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**SALTWATER SACRAMENTS AND BACKWOODS SINS:
CONTEMPORARY ATLANTIC CANADIAN LITERATURE
AND THE RISE OF LITERARY CATHOLICISM**

by

Andrew Peter Atkinson

Bachelor of Arts with Honours in English, Acadia University, 2002

Master of Arts in English, Carleton University, 2004

Master of Arts in Religion and Culture, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2005

DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies

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Abstract

In the 1990s, Canadian readers were offered a new literary trend: the Atlantic Canadian Catholic novel. In this dissertation, I examine works from six authors whose writing reflects the scope of this trend and I argue for a consideration of their collective impact on our social imaginary. The bulk of my argument is devoted to an examination of the Catholic religious content in the five novels and one memoir: David Adams Richards' *Bay of Love and Sorrows* (1998); Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees* (1996); Lynn Coady's *Strange Heaven* (1996); Wayne Johnston's *Baltimore's Mansion: A Memoir* (1999); Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails* (1996); and Michael Crummey's *The Wreckage* (2005). These novels are indicative of what is more broadly referred to as the contemporary “return of religion” in Western discourse and politics. But what exactly does this revitalized religious discourse tell us? It is my contention that the rise of the Catholic novel in Atlantic Canada signals shifts in what we consider as the “religious” and the “secular.” I offer an account of this shifting religious-secular dynamic in my introduction.

While each of the works I study is unique, there are consistent theological constructs that are repeated through them all. I have called these consistencies a “theological aesthetic.” They include: firstly, *the analogy of being* - a specific linguistic pattern for considering the similarities and differences between God and humanity; secondly, the spiritual sense - a way of reading Scripture which allows for figures and events to take on significance that resonates beyond the literal element of the text; and thirdly, *gathered time* - a description of the way that eternity relates to temporal beings.

These three aspects of the theological aesthetic offer insight into contemporary Western understandings of the relations between the secular (nature) and the religious (grace). I argue that instead of putting the emphasis on the extreme difference between nature and grace, as was done by the influential Protestant movements that underwrote the earlier Atlantic Canadian imaginary, the current shifts have allowed for a more broadly defined nature-grace continuum. To understand this shift we require a fuller distinction between what I call “Secular I” (as described in most earlier secularization theories) and “Secular II” (now sometimes referred to as the “post-secular”). In my final chapter, I offer an explanation of this shifting religious-secular dynamic through an historical overview of key texts in the Atlantic literary canon. I theorize the shift from a stable divide between the religious and the secular that was managed by a general Protestant ethos, to a more stringent privatization of religion. While many have naturalized the resulting secularism, I claim that this recent Catholic literary trend challenges our preconceived notions about what constitutes secular and religious contributions, and thus, frustrates any notion of purity on the side of the secular or the religious. Understood this way, the contemporary Catholic novel in Atlantic Canada, which could stereotypically be thought to express marginal concerns, reflects a post-secular innovation that represents a transnational critique of the Protestant structures that underpin our social imaginary.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for two events that occurred during my undergraduate degree at Acadia: I discovered that a man from my home town was thought to be one of “Canada's greatest living writers” - David Adams Richards - and I was asked to interview George Elliott Clarke just after he had won the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 2001. Atlantic Canadian literature became even more alluring through Parker Duchemin's course, which introduced me to several of the works that I have considered here. Impressions from that class lingered with me as I reread (and reread) these works. It was during Peter Erb's course on Charles Taylor that the project first began to take shape and the first pages were written; many more were influenced by his classes on Augustine and Newman. His conversations, editing suggestions, and encouragement have helped me immensely; without Peter's wisdom this study and I would be lost in a *selva oscura*. I have also received sound advice and encouragement from Carol Duncan, Norm Klassen, and Madelaine Hron. Along the way, my many conversations with Scott Barnes, Holly Pearse, Chris Cutting, Margie Patrick, Siobhan Chandler, Mitra Bikkhu, and Brent Hagerman have honed my critical skills and lightened the scholarly load. I also want to thank Lynn Coady for her impressions of Atlantic Canadian Catholicism, and Herb Wyle for accepting my proposal to present at *Surf's Up: The Rising Tide of Atlantic Canadian Literature* before this project was a twinkle in my eye.

My family has been extremely supportive of this project. My parents, Terry and Brenda, have done “theology on their knees” on my behalf. Graham and Janette Wood have given me safe haven on many a weekend, and offered me sound advice on my topic

— even reading SSHRC proposals!¹ My wife, Amanda, has been an inspiration since those long-passed days at Acadia. Her ceaseless support (and sharp editing eye) has kept me moving forward. I also want to thank my little guy, Gavin, for his helpful distractions, which remind me of the limits of scholarship, and the unfathomable mystery hidden in the most mundane things.

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For citation purposes the following works will be reference in the abbreviated form listed here:

SH - Coady, Lynn. *Strange Heaven*. Toronto: Anchor, 1998.

TW- Crummey, Michael. *The Wreckage*. Toronto: Doubleday, 2005.

BM- Johnston, Wayne. *Baltimore's Mansion*. Toronto: Vintage: 1999.

GT - Kavanagh, Patrick. *Gaff Topsails*. Dunvegan: Cormorant Books, 1996.

FK - MacDonald, Ann-Marie. *Fall on Your Knees*. Toronto: Vintage, 1996.

BL - Richards, David Adams. *Bay of Love and Sorrows*. Toronto: Anchor, 2002 (1998).

SA – Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap, 2007.

All quotations from the above texts will be referenced though parenthetical quotations in the text, i.e.: (SH 111).

All biblical quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted and will be referenced in parenthetical quotations in the text, i.e.: (John 3:16).

Atlantic Canadian Literature, Post-Secularity, and Theological Aesthetics

*"Where are the other English-Canadian Catholic fiction writers?"*¹

In his essay "The Intuition of Being: Morely, Marshall and Me," Canadian novelist Hugh Hood recounted a conversation with Tim Struthers from the 1980s:

'Tim Struthers of the University of Guelph once suggested to me that he give a graduate course in the English-Canadian Catholic literary tradition. As soon as he said this we both realized that the proposal might be one of those really captivating ideas that persuade as soon as formulated, then on closer examination turn out to be false lights. Is there an English-Canadian Catholic literary tradition? If there is, who belongs to it? I put these questions to Professor Struthers, who was already disappearing in the distance, running hard with the ball as a born course-designer does when developing a bright notion.

