *temporal discrimination*, the belief that one particular model of time is natural, desirable, and superior to other models of time – a belief that goes hand in hand with the assumption that certain times (the present or the short-term future) are more deserving of agency, empowerment, and resource exploitation than other times. This articulation of temporal discrimination can provide a terminology and a potential framework for thinking through the politics of contested cultural temporalities. For instance, just as racism requires, and even creates, supposedly objective categories of races – categories that inevitably break down under scrutiny – so too does temporal discrimination rely on, and create, different times. Sioui’s notion that “the thing that is named ‘the past’ is a European construct and

is not part of the Amerindian psyche” (278-79), as well as Ricoeur’s belief that the indivisibility of the past, present, and future may “require that the very terms ‘future,’ ‘past,’ and ‘present’ be abandoned” (3: 68), highlight the cultural construction of temporal categories that are (often unwittingly) necessary to temporal discrimination.³⁹ Of course, just as we must be wary of framing the fragility of racial categories as the ultimate justification for equality because of the risk that the discovery or invention of clear genetic racial markers would then appear to destroy the case for equality, we should also be cautious in describing the fragility of temporal categories as the justification for temporal equality. Whether we highlight time’s linear, cyclical, or indivisible aspects, respect for different temporalities itself must be seen as having intrinsic value if it is to maintain purchase. Articulating the very existence of alternative models of time is an important step in countering the hegemony of a singular temporal ideology, and in this regard the comments of writers like Sioui – who claims that “[y]esterday is today and tomorrow is yesterday: time is one, life is one” (279) – play a vital role in critical time studies.

Seeing and Failing to See Alternative Temporalities

³⁹ The question of which emerges “first” in western civilization – the articulation of fundamentally discrete categories of time, or the idea that one particular cultural embodiment of time is natural and superior – likely does not have a simple answer. Commenting on the history of anthropological discourse that distances “primitive” indigenous cultures in time, Johannes Fabian offers a preliminary approach to such a discussion by arguing that “the idea of a knowledge of Time which is a superior knowledge” was “[p]refigured in the Christian tradition, but crucially transformed in the Age of Enlightenment” (10).

The ability to examine temporal assumptions critically, to envision modes of time outside those that emphasize linear progress, has an important but troubled history in Canadian and indigenous writing. I have already mentioned the struggle that George Copway records, in his nineteenth-century autobiography, as he attempts to reconcile western ideals of progress with his Ojibwe background. He vacillates between anger at the imposition of cultural and technological progress onto his way of life, and gratitude for the opportunity “to tread in the footsteps of worthy white men” (144) – a conflict with no easy resolution. Pauline Johnson, who was born in 1861 to a Mohawk father and an English mother, also reveals a degree of internal conflict in her writing from the turn of the twentieth century. In one of Johnson’s stories in *The Moccasin Maker*, the European settler Charlie marries a young half-indigenous woman named Christie, who explains that when her own parents were married the community prepared a feast, but did not perform a ceremony. “There is no ritual to bind them,” she explains; “they need none; an Indian’s word was his law in those days” (89). But while Christie takes pride in this tradition, Charlie is furious at what he sees as a scandal, claiming that in the absence of a Christian ceremony Christie’s parents were never actually married. While previous generations of the family could not have known better, he says, “your father and mother live in more civilized times. Father O’Leary has been at the post for nearly twenty years. Why was not your father straight enough to have the ceremony performed when he *did* get the chance?” (92). In response to Charlie’s rhetoric of “civilized times” and “straight” behaviour, Christie emphatically resists the notion that the western perspective is more advanced, and she does so through images of simultaneity and recurrence:

Why should I recognize the rites of your nation when you do not acknowledge the rites of mine? According to your own words, my parents should have gone through your church ceremony as well as through an Indian contract; according to *my* words, *we* should go through an Indian contract as well as through a church marriage. If their union is illegal, so is ours. If you think my father is living in dishonor with my mother, my people will think I am living in dishonor with you. How do I know when another nation will come and conquer you as you white men conquered us? And they will have another marriage rite to perform, and they will tell us another truth, that you are not my husband, that you are but disgracing and dishonoring me, that you are keeping me here, not as your wife, but as your – your – *squaw*. (93)

But while Johnson is eloquent here in interrupting the racialized model of time that privileges western culture as advanced, she also reinforces the idea that aspects of indigenous culture are backwards and not yet developed. Earlier in the story, Johnson describes the initial meeting of Christie's parents in terms of their relative positions along the arrow of civilization:

The country was all backwoods, and the Post miles and miles from even the semblance of civilization, and the lonely young Englishman's heart had gone out to the girl who, apart from speaking a very few words of English, was utterly uncivilized and uncultured, but had withal that marvellously innate refinement so universally possessed by the higher tribes of North American Indians.

Like all her race, observant, intuitive, having a horror of ridicule, consequently quick at acquirement and teachable in mental and social habits, she had developed from absolute pagan indifference into a sweet, elderly Christian woman [...].

He had given their daughter Christine all the advantages of his own learning – which, if truthfully told, was not universal; but the girl had a fair common education, and the native adaptability to progress. (83)

The uncritical language of development, progress, and the acquisition of civility troubles the plausibility of the story's apparent repudiation of these concepts. Whom are we meant to believe: Johnson's narrator, or Christie? Like George Copway, Johnson appears to have internalized two contradictory models of temporality, and her own articulations of

progress – as both an unquestioned truth and a culturally biased assumption – are fractured and inconsistent. In their detailed examination of Johnson’s work and life, Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson write that “[b]y claiming and expressing the sensibilities of both Aboriginal margin and European centre, Johnson ultimately confounds the simple dichotomies that underpin Western consciousness” (5). This complexity, though, may reveal an unresolved inner tension as much as it enacts a questioning of normative power.

Writing by Canadians of European descent sometimes reveals similar vacillations, though the bias towards a racialized, progress-oriented model of time has often been a dominant force. Duncan Campbell Scott, the poet and Deputy Superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932, is infamous for his support of the mandatory residential school system that separated indigenous children from their families and cultures. Like many of his contemporaries, Scott saw indigenous peoples as an inherently backwards race, and, as Lisa Salem observes, the policies that he orchestrated were “based on the idea that the Native peoples possessed an essentially ‘savage’ nature and therefore needed to be guided into civilization by the representatives of the British Empire.” In Scott’s own somewhat contradictory words, the inevitable disappearance of indigenous peoples would be accomplished “not by race extinction but by gradual assimilation with their fellow citizens” (qtd. in Salem). His 1898 poem “The Onondaga Madonna” portrays a woman of the Onondaga First Nation as living proof of the inescapable demise of her people; she belongs to “a weird and waning race” (line 2), and the fact that she is never named fits the notion that she is a representative of a type

rather than an individual. While the woman holds a newborn child, normally a sign of regeneration and futurity, the baby is merely “[t]he latest promise of her nation’s doom” (10); he sulks moodily with “[t]he primal warrior gleaming from his eyes” (12). For Scott, the collective “promise” of native peoples, their very future, reveals only violence and ruin. Reading the baby’s “paler” skin as a sign of interracial lineage, Salem writes that “Scott uses the mother and child tableau in ‘The Onondaga Madonna’ to represent, not the hope and promise of the Madonna and Christ-child of Christian iconography, but the impending death of the Indian race through miscegenation.”

This racialized view of cultural temporality carries through into many twentieth-century works, but also becomes a target for critical resistance. Emily Carr, who is best known for her paintings of indigenous art and west coast landscapes early in the twentieth century, also wrote creative nonfiction accounts of her travels, and while the assumption of racialized temporality is sometimes visible in Carr’s *Klee Wyck*, she moves much more towards a critical understanding of cultural bias. Her stories bear witness to the imposition of western temporality onto west coast indigenous cultures, and reveal how a transition towards an acceptance of alternate, simultaneous presents can unfold.

In one of *Klee Wyck*’s early stories, Carr watches while a missionary in Ucluelet blows on a cow’s horn, signalling the beginning of the school day; “the blasts were stunning, but they failed to call the children to school, because no voice had ever suggested time or obligation to these Indian children. Then the Greater Missionary went to the village and hand-picked her scholars from the huts” (33). This scene establishes two of Carr’s beliefs that will gradually be questioned and dismantled during the course

of her experiences. First, she believes that the western model of time is the *only* model; if the children have not been trained about school days and working hours, they must have no understanding of time. Second, the connection of time with “obligation” reveals that adherence to western temporality involves a moral dimension. The connection brings to mind the American Electric Signal Clock Company advertisement from 1891 which states: “If there is one virtue that should be cultivated more than any other by him who would succeed in life, it is punctuality; if there is one error to be avoided, it is being behind time” (qtd. in Levine 67). Like twenty-first-century citizens who feel compelled to respond quickly to electronic messages lest they be seen as unreliable and out of touch, westerners at the turn of the twentieth century are held captive by the moral, almost sacred importance of clock technology. In Ucluelet, the reluctant indigenous students begin “squirming out of their desks” while the missionary writes the English alphabet on a chalk board (34). This schoolhouse is clearly a place where the dominance of western cultural forms is inscribed, but while the English language lesson is an overt example of cultural politics and the alterity of indigenous knowledge, the very fact of the children’s attendance at particular times of day serves to indoctrinate them into the western models of clock time, working hours, and weekdays. The authority of western time-reckoning is always the schoolhouse’s message, regardless of the particular topic of each day’s lesson.

While Carr begins tentatively to question her own assumptions in “Ucluelet,” realizing that she is “to them a child, ignorant about the wild things which they knew so well” (40), her later story “Greenville” is especially significant in the way it traces her gradual understanding of alternative temporalities. When she hires a ride to the town of

Greenville from an indigenous man named Sam, she asks what time the boat will depart. “Eight o’clock,” he replies, but on the appointed day Carr sits waiting “on the wharf from eight o’clock till noon” while “Sam and his son sauntered up and down getting things as if time did not exist” (79). As in the Ucluelet scene, the indigenous man’s failure to adhere to western standards of punctuality means, in Carr’s eyes, that he operates as though he is outside of temporal existence altogether, western temporality being the only form with which she is familiar. The perceived necessity of western temporality for life itself becomes apparent when she finally arrives in Greenville and enters the abandoned schoolhouse that is to serve as her lodging. She notes that “the hum of the mosquitoes had stopped, as every other thing had stopped in the murky grey of this dreadful place, clock, calendar, even the air – the match the Indian struck refused to live” (81). Recoiling at the room’s “strangling deadness,” she decides to improve the situation as best she can: “I turned forward the almanac sheets and set the clock ticking. When the kettle sang things had begun to live” (82). The regular ticking of the clock is associated here with comfortable living space and the forward motion of normal existence, and yet, the fact that the clock and calendar function only when Carr is present to activate them suggests that western temporality, far from being omnipresent, is a specific socio-technological practice that she herself brings with her into a place where it would not otherwise exist.

As Carr spends time in Greenville she begins to find evidence that the choice between western temporality and stifling atemporality is a false one, for along with their languages, arts, and forms of spirituality, her indigenous hosts adhere to alternative forms of time-reckoning. On the verge of this discovery, Carr notes that the typical method of

house construction in the village follows (or fails to follow) what she considers to be a slack schedule: “As soon as a few boards were put together the family moved in, and the house went on building around them until some new interest came along. Then the Indian dropped his tools [...] and after a long pull on his pipe he would probably lie round in the sun for days doing nothing” (83). While “the Indian” is troublingly cast here as a type rather than an actual person, Carr’s observations call to mind Robert Levine’s distinction between clock time and event time, where he concludes that “[o]ne of the most significant differences in the pace of life is whether people use the hour on the clock to schedule the beginning and ending of activities, or whether the activities are allowed to transpire according to their own spontaneous schedule” (82). While Carr expects construction to follow a rigid timetable organized around predictable assembly milestones, the people building this house may have decided that the construction has proceeded as far as necessary for the moment. Cultures that operate on event time, Levine argues, may resist the western linkage of time with money, and may have no use for the concept of “wasted” time; he quotes Jean Traore, a student from Burkina Faso in Western Africa, as saying that “There’s no such thing as wasting time where I live [...]. How can you waste time? If you’re not doing one thing, you’re doing something else” (91).

The concept of event time, then, goes part of the way towards articulating the experience of time that Carr is seeing. And yet, something more is at work. Peering into empty houses that have clearly been rapidly vacated, she realizes that “[b]ecause the tide had been right to go, bedding had been stripped from the springs, food left about, water left unemptied to rust the kettles. Indians slip in and out of their places like animals.

Tides and seasons are the things that rule their lives: domestic arrangements are mere incidentals” (83). The notion that the villagers spring into rapid action when the tide is “right to go” suggests that they are perfectly quick to act when need be. Scheduling one’s activities in strict accordance with tides and seasons is neither clock time nor event time – it is a form of ecological time in which actions are coordinated around naturally recurring changes. While Sam’s departure had been four hours late by the clock, another form of punctuality now becomes visible, one based on a keen awareness of changing marine conditions. It is important to remember here that just as the indigenous mode involves event-based, ecological, and other temporal factors, so too does western temporality consist of various complex layers. As Adam writes, “[t]he abstract, quantified, spatialized time of clocks and calendars forms *only one aspect* of the complex of meanings associated with Western time”; social interactions and environmental concerns remain potent sources of time-reckoning (“Perceptions” 509). The tide-based temporality that Carr identifies is not a definitively indigenous mode; indeed, her experience is as much an encounter between the temporality of an urbanite and the temporality of mariners as it is an encounter between western and indigenous time. Still, the temporal emphases that strike her as unexpected reveal the contrasting elements foregrounded by alternative forms of social time-reckoning.

Carr’s earlier accusations that Sam and the school children had no understanding of time now take on an ironic tone, as we realize that Carr herself has been failing to understand *their* sense of time. At this point in the story Carr writes in detail about the totem poles she encounters nearby, and her growing willingness to accept cultural modes

different from her own becomes apparent. The carver of the poles, she muses, “cut forms to fit the thoughts that the birds and animals and fish suggested to him, and to these he added something of himself. When they were all linked together they made very strong talk for the people. He grafted this new language onto the great cedar trunks and called them Totem poles and stuck them up in the villages with great ceremony” (85).

Importantly, Carr chooses this moment to reveal the indigenous name for Greenville: “Lakalzap” (86).⁴⁰ The languages, arts, and cultural forms that have been made invisible under western colonialism begin to become apparent now in Carr’s eyes, and she grows increasingly critical of the missionaries who “came and told the Indians this was all foolish and heathenish” (86). As she prepares to leave Greenville at the end of the story she has grown to see western temporality – along with western art and language – not as inevitable and singular, but as a limited framework, a construction that she carries with her in her travels, and that, like the colonialist agenda itself, is sometimes better left behind. “I let the clock run down,” she writes. “Flapped the leaves of the calendar back, and shut the Greenville schoolhouse tight” (87). This sentiment is reinforced in the story “Friends” where, after hearing a missionary complain about the difficult job of pulling “these half-civilized people” from “old ways into new,” Carr emphatically rejects the residential school system, advising her friend Louisa not to “give up her boys” (113-114).

In one of the late episodes of *Klee Wyck*, Carr highlights the importance of alternative forms of timekeeping directly in the title of the story: “Century Time.”

⁴⁰ Carr does not often specify which indigenous culture or language she is referring to. Aside from occasional references to Chinook and Haida, she more often uses the general term “Indian.”

Describing an indigenous graveyard, she writes: “In the late afternoon a great shadow-mountain stepped across the lake and brooded over the cemetery. It had done this at the end of every sunny day for centuries, long, long before that piece of land was a cemetery. [...] Indians do not hinder the progress of their dead by embalming or tight coffining. When the spirit has gone they give the body back to the earth” (135). This passage frames human lifespans as insignificant in comparison with the geological time of the earth; the language reveals a willingness to entertain an elongated perspective on time, and the statement about giving human bodies “back” to the earth sees longstanding earthly processes as primary sites of ownership and importance.

Noting that the cemetery itself contains a blending of traditional indigenous burial conventions with more recently learned Christian practices – wooden crosses and written words – Carr reads the lettering on the grave markers:

SACRED OF KATIE—IPOO
SAM BOYAN HE DIDE—IPOO
RIP JULIE YECTON—IPOO
JOSEPH’S ROSIE DI—IPOO (136)

Carr does not understand the word “IPOO,” so she asks a woman in the village what it means. This results in a convoluted linguistic struggle as the two women try to understand one another across their cultural and language differences:

“Mean die time.”
“Die time?”
“Uh huh. Tell when he die.”
“But all the graves ‘tell’ the same.”
“Uh huh. Four this kind” (she pointed separately to each of the four letters, IPOO) “tell now time.”
“But everybody did not die at the same time. Some died long ago

and some die now?”

“Uh huh. Maybe some year just one man die—one baby. Maybe influenza come—he come two time—one time long far, one time close. He make lots, lots Injun die.”

“But, if it means the time people died, why do they put ‘IPOO’ on the old graves as well as on the new?”

Difficult English thoughts furrowed her still forehead. Hard English words came from her slow tongue in abrupt jerks. Her brown finger touched the I and the P. “He know,” she said, “he tell it. This one and this one” (pointing to the two O’s) “—small—he no matter. He change every year. Just this one and this matter” (pointing again to I and P). “He tell it.”

Time was marked by centuries in this cemetery. Years—little years—what are they? As insignificant as the fact that reversing the figure nine turns it into the letter P. (136-37)

Visible in this conversation is the gradual convergence of two radically different conceptualizations of time. While Carr cannot understand why “old” and “new” graves would be marked with the same time of death, the indigenous woman cannot understand the distinction that Carr is trying to make; for her, Carr’s notions of old and new both fall within the duration that she calls “now.” The landscape itself, we now realize, with its many centuries of daily cycles, had been hinting all along at the importance of this longer-term view.