"No problem," he said. "There is Morely Callaghan and Marshall McLuhan, and then there's you."

"Sure, fine, granted. But who else?"

There was a silence... Can there be a tradition that consists of three members?'²

Perhaps we can forgive Hood for overlooking the efforts of English-Canadian Catholic writers before 1991 when he wrote this essay, because they were not numerous, nor were they widely noted by the literary establishment. Striking, however, is the fact that he and Struthers overlooked significant Catholic novels: Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* (1966), Alden Nowlan's *Various Persons Named Kevin O'Brien* (1972), Frank Paci's *Black Madonna* (1982), Wayne Johnston's *The Story of Bobby O'Malley* (1985), and the first two instalments of David Adams Richards' "Miramichi Trilogy": *Nights Below Station Street* (1988); and *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace* (1990).³ Still,

¹ Hugh Hood, *Unsupported Assertions* (Concord: Anansi, 1991), 112.

² Hood, 112.

³ See Sheila Watson, *The Double Hook* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989); Frank Paci, *Black Madonna*. (Canada: Oberon, 1982); David Adams Richards' *Miramichi Trilogy: Nights Below Station*

Hood and Struthers were not far off the mark: aside from translated works by Québécois authors that were published through McClelland & Stewart's *New Canadian Library*, Catholic writers have simply not had a strong influence on English-Canadian literature.

In the 1990s, however, something changed, particularly in Atlantic Canada. There, a literary discourse on Catholicism emerged, predominantly in the novel form. This new discourse has complicated the relationship between the secularity of the novel and contemporary expressions of religiosity. This work explores this movement by offering close readings of six novels: David Adams Richards' *Bay of Love and Sorrows* (1998), Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees* (1996), Lynn Coady's *Strange Heaven* (1996), Wayne Johnston's *Baltimore's Mansion* (1999),⁴ Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails* (1996) and Michael Crummey's *The Wreckage* (2005).⁵ The themes that unite their multiple and varied entry points into the Atlantic Catholic imaginary warrant an interpretive approach that sets these novels beside each other in such a way that their points of identity and difference are easily identified. Richards and MacDonald have theological concerns that are directly related to the politics of community, thus they describe the political landscape. In contrast, Coady and Johnston focus on problems

Street. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988); *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990); *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993).

⁴ Technically, Johnston's *Baltimore's Mansion* is a memoir, and in my criticism of the memoir I do not lose sight of Johnston's attention to the meeting points of historiography and fiction. However, because Johnston exploits the conventions of the novel in his memoir, there is a certain accuracy in reading *Baltimore's Mansion* alongside novels. In fact, Johnston's conflation of novel and history provoked great disdain from his loyal critic Stuart Pierson; See Stuart Pierson, *Hard-Headed and Big-Hearted: Writing Newfoundland*, ed. Stan Dragland (St. John's, NL: Pennywell Books, 2006), 216-248, 136-152.

⁵ A parallel Catholic literary movement was active in Britain during the 1990s; See Peter Erb's "Psychological Integrity and the Reappropriation of a Catholic Past: British Catholic Novelists in the late 1990s," *The Canadian Catholic Review* 16/1 (1998), 32-44; and also Peter Erb's "Some Aspects in Modern British Catholic Literature: Apologetic in the Novels of Josephine Ward," *Recusant History* (24:3), 364-74.

associated with transitions from one conception of Catholicism to another. Kavanagh and Crummey both introduce themes of re-enchantment to challenge the naturalized secularism of modernity. Lastly, in all of these novels, “Catholic themes” are integrated with issues that we often associate with regional literature.

Whether in literature or politics, regionalism has been an important part of a Canadian collective strategy for coping with the expanse of the terrain and the great distances between communities that lie in the country's borders. Regionalism turns away from the desire to generalize on the national level, in an attempt to describe and do justice to local difference. For those who drive “out east” from Ontario, through Quebec, it becomes apparent that the Québécois cultural-linguistic buffer has given both English and French speaking Atlantic Canadians “room” to develop their differences. Atlantic Canadians not only embrace, but fiercely defend these differences. Furthermore, Atlantic Canadians tend to have a longer history in their home region than do those Canadians who settled to the west. My own genealogy may reflect the stories of others: John Atkinson arrived in the crown colony of Nova Scotia in 1771.⁶ He returned to his family in Mansfield, England, after which he chartered the *Arethusa* and settled in Fort Lawrence, NS in 1774. Captain John Oblenis, the patriarch on my mother's side, settled in Salisbury, NS in 1783. He was a United Empire Loyalist, whose Flemish family had resided in Harlem, NY, since his Huguenot grandfather, Joost Van Houplines Sr., fled France in 1663. That both of these families have lived in the Maritimes since Edmund

⁶ In 1771, “Nova Scotia” referred to a crown colony that covered the territory that is now Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and eastern Maine. In 1784, New Brunswick was created and the district of Maine was officially given back to Massachusetts (until then, there was a jurisdictional overlap between NS and Massachusetts).

Burke first served in the British Parliament is not a credential for my writing about Atlantic Canada, but rather demonstrates the depth of the regional historical imagination. Incidentally, many of the authors considered in this work grapple with this history in their fiction.

Furthermore, this distinctive historical element of the regional imaginary is manifested in its religious forms. Without equating religion and tradition, the Atlantic Canadian authors I address link the two, and for good reason. It is clear in reading their fiction that these authors find their work in tension with the sensibility which champions secularization, because that sensibility also champions the idea that we have a deep need for a break with the past.⁷ The authors considered in the core chapters of this study, therefore, represent a turn of the ideological tide: they mine the past for narrative, linguistic, and religious constructions which they infuse in their contemporary fictions. There is, thus, a confluence between the regional literary expression of Atlantic Canadian Catholicism and the broader current of change that is being called “post-secularism.”⁸

The Five Dimensions of the Social Imaginary

The forces that have permitted the Catholic novel to come to the fore in Atlantic Canada are related to this post-secular shift in our social imaginary, a shift with global

⁷ Even Lynn Coady's *Bridget of Strange Heaven*, who most longs for a break with the social mores of her community, complicates the trajectory of escape. Indeed, I argue in ch. 3 that Coady allows Bridget no complete break with her “prejudices” (I use the term in the Gadamerian sense here and throughout this study), even though she desires such a break.