Explaining his desire for western societies to develop a longer-term perspective, Stewart Brand asks, “How long *is* now, usually?” For most of us, “‘now’ consists of this week, slightly haunted by the ghost of last week. This is the realm of immediate responsibility, one in which we feel we have volition, where the consequences of our actions are obvious and surprises limited” (29). Arguing that “[c]ivilizations with long nows look after things better,” Brand goes on to collaborate on a project – a mechanical clock designed to run for as long as human civilization has currently existed, called “The

Clock of the Long Now” – intended “to extend our concept of the present in both directions, making the present longer” (29). Our sense of now, he says, should encompass ten thousand years, which is, after all, “not all that long. It is only four hundred generations” (30). The physicist Freeman Dyson more specifically elaborates six different layers of now:

The destiny of our species is shaped by the imperatives of survival on six distinct time scales. To survive means to compete successfully on all six time scales. But the unit of survival is different at each of the six time scales. On a time scale of years, the unit is the individual. On a time scale of decades, the unit is the family. On a time scale of centuries, the unit is the tribe or nation. On a time scale of millennia, the unit is the culture. On a time scale of tens of millennia, the unit is the species. On a time scale of eons, the unit is the whole web of life on our planet. Every human being is the product of adaptation to the demands of all six time scales. That is why conflicting loyalties are deep in our nature. (qtd. in S. Brand 35)

In this view, Carr’s conversation with the indigenous woman is an encounter between two different privileged layers of now. Carr’s upbringing has taught her to privilege the now of the individual, while the other woman values the now of “the tribe or nation,” revealing a more expansive sense of self and responsibility. One of the critical differences between this conversation and Carr’s earlier encounters (with Sam and his boat, for instance) is that Carr has now become cognizant of her own cross-cultural incompetence. Instead of disparaging the woman for failing to understand the difference between old and new, Carr repeatedly asks questions to ensure her own understanding. Rather than imposing western models of temporality, she opens herself to accepting, even admiring, the other woman’s more expansive sense of time. After all, even Carr’s notion that grave markers ought to be classified by year is quite arbitrary; why not classify the time of death by the minute? The sense of defamiliarization to which Carr has opened herself

allows for all assumptions to be questioned, and the result of this questioning is visible in her remarkable transition over the course of the narrative, from anger over Sam's four-hour delay, to her revolutionary comment, "Years—little years—what are they?"

The final brief anecdote in *Klee Wyck*, a story called "Canoe," also highlights this sense of temporal defamiliarization, but carries a distinct note of sadness. Having hitched a canoe ride from an indigenous family, Carr becomes mesmerized by the sedate, tranquil pace of the voyage:

Our going was imperceptible, the woman's steering paddle the only thing that moved, its silent cuts stirring phosphorus like white fire. Time and texture faded . . . ceased to exist . . . day was gone, yet it was not night. Water was not wet nor deep, just smoothness spread with light. (151-52, ellipses in original)

This passage contains a clear echo of Carr's statement in "Greenville," where "Sam and his son sauntered up and down getting things as if time did not exist" (79). But while the "Greenville" comment accuses Sam of failing to adhere to normative temporality, the difference here is the absence of the "as if"; in the canoe, time *has* ceased to exist. The statement is not literal; it indicates that Carr has learned to operate outside of her cultural-temporal assumptions about inflexibly calculated hours and absolute distinctions between temporal markers like years, days, and nights. At least for the moment, Carr has entered her hosts' conceptual vehicle for moving through time, just as she has entered their physical canoe. Continuing to frame the canoe as a profound metaphor for indigenous society as a whole, the final sentence of the book serves as Carr's lament for what she sees as the inevitable demise of her hosts' beliefs and ways of life: "Slowly the canoe drifted away from the moonlit landing, till, at the end of her rope, she lay an empty thing,

floating among the shadows of an inverted forest” (152).

The image of indigenous peoples drifting, emptied, at the end of their figurative ropes appears inescapable. Throughout *Klee Wyck* Carr describes even the natural aging process of indigenous individuals as accelerated; grandparents and young children alike are depicted in similar terms as elderly, worn out, and dying. A woman named Sophie walks from door to door selling her homemade baskets – a symbol for the womb, and for reproduction and futurity itself – while her own babies die one after another.⁴¹ The image finds a notable counterpart in A.M. Klein’s mid-1940s poem “Indian Reservation: Caughnawaga,” which laments the final dying days of indigenous people who have been reduced to caricaturing their own cultural history “for the tourist’s / brown pennies” (304). Klein writes: “Their past is sold in a shop: the beaded shoes, / the sweetgrass basket, the curio Indian, / burnt wood and gaudy cloth and inch-canoes” (304). Carr is not alone as an outsider who bears witness to horrible destruction and helplessly laments the collapse of indigenous civilization, even as the final blow never quite seems to take place.

Reinvigorating Indigenous Temporalities

Over the last several decades authors and artists of indigenous descent have frequently used temporal orientation as a way to articulate indigenous modes of thought, or to challenge dominant cultural norms. Perhaps the most important function that recent indigenous literature has filled is the assertion that indigenous societies, while

⁴¹ I am grateful to Roger Hyman for pointing out the significance of this image to me.

continuously faced with adversity, are *not* dying civilizations relegated to the past, but remain very much alive in the present, often with a keen awareness of the future.

Buffy Sainte-Marie, the Cree singer-songwriter and social activist, became famous in the 1960s and 70s for her songs that protested war and helped to invigorate broad social conversations about issues of indigenous survival and policies of forced assimilation.⁴² Her song “My Country ’Tis of Thy People You’re Dying,” released in 1966, questions the dominant narrative of North American colonization by ridiculing and redrawing the normative temporal frame that surrounds these events:

Now that our longhouses breed superstition
You force us to send our toddlers away
To your schools where they’re taught to despise their traditions;
Forbid them their languages, then further say
That American history really began when Columbus set sail out of
Europe!
And stress that the Nation of leeches that’s conquered this land
Are the biggest and bravest and boldest and best!
And yet, where in the history books is the tale of the genocide basic to this
country’s birth?
[...]
Oh, the tricked and evicted, only know what I mean;
My country, ’tis of thy people you’re dying.

The past, it just crumbled; the future just threatens,
Our life-blood’s shut up in your chemical tanks,
And now here you come, bill of sale in your hand.
[...]
Now that my life’s to be known as your heritage,
now that even the graves have been robbed. (176-77)

⁴² Born on the Piapot Cree First Nation in Saskatchewan, but having spent most of her life in the United States, Sainte-Marie has ties to the Cree, American, and Canadian nations. “My Country ’Tis of Thy People You’re Dying,” for instance, focuses explicitly on the United States, though Sainte-Marie herself was inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame in 1995 and received a Lifetime Achievement Award in Arts at the National [i.e. Canadian] Aboriginal Achievement Awards in 1998.

Sainte-Marie's use of the word "now" ironizes the way the colonialist narrative presumes to modify, at an arbitrary historical moment, the cultural significance of longstanding indigenous social institutions. Likewise, the very act of questioning when American history "really began" challenges the widely accepted foundational moment of the "New" world supposedly discovered by Columbus. The narrative that recounts the nation's history, Sainte-Marie argues, must take into account the people *before* Columbus, as well as the long history of genocidal acts *following* the arrival of Europeans.

Also tied up here in the colonialist framing of settler-indigene relations is the process by which settler culture portrays itself as native, as originary, and as the primary seat of value and power. Coleman writes that "by representing himself as already indigenous, the settler claims priority over newer immigrants and, by representing himself as already civilized, he claims superiority to Aborigines and other non-Whites" (*White Civility* 16). For Sainte-Marie, this appropriation of indigeneity figures metaphorically as grave robbing, as the theft of the past. At its most pessimistic, the song indicates that the temporal reverberations of colonialism move destructively both backwards and forwards: into the past, which crumbles, and into the future, which, because it is built on the past, now threatens. In another song, "Now That the Buffalo's Gone," Sainte-Marie describes the appropriation of indigenous land as an ongoing ordeal, singing, "Oh it's all in the past you can say / But it's still going on till today" (178). By framing the threats to indigenous lives and cultures as ongoing, as carrying consequences "still," and on into the future, Sainte-Marie's lyrics resist the notion that indigenous people, and colonialism itself, belong to some other time in the past. The settler culture's

claim to firstness is not a mere historical detail, but a deeply political act that continues to be performed and continues to cause material consequences.

In Chapter One I briefly discussed Maria Campbell's autobiography *Halfbreed*, which highlights how federal government policy around the time of Canada's confederation imposed arbitrary temporal restrictions on Métis land use in Saskatchewan. The majority of Campbell's narrative, though, describes her own impoverished and unstable living conditions in the middle of the twentieth century, indicating how the consequences of racist social structures reverberate through time and influence her own temporal experience. Even the first sentence of the book – "The house where I grew up is tumbled down and overgrown with bush" (1) – suggests that the comforts of the past, broadly speaking, have been lost and destroyed. Identifying the temporal fractures that emerge from racial divisions, Campbell imagines herself speaking to white Canadians as a whole: "I know that poverty is not ours alone. Your people have it too, but in those earlier days you at least had dreams, you had a tomorrow. My parents and I never shared any aspirations for a future" (9). The sense of a decayed past and hopeless future echoes Sainte-Marie's pessimistic moments as well as D.C. Scott's outlook, and during the rare moments when Campbell actually articulates hopes for the future, her dreams are tellingly modest. Desperate to maintain her standing in school despite having to raise her own younger siblings, she "even day-dreamed that I would make it through high school, and that we would all make good friends and become part of the community. But it didn't work out like that" (86). The constant experience of racism not only directs the Métis into a mentality of absent or humble futures, but even physically segregates them in time from

white citizens. Reflecting on how the people from her community would often travel into the nearby town of St. Michele on Saturdays to shop, drink, and watch movies, Campbell writes, “There was an unwritten law: our people never came in until after four and the whites would then turn the town over to us. They never mixed with us although their revenue depended on Native people’s money” (110). The daylight hours associated with business and productivity belong to the white townspeople, leaving the late-night weekend hours associated with debauchery to the Métis who support this productivity.

When Campbell moves to Vancouver and takes up work in the sex trade, she develops a drug addiction that serves mainly as a form of temporal escapism. The drugs “helped me to sleep, they kept me happy, and most of all, I could forget about yesterday and tomorrow” (136). In a form of self-fulfilling prophecy, the expense of the pills prevents her from putting any savings aside to improve her future, “and my dreams of saving a lot of money just seemed to get farther and farther away” (136). Like some of the impoverished people and characters I discussed in Chapter Three, Campbell finds that “My life became an endless circle of work, drink, and depression” (158). Gradually she works to repair her own psyche, joining an addiction support group as well as the Native movement in Alberta. By the end of the autobiography, she looks forward to a more positive time with the belief that “one day, very soon, people will set aside their differences and come together as one” (184). The hopefulness of this thought is encouraging, even if the future it envisions is more idealistic than probable.

Through much of the 1980s Campbell was also involved in an extended collaborative writing project with Linda Griffiths. In the resulting theatre production,

Jessica, Griffiths plays a version of Campbell herself, enacting Campbell's life experiences through encounters with the figures of coyote, bear, and wolverine. In a collaborative volume called *The Book of Jessica*, Griffiths and Campbell record the protracted debates, frustrations, and breakthroughs that surrounded the writing and production of the play. One of the transcribed conversations in this volume is particularly telling in the way it reveals differences in temporal orientation between Griffiths – a white woman who adheres to normative models of scheduling and punctuality – and Campbell herself. Maria comments that her relationship with Linda has “helped me to see the white part of myself,” and that she would like Linda “to see it too.” Linda responds:

LINDA But the white part of you knows exactly how I feel when you don't show up.

MARIA Don't pressure me with these things. You know I'm not very good with time. In fact, I'm totally unreliable. The way I feel about time or appointments is not the same way you feel about them. I respect and appreciate that those things are important to you, but they're just not very important to me. You know, like, if you were to come along and take the stuff that I picked up at the second-hand store and crap all over it or something, I could understand that, because that's important to me, but not time. I'm always here when you really need me.... I don't understand about time, stealing, yes, but not the importance you put on it.... Time – what is that anyway?

LINDA It has nothing to do with appointments. It has to do with respect – basic respect. I thought what was happening was that finally, after all this time, we were finally respecting each other, and then you didn't show up again. (Griffiths and Campbell 77-78)

While the two friends are putting genuine effort into locating the source of their dispute, they stop short of uncovering the shaky racialized assumptions that frame punctuality as an intrinsically “white” quality. In Levine's terminology, Linda operates within the dominant clock time mode, while Maria operates on event time: Linda expects Maria to arrive for a particular scheduled appointment, while Maria claims to be “always here

when you really need me.” For Linda, Maria’s failure to arrive on schedule means that she “didn’t show up again” (her exasperation is reminiscent of Emily Carr’s frustration over Sam’s late departure in his boat) while Maria may feel that the moment at which her presence is truly necessary has not yet arrived, regardless of the hour on the clock. What is especially significant here, though, is that instead of articulating the different ways in which time *is* important to her, Maria accepts Linda’s mode of time as the legitimate one, and describes herself as “not very good with time” and “totally unreliable.” While Maria’s application of event time itself may be flawed by her failure to realize just how important her presence was to Linda, she sees herself more as a failed clock-timer than a well-intentioned event-timer, because she perceives clock time to be the one rightful mode. We can see a hint here of how entrenched models of time can serve, even unintentionally, to legitimize the subjugation of non-white races. In retrospect, we might read Campbell’s autobiography as a narrative of how racial and economic divisions can not only fracture the experience of temporality for impoverished people, but also prevent alternative frames of temporal experience from gaining purchase.

The inherent legitimacy of indigenous conceptual modes is a primary concern as well in Jeannette Armstrong’s 1985 novel *Slash*. The novel tells the story of Thomas “Slash” Kelasket, an Okanagan Indian youth who travels through Canada and the United States in the 1960s and 70s learning about the struggle for indigenous rights. As a child, Slash is confused over the conflicting attitudes towards newness and oldness in his community. His friend Jimmy declares, “You guys up-the-hill is just stupid and old-fashioned. Nobody needs to talk Indian anymore. My Dad and them are smart. They are

up-to-date. We are gonna get a T.V., too” (11). “Why,” Slash wonders, “were my Dad and them so stubborn about new stuff anyway?” (11). The answer to this question comes to light when Slash’s father expresses his anger over the imposition of English schooling, Band housing, and welfare dependency, all of which have led members of the community to “do nothing but get money and spend it drinking. [...] Seems like the more Indians try new things, the worse things get for them” (25). Slash’s grandfather Pra-cwa agrees: “our people are two now. There is us and there is them that want to try all kinds of new stuff and be more like white people” (25). Meanwhile, Slash attends a talk by an indigenous man who has dressed himself to appear “almost like a white man,” who explains that indigenous people are “living in the twentieth century” and “have a lot of catching up to do. [...] We no longer need to sit back and be forgotten, second-class people stuck on reservations, living in the dark ages” (25, 26). All of this leaves Slash unsure what to make of the conflicting advice. Newness, we come to understand, is framed broadly as an intrinsically white quality associated with the positive values of modernity, relevance, and inevitable progress, while oldness becomes a pejorative for obsolete Indian foolishness. Those who wish to question these associations, who find value in traditional approaches and remain suspicious of assimilation, find themselves in the impossible position of resisting the apparent reality of ongoing life itself.

When Slash is sentenced to 18 months in prison for his involvement in a brawl, the incident that earns him his nickname, Armstrong casts the experience of enforced assimilation in prison as a metaphor for indigenous life itself within a dominant white culture. “In there,” Slash says, “you had to learn fast. It’s like everybody had to kind of

fit in somewhere. It's not a matter of wanting to. It's that you had to. You were playing their game. You had to form a new attitude. You had to, or you got swept away" (44). Once he leaves prison, though, and becomes increasingly involved in Indian rights movements, Slash questions the necessity of "playing their game" and subscribing to "a new attitude" in a broader sense. "I wondered what was so complicated," he says, "that large conferences and long resolutions had to be passed to do something for Indians. Something as simple as making a man feel good to be Indian didn't ever seem to be considered as an answer" (62). As he joins forces with a rebellious protest group that stages an occupation at the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington D.C. and illegally takes over land at Wounded Knee, Slash is exposed to the apparently radical thought that the protest activities cannot accurately be called a takeover at all: "This is our land," one of the protesters says, invoking an expanded sense of temporal recognition, "we have rights here. How can we take over? We're already here" (87).

As the protesters experience violence and hatred, as well as occasional successes, Slash vacillates between doubt that there can be any hope for indigenous communities, and excitement over the thought that the real answer is to increase indigenous peoples' pride in their own identities. Like Maria Campbell, during his periods of hopelessness Slash takes refuge in inebriation, blocking out the experience of time altogether:

I scraped pennies together with the other winos to buy bay rum and shaving lotion. I ended up in the drunk tanks and detox centres and ate whenever I thought of it at the Salvation Army. I don't remember too much, but sometimes, when I woke up in jail or in the D, I got flashes of things that I had done. Sometimes I didn't remember a thing for weeks. That was frightening but somehow comforting, too. Frightening because of what I might have done and didn't know about, and comforting that I didn't have to bear those days. They were just gone forever. (159-60)

After spending six months in a camp sanctuary where he gradually recovers and learns more about indigenous culture, he decides that there is “something worthwhile to live for” (163), that, “being an Indian, I could never be a person only to myself. I was part of all the rest of the people. I was responsible to that. Everything I did affected that. What I was would affect everyone around me, both then and far into the future, through me and my descendants” (164-65). His extended immersion in indigenous culture has helped him to reject the notion of time as a painful, hopeless ordeal to be blocked out, and has expanded his perspective to the point where he is able to envision a deep future.

As a result of this shift Slash articulates a new goal: “I had to find out what things were left of the old ways in my own Tribe and make it usable in our modern Indian lives” (171). Visible here is an indication that the apparent division between tradition and assimilation, between old and new, is a false choice, that successful adjustment to present conditions must involve working with traditional knowledge and continuously reshaping “old” ways to ensure their continued usefulness. Newness itself, after all, is never created out of nothing, but is an ongoing emergent process. In the words of an “old man” who advises Slash on how to prevent a traditional medicine place from being rezoned into a tourist attraction, “it’s important that the place be protected. But the fact that it was a medicine place which once meant something to our people isn’t enough. It’s like an old basket on a museum shelf. You can’t preserve our culture that way. It’s using them things that are important. In using it, you understand it. That’s what our culture is. You protect it by using it” (171). As the novel draws to a close, Slash tells his son Marlon, “You are an Indian of a special generation. Your world will be hard, but you will grow up proud to be

Indian. [...] You are the part of me that extends in a line up towards the future” (206-07).

The notion that indigenous modes of temporality and thought are legitimate in their own right, and are living rather than fossilized, is of critical importance here even if the broad goal of an acceptable quality of life for indigenous peoples remains largely unrealized.

The re-legitimizing and ongoing evolution of indigenous thought is also visible in the very form of Armstrong’s novel. The narrative of *Slash*’s experiences follows an extensive string of events tied to the history of indigenous activism in the 1960s and 70s – he attends meeting after meeting, travelling from city to city – and while Armstrong describes many changes in her protagonist over the years of the story, the narrative does not adhere to the typical western framework in which events are shaped into rising actions that lead towards a definitive climax. Useful here is Thomas King’s suggestion that the diversity of indigenous literature can usefully be described using several terms that avoid privileging European ideas of progress and colonialism. *Slash* can be said to adhere to King’s concepts of polemical literature, which “chronicles the imposition of non-Native expectations and insistences (political, social, scientific) on Native communities and the methods of resistance employed by Native people in order to maintain both their communities and cultures”; interfusional literature, or “that part of Native literature which is a blending of oral literature and written literature”; and, of the most relevance here, associational literature, which tends to describe a Native community, concentrating

on the daily activities and intricacies of Native life and organizing the elements of plot along a rather flat narrative line that ignores the ubiquitous climaxes and resolutions that are so valued in non-Native literature. In addition to this flat narrative line, associational literature

leans towards the group rather than the single, isolated character, creating a fiction that de-values heroes and villains in favour of the members of a community, a fiction which eschews judgements and conclusions. (“Godzilla” 244-46)

By confounding the expectation, built largely into the novel form itself, of a European narrative arc, Armstrong advances indigenous storytelling modes as legitimate in their own right, and as living systems able to reshape themselves to fit within new delivery mechanisms. Far from abandoning the Okanagan storytelling tradition in which she is trained, Armstrong engages in a productive dialogue with the form of the printed novel, an undertaking which, like *Slash*’s life experiences, is best understood as an ongoing process rather than a neatly shaped narrative arc leading towards a definitive conclusion. As a further sign that the continuous remaking of “old” indigenous storytelling modes can speak adeptly to present cultural circumstances, *Slash*’s subversion of typical narrative form is strikingly similar, in some ways, to the challenges that postmodern fiction poses to narrative traditions.

Armstrong again takes up contested cultural temporalities in a poem memorably titled “Trickster Time.” Based on a series of hassles that Armstrong and five of her writer friends experienced at the Vancouver airport, the poem describes how the group’s flight to New Zealand via Los Angeles was repeatedly cancelled, rebooked, victimized by computer glitches, and transferred between different airlines at the last minute (see Karin Beeler’s interview with Armstrong for details on the events that inspired the poem). The sequence of events creates the impression that the friends, who are “Cree Okanagan Nanaimo Salish Inuit and Mohawk” (1), are always late and rushing to catch up, or early and having to wait, and that being unsure of whether there is anything they can do to

control the situation they may as well submit to the ludicrous circumstances and endure them with grace and humour. In the first lines of the poem Armstrong personifies the chaos as the traditional trickster figure:

We saw trickster
there at the airport
only he wasn't raven form
coyote nanabush napi or wasakeja (1)

No, the trickster figure has taken on a new form, specially chosen for the occasion: “he looked just like one of them / behind the computers” (5). As he tap dances across luggage carousels and slides down escalator rails, trickster appears to take great pleasure in his success at preventing the friends from reaching the moment when they will actually board a plane. At the agent's computer terminal, “trickster bounces across the screen / laughing hysterically and keeping time / from moving” (2). The brilliant line break, where trickster's clock-like act of “keeping time” transforms into the *breakdown* of time's regular forward motion, speaks to the figure's ambiguous and contradictory status as both enabler and disabler, an icon of indigenous culture and a conspirator with colonialist power structures. Settler culture itself, which creates strict regulating mechanisms and then prevents the indigenous friends from actually accomplishing their goal, both keeps time and keeps time from moving.

When they are finally booked onto a new flight with time to spare, the friends compose themselves and slacken their pace:

we're not worried we can wait
we know there must be a reason
we can have the time to have a bite
the time to relax that's what we needed
boarding cards in hand we all sip coffee

no sign of trickster (3)

Still, they agree to pass through the U.S. customs screening “early this time just in case” (3), and sure enough, trickster returns – “tap tap tap tap” – at the moment the immigration agent pulls aside one member of the group. “Sorry you can’t go through sir,” the agent says. “The U.S. classifies you as an / undesirable alien” (4). A member of Armstrong’s group replies,

“What the hell, none in this party that are aliens. YOU all are
aliens don’t you remember THAT.”
but nobody’s face betrays the weak moment
tick tick tick tick more time passes
its hard to stay positive (4)

The contested label of “alien,” which the immigration agent tries to attach to the member of Armstrong’s group, is pointedly reversed; indigenous cultures can hardly be alien compared to more recently arrived settlers. And yet, the moment betrays a weakness; as time passes, the challenge to the dominant temporal frame and its entrenched structure of power appears futile. While the immigration agent finally concedes – “we will allow you a / temporary stop in L.A. on the way to New Zealand” (4) – the victory also reinforces the idea that the indigenous people are mere guests, temporary visitors whose passage must be subject to bureaucratic approval and strict timing.

As the poem draws to a close, Armstrong writes:

we six laugh running down the corridor
“So that’s what we needed the time for!”
time to clear the path
in good time
Indian time
the right time
trickster comes just in the nick of it (5)

Keeping time once again, trickster reveals himself to have orchestrated the eventual success of the group. The frustration of coping with the delays and obstructions of the dominant temporal structure is reframed as a necessary process that, in retrospect, was always leading towards a positive outcome.

Finally, an italicized note at the end of the poem casts normative temporality itself in an ironic light:

*Jeannette Armstrong recorded this on paper
somewhere in the air
between Vancouver and Aoteroa/New Zealand
over the international time line*

*sometime between yesterday and tomorrow
whichever suits you best as we seem to have lost
December 1, 1990, unexplainably
somewhere in the time zone she chooses that day
to set this in memory in thin air (5)*

Highlighting the precariousness of assumed structures of time, the note serves as a reminder that the apparently entrenched concepts of calendar dates, meridian lines, and standard time zones are in fact partial and arbitrary, framing them as inherently contradictory constructs that would be absurd to take too seriously. Even the current day's date, in the end, is something chosen and re-chosen to suit particular needs. Taking this choice upon herself, Armstrong deconstructs the authority of normative time by showing, effortlessly, that it has already deconstructed itself.

Thomas King, a writer who is variously described as Canadian, Cherokee, Greek, and American, frequently uses trickster figures to satirize settler-indigene relations in Canada, and, like Armstrong, he locates normative temporality as a particularly potent site for parody and resistance. In his short story "Coyote and the Enemy Aliens," as in

many of his other stories, King writes in the first-person voice of a narrator who speaks in a colloquial style as though the words are transcribed from oral storytelling:

Sometimes that Napioa comes by my good place and says, tell us a good story. So I do. Sometimes I tell those good stories from the Indian time. And sometimes I tell those good stories from the European time. Grown-up stories. Baby stories.

Sometimes I take a nap.

Sometimes I tell Coyote stories. Boy, you got to be careful with those Coyote stories. (50)

Are we to understand that Indian stories are “grown-up,” and European stories are childish? This would suggest a pointed reversal of the linear Imperial time that frames indigenous culture as underdeveloped and infantile. As soon as he has articulated an apparent distinction, though, between stories from “the Indian time” and stories from “the European time,” King’s narrator complicates the matter by introducing the notion of “Coyote stories,” implying that Coyote, the trickster, plays a role that lies somewhere in between or causes a blending of Indian and European modes. The confusion of different cultural frames of time is inherently trickster-like; it is something “you got to be careful with.” King tends to use humour to both conceal and reveal matters of serious social concern, and the apparently lighthearted warning to “be careful” with Coyote stories turns out later on to signal the dangers of Canadian state racism, not only towards indigenous peoples, but towards Japanese Canadians during the Second World War.

While the narrator warns his listeners of Coyote’s tricks, and often speaks directly to Coyote to caution him against crafty or foolish behaviour, the trickster figure is at the same time inherent within the narrator himself, who intentionally conjures up the trickster by choosing to “tell you a Coyote story” (50). This particular story, the narrator explains,

follows Coyote's journey west towards the narrator's house:

That was in European time . . . 1940. Maybe it was 1944. No, it was 1942.

Coyote comes to my house in 1941. (51, ellipses in original)

Like Armstrong's "unexplainable" calendar dates, King's intentional fooling with regards to the Gregorian year serves to make light of the very notion of a strictly delineated linear European timekeeping system. At the same time, the listing of dates over a five-year span of war is a reminder that the dispossession and internment of Japanese Canadians was a protracted affair. The arbitrary timing of any one particular act of dispossession during this long span makes the circumstances all the more terrifying. Working on behalf of the government, Coyote rounds up the Japanese Canadians, claiming that "This story is not a good Coyote story. This story is a good Canadian story" (58); trickery is not an accidental part of Canada's history, but is intrinsic to the nation's character. To his surprise, though, the RCMP then begin rounding up indigenous people and Coyote himself. Insofar as Coyote is aligned with Canadian duplicity, the quick shift of power suggests that the very notion of nationhood and its associated social structures is transitory, arbitrary, and subject to continuous flux. If Canadians of particular ethnic descent can be declared aliens at any given moment, then the concept of Canada is in turn vulnerable to temperamental changes that can occur at any time.

King's 1993 novel *Green Grass, Running Water* also satirizes and resists European temporality, focusing especially on the role of narrative in articulating competing notions of time. Like *Slash*, the novel blends indigenous and western storytelling modes; King's first-person narrator carries out an extended conversation with

Coyote that resists the closed shape typical of linear narratives, yet the story as a whole takes the form of a novel, the exemplary western written mode. This self-conscious negotiation with western narrative becomes a central point of inquiry, as the characters endlessly debate whether the story has begun correctly, is proceeding correctly, or will have to begin again. When a character known as the Lone Ranger tries to begin the narrative with western clichés such as “*Once upon a time . . .*” (7), his companions ask him to start again until, finally, he successfully launches the story with the words “Gha! [...] Higayv:ligé:i” (11), a phrasing that Jane Flick and Helen Hoy identify as “the ceremonial opening of storytelling in a Cherokee divining ceremony, divining for water and so in a sense for the future” (Flick 144). Flick goes on to note that “Higayv:ligé:i” specifically refers to First Woman or Star Woman, who falls from the sky before the creation of Turtle Island in a number of North American indigenous cosmologies (147). The importance of indigenous cultural forms for shaping the narrative becomes a central motif in the novel, and the means by which King seeks to undermine the dominance of western notions of narrative and time.

Temporal politics are at work, too, within a central conflict in the novel, the construction of the Grand Baleen Dam which promises to flood the home of Eli Stands Alone. In addition to imposing a very real physical danger, the dam serves as a lens to focus the dominant sense of temporality on the present (on the immediate expected benefit of electricity generation, lakeshore property creation, and financial profits), drawing attention away from the past and future issues necessary to indigenous and environmental justice. Even Charlie Looking Bear, who is paid to defend the dam

construction company against Eli's legal challenges, acknowledges that "once Duplessis started construction on the dam, nothing stopped it. Environmental concerns were cast aside. Questions about possible fault lines that ran under the dam were dismissed. Native land claims that had been in the courts for over fifty years were shelved" (100). Clifford Sifton, meanwhile, whose job is to return to Eli's house every day to ask Eli to relinquish possession of his property, sees the persistent legal challenge of indigenous treaty rights as an ongoing irritation. He complains to Eli that

because the government felt generous back in the last ice age, and made promises it never intended to keep, I have to come by every morning and ask the same stupid question. [...] Hell, Eli, those treaties aren't worth a damn. Government only made them for convenience. Who'd of guessed that there would still be Indians kicking around in the twentieth century. [...] You can't live in the past. My dam is part of the twentieth century. Your house is part of the nineteenth. (117, 119)

The notion that indigenous land ownership and treaty rights belong to a previous century which telescopes into "the last ice age" reflects the colonialist strategy of framing indigenous existence as hopelessly out of date, the relic of a bygone age. Sifton is one of several characters named after historical figures; Clifford Sifton was Minister of the Interior under Wilfrid Laurier, and advocated irrigation projects that led to the damming of rivers in southern Alberta. King's choice of names here, then, suggests that western colonizing strategies themselves have failed to evolve with the times.

King also juxtaposes the politics of western progress and indigenous outdatedness against the tensions of Canada-U.S. relations. When George snaps pictures of the traditional Sun Dance event despite being told that photography is not allowed, Eli exposes the camera's film, erasing the photographs. George shouts, "You can't believe in

this shit! [...] This is ice age crap! [...] Come on! It's the twentieth century" (321). The statement echoes George's earlier claim that the United States is superior to Canada because "Americans were modern, poised to take advantage of the future, to move ahead. Canadians were traditionalists, stuck in the past and unwilling to take chances" (134). While George does not give any thought to the relationship between the two comments, King is crafting a subtle reminder that the same methods of temporal discrimination Canada has used to disempower indigenous peoples can also belittle Canada itself.

With these insidious temporal politics at stake, the importance of King's self-conscious critique of dominant narrative structures becomes increasingly clear. Presenting alternative plotlines to the linear Imperial story is not enough; the very form of the storytelling, the way that beginnings are chosen, and the matter of who is allowed to frame the course of events, must be continuously examined and revised. As the narrator and other characters repeatedly reject the way the story has unfolded, they return again and again to new attempts at beginning. When Coyote asks, "How many more times do we have to do this?" the narrator replies, "Until we get it right" (194).

Near the end of the story, three cars (whose names, "the Nissan, the Pinto, and the Karmann-Ghia," echo the names of Columbus's ships, the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria) float mysteriously on the water and collide with the dam, destroying it and draining the human-made lake, while "[b]elow, in the valley, the water rolled on as it had for eternity" (346-47). Recalling that water has been present since the "beginning" of the story, the blockage of water behind the dam suggests that the construction project has served in a graceless and dangerous way to interrupt the flow of time itself; only through

the dam's destruction can the normal flow be renewed. This renewal is still incomplete, though, since a tour guide had earlier described the lake as "[t]he eleventh largest manmade lake in Alberta" (337); the drama that has played out at the Grand Baleen Dam is but one instance out of many. In another sense, just as the automobiles destroy the dam that stood as a symbol of indigenous disempowerment, King uses the western "vehicle" of the written novel form to dismantle and reshape the larger western narrative structures that have reinforced racialized temporalities, a project that must continuously be reworked, begun again, and applied to different situations.

In the final lines of the novel Coyote complains that "there is water everywhere," to which the narrator replies, "'That's true,' I says. 'And here's how it happened'" (360). Even the ending, then, is another beginning, reshaping the narrative into a circle of continuous renewal where the work of storymaking continues. Is it a coincidence that the Houghton Mifflin hardcover edition runs precisely 360 pages, echoing the shape of a complete circle in which any given point can serve as a beginning of the whole? King's insistence on continuous process as a necessary corrective to linear goal-based progress is visible as well in a memorable line when the old Indians are late arriving at the Sun Dance: "'We would have gotten here sooner,' said the Lone Ranger, 'but Coyote knew a short cut'" (318). Just as racialized temporality must be corrected through an emphasis on circularity, multiplicity, renewal, and process, the idea of a shortcut whose goal is to find the shortest possible straight line between two points serves ultimately as an impediment.

Early in the twenty-first century, one of the prominent voices in indigenous writing in Canada is that of Joseph Boyden. His first novel, *Three Day Road* (2005),

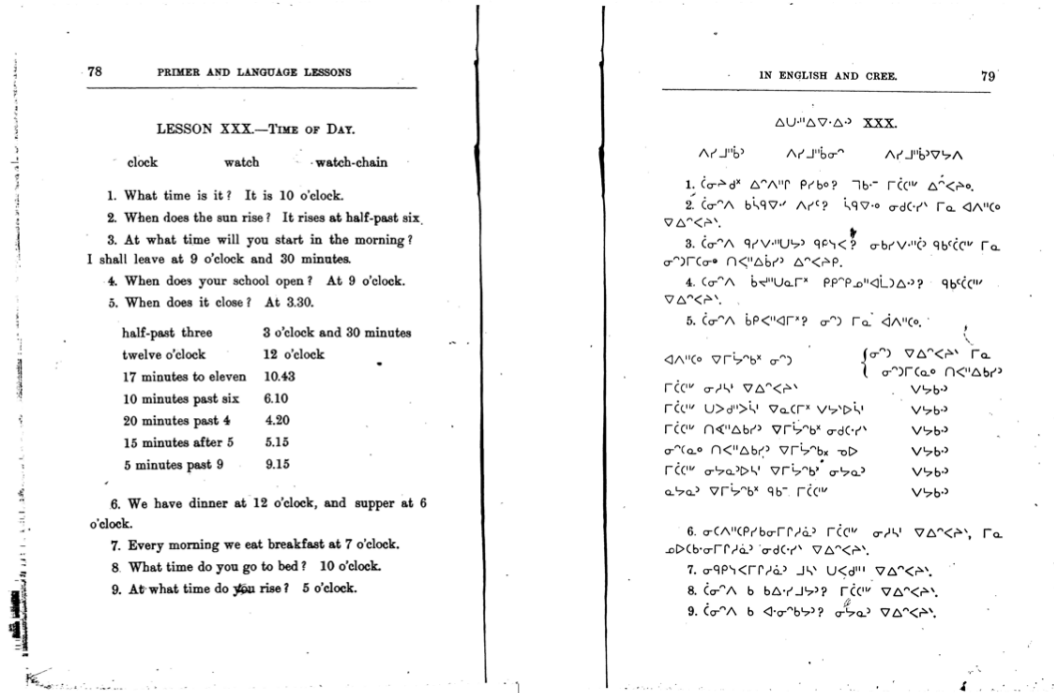
traces the lives of Xavier Bird and Elijah Whiskeyjack, two young Cree men who enlist in the Canadian army during the First World War. The politics of assimilation into western culture, symbolized monstrously through the soldiers' indoctrination into the violence of trench warfare, form a backdrop to the relationship between Elijah, a former residential school student who speaks English fluently and becomes popular among the white soldiers, and Xavier, who is much more hesitant to engage with western military culture. As the stakes of assimilation grow into a choice between life and death, Boyden repeatedly frames Xavier's uneasy relationship with western culture in terms of clashing notions of time. Anxious over the dangers of the battle, Xavier says,

To keep my head clear, I ask Elijah to teach me more English.
"Good day, sir," Elijah says. "Do you know the time?" (58)

Fluency in clock time and punctuality occurs to Elijah as the first, most appropriate use for the English language, so that centering one's perspective on the hour of the clock becomes a metaphor for western culture as a whole, and a specific site of potential resistance for Xavier.