⁸ Post-secularism has made inroads in philosophy, political theory, cultural criticism and religious studies through works by Charles Taylor, Talal Asad, Jeffery Stout, John Milbank, John Caputo, among a host of others. In literary studies, post-secularism has been carried forward by John McClure, Tracy Fessenden, Andrew Tate and Colin Jager.

consequences – as demonstrated in September 2001. Moreover, this shift is not only related to the writing produced, but also, to a wide and growing readership of these books. The nature of the Canadian literary market demands that if a literary movement is seen to emerge from Atlantic Canada, it cannot do so without a reading audience in the major urban centres (Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, for example). This reading audience participates with the Atlantic Canadian writers in forming the distinctive Atlantic Canadian imaginary.⁹ The term, “social imaginary,” is used in this study to represent my approach to the internal relations within the Atlantic Canadian region, as well as the region's involvement in broader cultural mappings (“the nation,” “North America,” “the West” and other such terms).¹⁰ The social imaginary is the sum of a culture's narratives, practices, and structures which we interact with on a daily basis by legitimating, sustaining, and pollinating them, and which we manipulate through images, stories, language, social dynamics, economics, policies, etc. As I define it, the social

⁹ See Lynn Coady's “Books that Say Arse” *Victory Meat* (Toronto: Anchor, 2003), 1-5, for a sharp consideration of the effects of tourism on Atlantic Canadian self-consciousness. See also, Dannielle Fullers' “Travelling Tales: Interrogating the Trans-Atlantic Journey of Three Atlantic-Canadian Bestsellers,” in *The Global Literary Field*, ed. by Anna Guttman et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars' Press, 2007), 78-104.

¹⁰ The term “social imaginary” owes a debt to psychoanalysis, particularly the thought of Jacques Lacan, who considers the imaginary to be a tertiary term beside the real and the symbolic, and also the thought of Cornelius Castoriadis, who adopted the term “social imaginary” to circumvent the determinism that he thought problematic in Marxist understandings of cultural production. See Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1987). Jacqueline Rose attempted to restrict the term “imaginary” to the Lacanian lexicon in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (New York: Verso, 2005), 167-97. The term had already attached itself to the discourses of sociology, political philosophy, and literary criticism. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1991) is credited by Arjun Appadurai and Charles Taylor as having an influence on the use of the term imaginary, although Anderson does not use the term “social imaginary” explicitly. Appadurai's article “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” in *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 1990) was also influential in promoting the use of the term imaginary as a positive, rather than negative descriptor. Finally, Taylor's *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), which is included in *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), and which develops his position in *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), has further popularized the term. I have developed the term, social imaginary, with Appadurai and Taylor in mind.

imaginary has five dimensions. Beginning with the image, the imaginary has height, width and depth, which are constituted by two dimensions of image as they are engaged by the third dimension of the viewer. The intentional subject interacts with this three dimensional lifeworld in a continuum of time – the fourth dimension, which gives rise to narrative.¹¹ Because the imaginary is a social creation, arising in a complex reflexive relationship with the givens of one's biological situation, it is informed by the past (in our genetics and traditions) as it negotiates the present and anticipates the future. Local distinctions (regionalisms, accents, practices) emerge from the coupling of place and time. These are not universal, but can be understood and acquired by anyone with similar biological and intellectual capacities.¹² The fifth dimension of the imaginary is the spiritual, which is evident in the bond that unites individuals in love, as well as the conceptual realm which we refer to when we make choices, practical and otherwise, using mathematics, or referring to an entity like “the Waterloo tech industry” in a coffee shop conversation.¹³ We see the tragic consequences of this spiritual dimension when humans are swept up in the evil zeitgeist of a genocidal group, targeting human victims through

¹¹ Paul Ricoeur's thesis argues that temporality is “the structure of existence that reaches language in narrative” and that narrativity is “the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent”; Hayden White, *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: John's Hopkin's University Press,), 171, as quoted from Ricoeur's essay “Narrative Time”.

¹² Of course there do seem to be formative periods in each human's life when he or she is no longer as impressionable he or she once was (say linguistically). After passing these periods there may be no way to acquire a new default language, even though one may acquire many new languages. Say, I may acquire Latin, or Korean, but the facticity (biological and intellectual) of my priory acquisition of English will always remain. I may have perpetual difficulty with conceiving of, say, the infinitive or subjunctive form, because I have never been taught to categorize English language in this way. Even if I come to master these forms, their metalinguistic status will always remain.

¹³ This fifth dimension would complicate the finite idea of dimensions in general. Without negating the first four dimensions, the fifth dimension could be infinite – in the case of the trinitarian godhead – or limited, as in the case of a Greek god. I'm thinking of William Blake's line: “If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through narrow chinks of his cavern.” See “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” in *Romanticism: An Anthology*: 2nd, ed., Duncan Wu (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 89.

ideological identity formations and their accompanying mythoi. An imaginary has a spiritual dimension by virtue of the complex structure of the human (spirit and flesh, soul and body) and the possible existence of a God or some other supernatural being(s), motivating force, or cosmic reality. Moreover, the spiritual dimension need not be considered supernatural. In the thought of Hegel and the writings of Virginia Woolf the spiritual dimension is understood as an aspect of the natural realm, as in the case of a character like Woolf's Septimus of *Mrs. Dalloway*, who is haunted by spectres of the traumatic events of WWI.¹⁴

An imaginary is not a world, but a lifeworld, a realm that would not exist if humans or other intelligent creatures (for instance, humpback whales trade songs with each other) did not add an artificial, expressive dimension to their existence. Moreover, the imaginary is not simply floating in some removed intersubjective dimension, but structures the material that we negotiate on a daily basis, such as sidewalks, traffic lights, the use of chairs (important in the West, but not so much in Korea and other Asian cultures, for instance), the structure of rooms and their uses, and the political forms in which individuals dwell.¹⁵ To use Charles Taylor's language, we are in the imaginary, like