Elijah's association of clock time with English lessons has a historical basis tied not only to the missionary presence in indigenous communities that I have already mentioned, but also to the residential school system. While Boyden does not make any such specific reference, his writing recalls educational texts such as the Reverend E.B. Glass's volume *Primer and Language Lessons in English and Cree*, circa 1890. Intended as an instructional volume for speakers of the Cree language, the book offers basic English phrases with Cree syllabic translations on the facing pages. Lesson XXX, called "Time of Day," begins with the question, "What time is it?" and proceeds into a

discussion of clock hours and the times of day associated with typical (i.e. ideologically-based) components of everyday life such as schooling and working hours.



E.B. Glass, *Primer and Language Lessons in English and Cree* (78-79)

Regardless of whether Boyden had such a specific example in mind, he carefully frames western models of timekeeping as central to the ideological goals of assimilationism. Later in the story, Xavier increasingly focuses on western notions of time as encapsulations of the war-driven culture that threatens to absorb him. “I try to figure out what day today is in the English way of keeping time,” he says. “It is high summer, but what day, what month? I slip into a light sleep, remembering that in the way that they keep time, it has been a year now that Elijah and I have been here” (223).

Reflecting on the soldiers' marking of Christmas and New Year's Eve, he muses,

This new year that begins they call 1918. I know that this is how many years have passed since they say their god was born as a man.

This sadness and reflection rubs off on me. I do not like their way of keeping time. Their way is based loosely on the moons but is as orderly as the officers try to keep the trenches, full of meaningless numbers and different names for days that are all the same anyways. I worked it out and I have been with the *wemistikoshiw* twenty-seven full moons. I've been in the battlefields for nineteen full moons. It is a long time, and there is no end in sight for this war they have created. (307-08)

These passages serve a defamiliarizing function, framing western temporality as partial and arbitrary, just as the Cree label *wemistikoshiw* challenges the ex-nomination of white people, denying their ability to frame themselves as unnamed and therefore natural. The passages also suggest a deep correspondence between the linear time-counting model and the apparent western inclination towards perpetual warfare; the strict orderliness of numerical days mirrors the systematic efficiency of the military, denying flexibility and insisting that progress is being made. Worrying that the military culture is coming to define his own existence, Xavier says, "In the dark of night I think that my life has been divided into three for me by these *wemistikoshiw*. There was my life before them and their army, there is my life in their army, and, if I live, there will be my life after I have left it and returned home" (245-46).

However, the image of time and life being divided into three parts also carries a more hopeful sense of belonging and renewal. Niska, Xavier's aunt who is trained as a medicine woman, has impressed upon him the importance of threes in Cree culture, and the belief that "we will all someday walk the three-day road" that marks the transition from life into death (246). When Niska receives word that Xavier has been killed in

battle, she plans her own three-day voyage from her home in the Ontario bush to the train station to collect the wounded Elijah, a passage that raises temporal confusions similar to the ones Xavier has experienced. Niska says, “I had Joseph explain to me how the *wemistikoshiw* calendar worked, what month I was to be there, and I made careful preparations to journey by canoe to that town where Elijah would arrive” (5). At the station, though, she discovers that it is Xavier, not Elijah, who has returned to Canada alive. Seeing that he is badly injured, traumatized, and addicted to morphine, she begins to travel with him back home along the same three-day path, a reverse voyage through which Boyden hints that Xavier is undergoing a passage not only back into traditional Cree territory, but also away from the deathly spectre of war – a transition that Elijah never makes, having been assimilated through the residential school system and the military into western language, temporality, and violence.

Significantly, as she leaves the train station behind them, Niska reveals an alternative model of timekeeping to the *wemistikoshiw* notion of calendars and clocks: “We do not get far,” she says, “before the sun lets me know that it is time to prepare a camp” (8). This simple acknowledgement of solar time-reckoning serves as a reminder that non-western temporal emphases exist, with their own centres of accuracy and legitimacy. The importance of this idea is expanded as Niska’s primary role in Xavier’s life becomes clear: she is a storyteller, who enfolds her ailing nephew in recollections of his youth and her own upbringing, reminding him of the culture into which he was born, and suggesting an alternative mode of existence to the complete assimilation that ended Elijah’s life in the war. The division of time into three parts, which threatened to define

Xavier's life in *wemistikoshiw* terms, is now re-appropriated into Cree culture, and Xavier's three-day journey becomes his rebirth into a continuing familial cycle: the novel ends with a hazy vision of his own children, to be born in the years to come.

Lee Maracle's 2002 novel *Daughters are Forever* also articulates the temporal disruptions that have accompanied the colonization of indigenous populations, but while Boyden's investigation of the conflicts associated with clashing notions of time acknowledges the forms of agency that can emerge, Maracle focuses more intensively on how a concentrated process of grappling with past and passing time can allow for time itself to become a productive force once more. The protagonist, Marilyn, is a Salish social worker in late twentieth-century Vancouver, but the narrative opens with a description of the beginning of creation and the first emergence of human life and culture through the productive energies of Westwind and Sky Woman. This idealized society of Turtle Islanders is then shattered by the arrival of hungry, diseased "newcomers" who slaughter and scalp countless members of the indigenous population for hundreds of years, leaving the survivors shocked and immobilized. "Women," Maracle writes, "the keepers of cultural survival, passed on stillness as the ultimate way to protect their daughters" (22). These women begin to be abused by their own men, who in turn are filled with shame:

It needs to be expressed, pushed up and out so they may sing again, but five centuries of "Hush, don't cry" holds the expression of their shame still. Under it lies a dangerous grief. [...] Their world has lost its future. Cut off from considering their past, they list in the momentary context of the present. [...]

They mark time. Time is the enemy of the dispirited. Those who dare not make use of it mark time for death, for murder. These men wander aimlessly, killing time in small pieces. (24-25)

Only after this introductory section does the narrative pick up the story of Marilyn's present day life as a social worker who is haunted by her fractured relationships with her grown-up daughters even as she helps other indigenous mothers whose children have been apprehended by child services. This narrative feat of establishing many centuries of context for the present situation affords a radically long historical perspective and frames the crises of abuse in native communities – child abuse, spousal abuse, and alcohol abuse – not as the result of innate characteristics or simple personal failures, but as the ongoing consequences of five hundred years of colonization.

The experience of time for Marilyn – and, the narrative suggests, for indigenous populations at large – is one of paralysis, confrontation, confusion, and perhaps madness. As she travels the country giving speeches on the need for indigenous communities to engage in the long process of healing themselves, Marilyn questions her own work: “Her presentations seemed stupid just now. Time was killing families while she trod the lecture circuit attempting to stop the clock and turn around an impossible situation conjured from attitude, condition and history” (57). Just as the shame-filled men in the introductory section “wander aimlessly, killing time,” time in turn becomes a violent opponent responsible for the ongoing destruction. Meanwhile, Marilyn's daughters Cat and Lindy are constantly anxious about their mother's well-being, causing Marilyn to lament the reversal of the generational temporality that is key to parental caregiving: “*Oh gawd, my children are taking care of me; it should be the other way around. How the hell did I ever get things so upside-down?*” (63). She begins to experience episodes of “gapping,” where intense memories of the past threaten “her capacity to differentiate between past and

current time. Today, yesterday, tomorrow all melded into one another” (64). Driven by an awareness that the “separation of moments in time defines sanity,” Marilyn becomes obsessed with her inability to stabilize her own grasp on time (64).

In the late stages of the novel, influenced by the energies of Westwind and her own reflections, Marilyn invites Cat and Lindy to her home, picks up the wooden spoon with which she had hit them as children after their father’s abandonment, and breaks it in half, saying, “I should have done that years ago” (233). She hugs Cat and Lindy, who cry and break the spoon into smaller pieces. This moment serves as the initiation of a form of familial truth and reconciliation, and allows Marilyn to appreciate the timeless quality of family relations: “The timelessness made her feel forever alive – floating in space above time. Forever being has no beginning and is without end; it is about being. It comforted and encouraged her. She felt safe” (239). Time shifts from a site of confrontation, limitation, and pain to a source of renewal, eternity, and comfort. In the final scenes Cat announces that she is pregnant – a sign of futurity and regeneration – and the three women decide to begin family therapy sessions to continue the healing process. They walk through Vancouver’s Marpole neighbourhood toward the point where the river meets the sea, seeking what Marilyn’s grandmother had described as “the ocean of love we all swam through before we arrived here” (246). As they approach this intersection of waters, Lindy and Cat reveal that a seer and healer named Dolly lives nearby. Dolly, Cat explains, “helped us to find ourselves when we were teenagers. Oddly enough, she helped us to carry on loving you, despite all the memories” (248). Overcome with tears, Marilyn embraces her own shame: “It was a good feeling, this shame. She let it sink in. It was the

shame of knowing there was no excuse for what she'd done" (248). As Dolly's house comes into view, Marilyn recalls one of her grandmother's stories, where a lake says to a distressed woman, "Sometimes to go forward you have to go back to the beginning" (250). The novel ends with the remark that "Dolly's house would be a kind of beginning for Marilyn and her girls" (250). This place where the rush and turmoil of what appears to be a unidirectional linear flow of water rejoins its deep and eternal source symbolizes the family's return to a regenerative relationship with time. In the sense that Maracle's narrative attempts to articulate the broader experiences of indigenous populations, this sequence also suggests that only by attending to the origins of the current situation – only by acknowledging the shamefulness of both imposed and self-inflicted histories – can new beginnings and renewed origins be embraced. A long view of time that acknowledges cultural and personal traumas while simultaneously contextualizing them within broader histories allows time to reveal its productive capacities once more.

The Ongoing Process of Reshaping

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which "hopes to guide and inspire First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and Canadians in a process of truth and healing leading toward reconciliation and renewed relationships based on mutual understanding and respect," appears somewhat divided between the above description of reconciliation as a process "leading toward" a definitive outcome, and the idea of reconciliation as "an *ongoing* individual and collective process" ("About Us," my

emphasis). Commenting on Stephen Harper's public apology to those affected by the residential schools, an apology that describes the abuses as belonging to a past "chapter" in Canadian history, Matthew Dorrell argues that "the construction of the statement of apology as a narrative of progress confines the abuses of the residential schools system to the past while removing the contextual information needed to understand the schools system as a critical component of a larger and continuing colonial project" (29-30); what is needed, then, is "a conceptual move from reconciliation to reconciling, from a finalizing process seeking closure to one which privileges an open-ended, ongoing dialogue between and amongst individuals and communities" (30). The partial and gradual infiltration of nonlinear temporal modes into the cultural discourse, visible in comments such as these, offers the possibility of a corrective to temporal discrimination, and encourages examination of actual ongoing consequences rather than an all too easy reliance on the metanarrative of linear progressive history.

Sioui's comment that "[a]t this moment, Canadian multiculturalism cannot have its full meaning, because Canadian thinking is still profoundly linear and the concept of multiculturalism does not agree with linear thinking" (107), recognizes the barriers to alternative visions of temporality, while holding out hope that temporal modes centred on indigenous cultures have at least the potential to reshape dominant discourse over time. Taiaiake Alfred, too, anticipates a broad social movement that eventually "will transcend Euroamerican notions of time and place that constrain the recognition of Onkwehonwe identities and rights to those who act in ways and live in places sanctioned by the state" (206). To the extent that they envision a theoretically more just future, such predictions

reveal that the notion of linear goal-setting, in the specific rather than the metanarrative sense, has real purchase even within a conception of time that seeks to operate outside of the normative mode.

Regardless of whether their authorship is traceable through indigenous lineage, thoughtful works of literature not only bear witness to the limitations of a singular view of time, but contribute towards the gradual and ongoing reshaping of social temporal discourse that Sioui, Alfred, and Dorrell advocate. Such a moment occurs in Eden Robinson's novel *Monkey Beach* when the character Jimmy, who believes that giving crows "things to steal" will bring good luck, leaves "an old run-down pocket watch on our porch." A crow named Spotty picks up the watch and places it carefully on a road where it is run over by a car. Spotty then "picked at the exposed innards of the pocket watch. She gathered up some of the pieces and flew away" (125). Like Thomas King, Robinson uses an automobile, that exemplary image of progress, to smash an icon of western temporality whose pieces can then be salvaged and reshaped into something new. Temporal discourse that is willing to disassemble and repurpose itself can help not only to resist temporal discrimination, but also to contextualize Canada's present-day existence within longstanding issues of contested indigeneity, ownership, and priority. Incorporating silenced temporalities into normal discourse allows the everyday language that has been complicit in temporal hegemony to transform itself, embracing a consciousness of its own embattled histories. In the final chapter of this project I will look more broadly at the possibilities of temporal reshaping in Canadian literature.

Chapter Five: Disrupting and Remaking Constructions of Time

“It becomes clear that I must destroy my watch, that false professor of time, and free its tiny slave.”

Don McKay (“Quartz Crystal” 15)

“What is time, she thought, but two hands shaking us from sleep.”

Sheila Watson (101)

By now it has become apparent that literary texts have often sought not only to witness and represent temporal power relations, but also to question, test, and reshape the relationships between time, power, and everyday life. From the leap of faith that Panych’s unnamed man takes in order to escape his confinement in the days of the week, to Brian Bartlett’s poetic speaker who tries to banish his infuriating clock to the closet, to Jeannette Armstrong and Thomas King’s reshaping of western narrative temporal sequence – literature and art have demonstrated a profound ability to articulate the often invisible impact of dominant temporal constructs and to rethink and repurpose the cultural mechanisms of time. In this final chapter I offer several case studies of works that deserve to be recognized as iconic in their self-conscious negotiations with the role of time in social interactions and their productive dismantling and reconstruction of dominant temporal codes. These texts reveal the ways in which normative time is a makeshift apparatus always on the verge of collapse, and indicate that while the construction of new, more just models of time is always possible, no temporal structure is

free from the politics of social power relations.

One of the themes across many works that question structures of time is the idea that moments of acute crisis – whether personal, social, or ecological – are especially amenable to temporal disruption; crises serve as potent sites for examining the limitations of dominant temporality with fresh eyes and for developing renewed forms of temporal experience. When Yann Martel's protagonist in *Life of Pi* finds himself hopelessly adrift at sea in a small lifeboat with only a deadly Bengal tiger for company – a crisis par excellence – the situation causes him, inevitably, to recognize the arbitrariness and fallibility of normative timekeeping:

I survived because I made a point of forgetting. My story started on a calendar day—July 2nd, 1977—and ended on a calendar day—February 14th, 1978—but in between there was no calendar. I did not count the days or the weeks or the months. Time is an illusion that only makes us pant. I survived because I forgot even the very notion of time.

What I remember are events and encounters and routines, markers that emerged here and there from the ocean of time and imprinted themselves on my memory. (212)

Only his catastrophic removal from the normal measurement of time causes Pi to realize the extent to which the everyday counting of days and weeks is “an illusion that only makes us pant.” Still, though, he believes that this counting process is synonymous with time itself, that ceasing to keep track of the calendar is equivalent to forgetting “the very notion of time,” an assumption that proves erroneous in the next paragraph where the passage of time clearly remains in place in his consciousness: Pi now begins to measure time through *events* that serve, like a form of calendar, to differentiate one moment from the next. While he has proclaimed himself free from the Crusoe-like act of counting the days, he now counts another form of temporal sequence. A terrible crisis has revealed the

limitations of normative time and has created the opportunity for a new form of time-reckoning to come about, even if Pi is not fully conscious of his own temporal innovation. What is more, Pi's form of event time, while spontaneously constructed, echoes the everyday experience through which remembered events *always* shape our own personal timelines. Even while Pi's temporal adventure dismantles normative time, it also serves as a reminder that the strictly numerical counting mechanisms which appear to rule our lives were never omnipotent but exist always in an ongoing negotiation with the subjective experiences of time that remain central to our survival. While the particular circumstances of this crisis are unique – as the maritime investigator who interviews Pi about his ordeal writes, “*Very few castaways can claim to have survived so long at sea as Mr. Patel, and none in the company of an adult Bengal tiger*” (354) – its consequences have a universalizing tendency. The texts to which I now turn also engage familiar experiences, but enact temporal reconstructions through crises that more directly mirror the prevalent social anxieties of war, poverty, colonialism, and civilizational collapse.

Harrison and Findley: The Temporal Disruptions of War

Since its first publication in 1928, Charles Yale Harrison's novel *Generals Die in Bed* has been controversial for its disturbing representations of gruesome violence and unethical military practices during the First World War. While the graphic depictions of death and survival tend to garner the most commentary, the novel's representations of temporal disorientation are also closely tied to the portrayal of the chaos of battle. When

the unnamed Canadian narrator first arrives in the trenches, he recalls the brief and disconcerting advice with which his military superiors have equipped him: “The shriek of the shell, the instructor in trench warfare said, was no warning because the shell traveled faster than its sound. First, he had said, came the explosion of the shell—then came the shriek and then you hear the firing of the gun” (22-23). As Roger Hyman has pointed out, this passage reveals not only that no precautions are possible against the shelling attacks that can occur at any moment, but also that the war itself disrupts the normal flow of causality, twisting and reversing the supposedly unshakeable notions of cause, effect, and sequence. Even the verb tense shifts unexpectedly partway through the instructor’s explanation. Like Pi Patel, Harrison’s narrator becomes lost in time, discovering that the perpetual chaos of battle renders normative temporal measurements meaningless and arbitrary. “We do not know what day it is,” he says. “We have lost count. It makes no difference whether it is Sunday or Monday. It is merely another day—a day on which one may die” (27).

In a particularly telling passage, we learn that even though the military transfers its troops to and from the front lines in accordance with strict schedules, the usual seven-day weekly cycle has been foreshortened into a six-day cycle that confounds the expected rhythm: “Six days in reserve near the light artillery, six days in supports, six days in the front trenches—and then out to rest. Five or six days out on rest and then back again; six days, six days, rest” (41). While the seven-day week is itself an arbitrary duration, it has long been normalized through millennia of deeply entrenched social and religious expectations; the disruption of this cycle, then, throws the mind’s temporal orientation

into disarray, as a six-day cycle appears nearly impossible to categorize, to align against recurring weekdays, or to keep track of through any meaningful context. What is more, the absence of the seventh day – a day traditionally associated with rest, recuperation, family socialization, and communion with God – suggests that the scheduling of the battlefield is specifically designed to excise any possibility of recovery and to deny the existence of any higher form of justice, wisdom, and redemption. While the troops are supposedly sent for “rest” at recurring intervals, the continuous alternation of these intermissions with periods of intense battle where death is always an instant away turns the cyclical schedule into a kind of torture; even the moments of rest serve only as opportunities to anticipate and dread the next bombardment. “In and out, in and out,” the narrator says, “endlessly, sweating, endlessly, endlessly [...]. Somewhere it is summer, but here are the same trenches. The trees here are skeletons holding stubs of stark, shell-amputated arms towards the sky. No flowers grow in this waste land” (41). While many works of literature ask us to interrogate and even resist normative sequences of time such as the seven-day week, Harrison’s writing reveals that the chaotic, violent disruption of normative temporality can be a shattering experience. The corruption of the patterns of daily life even extends to the soldiers’ literal inability to cleanse themselves of the grime of war. Preparing for his “quarterly bath,” the narrator says, “It is three months since we have been under hot water. [...] We strip and stand waiting for the water to be turned on. Fifteen seconds under the steaming water and then out. We soap ourselves, covering our bodies with a thick lather. Fifteen seconds under the water again for rinsing” (96).

During one scene, the temporal disarray of the war leads the soldiers to question

their circumstances. After being packed into a convoy of lorries, the men are driven back and forth for countless hours in a kind of surreal timelessness with no destination, no sleep, and no food. As they watch an ammunition dump “blowing itself up in sporadic explosions,” they begin for the first time to contemplate how the war itself must create enormous financial profits. Given the huge cost of the shells, even “a little barrage” must cost millions of dollars (142). “And I’ll bet,” says one soldier, “somebody is making a profit on those shells whether they are fired at the Germans or whether they just blow up” (142). The same is true with shoes, uniforms, food supplies, rifles, ships, and airplanes. The people making these profits, the soldiers conclude, are “all praying to God tonight for the war to last for ever while we’re riding in this god-damned lorry” (143). The suspension of time that creates this political awakening, though, is soon interrupted, and the soldiers once again find themselves in thrall to the endless machinations of the war.

Even when Harrison’s protagonist is away from the battlefield, the temporal disruptions of war are visible in the foreshortening or prolonging of various activities whose regularity would normally be taken for granted. Commenting on a fellow soldier named Brown who is “the only married man in the section,” the narrator says, “Two weeks before the battalion left Montreal a girl whom he knew back home came to the barracks and they got married. He obtained permission from the colonel to live outside. They took a furnished room somewhere and for two weeks Brown enjoyed complete and absolute married bliss” (34). While the narrator notes that the soldiers have a tendency to hire prostitutes whenever possible – these highly temporary physical relationships being the only ones available – Brown’s experience reveals that even a marriage, an ostensibly

permanent relationship, is compressed by the war into a fleeting, provisional affair. Later, while on leave in London, the narrator hires a woman named Gladys to move in with him for the duration of his stay; the ten days that they spend together are nearly equal to the amount of time Brown had spent with his wife. In war, we learn, all relationships are temporary – a point that is reinforced continually among the soldiers themselves as they are killed off one by one. As the title of the novel suggests, only the highest-ranking military officials are likely to experience longevity.

I have mentioned the temporal disruption that Timothy Findley's protagonist Robert Ross experiences when he is sexually assaulted in *The Wars*. Like Harrison, Findley suggests that the temporal dislocations associated with war occur both on and off the battlefield; as the title of Findley's novel implies, war is not a singular occurrence confined to a bounded space of military conflict, but is a multiplicitous phenomenon that pervades many aspects of social existence. A hint of the unconfined nature of war occurs at the beginning of the novel where Findley establishes the frame narrative of a present-day researcher – “you” – who is poring through an archive of news articles and photographs to learn about Robert Ross. “Spread over table tops,” he writes, “a whole age lies in fragments underneath the lamps. *The war to end all wars*. All you can hear is the wristwatch on your arm” (3). As the insistent ticking of the watch suggests, those who conceived of the Great War as the “war to end all wars” were sorely mistaken; time keeps moving, and along with it the human propensity for violence and domination. And just as the news clippings appear to splinter the historical era of the war into pieces, so too is the present moment always fractured by the biases and conflicts inherent in subjectivity.

Although she never enters the official battlefield herself, Robert's mother becomes particularly vulnerable to temporal dislocation. Already devastated by the death of her hydrocephalic daughter, she soon learns of Robert's decision to go to war. "Mrs Ross stared at her empty glass," Findley writes. "How long had it been empty? Hours? Minutes? Years?" (23). Once Robert has gone overseas she loses hope of ever seeing him again, and her visits to church, far from consoling her, become protracted trials of rote sequence: "They litanized. They sat down—they stood up—they sang—they sat down—they knelt. *God this and God that and Amen*" (53). When she reads that the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa have burned down, Mrs. Ross is "impressed by the fact that when the bells in the centre tower fell they were in the process of striking twelve o'clock—but had only tolled eleven times when they crashed to the ground. She wrote in the margin alongside this information—'*No more midnight.*' It was like a prayer" (152). With the recent death of her daughter and the expected death of her son, Mrs. Ross's psychological clock has metaphorically been tolling midnight for a long time – she is in the darkest period of despair. Her wish here is that the stopping of Canada's most iconic physical clock could somehow correspond to the end of her mental anguish; however, the image also inevitably suggests a freezing of time at the moment of greatest distress, a melancholic fixation on the darkness that will never become light. When Mrs. Ross receives the news several months later that Robert has indeed gone missing in action, she sits, nearly lifeless, at the bottom of the staircase, and discovers that she has actually gone blind. At this moment Findley writes that "In the distance, the traffic on Yonge Street and Bloor Street rumbled and clattered. Everyone was going home. All the clocks were

striking” (205). In other words, her symbolic paralysis within time has not stopped the inexorable progress of wartime devastation any more than it has stopped the city’s everyday mechanical timepieces or the rush hour traffic taking “everyone” (except Robert and his fellow soldiers) home. All of these processes continue to operate, like the researcher’s wristwatch decades later.

Meanwhile, in the war itself – which now serves both as a literal battlefield and as a metaphor for the “wars” that penetrate all aspects of life – Robert himself experiences increasingly devastating forms of temporal disruption. The heightened intensity of each moment on the front lines is made clear when we learn that shells at Verdun are fired “at the rate of 100,000 rounds per hour” in a bombardment that lasts “for twelve hours” (91). The combination of instantaneous death lurking behind each new fraction of a second, and the exhausting prolonged duration of the intensity, inevitably take a heavy toll on Robert and the other soldiers. As Juliet d’Orsey, who meets Robert during one of his leaves, comments to the researcher many years later, “I know ‘the bomb’ is terrible. But if the bomb falls, we all die together. In the war you had to face it day after day—week after week—month after month—year after year. Every day another friend” (115).

When Robert somehow survives a particularly destructive explosion, Findley writes, “He had no idea how long it had been since the mines went off, but it must have been hours. (In fact, it was twelve minutes.)” (125) This temporal telescoping, which echoes Mrs. Ross’s experience staring into her symbolic empty glass, also joins a disruption of causality that closely matches Harrison’s description of shells that move faster than sound. “There was a lot of noise,” Findley writes, “but none of it seemed to be

connected with what one saw. The driven, ceaseless pounding of the guns (from both sides now) had nothing to do with the bursting of the shells and the bursting of the shells had nothing to do with the thudding of the earth beneath one's feet. Everything was out of sync" (126). War has become the ultimate desynchronizing force, tearing normal experience apart into a perpetual temporal chaos. In this section of the book the usual numbered chapter divisions are replaced by headings that list the current clock time: *4.25 a.m.*, *5.30 a.m.*, *6.10 a.m.*, and so on. The perfect mechanical regularity of the clock throws the temporal chaos of the battle into even sharper relief, and the clock's sheer blindness to the psychological anguish and temporal telescoping that the soldiers are experiencing serves as a heightened reminder that clock time always diverges radically from subjective experience. As Lorraine York writes, "The rhythm of these sections powerfully suggests the way that time alters in times of crisis," even while "[...] the almost obsessive attention to these ticking minutes (see the headings: '4 a.m.', '4.25 a.m.', '5.30 a.m.' ...) reproduces the very rhythm of World War I: the slow rhythms of trench warfare, where years of battle could result in a gain or loss of only a few feet" (42). The temporal madness continues as newly invented flame throwers illuminate the night while smoking debris obscures the sun: "One day bled into the next. They melded. Day and night became inseparable—the nights lit up with the flames of a terrible new weapon and the days impaled in smoke. The ground was on fire" (146-47).

This gruelling spectre of violently disfigured yet inexorably continuing time explains the peculiar choice of similes when Findley writes that "Robert's footsteps and the water oozing from the wrung-out earth fell into puddles loud as clocks" (132). It also

explains an event that perplexes the young Juliet, who recalls that Robert “*would throw things down and break them on the ground. He broke his watch that way. I don’t know why*” (174). His symbolic destruction of the watch is almost immediately neutralized, though, when his lover Barbara buys him a new one (184); like his mother who prays unsuccessfully for no more midnight, Robert is unable to break the shackles of time. The fact that he acquires this new timekeeping device as his period of convalescence nears its end also highlights the looming inevitability of his return to the front lines, where, despite the many agonizing weeks of battle, “Nothing had been won” (197).

Installed in the trenches once more (and receiving no leave of absence after the sexual assault that occurs during his return to the front), Robert finds that he is “always a part of a general counter-movement—like a gigantic conveyor belt that ran between the front and Bailleul—back and forward and forward and back. [...] Back and forward—forward and back. It was just a muddy circus and sometimes Robert hardly knew which way he went” (199). The mechanical sequence of motions mirrors the rote litanizing in Mrs. Ross’s church, suggesting that both the military and religious institutions require a similar form of cold, automatic repetition; the unforgiving demands of the “conveyor belt” limit Robert to eight hours’ sleep in three days (201).

In the novel’s climactic scenes, Robert disobeys orders in an effort to save a group of horses and mules who are about to be caught in a bombardment. The resulting confrontation – forty soldiers pursue Robert, surround him when he hides in a barn, and then set fire to the building when he refuses to surrender – horribly burns and disfigures Robert, so that even Major Mickle, who had led the pursuit, “said a prayer for Robert

Ross—and the prayer was for a quick death” (212). But just as the war itself is a protracted affair that never seems to reach a conclusion, Robert survives, blind and bedridden, for another six years. Marian Turner, the nurse who takes care of him, recalls her own despair when she sees Robert as a representative of the perpetual devastation of the war itself: “[T]hat night—surrounded by all that dark—and all those men in pain—and the trains kept bringing us more and more and more—and the war was never, never, never going to end—that night, I thought: *I am ashamed to be alive*. I am ashamed of *life*” (215). She quietly offers to administer an overdose of morphine to allow Robert to die, but, she recalls,

he said: “Not yet.” *Not yet*. Do you see? He might have said “No.” He might’ve said “never.” He might’ve said “Yes.” But he said “not yet.” There, in those two words, in a nutshell—you have the essence of Robert Ross. And perhaps the essence of what it is to be alive. (216)

The human desire to carry on even for a little while longer despite the pain of mortality becomes a small life-affirming beacon amidst the horror of the wars. The quotation from Euripides that Findley offers as an epigraph at the beginning of the novel – “*Never that which is shall die*” – speaks to the ability of memory and subjectivity to keep symbolically alive those people and events from times past; together with Robert’s statement, “Not yet,” the epigraph attempts, in however small a way, to recognize within human life the same quality of perseverance that the rest of the novel associates with the wars themselves. If violence is never-ending, it is only because humanity itself, with all its power of life and renewal, is also perpetually present.

The notion that those who sacrifice their lives in war will continue to live symbolically for all time is continually reinforced in popular rhetorical responses to

wartime deaths, the most prevalent example in Canada being John McCrae's poem "In Flanders Fields," where dead soldiers continue to speak to the living, urging "you" to carry the torch and "Take up our quarrel with the foe" (lines 11, 10). McCrae's words are recited by Canadian school children each Remembrance Day, and have been granted the endorsement of inclusion on the Canadian ten-dollar bill. Unlike Findley's writing, such officially sanctioned rhetoric conceals the brutality of what it means for lives to be cut short by war, and reinforces the acceptance of a singular vision in which the future will continue to be determined by entrenched narratives of good fighting evil. Similar formulations of the immortality of soldiers are visible at the National War Memorial in Ottawa, where several large metal panels are engraved with carefully selected words from Virgil's *Aeneid*: "No day will ever erase you from the memory of time." In the same plaza, a memorial plaque quotes Governor General Adrienne Clarkson's eulogy for the unknown soldier: "*This unknown soldier was not able to live out his allotted span of life to contribute to his country. But in giving himself totally through duty, commitment, love and honour he has become part of us forever. As we are part of him.*"

One function that this wartime rhetoric of eternal remembrance performs is the obscuring of the highly present-oriented, reactionary approaches often embodied in wartime political measures. Borrowing Jerome Binde's concept of "emergency time," Henry Giroux argues that by promoting urgent actions in response to perceived threats during times of war, governments and other organizations can encourage the adoption of a short-term view of time which, "under the imperatives of utter necessity and pragmatism eschews long-term appraisals" (8). Such a temporality is "detached from a

sense of public deliberation, critical citizenship, and civic engagement,” and in the context of the United States “provides the conditions in which Americans can be asked to spy on each other, dissent can be viewed as un-American, and dissenters can be subjected to possible internment” (7-8). The emergency internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II, as well as the use after 9/11 of so-called security certificates to detain people who are accused of terrorism indefinitely and for reasons that remain secret even to the accused, indicate that such reactionary responses are by no means restricted to the United States. “Against this notion of emergency time,” Giroux writes, “educators, cultural workers, and others need to posit a notion of public time” (9). By slowing down reactionary responses and fostering “a culture of questioning,” public time “provides a conception of democracy that is never complete and determinate but constantly open to different understandings of the contingency of its decisions, mechanisms of exclusions, and operations of power” (9). While it grapples with the notion of a culture of questioning, *The Wars* does not offer a simple endorsement of the benefits of public time; Robert’s refusal to adhere to the immediate directives of the military operation is perhaps heroic, yet leads to his disfigurement, disrepute, and death. Instead, by bearing witness to the fragmentation of time brought about by violence and domination, the novel emphasizes the human cost of engaging in literal and figurative wars, opening new questions about the limitations of *everyday* structures of time and power.

Clock Bomb: Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*

In his 1987 novel *In the Skin of a Lion*, Michael Ondaatje brings together several of the key issues I have been discussing throughout this dissertation: the way in which conceptualizations of time form the mechanism for the articulation of story; the politics of hegemonic representations of time through language and other cultural forms; the conflict between identity as a continuous process of negotiation and identity as a fixed characteristic defined by past events; and the “fit,” or lack thereof, between personal and collective chronotopes. Through both its formal structure and particular events, the novel questions the processes by which normative understandings of time are constructed, insists that even deeply entrenched models of time are fragile and incomplete, and explores both the possibilities and the pitfalls of dismantling established forms of time-reckoning.

Patrick, the protagonist who struggles to survive working-class life in 1930s Toronto, encounters people whose identities shift from one moment to the next – who wear different types of figurative skins – so that the metaphor suggested in the novel’s title grows to speak to the performative aspects of identity. This notion is especially evident in Alice, a former nun who reinvents herself by taking a new name and becoming a stage actress, dressing up as a doll puppet so convincingly that Patrick cannot distinguish between the living Alice and the actual puppets, which themselves “no longer looked like puppets but relaxed humans” (120). Perplexed over Alice’s performances, Patrick “can never conceive how she leaps from her true self to her other true self” (153); whichever skin Alice wears at a given moment is her real skin. After her death, Patrick speaks her name, reflecting that “only a dead name is permanent” (165). The idea that

identity is a shifting construct rather than a permanent characteristic expands, through the course of the story, to a reading of social structures of all kinds; if a person's identity can change over time, so too can collective patterns of language, history, and power.

The ability for the characters to shape their own identities, though, is obstructed in two important ways. Patrick reflects that “the story,” by which he seems to mean both the past events through which people define themselves, and the inevitable march of time, is “like a tired child tugging us on, not letting us converse with ease, sleeping on our shoulder so it is difficult to embrace the person we love” (159); the limits to the ongoing negotiation of identity are built into the workings of human memory and the flow of time itself. The second factor in the obstruction of self-made identity is the oppression of immigrants and the working classes by the dominant structures of wealth and power, as labourers have little say in the large decisions that influence the course of their lives over time. Even the pain of permanently losing a loved one is, for Patrick, the result of political power struggles; Alice's death, we eventually learn, occurs when she carries for too long a ticking bomb intended to disrupt dominant power.

Especially frustrating for Patrick and his companions is the dominant culture's apparent refusal to acknowledge the labour and poor living conditions of the underprivileged, even while the entire citizenry relies every day on the infrastructure these labourers build. As Patrick works on the dangerous and enormously difficult construction of an intake tunnel for Toronto's new water purification plant, Ondaatje equates the tunnel labourers with the beasts of burden working alongside them:

They can hear the mules and pit-horses who live down here, transporting the dug earth and mud barrels to the ladder. When these creatures were

lowered down the shaft by rope they had brayed madly, thinking they were being buried alive [...], lowered forty feet down and remaining there until they died or the tunnel reached the selected mark under the lake. And when would that be? The brain of the mule no more and no less knowledgeable than the body of a man who dug into a clay wall in front of him. (108)

As he emphasizes the subjectivity of the mule, Ondaatje simultaneously animalizes the men, who are allowed to be nothing more than their endlessly digging bodies. When he later has the chance to confront Rowland Harris, the Commissioner of Public Works, Patrick accuses Harris of endangering the tunnel labourers. “You forgot us,” Patrick says. “Your goddamn herringbone tiles in the toilets cost more than half our salaries put together. [...] Do you know how many of us died in there?” Harris responds, “There was no record kept” (235-36).

Record-keeping, the construction of the past in the form of officially sanctioned histories, is a key form of hegemonic time-reckoning. Patrick finds that the version of history that is published in record books, archived in libraries, and distributed in newspapers tends to emphasize society’s grand achievements – the completion of the water plant, the construction of the Bloor Street Viaduct – while remaining largely silent on the toll the projects take on individuals. The limitations that the labourers experience in terms of poor living conditions are thus compounded by society’s perpetual trumpeting of the grand notion of progress and perpetual indifference to its costs. Harris’s ignorance is not Patrick’s first encounter with “official history” (145). Earlier, he had tried to learn everything he could about the Viaduct: “The articles and illustrations he found in the Riverdale Library depicted every detail about the soil, the wood, the weight of concrete, everything but information on those who actually built the bridge” (145). Even the

novel's first chapter, "Little Seeds," plants the seed of this frustration in the young Patrick's mind: "He was born into a region which did not appear on a map until 1910, though his family had worked there for twenty years and the land had been homesteaded since 1816" (10).