¹⁴ See Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ For Claude Lefort the political signifies the "principles that generate society" which means that he sees no firm differential between a societal realm and a political realm. See *Political Theologies*, ed. Hent de Vries and Lawrence Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006) 157. Many sociologists dichotomize society and culture. Jürgen Habermas, goes farther. He claims that there is an important distinction between a lifeworld, in which a subject negotiates everyday life, and a system, which attempts to achieve the goals and adapt to natural challenges through total rationality (ie. economies, political structures, health care). In making this distinction, Habermas claims that the two realms are connected to each other because the system relies on the lifeworld for legitimation, even as the system attempts to de-couple itself from the lifeworld. This creates a legitimation crisis in modernity because lifeworlds which support the system become alienated from it, and thus threaten the stability of the system. Habermas claims that interpretive sociology cannot explain this problem because it will not permit the existence of factors that are beyond the purview of hermeneutics. Habermas is trying to integrate Lukac's critique of reification into a theory of democratic liberalism while wrongly arguing that hermeneutic theory cannot explain the legitimation crisis that arises from instrumental rationality.

a player is in a football game, not an armchair coach (as Cartesian theories of epistemology would have it).¹⁶ As Taylor argues, we only ever see part of the imaginary that we dwell in, since a great deal of it remains beyond the margins of our “vision,” and constitutes the frame of our picture. This is to say that the imaginary is both the two dimensional picture before us (the image, which extends into the third and fourth dimensions through memory) and also, the legitimating support for the existence of that image. Much of the legitimating support is difficult to examine, however, because we always rely on some sort of picture, frame, and narrative through which to examine it. One such framing story has been the secularization theses.

The Post-Secular Turn

As developed since the nineteenth century, the study of literature has relied on unstated secularization theses for its legitimation. Current proponents of this naturalized secularism imply that the shrinking influence of religion on culture is necessary for humanity to flourish; as a consequence, the proper soil for artistic and political

To this I would argue that while Habermas integrates tradition into his theory of the lifeworld, he refuses to acknowledge that traditions encompass systems, and that systems are simply a product of the Western tradition. Thus, I would argue that while his identification of the dynamic of the legitimation crisis is important, his critique of hermeneutics is less so. In contrast to Habermas, I argue that a system is an intricate part of a social imaginary. Even though it may attempt to escape the ground of tradition, a system is nonetheless generated and sustained and internal to an imaginary: that is, the pre-understanding of the imaginary gives rise to the system and limits a system. In arguing thus, I am siding with Weber and Gadamer against the revisionary readings that Habermas has given them. See Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action, Vol 2: Lifeworld and system: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 113-198.

¹⁶ See Charles Taylor, “Overcoming Epistemology,” in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 12. Taylor argues that theories of representational epistemology excessively remove the subject from the object to account for self-consciousness, and he sides with Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in arguing that “the condition of our forming disengaged representations of reality is that we must be already engaged in coping with our world, dealing with the things in it, at grips with them” (11). Taylor elaborates on this in his forthcoming book, *Revisiting Realism*, with Hubert Dreyfus.

endeavours is secularism. This shrinking religious influence is interpreted as resulting from the cultural logic established by the conditions of modernity. The marginalization of religion is thus construed as inevitable, while also being advocated as a hegemonic policy that is necessary for critical endeavours in the academy. Commenting specifically on literary studies, Michael Kaufmann argues that the post-secular is emerging because of the failure of dominant narratives of secularization, namely: 1) the Marxist reading of religion as epiphenomenal or as a facade for the “real” economic processes at work below the superstructure; 2) the Arnoldian replacement theory of religion which sees “Poetry” as replacing “Religion” and the “Poet” as replacing the “Prophet”; and 3) Said's doctrine of “secular criticism” which encourages a type of old style individuality that will not subscribe to party lines, be they Marxist, Derridean, Formalist, or Theological.¹⁷ These positions attempt to escape the hold of religion (thought of as unprogressive), by positing a frameless space beyond religion where a future society might operate. However, philosophical hermeneutics and the failed project of deconstruction (which by necessity has to be a failed project), demonstrate that there is no “areligious beyond” to discover. In the words of Hent de Vries, “repression of the theologico-political and, indeed, of the legacy of the 'Latin' in *globalatinization* – the very premise upon which the tradition of early and later modern liberalism is based – simply reproduces what it, in vain, tends to suppress, ignore, or relegate to internal or external, but no longer public sphere.”¹⁸

According to post-secularization theories, we must take it as *a priori* that knowledge is

¹⁷ Michael Kaufmann, “Literary Studies and Post-secularism,” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Chicago, Nov. 2, 2008).

¹⁸ Hent de Vries “The 'Theological Machine'” in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, ed. Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 379.

not possible without faith and that faith is not possible without a confession, a truth claim that structures one's horizon.¹⁹ According to this argument, secular criticism is an impossibility, but the realm of the secular, nevertheless, remains a reality. Although (faith in a) religion cannot be made compulsory by a coercive political power, it is equally true that there no recourse to the pure secularity that was the dream of Comtean positivism. Rather, because the pure religious and the pure secular are never possible, there remains a field of negotiation in which the religious and the secular are pushed into a relationship that approaches conflation. I will develop this argument in my discussion of Secular I and Secular II below.

John McClure has attempted to describe these shifts away from secularization theories both from the perspective of the author, as well as that of the critic. He argues that when the religious appears in Tony Kushner's post-secular fiction *Angels in America*, it is not “as monolithic truth but as a complex field of enigmatic apparitions, assertions, and counterassertions.”²⁰ This partial faith is similarly at work, McClure argues, in the

¹⁹ For several complex arguments on this front see Charles Taylor's *Sources of The Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 3-107; John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory* (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 257-442; David Bentley Hart's *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 35-152, 413-45; Paul Badiou's *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1-15, and *Metapolitics* (New York: Verso, 2006), 10-57. The point of commonality between these thinkers lies in an understanding of knowledge that is maintained by a faith action toward its referent, that if dissolved, gives way to plurality, and if maintained puts the subject in a decisive position with regard to the truth of this claim: to reject or accept it. See also Jacques Derrida's “Faith and Knowledge” in *Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1998), 1-78, for an engaging critique of the relationship between knowledge and faith.

²⁰ John McClure, *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 3. McClure draws attention to the similarities between his own characterization of the post-secular and those of Gianni Vattimo and William Connolly. Vattimo has argued that a post-Christian society, which he sees the West as, must think weak thoughts, that is, thoughts that have less ontological force. He argues that the legacy of charity that Christianity has bequeathed the West must under go a kenosis (self-emptying) of its Christian content and become the rule of secularized society; see *Belief* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 62-5. Connolly resists secularism and Augustinianism, while articulating a counter-tradition in European philosophical modernity that embraces a life force that is associated with the earth. He includes Spinoza, Nietzsche,

novels of Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo and Toni Morrison. In these fictional domains, the secular is ruptured by the religious, yet the particular form of transcendence is kept in a state of flux and the secular remains the domain of experience. It is, for example, quite interesting to see the secular domestic space of DeLillo's *White Noise* descend into chaos by the threat of death, which takes the form of an "airborne toxic event." I take this event as symbolic of the larger dynamics at work in the post-secular. This fear-evoking toxic cloud brings the community of *White Noise* together in a collective experience of mystery, awe, and angst. The people must evacuate the modern city to escape this wondrous event, yet even then they may not be safe. This repulsive product of technological prowess and instrumental rationality is the result of modern aspirations that are extended without limit; this technology threatens the viability of the secular lifestyles that it is designed to support.²¹ The *telos* of the Kantian sublime²² is to overcome nature, but in following this trajectory the program of secular reason gives rise to its own illogic. Forcing human aspiration beyond the limits of human flourishing, it brings about a crisis which necessitates a move "back" into a religious mode and necessitates a practice of epistemological humility. The reader is reminded of the iconic scene from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* where the young Wordsworth steals a "shepherd's boat," only to feel conviction about his transgression when he sees the grandeur of the "huge cliff" that

Kafka, Henri Bergson, William James, Deleuze, and Foucault, among others in this genealogy of thought, see Connolly "Europe: A Minor Tradition," *Powers of the Secular Modern* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 75-92.

²¹ Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 107.

²² Kant writes in § 28 in *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 64, that "sublimity, therefore, does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind, in so far as we may become conscious of our superiority over nature within, and thus over nature without us."

“strode after him.”²³ DeLillo rewrites this scene to illustrate the horrifying potential of the Kantian sublime (a horror that Wordsworth had intimations of “in lonely rooms, mid the din /Of towns and cities”).²⁴ This horror is found in humanity's will to overcome nature without end.

Further questions are brought up on the theological level, where DeLillo's polluted cloud of unknowing seems to participate in the apophatic method of naming God, yet this naming is void of any revelation of that God (i.e. a creed, a sacred text). Could an “airborne toxic event” possibly be the natural predicate of a holy God, or some other supernatural force? If it is not functioning on this level of signification, what is it that gives rise to the religious effervescence that the community experiences? Is this, to use John Caputo's phrase, “religion with/out religion”?²⁵ As the slash intimates, the answer can only be yes and no. This shift in the relationship between religion and secularity is pervasive in Western culture and gives particular shape to the discourse on Catholicism in Atlantic Canadian literature (as with the discourse McClure delineates). The slash is the omnipresent theo-political condition of writing in a non-confessional imaginary, a location where the secular has not overcome the religious, and the religious is now permeated with the secular. Neither the secular nor the religious are the “drivers” (hegemon), but both are reduced to partial control.

It is surprising, then, to find that critics have not engaged the complex religious representation in Atlantic Canadian literature. In *Under Easter Eyes: A Critical Reading*

²³ William Wordsworth, “Two-Part Prelude,” in Wu, 302, Part I, l. 82, 108, 114.

²⁴ William Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey,” in Wu, 266, l. 26-7.

²⁵ John D. Caputo wrote *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997). John H. Olthuis edited *Religion With/out Religion: The Prayers and Tears of John D. Caputo* (New York: Routledge, 2002). The slash is Olthuis' innovation.

of *Maritime Fiction* (1987), Janice Kulyk Keefer deploys considerable critical powers to legitimate the study of Maritime writing, but she glosses over the religious element at work in the literature.²⁶ David Creelman's *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction* (2003), similarly offers a thorough overview of the primary generic form that Atlantic novelists have adopted, the realist novel, and charts the workings of liberal and conservative tendencies in these narratives, but he also overlooks their religious underpinnings.²⁷ While giving further credence to studying the literature of the region, Creelman's work demonstrates one of the weaknesses of political analysis – religious actors are often not taken seriously as rational actors in the polis. They are considered, instead, to be unqualified to engage in the real work of politics because their ultimate commitments impede them from seeing the “art of the possible.” Creelman's engagement with Richards is indicative on this front; he wants to address Richards' complicated move from existentialist to mystic by claiming that Richards has ceased writing realism and started writing romance.²⁸ Likewise, with Coady and MacDonald, Creelman's analysis avoids their multifaceted engagement with religion and instead puts the emphasis on his regnant dialectic: liberalism and conservatism.²⁹ In this study, I suggest that both of these labels can be thoroughly complicated by an analysis of Catholicism. The submerged third of this critical discourse is Herb Wyile, who has been influential in drawing attention to

²⁶ Janice Kulyk Keefer, *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction* (Toronto:University of Toronto Press, 1987).

²⁷ David Creelman, *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003). These are Frye's categories, yet they inscribe a certain anachronism into contemporary discourse. Richards pushes the genre of realism towards tragedy in order to disclose the workings of redemption. For Richards, redemption always involves suffering.

²⁸ Creelman, 168-72.

²⁹ Creelman, 189-92; 195-200.

Atlantic Canadian writing through his many articles and interviews. Still, Wyile's poignant analysis is largely limited to the deconstruction of regional constructs and the identification of ideological conflicts at work in gender, economic, and disciplinary (history and literature) categories. In 2003, Wyile organized the influential conference, "Surf's Up: The Rising Tide of Atlantic Canadian Literature,"³⁰ on such themes as multiculturalism, class, and writing at the margins. While this conference generated further interest in the region, sadly the category of religion remained absent.

My analysis of Atlantic Canadian literature does not seek to invalidate the arguments of those who have established the region; however, it does argue that their criticism must be supplemented by an analysis of religion. Because religious and theological structures highly influence the form of Atlantic Canada's secular imaginary, we must take them seriously. Without considering religion, many of the critical enterprises may fail, having omitted this fundamental category.