All of these experiences lead Patrick to a decision that forms the crux of the novel's plot: using his knowledge of mining explosives, he will break into the water purification plant and blow it up. What is especially interesting about Patrick's plan – a plan whose details emerge for the reader only as it is enacted – is his specific choice of targets, about which an initial clue is given when Ondaatje writes: "He wants the heart of the place. He wants to step in and destroy meticulously, efficiently" (227). Patrick breaks into the plant by swimming through the intake tunnel he helped to create, and then wires his sticks of dynamite to a blasting box. He lays the bombs on the support columns of the pumping station, on the centrifugal pump, and under the ferric chloride tanks, all physically strategic targets meant to disrupt the functioning of the so-called "public works" whose blind pursuit of progress has caused him years of torment. The final bomb, though, he places "beside the rose marble tower clock" (234). While the clock contains code lights that indicate the status of the filtration pools, it is not central to the operation of the plant and its value as a physical target is low. Clearly, though, this clock represents "the heart of the place"; in Patrick's mind the grand cultural project is inextricably tied to – and will cease to sustain itself once deprived of – its iconic time-reckoning device. The official methods of record-keeping, historical documentation, and progress-oriented

decision making that Patrick believes have proven so destructive to the masses of workers all emanate, for him, from the beautiful, exorbitant marble clock.

This choice of an emblematic timekeeping device as a political target echoes Joseph Conrad's 1907 novel *The Secret Agent*, in which the protagonist Mr. Verloc attempts to carry out a bombing planned by a secretive anarchist organization intent on counteracting England's "universal repressive legislation" (65). Such an attack, Verloc learns from its orchestrator, Mr. Vladimir, will not have the necessary psychological impact if it is aimed at a mere physical target. The attack "must have all the shocking senselessness of gratuitous blasphemy. [...] It would be really telling if one could throw a bomb into pure mathematics" (67). Verloc's mission, Vladimir goes on to reveal, is to bomb the Greenwich Observatory, the official site of the prime meridian and the central point from which world standard time is measured and disseminated. As Robert Levine has pointed out, "assaults on clock time have often been directed at the fundamental values of modern life itself" (74). While Conrad changed many details of the actual attack upon which his story was based, one detail that he left intact was the mission's ultimate failure. In *The Secret Agent*, as in reality, Greenwich remains unscathed.

Ondaatje, too, leaves the water plant and its tower clock standing, but while Verloc's plot fails due to fear and incompetence, Patrick's mission runs off course in a more curious manner: with no apparent explanation, he decides at the critical moment not to detonate the bomb. Critics have been somewhat divided over why he does this. Rod Schumacher suggests that "because Harris's narrative is not founded on political power, but on a personal vision of beauty, Patrick is unable to view Harris as a figure of evil." In

particular, upon meeting him in person Patrick is confronted with the truth that Harris is a human being and not simply an abstract representative of the powerful elite. Julie Beddoes sees Patrick's decision to abandon his attack as a realization of its likely consequences: "Rather than memorializing the workers killed during construction, it would destroy their only memorial and deprive of water those who have survived."

The insights offered in these readings are critical to understanding the novel, though I would like to suggest that Ondaatje offers another important clue when, instead of detonating the bomb, Patrick becomes lost in memories of the death of his lover, Alice. Earlier in the novel, during another anarchist mission, Alice had "picked up the wrong bag. So she was carrying dynamite with a timing device, a clock bomb" (239). This earlier clock bomb, intended to promote the anarchical cause, fulfils its purpose only too well: disorder reigns supreme when it explodes in Alice's hands. And while we are never told which "anarchist" built Alice's bomb, several critics have reasonably conjectured that it was probably Patrick himself. After laying his tower clock bomb in the water plant, Patrick drifts from these memories of Alice into sleep. The reader is left to grasp the connection between Alice's clock bomb and the water plant clock bomb he never detonates, a connection that suggests Patrick cannot bring himself to perpetuate destructive behaviour any longer, even if this means allowing the dominant time-reckoning model to remain in place. The anarchical timing device, he realizes, is just as dangerous as the one it seeks to destroy; rather than nullifying the ideological construction of history and wiping clean the slate of socioeconomic disparity, the clock bomb would impose an equally violent form of power. The rejection of a particular

chronotope would necessarily leave other equally partial and subjective chronotopes in its place, for, as Paul Ricoeur and others have shown, as long as human existence retains any degree of coherence it must be perceived in some way as existing in and through time. Time-reckoning, like any form of power, is never neutral, and clock destruction inevitably goes hand in hand with a process of clock *making* that is fraught with dangers and politics of its own. As Harris says to Patrick during their confrontation deep inside the water plant, “You don’t like power, you don’t respect it, you don’t want it to exist but you move around it all the time. [...] You’re as much of the fabric as the aldermen and the millionaires” (236, 238). The novel’s second epigraph – “Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one” – reveals that any one model of time remains always vulnerable to deconstruction, but also suggests that the co-existence of multiple temporalities, multiple stories, can be a source of resilience and critical awareness.⁴³

Even the form of Ondaatje’s novel, which is told in fragmented sections of memories jumbled into nonchronological order and which often appears to confuse or halt the flow of time altogether, subverts the dominant model of sequential narrative; in

⁴³ The novel’s treatment of Harris, too, is fraught with ambiguity. He intends for his projects to make Toronto beautiful, yet remains blind to their costs; he wields great power, yet claims to be a slave to his superiors. Rowland Caldwell Harris, the historical figure, did indeed lead the construction of Toronto’s R.C. Harris Water Treatment Plant, described on the City of Toronto website as “an architectural masterpiece, designed in the classical version of the Art Deco style” (“History”). The plant still functions, and has been declared a National Historic Civil Engineering Site. In a 2008 *National Post* article, Joseph Brean writes of the plant’s “exquisite” interiors, “with Italian marble floors and gleaming copper doors on the control stands in front of each tank”; the tower clock itself was built within “the longest hallway in Toronto.” The ambiguity of Ondaatje’s Harris remains potent in his final line of dialogue, spoken over the wounded, sleeping Patrick: “Bring a nurse with some medical supplies here, he’s hurt himself” (242). Harris is willing to help Patrick, yet perceives the wounds that he has sustained in the fight against society’s oppressions as self-inflicted.

Winfried Siemerling's words, "the simulation of oral narratives in the novel imagines the conveyance of oral histories of immigrant experiences obscured by historiography" (1). Beddoes reads this conveyance as incomplete, as aborted along with Patrick's revolutionary attack, concluding that because of the novel's conflict "between its aesthetics and its ideology [...] it is not established power but the novel's own attempt at subversion that is subverted." Subversion is not necessarily a zero-sum game, though; the novel can be said to subvert established power along with its anarchical opposition, the former as a function of the novel's narrative form and characters' perspectives, and the latter through the ironizing light the story throws on the contradictions of revolutionary struggle. Importantly, though, the novel also celebrates the ongoing nature of the construction of narrative and temporality; in the novel's final scene, Patrick, who has been telling his story to Alice's daughter Hana, suggests that Hana now drive the car they have been travelling in, passing the power of conveyance – and figuratively, the power of narrative and temporal construction – to the girl. She replies, "I'll try for a bit," acknowledging that such power is necessarily temporary, and then "adapt[s] the rear-view mirror to her height" (244); her version of the ongoing narrative will regard the flow of events from the present to the past from her particular point of view. The final sentence, "—Lights, he said," reminds Hana to gauge oncoming events with caution, and serves simultaneously as a stage call: Hana is now the primary actor on stage, and will carry out the performance as she sees fit. The revolutionary struggle may in a sense be contradictory, but it is made necessary, enjoyable even, through the power of creation intrinsic to the performance of identity and the ongoing conceptualization of time; the

word revolution itself etymologically contains a sense of return that is appropriate to the generational cycle at the same time that the concept speaks to the onset of new conditions. Even if Patrick hesitates to overthrow the current structure of power, the narrative in which he exists fractures established modes of time-reckoning and creates its own. The novel itself is a kind of clock, and a kind of clock bomb.

The Silence of Time: Philip's *Looking for Livingstone*

In Chapter Three I mentioned Marlene NourbeSe Philip's comment that, for people of African descent in the New World, "tomorrow is a constant problem," that because western culture's promises of progress are founded on exclusionary principles of white authority, "time and its representations present a constant challenge" (271). In her 1991 volume *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence*, Philip imagines a radical reconstruction of the normative western temporality that has served to cement and legitimize the status of white English colonialism as the sole driver of progress and authoritative universal timekeeper. If *In the Skin of a Lion* is both a clock and a clock bomb, *Looking for Livingstone* is a calendar and a calendar bomb; or, more than that, if the very notions of common-sense linear counting and everyday language are tied inextricably to normative understandings of time, then Philip's book explodes the very nature of time itself.

I refer to *Looking for Livingstone* as a "volume" and a "book" partly because the genre and form of the writing are difficult to define. Just as the work troubles the linear

distinctions between past, present, and future, it also reveals that the boundaries between prose and poetry were never clear to begin with. The story follows the journey of a narrator, known only as The Traveller, in her efforts to find Dr. Livingstone, the famed explorer of Africa. From the very beginning, starting with the heading of the first section of the book, the narrative deconstructs and refigures the normative model of time:

THE FIRST AND LAST DAY OF THE MONTH OF NEW MOONS
(OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE LAST AND FIRST MONTH)
IN THE FIRST YEAR OF OUR WORD

0300 HOURS (7)

It seems that the month in question has a duration of only one day, and that the year itself contains only the one month; the entire annual cycle is compressed into a single day, in which there is a new moon. Either the physical motions of the Earth's rotation and revolution have been radically altered, or the meanings of familiar terms like "day," "month," "year," "first," and "last" have been refashioned into a new temporal vocabulary that twists and disfigures normative timekeeping. The *Anno Domini* signifier that is typically attached to historical dates of the last two millennia and means "year of Our Lord," is here modified to "year of our word," and while the notion of "the Word" carries a deep association with Christ in the New Testament, "*our* word" appears to be something different; the label throws the authority of the Gregorian calendar into question along with its Christian foundations, ringing in the axial moment of a novel calendrical system. Only the "0300 hours" appears, for the moment, to follow a familiar pattern.

Below this heading, the narrative immediately takes issue with the cultural

politics involved in Dr. Livingstone's "discovery" of African geographical features, pointing out that the process through which explorers like Livingstone find, identify, name, describe, and become famous for their discovery of rivers and resources requires the assistance of indigenous people who have known about these features for ages:

David Livingstone, *Dr. David Livingstone, 1813-73* – Scottish, not English, and one of the first Europeans to cross the Kalahari – *with* the help of Bushmen; was shown the Zambezi by the indigenous African and "discovered" it; was shown the falls of Mosioatunya – the smoke that thunders – by the indigenous African, "discovered" it and renamed it. Victoria Falls. Then he set out to "discover" the source of the Nile and was himself "discovered" by Stanley – "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" And History. Stanley and Livingstone – white fathers of the continent. Of silence. (7)

The colonialist vision of temporality, in which prior human knowledge of a river or waterfall is suppressed beneath the defining moment of the first European sighting – a "watershed" moment, indeed – serves to silence alternative histories, to cast one particular frame around the order and timing of selected events. According to the mythology that Philip identifies surrounding these explorations, the world's largest waterfall was obscured from human history and knowledge for all time until Livingstone himself arrived to dis-cover it. Meanwhile, the United Nations Environment Programme reports that "Stone artefacts of *Homo habilis* from 3 million years ago have been found near the falls," along with extensive evidence of "prolonged occupation" by hunter-gatherers, farmers, and villagers for the last 50,000 years ("Mosi-oa-Tunya" 3). The intention of Philip's reconfigured calendrical system now becomes clear, since the European reckoning of dates is inseparable from the biases and erasures of the colonialist vision of time.

In the second dated section of the narrative – “THE FOUR HUNDRETH DAY IN THE SIXTEENTH MONTH / OF THE TEN THOUSANDTH YEAR OF OUR WORD” – we learn that the narrator has been “travelling in circles these past hundred years – circle upon circle – ever widening” (10). The description not only further distorts the usual concepts of months, years, and age, but also confounds linear thought. While the act of travelling in circles at first sounds like a failure, the accidental retracing of steps, we learn that the circles are actually building upon one another, widening the path of their motion; circularity becomes not the shape of failed linear motion, but its own constructive form. The line also responds to Yeats’s ominous “widening gyre” (line 1) in his poem “The Second Coming”; while for Yeats “the centre cannot hold” (3), Philip’s line suggests that the centre retains its hold despite the widening circle, and leaves open the possibility that an unbounded trajectory may actually be desirable. Sure enough, at this point The Traveller begins a series of productive encounters with various groups of people – the ECNELIS, the SINCEEL, the LENSECI – whose names are rearranged letters from the word “silence.” The ECNELIS believe that God “first created silence: whole, indivisible, complete,” but has since cursed the world with words (11). Others believe that “the first act of God was to create the word – primary and indispensable”; the ancestors of these people, “so their stories tell, mounted armies of words to colonise the many and various silences of the peoples round about, spreading and infecting with word where before there was silence” (11, 12). Just as nonlinear, non-Gregorian models of time are figured as legitimate constructs in their own right, silence is represented not as a lack of language but as a primary and powerful aspect of existence. And just as non-Gregorian temporality

faces obstruction and damage at the hands of colonizing temporality, silence is a contested ground always at risk of linguistic invasion; the narrative repeatedly casts words as violent masculine entities penetrating and appropriating silence. Continuing this vision, Philip describes a Museum of Silence whose curators insist that “the silences were best kept there where they could be labelled, annotated, dated, catalogued” – to which The Traveller says, “You must return these silences to their owners. Without their silence, these people are less than whole” (57). While recognizing that colonization has rendered silent pre-existing histories and temporalities, the narrative also reclaims the notion of silence, casting it not as a weakness and an absence but as a strength and a presence. The Traveller’s dawning recognition of the power of silence lies in tension with her refusal to be silenced; her telling of her own narrative, her construction of her own story and reckoning of time, enacts a powerful form of resistance.

Just as the narrative relegitimizes silenced modes of language and time, it also ironizes Livingstone’s language of civilizing discovery through which he incorporates Africa into European frameworks of knowledge. Livingstone, The Traveller notes, has “a sextant, a chronometer watch – *with* a stop second hand no less! an artificial horizon, *and* a compass. And finally his arrogance” (16). His technological tools, which include his instruments for measuring seconds and degrees – time and space – are paired with his belief that these forms of reckoning, of naming, are primary and absolute. As The Traveller notices that time appears to move at different rates for her than for other people, she begins to speak in terms of relative time and multiple calendars, further destabilizing the singular authority of Gregorian time: “I had been with the LENSECI three years and

three days – by my calendar” (14). When Mary Livingstone, David’s wife who has been left behind in London, writes a letter to him dated “*Friday the eighteenth day of January, 1859*” (29), we understand that she, too, has been colonized by the masculine power of Gregorian time. Of course, throughout *Looking for Livingstone* the usual problem of resistance applies: by putting so much effort into subverting and discrediting normative time, the narrative partially reinforces the existing structure of power. This power is already so entrenched, though, that the acts of resistance are more notable in their gradual chipping away at normative temporal authority.

As her journey to find Dr. Livingstone continues, The Traveller moves through vast, unthinkable quantities of time. “Five thousand years – that’s how long I had been travelling when I arrived in the land of the SCENILE,” she says, under a heading that signifies an even more expansive, completely incongruous, amount of time: “THE TWENTY-FIFTH DAY IN THE TWO THOUSANDTH MONTH / OF THE TWO BILLIONTH YEAR OF OUR WORD” (19). Dorothy Jones comments that time in The Traveller’s narrative “is portrayed as malleable since the standard ways of reckoning its passing become irrelevant when measuring the psychological and spiritual journey Philip chronicles here” (200). Certainly, some subjective experiences of time operate on a different register from the rigidly computed calendar, but the standard ways of reckoning time are entirely relevant: they are invoked again and again precisely so that they can be resisted, twisted, and overcome. The dominant temporal ideology is so powerful that it cannot be countered and dismantled in one blow; The Traveller grapples with it continually, in a process that eventually encompasses *all* time: “I had been searching for him for an eternity, it seemed

– eighteen billion years – the age of the universe” (61).

In the final section of the book *The Traveller and Livingstone* finally encounter one another, and their two calendrical systems collide:

THE FIRST AND LAST DAY OF THE MONTH OF NEW MOONS (OTHERWISE
KNOWN AS THE FIRST AND LAST MONTH) IN THE EIGHTEEN BILLIONTH YEAR
OF OUR WORD, WHICH IS THE SAME AS THE END OF TIME, WHICH IS THE
SAME AS THE FIFTEENTH DAY OF JUNE, NINETEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY
SEVEN IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD (60)

The Gregorian date – June 15th 1987 – is more than a century after Livingstone’s death, which is appropriate in the sense that Philip herself is able to encounter only the ghost (the reputation, the writings, the memory) of the explorer; *Looking for Livingstone* was first published in 1991, so the writing likely occurred mainly in the late 1980s. By having this Gregorian date coincide with an entirely different calendrical date in the eighteen billionth year, Philip again casts each time-reckoning system as partial. Like Ondaatje, she is suggesting that never again can a single story be told as though it were the only one. The collision of the two calendars brings about “the end of time” not only because the age of the universe has been reached, but also in the sense that the longstanding notion of singular temporal dominance, of absolute colonialist timekeeping authority, has been dealt a crippling blow.

The clock time at this moment – “0000 HOURS” – also enacts a resetting of counted time. Catching sight of Dr. Livingstone, *The Traveller* notes that “We looked at each other... across a distance of some three feet – the infinite in time – my silence. I looked at my cheap, digital watch – I had picked it up somewhere along the way – it was 2800 hours exactly” (61). Like *The Traveller*’s calendar that serves mainly to warp

Gregorian time, her wristwatch, after the symbolic zero-hour reset, now displays a time that violates the usual strictures of the 24-hour clock. This violation of normal clock time recalls the opening line of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen" (7). For Philip's Traveller the transgression of normative time is triumphant, while in Orwell's text the line reveals that something appallingly unfamiliar has happened to the measurement of time and, we surmise, to society as a whole. The contrast illustrates how the disruption of normative time can be at turns liberating or distressing depending on social context and personal perspective. For the Traveller, the desirability of destabilizing colonialist time is visible in her tendency to emphasize the fact that the "explorer" is a recent arrival in a land that has been inhabited for millennia. Her first words to Livingstone are "You're new here, aren't you?" (61).