What we require, then, is a description of the post-secular that will allow us to produce an adequate reading of contemporary Atlantic Canadian literature. I do not, however, advocate an uncritical adoption of McClure's description of the movement at

³⁰ Held at Acadia University, Oct. 15-17, 2004. See Wyile's "Making a Mess of Things: Postcolonialism, Canadian Literature, and the Ethical Turn." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 76.3 (2007): 821-37; "As For Me and Me Arse: Strategic Regionalism and the Home Place in Lynn Coady's *Strange Heaven*." *Canadian Literature* 189 (Summer 2006), 85-103; and with Christopher Armstrong, and Christopher Armstrong. "Firing the Regional Can(n)on: Liberal Pluralism, Social Agency, And David Adams Richards's *Miramichi Trilogy*." *SCL/ÉLC* 22.1 (1997): 1-18. See also the website Wyile has produced with Jordan MacDonald and Julie Veinot, *Waterfront Views: Contemporary Writing of Atlantic Canada*, Wolfville: Department of English, Acadia U, 2007, Website, <http://english.acadiau.ca/waterfrontviews/flash/intro.html> (accessed Dec 18, 2008).

large,³¹ nor do I encourage variations formulated by Gianni Vattimo or William Connolly,³² both of whom fail to theorize Christianity in its due complexity to offer convincing readings of our contemporary problematic. And although McClure's theory of post-secularism recognizes essential themes in the movement, it tends toward reading the post-secular as only a contemporary literary aesthetic. In contrast, I see the post-secular as also a cultural and critical turn that affects our imaginary holistically and includes shifts in our politics, our economies, as well as our interpretation of literature more generally.

Catholic Writers and the Post-Secular

Looking at McClure's list of writers and theorists – Pynchon, DeLillo, Morrison, Ondaatje, Vattimo, Taylor – the commonality that arises among these figures is that they are all Catholic (Ondaatje was raised Anglo-Catholic in Sri Lanka). Moreover, there is a strong Catholic contingent among the writers who are leading the current reconsideration of religion: Cormac McCarthy; Joseph Boyden; J.M. Coetzee; Michele Roberts; Seamus Heaney; John Patrick Shanley; Peter Carey; and Craig Finn.³³ As with the authors I am

³¹ McClure gives voice to a literary movement that might align with the population that sociologists call “Spiritual But Not Religious” (SBNRs). In doing so, he describes a middle ground between the rational certainties of modern propositional religion and the Kierkegaardian “leap of faith” existentialists. Often, however, it seems that McClure's determinant for the post-secular is that these are “religious writers” who share with the post-modern an incredulity towards metanarratives.

³² See Gianni Vattimo's *Belief*, trans. Luca D'Isanto and David Webb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), and Vattimo, and Richard Rorty's *The Future of Religion*, ed. Santiago Zabala (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2005). See William Connolly's *Why I am Not a Secularist* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), and also Connolly, “Refashioning the Secular,” in *What's Left of Theory?: New Work on the Politics of Literary Theory*, ed. Judith Butler et al, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 157-191. I address Vattimo and Connolly in chapter six.

³³ See McCarthy's *The Road* (New York: Vintage, 2006); Boyden's *Three Day Road* (Toronto: Penguin, 2006), and *Through Black Spruce* (Toronto: Viking, 2008); Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* (Toronto: Viking, 2003); Roberts' *Impossible Saints* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1997); Heaney's *Electric Light* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001); Shanley's *Doubt: A Parable* (New York: Dramatist Play

considering in this study, these writers celebrate (though not without critique) Catholic symbols, thought forms, practices, and spirituality in ways that reflect changing interests in the public readership. These interests are connected to shifting cultural and political structures, which point to innovations on the level of the “frame” that allow for the entire imaginary to “picture” religion in a new light. The Catholic authors who participate in this reconfiguration of religion (and also the secular) may not consider themselves religious writers, nor is this a homogeneous movement. Even in the case of the Atlantic Canadian Catholic authors, where the word “movement” makes much more sense, there is no consensus about how to approach Catholicism.³⁴ Only MacDonald, Coady, and Johnston's work could be described by the partial faith that McClure sees as the regnant sensibility of post-secularism. With Richards, Kavanagh, and Crummey, what emerges is a robust articulation of a sacramental reality that pervades the world; these narratives are not indicative of a retreat from the world, but rather a committed engagement that is highly self-conscious of sceptical readings of their confessed sacramental reality. Thus, they anticipate the *secularist* critic, while situating their work squarely in the *secular*. We could argue alongside Colin Jager that the sceptic is to be found operating in their fictions as an internal other, or a self that competes against their “orthodox” self for interpretative dominance.³⁵ To have internal differentiation that is based on resonance with the plural

Service, 2005); Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* (New York: Harper, 1998), and *Jack Maggs* (New York: Vintage, 1997); Finn's albums with The Hold Steady, *Separation Sunday* (New York: Frenchkiss Records, 2005), *Boys and Girls in America* (Santa Monica: Vagrant, 2006), and *Stay Positive* (Santa Monica: Vagrant 2008). I include Finn in this group because his lyrics are overtly literary – John Berryman comes to him in visions – and particularly in tune with post-secular Catholic sensibilities.

³⁴ Arguably the Southern Agrarians, and specifically the three figures, Allen Tate, Caroline Gordon, and Flannery O'Connor represent a literary movement that expresses, self consciously, a greater degree of theological consensus than the Atlantic Canadians. See Francesca Murphy, *Christ the Form of Beauty: A Study in Theology and Literature*. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).

³⁵ Colin Jager, “After the Secular: The Subject of Romanticism” *Public Culture* 18.2 (2006): 301-21.

confessions at work in our imaginary is, one might argue, the normative subjectivity of the post-secular.³⁶

The argument that I would like to advance has arisen from my readings of the Atlantic writers in the context of a burgeoning artistic discourse on religion which extends beyond the region. We read the religious and the secular in the Western imaginary according to the historical and theological context in which they developed.³⁷ The history of the secular-religious binary, I contend, is strongly associated with another binary, nature and grace, which underwrites and informs the discourse of the secular and the religious. These binaries can be more clearly understood if we differentiate between two forms of the secular: Secular I and Secular II. Where Secular I interprets a strong division between nature and grace which, consequently, erects a harsh divide between the religious and the secular, Secular II (the post-secular) is best understood as a re-constellation of the secular which fosters expressions of the religious that are structured on a continuum between nature and grace.³⁸ We could ascribe this difference to the

³⁶ For this reason, McClure's thesis needs to be amended. The post-secular is not only about one's own incredulity, but may be responding to the incredulity that is omnipresent in a pluralist framework. The collective force of this incredulity is so powerful as to inscribe itself internally in the believer. This does not mean that there is a collective agent consciously opposed to the believer, but that each group understands itself as against all other subjects or groups and sees all others as the collective force of hegemony.

³⁷ The influence of Western construals of the religious and the secular has had global consequences. Two considerations of secularism in India describe how these constructs that have developed through debates that are internal to Christianity, debates between Protestants and Catholics and their governing powers, have brought political forms into an Indian context where they continue to be as problematic as they are in the West. See *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, ed. Anuradha D. Needham and Rajeswari S. Rajan, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) and *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³⁸ This explicitly Catholic language is not meant to estrange other religious positions, but to elicit analogical similarities with other religious idioms. At times I have thought that the differences between Secular I and II are nicely teased out through an analogy with web-based interfaces: thus Secular 1.0 and 2.0. "1.0" would represent a static, inflexible secularism, and "2.0" a dynamic mode of the secular which permits dialogue, communication, and supplementation of the "neutral public" by religious positions and their transcendental structures.

contrast between Protestant and Catholic versions of the secular, but this may give readers the impression that these traditions are stable forms without exceptions. It may also imply that Catholicism in 2009 is the same as it was in 1517, which is not the case. There is no simple return of Catholicism in Secular II and yet it would be an oversight not to identify the nature-grace continuum as a Catholic form.

Secular I and II: Underwritten by Interpretations of Nature and Grace

The distinction I am making between Secular I and II is not one that is meant to describe the totality of social and historical changes that have occurred through modernity, but rather a device that allows us to see how current aesthetic, social, and political modes differ from those of liberalism. In recent years, liberalism has come under an increasing critique. There are certain failures of the liberal metanarrative³⁹ that have prompted the cultures of the West to reconsider the role of religion; these include liberalism's inability to foster fulfilling conceptions of the subject, the polis, the global economy, and our relationship to our environment. Two developments, in particular, have

³⁹ I take liberalism to be a philosophy of society that is built on a conception of the self as autonomous, free, self-creating, voluntary, and pragmatically innocent. Liberalism views conventions as structures that permit privacy, while sustaining a public that is “neutral” and open to free, “rational” discourse (Berlin). It privatizes conceptions of the good in order to prioritize justice (Rawls, Habermas). Likewise, it separates the religion and the state and argues that ideas that emerge from religious doctrine must be articulated in ways that are accessible to those who reject the principles of those traditions if they are to be uttered in the public (Rawls, Habermas). Ideally, public policy must be universalizable (Kant); See Uday Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 51-5. The state is to have international policy that disavows friend-enemy constructions while also building multilateral consensus across inter-state boundaries; see Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 55-6, 78-9. Liberalism also attempts to free the market from the fettering forces of the state. State policies are to be created through discussion, not decision (as in the case of Schmitt), and the pluralization of “brands” of public institutions is encouraged to this end; see Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (New York: Verso, 2005), 102-116. Ultimately these political innovations route back to my starting point: liberalism seeks to create the conditions that permit the self to be deterritorialized, maximally mobile, and self-determining, while not infringing on other's abilities to achieve the same ends.

lead to this reexamination of liberalism. Multiculturalism, which has been taken up by liberalism as a mode of fostering decolonization as well as international mobility, has given rise to a cultural self-consciousness through which we have come to see the embeddedness of subjects in communities as something that is thick, richly layered, and the primary source of strong ethical evaluations.⁴⁰ The deep roots that languages and cultures provide map into modes of interpreting reality that are religious and that are not easily reduced to the thin accounts which are permissible under the conventions of the liberal public. Moreover, the Western fascination with cultural “others” has given rise to an internal analysis of the sources of its political forms and this archaeology routinely encounters points where this secular system rests on theological underpinnings. The American discourse on self-evident rights is based on congregationalist understandings of the rights bestowed to Adam and Eve in Eden, and this legacy of civil and human rights inherits its genealogy from the early modern understanding of natural law, which is mapped into a conception of the “great chain of being” and Hellenistic/Christian hypergoods.⁴¹ The forms that have shaped Canada and Britain are also strongly tied to theological models of realism according to which the state finds its representation in the person of the Queen who stands before God and the very land that is built on is

⁴⁰ On “strong evaluations” Taylor writes, “Our identity is therefore defined by certain evaluations which are inseparable from ourselves as agents. Shorn of these we would cease to be ourselves, by which we do not mean trivially that we would be different in the sense of having some properties other than those we now have – which would indeed be the case after any change, however minor – but that shorn of these we would lose the very possibility of being an agent who evaluates; that our existence as persons, and hence our ability to adhere as persons to certain evaluations, would be impossible outside the horizon of these essential evaluations, that we would break down as persons, be incapable of being persons in the full sense” in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 34-5.

⁴¹ John Milbank's analysis of the theo-politics in *Theology and Social Theory* (Malden: Blackwell, 2006) is instructive here. He traces the origins of rights discourse and private property in Gerson, Locke and Hobbes to the dominion of Adam in Eden (13-18).

understood as a “dominion,” or a area to be ruled over that is bestowed by a higher power. As the preamble to the 1982 Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* makes clear - “Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law”⁴² - it is difficult for a liberal democratic state to divorce itself from the theo-political forms that precede it and continue to remain active in civil society.

Tracey Fessenden draws our attention to the role that dominant religious frameworks have had on our interpretation of the master categories of our imaginary. Considering the Protestant legacy, she asks:

How have specific forms of Protestant belief and practice come enduringly to be subsumed under the head of 'Christian' – to the exclusion of non-Protestant and differently Protestant ways of being Christian – and how, in many cases, does the 'Christian' come to stand in for the 'religious' to the exclusion of non-Christian ways of being religious? Part of the answer surely lies in the ability of a Protestantized conception of religion to control the meanings of both the religious and the secular. (4)⁴³

Protestantism has had a strong influence on Western culture, particularly the Calvinist theology of human depravity that underwrites the strong division between the two poles

⁴² This is a reduced version of the preamble to the 1960 Canadian *Bill of Rights* that read: “The Parliament of Canada, affirming that the Canadian Nation is founded upon principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God, the dignity and worth of the human person and the position of the family in a society of free men and free institutions; Affirming also that men and institutions remain free only when freedom is founded upon respect for moral and spiritual values and the rule of law; And being desirous of enshrining these principles and the human rights and fundamental freedoms derived from them, in a Bill of Rights which shall reflect the respect of Parliament for its constitutional authority and which shall ensure the protection of these rights and freedoms in Canada:...” The 1982 version is significantly thinned from its 1960 version.