Up to this point the narrative has been fairly relentless in its criticism of Livingstone and the colonizing impulse he represents. When they actually begin speaking with one another, though, Livingstone and The Traveller find that they get along reasonably well, laughing and having their picture taken together, although The Traveller maintains a sardonic tone towards his accomplishments. When Livingstone is skeptical about The Traveller's claim that she has discovered silence, she angrily responds, "you ask for proof that I discovered my Silence – my very own Silence – when you're sitting right there in front of me? You want facts, dates and years – the time down to the last millisecond – don't you?" (67). A "fact," The Traveller declares, "is whatever anyone, having the power to enforce it, says is a fact. Power – that is the distinguishing mark of a fact" (67). Livingstone's discovery of Victoria Falls "is a lie, *and* a fact, because you and

your supporters, your nation of liars, had the power to change a lie into a fact. Those falls had a name long before you got to them” (68). Like the “facts” of European discoveries of African landmarks, the authority of normative timekeeping itself is a matter of power, and The Traveller’s questioning of the legitimacy of this power reaches a climax in her confrontation with Livingstone. As with Patrick’s confrontation with Harris in *In the Skin of a Lion*, the meeting between The Traveller and Livingstone involves both critique and conciliation, both a meeting and a separation of different temporal systems. By articulating alternative visions of time with potentially competing claims to legitimacy, these scenes hint at a concept that I will address more fully in the final section of this chapter: multitemporality.

Finishing her conversation with Livingstone, The Traveller embraces silence once more and the narrative draws to a close:

I touched something warm familiar like my own hand human
something I could not see in the SILENCE reaching out through the
SILENCE of space the SILENCE of time through the silence of
SILENCE I touched it his hand held it his hand *and* the SILENCE
I surrendered to the SILENCE within (75)

These final words speak, paradoxically, to the power of nonrepresentation, gesturing toward a time and space before language and culture, so that the tension that exists throughout the story between normative time, alternative times, and silence, is not resolved but reinforced. The word “of” in “the SILENCE of time” turns the phrase in two directions: time both possesses silence and *is* silence. There is an aspect of time and space that cannot be encompassed by language and representation, so that the colonizing appropriation of other times, like the appropriation of silence, can never be complete. Just

as resistance always risks reinforcing the power it seeks to subvert, the colonization of time and silence, being incomplete, makes visible its own inadequacy and its dependence on the colonized.

At the end of the book an ostensible “Author’s note” describes the original leather-bound volumes, held at the Bodleian Library in Oxford University, that contain The Traveller’s diary, notes, and maps. “The diary,” the note explains, “is arranged in chronological order, according to present calendar time; this conflicts with the time through which The Traveller journeyed” (77). This mysterious “author,” then, is sympathetic to the multiplicitous subjective temporalities embodied in The Traveller’s narrative, and goes on to quote The Traveller’s statement that the diaries are in fact “*a facsimile of my odyssey into Silence. The original diaries, including maps of these travels, were given to the CESLIENS for safe keeping, since they were the only ones who kept their Silence*” (78). However, in one final twist, the author’s note ends by quoting another note attached to the display case that contains the diaries: “*Contrary to the statement on the last page of Volume II, these volumes comprise the only and original copy of the Diary of a Traveller. – William D. Boyd, Chief Archivist and Librarian*” (78). This bizarre series of claims and contradictions has the appearance of a real-world example of contested notions of priority, ownership, and authority of narrative. While The Traveller may very well feel that the “original” narrative is the record of experiences stored within her own memories, of which the written, dated description is an inadequate reproduction, the archivist sees the officially registered publication as the one factual version. His statement echoes Livingstone’s tendency to associate facts with dated

records, and also recalls the Museum of Silence where colonized silences are stored and labelled. Jones notes that “the voice of what is supposedly authoritative, male, white scholarship has the last word, appropriating the Traveller’s silence” (206); and yet, even William D. Boyd’s note appears *within* the “Author’s note,” adding another layer to this appropriation. Still, Jones self-consciously sees this ironic quotation as “a warning which places literary conferences, and particularly anyone giving a paper on Marlene Nourbese Philip in a most invidious position, for which the only solution is silence” (206). My initial reaction to such a conundrum would be to say (and already I have broken the silence) that the text does not so much require silence on the part of the reader as it asks readers to become self-conscious of the colonizing power of their own narratives and constructions of time. Such a response is indeed likely to prove productive, and yet, like the museum, it risks incorporating alternative forms of knowing into a discursive system not fully equipped to understand them. Like Emily Carr in *Klee Wyck*, who not only gains awareness of the time-reckoning forces that she carries with her into indigenous communities but also goes so far as to let her clock wind down and stop, readers of *Looking for Livingstone* may find that addressing the power imbalances implicit in their own models of time requires not only articulating the limitations of these structures, but also embracing the silences that they have interrupted. Yes, we should be conscious of the impositions of our clocks and calendars, but it is another thing entirely to shut them down, even for a moment, and listen.

Multitemporality: Atwood’s Apocalyptic Vision of Time

In the opening scene of Margaret Atwood's 2003 novel *Oryx and Crake*, we meet a man who calls himself Snowman, who has survived a global pandemic apocalypse, and is now looking at his wristwatch. "Out of habit he looks at his watch – stainless-steel case, burnished aluminum band, still shiny although it no longer works. He wears it now as his only talisman. A blank face is what it shows him: zero hour. It causes a jolt of terror to run through him, this absence of official time. Nobody nowhere knows what time it is" (5). Somebody, Snowman's panic implies, *ought* to know what time it is; the absence of a strict, mathematical, "true" clock time is not a liberation but a deprivation. Here, on the first page of *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood identifies a concern that remains prominent throughout the novel: what does it mean for a dominant cultural model of time to break down? This question also opens the door to a related concern that becomes central in *Oryx and Crake*'s companion novel, *The Year of the Flood* (2009): how might cultural constructions of time be reconfigured?

The books' responses to these questions hinge partly on the assertion that while the human desire to "break the shackles of time" (*Oryx* 320) is universal, so too is the deep psychological need to remain bound by discrete, comprehensible, and above all predictable socially shared units of time. The specific nature of these units, though, remains open to question; like Philip and other writers, Atwood promotes the notion that despite appearing to be logical and inevitable, social categories of time are in fact fragile and arbitrary. There is no reason why old models of time like the one symbolized by Snowman's broken watch cannot go extinct, and no reason why new models of time

cannot be created. And because culturally shared ideas about time are closely tied to the politics of social relations, the destruction and reconfiguration of “official” time in Atwood’s dystopian world becomes a thought experiment in political revolution, containing the threat, or the promise, of recasting deeply held convictions along with the structure of social power hierarchies.

The personal consequences of the breaking down of predictable time units are a central source of motivation for Snowman, and a source of reader sympathy. Before the plague virus destroys civilization, Snowman is called Jimmy. Jimmy has desires and anxieties familiar to us, and measures time according to normative social tools including the Gregorian calendar and standard clock time. When Jimmy’s friend Crake unleashes a genetically engineered virus that appears to kill everyone on earth, Jimmy conceptualizes a break in time, a disruption that he emphasizes by rechristening himself Snowman. As we join him at the beginning of the novel, Snowman has grudgingly taken on the role of caretaker for the Crakers, the genetically engineered posthumans that Crake created in an attempt to supplant humanity with a superior humanoid species. When a group of young Crakers shows Snowman a collection of objects that they have found on the beach and which they consider to be incomprehensible – “a hubcap, a piano key, a chunk of pale-green pop bottle smoothed by the ocean” (9) – Snowman accepts that he will be unable to explain the provenance of such items to people who do not share his cultural memory. “These are things from before,” he says simply (9), implying the existence of a watershed moment in time against which all subsequent times are measured. Everything in his experience is divided now into “before” the virus and “after,” categorizations whose

newly profound meaning was not anticipated by the dominant cultural model of time that has ceased to exist along with its creators, and which, like the hubcaps and piano keys, now carries no meaning outside of Snowman's solitary mind. He wanders the desolate landscape, ironically casting his own cultural memory as a historical relic: "It is the strict adherence to daily routine that tends towards the maintenance of good morale and the preservation of sanity,' he says out loud. He has the feeling he's quoting from a book, some obsolete, ponderous directive written in aid of European colonials running plantations of one kind or another" (7). Not only are slave or military camps things of the distant past, but so too is the concept of a normative daily temporal structure, and along with it, perhaps, the concept of sanity.

As Crake explains before his own death, the destruction of technological civilization will be irreversible: all of the metals near the surface of the earth have been mined, while any deeper metals paradoxically require intact metal tools to access. "All it takes," Crake says to Jimmy, "is the elimination of one generation. One generation of anything. Beetles, trees, microbes, scientists, speakers of French, whatever. Break the link in time between one generation and the next, and it's game over forever" (270). Many critics have highlighted Snowman's obsession over the rich vocabulary of English words that he knows will die with him; Grayson Cooke writes that "Snowman's language, with which he explains his world and must explain the world also to the Children of Crake, is a storehouse, a mnemo-technic and archive, but what it preserves no longer exists. It is in this sense that the end of the human is figured — as a crisis of language and thus of memory" (121). The cultural practices of temporality, too, are

fragile artefacts that Snowman will take to the grave. He realizes to his disgust that he will now be the only person to mark the passing (in both senses of the word) of official time: “On the second Friday of March – he’d been marking off the days on a calendar, god knows why – Jimmy showed himself to the Crakers for the first time” (414). The death of cultural time is certainly a crisis of memory, as the prospects for comprehending and communicating the flow of time, and thus the flow of history and even subjectivity, begin to disintegrate before Snowman’s eyes. While the bulk of the novel consists of Snowman’s narrativized recollections of the events leading up to the pandemic, the futility of this exercise strikes him when he discovers Jimmy’s scrawled explanation of the virus’s origin inside Crake’s destroyed bioengineering compound. Snowman “crumples the sheets up, drops them onto the floor. It’s the fate of these words to be eaten by beetles” (413). He is forced to accept that the symbols through which he has always comprehended the flow of events through time will never be used again.

Oryx and Crake’s ambiguous ending keeps the matter of time at the forefront. Having learned from the Crakers of the existence of three more human survivors, Snowman follows the human footprints and finally locates the unnamed trio in a forest clearing. The novel ends as Snowman peers at these people – possibly the final remnants of the human species – and tries to decide whether or not to kill them; if he does nothing, he reasons, they might kill him first. Again, his wristwatch is Atwood’s icon of choice:

From habit he lifts his watch; it shows him its blank face.
Zero hour, Snowman thinks. Time to go. (443)

The phrase “Zero hour” may suggest that because no system of official time-reckoning is in place, Snowman is empowered to determine for himself the “right” time to act. Or, he

may see the lack of shared social time as a death knell: it was zero hour at the beginning of the novel, and it is still zero hour at the end; cultural time has stopped, so it is only appropriate for Snowman himself to disappear or die as well. And he does disappear: the novel ends. “Zero hour” also conjures the sense of having reached the end of a countdown; but once the countdown is over, what happens? What happens after the end of time? This depends on how we read the ambiguous final sentence, “Time to go.” As J. Brooks Bouson asks, “Does ‘time to go’ mean that it is time to act as a peacemaker or that it is time to die?” (153). Just as *The Traveller’s* encounter with Livingstone in *Looking for Livingstone* takes place at the end of time but simultaneously opens up new articulations of temporality, Snowman’s “Zero hour” may be the end of a countdown, or the starting point for a reborn narrative of time. It is the beginning of something new, or the end of everything.

Atwood continues to address these issues in *The Year of the Flood*, which takes place in the same time frame as *Oryx and Crake* but traces the lives of characters who are minor in or absent from the first novel. The protagonists Toby and Ren belong to the God’s Gardeners, an enviro-religious sect led by Adam One, who believes that a “Waterless Flood” will soon destroy all non-Gardener members of humanity. When Crake’s virus strikes, the surviving Gardeners see the plague as the fulfilment of Adam One’s prediction. The novel’s preoccupation with the relationship between uncontrollable external events and the socially constructed nature of time is visible in its title, which names a temporal event bestowed with cultural importance. The title of the first chapter – “Year Twenty-Five, the Year of the Flood” – is especially intriguing in that it implies the

existence of a calendrical system and associated watershed moment unfamiliar to readers.

While the normative Gregorian calendar holds history's axial moment and the onset of year one to be the birth of Christ, the year 25 A.D. is not the year twenty-five referred to by the Gardeners, who, we gradually learn, have invented an entirely new calendar.

Reciting the Gardeners' rhyming oral history, Ren reveals that the axial moment in this calendar is the creation of the God's Gardeners organization itself: "*Year One, Garden just begun*" (60).⁴⁴ And while the Gardeners still use a variation on the concept of the week, participating in "Retreats and Isolation Weeks" (100), the familiar units of months, weekdays, and numbered dates have no place in their calendar, resulting in conversations like this one between Toby and Ren:

When I wake up, Toby's already sitting in her hammock doing some arm stretches. [...] "What day is today?" she says.

I think for a moment. "Saint Terry, Saint Sojourner," I say. "All Wayfarers." (407)

As Ren explains, each day of the year carries a different name, honouring important people or concepts: "We also had to memorize every saint's day, and every single day had at least one saint and sometimes more, or maybe a feast, which meant over four hundred of those" (61).

⁴⁴ Atwood never explicitly aligns the dates in *Oryx and Crake* or *The Year of the Flood* with actual Gregorian dates, although Bouson, drawing clues from interviews with Atwood, pegs the pandemic around 2027 (140), which would place the creation of the God's Gardeners near 2002. The Gardeners' decision to create a new Year One echoes the short-lived attempt by the leaders of the French Revolution to implement a "revolutionary calendar." According to this system, "The year 1792 of the Christian era would be the year one of the new Republican calendar," and new measurements would be used to count weeks, months, and hours (Levine 78). This new calendar proved unpopular largely because it reduced the number of holidays and violated the counting of the Sabbath; like Stalin's revolutionary calendar in Russia, it was abandoned after a few years (Levine 78-79).

This calendrical system borrows from the traditional Christian calendar of saints, of which there are various historical versions dedicating particular days to one or more saints. For their saints, though, the God's Gardeners have selected historical figures who are celebrated for promoting environmental sustainability, biocentrism, energy efficiency, and social justice. The Saint Terry that Ren refers to is Terry Fox, the cancer research activist who died in 1981, and he joins company, in what turns out to be a Canadian-centric list, with such figures as David Suzuki, Farley Mowat, Allan Sparrow (the Toronto city councillor who fought overdevelopment in the 1970s), Bridget Stutchbury (a York University biologist who promotes bird-friendly agriculture), and so on. An eclectic group of international names is also included: Saint Yossi Leshem of Barn Owls (Leshem is an Israeli ornithologist and owl advocate), Saint Dian Fossey, Martyr (whose research into gorilla societies ended with her murder in 1985), Saint Maria Sibylla Merian (the seventeenth-century entomologist who described insect metamorphosis), Saint Al Gore, Saint Rachel Carson, Saint Linnaeus of Botanical Nomenclature, and Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. Finally, some days are named after events such as the creation of the God's Gardeners, or after living things, as with Podocarp Day and Mole Day. This list is not exhaustive, and Atwood claims in an afterword that the Gardeners "have many more saints, as well, but they are not in this book" (433). The novel's companion website, meanwhile, provides a form for visitors to nominate their own saints along with respective areas of jurisdiction; saint-worthy acts can "range from saving a species to planting a tree or setting up a backyard bird feeder" ("Enroll a Saint"). Visitors can purchase a God's Gardeners' Scroll to certify the nomination, with a percentage of the

fee going towards Atwood's chosen charities.

The Gardeners' calendar performs several functions. It establishes the types of values to which the Gardeners aspire; it allows Atwood to publicize and endorse selected real-world environmentalists and social figures, some of whom are known only within specialized disciplines; it encourages readers to learn more about the saints and their work and to become active in social concerns outside of the text itself; it serves as a type of authorial wink by portraying present-day figures as the deceased and anointed heroes of a religious sect which is both insightfully forward-looking and somewhat ridiculous; and finally it serves as an example of a radically reconstructed model of social time-reckoning, demonstrating how such a refashioning could conceivably function.⁴⁵

Further details of Gardener mythology are gradually revealed through sermons delivered by the leader Adam One, who, in his warnings about the coming Waterless Flood, frequently speaks about the significance of time:

While the Flood rages, you must count the days, said Adam One. You must observe the risings of the Sun and the changings of the Moon, because to everything there is a season. On your Meditations, do not travel so far on your inner journeys that you enter the Timeless before it is time. In your Fallow states, do not descend to a level that is too deep for any resurgence, or the Night will come in which all hours are the same to you, and then there will be no Hope. (163)

⁴⁵ Writing prior to the publication of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, Alice Ridout notices that many of Atwood's stories experiment with temporal reconstructions, at least on the level of individual characters whose life stories "move away from depicting female victims of the linear narrative of marriage and family towards more complex relationships with 'multiple futures.'" While Ridout focuses on Atwood's short stories, Atwood's early novel *Surfacing* is also notable in its protagonist's explicit rejection of the normative, colonizing temporality associated with patriarchy and Americanization. At the end of the novel the narrator decides to "re-enter my own time" (191). The ambition of the Gardeners' calendar, then, can be seen as an extension of Atwood's longstanding interest in the reconfiguration of social temporality.

The poetry of “the Timeless before it is time” almost seems to name a mythical time before the beginning of time, but refers primarily to the idea of entering death before a person’s appropriate death-time has arrived. Throughout these speeches the importance of time-reckoning, of counting the days of lived experience, is paramount. The danger of a Fallow state (the Gardener euphemism for psychological depression) is the onset of undifferentiated time, since hope in the face of devastation requires the careful marking of sequential moments. While the Gardeners’ calendar, then, in some ways departs radically from normative Gregorian time, the two systems share a deep investment in the psychological and practical necessity of the categorization of human-scale temporal units.

In contrast to the Gardeners’ quasi-Christian interpretation of the sacred implications of time-reckoning, Crake’s atheist-materialist view holds that the idea of immortality is “a consequence of grammar. And so was God, because as soon as there’s a past tense, there has to be a past before the past, and you keep going back in time until you get to *I don’t know*, and that’s what God is” (*Oryx* 316). For Crake, God is at heart a cultural model for understanding time; God explains the past before the past as well as the potentially transcendental future. And the anxiety that the idea of mortality produces in human beings, in addition to fuelling religious devotion, is a potent site for profit-making. When Jimmy is awed by the state-of-the-art luxuries in Crake’s genetic engineering compound he asks, “What pays for all this?” Crake responds, “Grief in the face of inevitable death. [...] The wish to stop time. The human condition” (*Oryx* 352). The AnooYoo corporation similarly profits from its customers’ dread of “the whole signs-of-mortality thing,” offering intensive spa treatments and conducting research into

age reversal (*Flood* 264). Even Jimmy halfheartedly preys upon these anxieties and desires; when he is hired to write advertising slogans for sex-enhancement products, he produces such lines as, “*Live in the moment*,” and “Why chain your body to the clock, you can break the shackles of time” (*Oryx* 319-20). The observation that serves as the foundation for all of these corporations’ business models is one that is shared by Adam One, even though his conclusions are noncommercialist. The natural human response to death, he says, is “the universal protest against Time,” the cry, “Why now?” (*Flood* 326).

This “universal protest” is one reason why, despite the different calendars and widely varying approaches to sacred and secular time that Atwood’s characters take, they perceive the destruction of social time-reckoning in strikingly similar ways. When we meet Snowman in the opening scene of *Oryx and Crake* we see that despite his advertising slogans he has clearly failed to remove the shackles of time from his own feet, or rather, his wrist. And several months into his post-apocalyptic life he continues to brood anxiously over the passing of time: “He doesn’t know which is worse, a past he can’t regain or a present that will destroy him if he looks at it too clearly. Then there’s the future. Sheer vertigo” (*Oryx* 179). The Gardeners, meanwhile, have ostensibly received some degree of psychological inoculation against the effects of complete social breakdown. Speaking on humanity’s “brutal history” of violence towards living things, Adam One urges his followers to “Take comfort in the thought that this history will soon be swept away by the Waterless Flood” (*Flood* 312). His words turn out to be cold comfort for Toby, though, whose meticulous recording of the saints’ days in a notepad after the Flood does not spare her the thought that her continued existence is futile. “This

thing I'm doing can hardly be called living," she thinks. "Instead I'm lying dormant, like a bacterium in a glacier. Getting time over with. That's all" (95). Her despair echoes Jimmy's quandary nearly thought for thought: "She can't live only in the present, like a shrub. But the past is a closed door, and she can't see any future" (96). Like Jimmy, Toby faces a form of temporal vertigo brought on by the isolation of social collapse. Both characters have had their respective societies destroyed, and both now experience time as a constrictive and painful presence that the act of counting days cannot alleviate, whether these days are Gregorian days of the month or Gardener saints' days.

There are moments when these characters experience the absence of social time as a relief because it allows for intense personal freedom. Snowman relishes the power of historical invention that he holds over the Crakers; realizing that there is no one to contradict him, he fabricates mythical events to explain the time before the Crakers' existence: "In the beginning, there was chaos [...]. And then Oryx said to Crake, *Let us get rid of the chaos.* [...]. And this is how Crake did the Great Rearrangement and made the Great Emptiness" (*Oryx* 124-25). For Ren – who wakes up one post-Flood morning crying, "Oh shit, oh shit, [...]. I'm late! What time is it?" – relief comes in the realization that shift work is a thing of the past. "'You're not late for anything,' says Toby, and for some reason both of them laugh" (*Flood* 383). These temporary moments of solace, though, serve ultimately as melancholic reminders of a deeper distress. Not being late for anything indicates freedom, but also a profound loneliness. While they can be oppressive, social time conventions are necessary for coordinating everyday life with other people, so that escaping social time-reckoning leads to alienation as well as liberty.

Meanwhile, there is a third cultural model of time-reckoning in the two novels, and this belongs to the Crakers. Like the not-quite-human Crakers themselves, their relationship with time is eerie and defamiliarizing. Part of this springs from the fact that Crake has engineered them to grow at a faster rate than humans: “Snowman still hasn’t got used to it, the growth rate of these kids. The yearling looks like a five-year-old. By the age of four he’ll be an adolescent. Far too much time was wasted in childrearing, Crake used to say. Childrearing, and being a child. No other species used up sixteen years that way” (*Oryx* 193). Crake has also supplied his creations with their own internal doomsday clocks. “They’re programmed to drop dead at age thirty,” he explains, “suddenly, without getting sick. No old age, none of those anxieties. They’ll just keel over. Not that they know it; none of them has died yet” (364). What is more, Crake sees this lack of temporal anxiety as a way to avoid mortality altogether, in a manner of speaking. “Immortality,” he explains, “is a concept. If you take ‘mortality’ as being, not death, but the foreknowledge of it and the fear of it, then ‘immortality’ is the absence of such fear. Babies are immortal” (364). If the AnooYoo spa remained operational in a world populated by Crakers it would surely go out of business. Snowman encounters a frustrating consequence of this lack of temporal anxiety when he discovers to his astonishment that the Crakers have recently seen a group of humans, and asks them to describe the encounter:

“When did they come here?”

“Oh, the day before, maybe.”

Useless to try to pin them down about any past event: they don’t count the days. (434)

Even the counting of lineage lines is absent from Craker culture. The Craker women

enter sexual “heat” at regular intervals and engage in what Crake calls “guilt-free promiscuity” (203). As a result, “It no longer matters who the father of the inevitable child may be, since there’s no more property to inherit, no father-son loyalty required for war” (202). The lack of physical property in turn means that the Crakers will have “no need to invent any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money” (367). Even jokes, which require “a certain edge, a little malice,” have been eliminated (368). While Crake’s estimation of his own creations is not entirely accurate – Snowman bears witness as the Crakers begin to deify Crake himself and construct a symbolic effigy of Snowman – the degree to which they deviate from normal human thought and practice makes them uncanny and somewhat repulsive to Snowman, and perhaps to Atwood’s readers as well. It is difficult to relate to people who have no desire to count time.

When we reach the final scene of *The Year of the Flood* – the same scene that ends *Oryx and Crake*, but told from Ren’s point of view – three fragile cultural models of time coexist: Snowman’s Gregorian time, Ren and Toby’s Gardener time, and the Crakers’ unmeasured “immortal” time. Once again, though, the outcome is ambivalent. The narration in *The Year of the Flood* takes us a little further, perhaps a few hours beyond the ending of *Oryx and Crake*. The three people in the forest clearing who remain unidentified in *Oryx and Crake* are now revealed to be Ren’s friend Amanda and her violent male captors; Ren and Toby arrive, manage to take the two men captive, and prevent Snowman from killing anyone. Once the situation is defused and the novel nears its close, Toby suggests that “This is not the time [...] for dwelling on ultimate purposes. I would like us all to forget the past, the worst parts of it” (430-31). Just as Adam One, in

his final speech before apparently succumbing to the plague virus, asks his followers to “forgive the killers of the Elephant, and the exterminators of the Tiger” (425), Toby too calls for a break with the traumas of the past, inviting a sense of temporal serenity. Snowman, meanwhile, grown delirious from an infected foot and psychological trauma, rambles: “‘Listen to the music.’ He tilts his head to the side; his expression is rapturous. ‘You can’t kill the music,’ he says. ‘You can’t!’” (431) He seems to be recalling an earlier conversation with Crake about the impossibility of removing the genes responsible for an appreciation of song from the human DNA sequence. But on a broader level, Snowman’s rambling suggests that no amount of trauma and destruction will negate that which is creative and good in people or in the world. In the final paragraph, Ren realizes that Snowman is correct, at least literally: distant music is audible. “It’s faint and far away, but moving closer. It’s the sound of many people singing. Now we can see the flickering of their torches, winding towards us through the darkness of the trees” (431). While the singers are not positively identified, Atwood has made earlier mention of the Crakers’ tendency towards singing, and their use of torches. It seems likely that they are approaching now with the intention they expressed earlier, to help Snowman and the other humans, who are known to the Crakers to be vulnerable to injury. The swelling of the music and the spilling of light into the protagonists’ dark surroundings suggest a hopeful ending. And yet, a group of faceless individuals holding torches carries inevitable associations of violent mob justice. The hopeful musicality of the novel’s end remains troubled and uneasy.

We may be able to read this final uneasy coexistence through the theories of

multiple temporalities that I have discussed earlier, such as Coleman's call "to develop an awareness of contending, rather than single, civilities" – a position that "will involve cognizance of multiple, contemporaneous chronotopes" ("Contented" 231). Since multiple conceptualizations of time are inevitable, Coleman says, "a diverse civil society cannot establish any one of these chronotopes as its sole narrative" (237). The language of multiculturalism is not far from the surface here, nor is it far removed from Levine's appeal for what he calls multitemporality. Examining the conflicts that can arise between clock time and event time, he concludes that "The person, or the culture, who combines both modes in a temporal repertoire – or even better, who can draw upon a multiplicity of modes – is more likely to be up to all occasions" (219). His final chapter describes strategies for adapting to unfamiliar temporal systems, offering suggestions for recognizing cultural distinctions between work time and social time, considering the different weights that may be assigned to time in which "nothing" happens, and anticipating accepted sequences of social events. Like Coleman, Levine locates an important measure of cultural resilience in the capacity of its members to conceptualize the flow of time in multiple ways. Both authors recognize, though, that highly ingrained power relationships are at stake in the cultural negotiation of temporalities, and that multitemporality, like multiculturalism, is not a discrete, stable condition, but involves an ongoing process of complex interactions.

The Year of the Flood is in some ways a fictional companion piece to cultural studies such as those carried out by Coleman and Levine. By the novel's end, Atwood's readers are cognizant of three contemporaneous chronotopes, even if each temporal mode

contains its own biases and each character remains invested in only a single one. The hopefulness inherent in the multitemporal ideal is present in the novel mainly through the capacity of the Gardeners to reconstruct and refashion cultural models of time in the face of anticipated catastrophic upheaval. But just as the novel's ending is made uneasy by the approach of potentially ominous strangers, the hopefulness of multitemporality is troubled by the fact that the characters tend to naturalize their own cultural norms and see other temporal systems as inferior or nonsensical. The Craker time system in particular is so alien to Snowman that he finds it difficult to carry out a simple conversation with his posthuman companions, and continually disparages them in his mind.

In her own descriptions of the novel, Atwood takes up the language of multitemporality, even producing a temporal neologism to describe *The Year of the Flood's* relationship to *Oryx and Crake*: "It's not a sequel and it's not a prequel – it's a 'simultaneouel' in that it takes place during the same time span and with a number of people in it who are peripheral in *Oryx and Crake* but are central in *The Year of the Flood*" (qtd. in Coyne). By narrating a single time span twice, in two books, Atwood indicates that different timelines coexist in her fictional world, just as they do in reality. Not only are different grand social systems of time-reckoning possible, but every fully-realized character – every person – inhabits her own personal calendar, her own timeline. Just as Atwood's characters experience a break in the dominant model of time only to create and encounter alternative temporalities, her simultaneouel narratives tell us that there is no singular story, but always multiple intertwined ones.

Conclusion

Because of my own constraints as a temporarily funded graduate student and a temporarily living human being, this project remains provisional. Among the topics I have not been able to address sufficiently are the complex relationships through which temporality is tied to place, both in the sense of regions of human activity – urban and rural places, provincial and territorial jurisdictions, differing climatic regions – and in the sense of the ecological and geological matrices of the natural world. It is my hope that my next research projects will address these issues. In the meantime, my goals here have been to offer a preliminary framework for understanding the cultural structures of time that have taken hold in Canada; to articulate the ways in which social patterns that may appear unconnected to temporality can in fact profoundly influence the experience of time for individuals; to recognize that literary authors have been highly adept at witnessing, questioning, and shaping these connections; and finally to demonstrate how the above frameworks can be used to construct politically informed readings of temporal power relations in literature and culture.

I will close with a comment on the opportunities afforded by ongoing conversations on temporal discrimination and multitemporality. The concept of temporal discrimination, which I have begun to develop here as a means of identifying and responding to unequal valuations of different times, offers one possible framework for working towards a heightened consciousness of temporal injustice. The need for the term temporal discrimination to undergo further theorization and clarified definition is one that

I hope to address in my future work. For the moment, though, I offer it in the hopes of attaching a coherent name to the multifarious ways in which certain times are considered natural, correct, and righteous while other times are considered backward, self-destructive, fanciful, and wrong; to the ways in which the rights of the future – of our own future selves – are silenced and sacrificed for the enrichment of the short term; to the ways in which forms of social hierarchization built on categories of age, class, race, and gender serve as foundations for the unquestioned reduction of temporal agency in those groups and individuals excluded from elite status. I offer the term temporal discrimination in order to articulate the necessity of working towards equal temporal agency for those who have been, are being, and will be excluded from dominant narratives of progress, and to prompt an opening within our social configurations to make room for the intrinsic value of alternative visions of time.

The notion of multitemporality remains a promising one for identifying and advocating flexible structures of time-reckoning that remain sensitive to the repressive forms of power tied to dominant temporalities. Multitemporality reminds us that the apparently monolithic time of workday punch clocks, seven-day weeks, and economic progress was never uniform or totalizing to begin with, but consists of many interrelated temporalities which themselves form shifting and difficult relationships with personal experiences of time and alternative cultural valuations of slowness, recursion, justice, work, and leisure. In advocating flexible conceptualizations of the multiplicity of social and personal temporalities, though, I am conscious of the unequal distribution of power alongside which normative models of time have become entrenched. Any call for

increasing awareness of multiple temporalities must recognize that a slanted playing field of temporal difference coexists with the imbalances that have afflicted the notion of multiculturalism.

Eva Mackey has cogently identified the key problems with Canada's implementation of multiculturalism, and these concerns are worth enumerating here to acknowledge the similar pitfalls to which a concept of multitemporality may be vulnerable. Noting that Trudeau's announcement of an initial multiculturalism policy in 1971 sought to help cultural groups "overcome cultural barriers to full participation in Canadian society," Mackey writes that the "Canadian society" in question is one in which the English and French cultural-linguistic groups maintain central and primary status; "Therefore, acceptable cultural diversity must buttress the project of nation-building and national unity in Canada" (66). Within this framework, minority cultures risk being framed "as fragments of cultures, constructed from folkloric and culinary remnants," which in turn "become conceptually divorced from politics and economics, and become commodified cultural possessions" (66). Compared to the initial 1971 policy, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 shifts the focus more towards combating racism and democratizing the responsibility for shaping society, yet Mackey finds that the Act "is still primarily concerned with mobilising diversity for the project of nation-building, as well as limiting that diversity to symbolic rather than political forms" (67), and that the economic discourse surrounding the Act "proposes that multiculturalism is a national resource in the context of global capitalism" (70). At the same time, the policy is not equipped to counter the particular marginalization of indigenous groups, and "has been

criticised as a means to undercut Québec's demands for special recognition by bestowing recognition on other cultural groups" (64). The "key issue," Mackey writes, "is that despite the proliferation of cultural difference, the power to define, limit and tolerate differences still lies in the hands of the dominant group. Further, the degree and forms of *tolerable* differences are defined by the ever-changing needs of the project of nation-building" (70).

Mackey's criticisms are well-placed, but Canada's multiculturalism policy still retains value in its attempt to recognize a plurality of cultural experiences even if this attempt suffers from flaws and biases. We might say that the problems associated with multiculturalism can productively be addressed through a "politics of fulfilment" that remains conscious of a "politics of transfiguration." Borrowing these terms from Paul Gilroy's commentary on the African diaspora, Daniel Coleman explains that a politics of fulfilment calls "upon bourgeois civil society to live up to its own declared egalitarian, universal values," while a politics of transfiguration is "radically utopian, aspiring to transcend the limits of the existing social order" ("Contended" 229). In calling for a broad social recognition of contending civilities to take the place of an assumed singular measure of civility, he suggests that such a desire "leans more towards the politics of fulfilment" by aiming to live up to the admirable promise of equitable civil protections, even while it remains conscious of the utopian desire for profound changes to underlying assumptions (229). Given the more draconian social policies that have been and are being implemented in various political spheres, the effort to create improvements within a flawed vision of cultural equity may promise more benefits, at least for the time being,

than the abolishment of this vision altogether.

I would like to understand the politics of multiculturalism as a lesson in thinking through a politics of multitemporality. One possible response to the inequalities tied to dominant models of time would be the attempt to abolish standardized notions of time altogether, leaving a vacuum of temporal power. This approach, though, suffers from two serious problems. The first problem is the same one that Michael Ondaatje's character Patrick encounters during his mission to blow up the Toronto water purification plant tower clock: the destruction of dominant forms of time, even if successful, will not create a neutral situation from which all people can benefit equally, but will inevitably impose differently biased forms of temporal structures. This in turn reveals the second problem: shared understandings of time are necessary for the coordination of sociality, and the abolishment of social temporal agreements would, like the abolishment of language, result in an untenable loss of cooperativeness and stability. As Coleman asks, "How can you meet to discuss differences if you don't know when the people will be gathering to discuss it?" ("Timing Question").

This is why a politics of fulfilment can offer a useful paradigm in the fight against temporal discrimination. An equitable approach to cultural constructions of time can acknowledge the need for socially shared temporal coordination and also understand temporal constructs as provisional frameworks to be reevaluated and reshaped on an ongoing basis in the service of social justice. *Provisional* time remains alive, always present out of necessity and always ready to undergo new rounds of questioning and negotiation. If a politics of multitemporality is to engage legitimately with differing

temporal experiences and work towards a public sphere of equitable temporal agency, it must be founded on a deep valuation of the legitimacy of multiple temporalities, must recognize the provisional and temporary nature of cultural constructs, and must be willing to recognize and question existing patterns of unequal temporal power and pressures. One of the goals of my project has been to open up new spaces for multiple experiences of time to make themselves heard, and to identify the necessity of recognizing diverse and shifting temporalities while enhancing our consciousness of entrenched hierarchies of temporal power. To this end, listening to one another's stories, to one another's distinctive and collective articulations of time, enacts a powerful resistance against unequal temporal power and allows for sensitive conversations about the shared responsibility for social temporal justice. The study of literature contributes to these conversations by identifying multiple registers of temporal experience, by providing a critical vocabulary for discussing the ways in which these experiences are inevitably articulated through the formal structures of narrative, and by fostering a habit of slow and thoughtful contemplation that counteracts hasty assumptions and clarifies the provisionality of normative time.

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