⁴³ Fessenden adds that “Protestantism's emancipation from Catholicism both provides the blueprint for, and sets the limits of, secularism's emancipation from 'religion' itself”; *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 4. This Weberian logic is hard to avoid. Frederic Jameson calls Calvinism a vanishing mediator; Frederic Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 3-34. It emerges from Catholicism, mediates from Catholicism to Capitalism, and then vanishes. I do not think it is that simple; although Calvinism plays an important part in making the visible Church invisible, which is an optical trick that is later taken up by secularist partisans operating under Secular I. Once the Church is invisible it is easy to say that it does not exist.

of the religious-secular binary in Secular I.

John Calvin and the Reformed Church set out to defend God's majesty, his ability to transcend all human categories and advances, against what it interpreted in the Catholic Church as a prideful mastery over God's rightful domain. To do so, Calvin had to counter the Catholic understanding of nature and human agency (works) and insist that human nature is totally depraved before God and only open to the divine by virtue of God's own gratuitous self-offering, accepted by faith. Calvin argued that because God is such a powerful actor, his predestination of humans to their eternal ends overcomes all human acts of will and is exclusively the domain of divine action. Grace, according to Calvinism, is irresistible. Moreover, those who are elected by God are never certain of their election. This is crucial because it forces the true Church into a position of invisibility. Where the Catholic understanding of the Church's visibility was based on Matthew 16:19, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (NRSV), Calvin emphasized the point that certainty of the knowledge of salvation is of God's majestic dominion, and not human. Thus the Catholic Church claimed that it was the visible true Church, whereas the Reformed Church emphasized that the true Church was invisible and moved beyond all sectarian divisions.

Practically, what occurs in this structure is that the secular domain, the realm of human action, and the religious domain, the realm of divine action, are distanced. The secular is seen as the jurisdiction of the saints and a venue for justice, but not ultimately the realm of salvific action. All salvific action is God's action and this action is invisible,

inscrutable, and totally given over to God's voluntary decision. This structure is at the foundations of American culture in the seventeenth century traditions of the Puritans, the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians, the Dutch Reformed, and the Baptists; it also informs an Evangelical outlook on society. Evangelicals, however, have modified the Calvinist framework so that passivity about salvation is trumped by *active* evangelization and engagement with others.⁴⁴

Where Calvinism maintains a strong divide between a conception of the “pure” religious – a pure realm of divine action – and the realm of secular, human action, liberalism and other secularist forms, flip this binary for ulterior purposes. The realm of divine action is seen by such purity theses as a corruption of the properly secular realm. There, thus, arises an anxiety about the purity of the secular. In Marxist ideologies, religion is seen as a corruption of proletariat reason by bourgeois forces. In Rawlsian and Habermasian formations of democratic liberalism, the religious is a sub-public realm of life that must translate its claims into “rational” secular claims that are accessible by all parties. The religious is a domain which is to be watched, interrogated, translated/colonized, and purified, before it is able to act on secular grounds.

What I designate as Secular II does away with this anxiety about purity and

⁴⁴ Evangelicals are, however, an anomaly in this paradigm because they are genealogically related to Calvinism, and yet they are still drivers in much of what has become Secular II. Upon closer inspection, however, Evangelicals often operate with a theology that depicts human and divine action working co-operation (resonating, perhaps, with the teachings of John Wesley). Many Evangelical denominations have moved away from an emphasis on predestination, and adhere to Arminianism (free-will). There is, thus, a *sensus fidelium* in Evangelicalism that is associated with the nature-grace continuum. This is what H. Richard Niebuhr identifies in his chapter “Christ the transformer of Culture” in *Christ & Culture* (New York: Harper, 2001), 190-229. Evangelicals view the secular as having the capacity to be transformed, and this is largely conceived of something that they are actively involved in transforming. We can see here a middle ground between the care-taking mentality of Calvinism, and natural theology of Catholicism.

instead, delights in conflating the religious-secular binary. This conflation serves the purpose of making room for a nature-grace continuum that celebrates human agency in the realm of the religious. Sometimes this form of the secular is an outright celebration of what Augustine denounces as Pelagian works-based righteousness; at other times, it celebrates the purely gratuitous grace of the Trinity working in confluence with an already graced human nature.⁴⁵ Scott Lash claims that the regnant dynamic of postmodernism is the “de-differentiation” of 1) “aesthetic, theoretical, ethical” processes, 2) cultural and social realms, 3) the conditions of the cultural economy (production, consumption, circulation), and 4) “the mode of signification.”⁴⁶ Lash claims that this de-differentiation is a process that occurs solely on the cultural and not the societal level. Against this, I argue that Secular II de-differentiates the religious and the secular, and provokes changes at political, as well as social and cultural levels. This is not to say that Secular II emerges and completely overtakes all ground that was negotiated under Secular I. However, shifts on the religious level point to deeper reconfigurations that involve more than a change in cultural content.⁴⁷ As Mark Juergensmeyer states, “It isn't so much that we've seen a politicization of religion in over the last twenty years, but that we've

⁴⁵ The Catholic theology on this nature-grace question is highly complex and cannot be developed in this dissertation. For an overview of the debate on the natural desire for God see John Milbank in *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) and Reinhard Hütter in “*Desiderium Naturale Visionis Dei – Est autem duplex hominis beatitudo sive felicitas*: Some Observations about Lawrence Feingold's and John Milbank's Recent Interventions in the Debate over the Natural Desire to See God” *Nova et Vetera* 5.1 (2007): 81-132.

⁴⁶ Scott Lash, *Sociology of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 11. About representation Lash writes, “modernism conceives of representations as being problematic whereas postmodernism problematizes reality” (12).

⁴⁷ For a consideration of how a “Catholic modernity” has offered different options for reading the secular see Anthony J. Carroll, “Church and Culture: Protestant and Catholic Modernities,” *New Blackfriars*, 90: 1026 (2009), 163-177. Carroll's analysis is indebted to Charles Taylor's essay, *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture*, ed. James L. Heft (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1999).

seen a religionization of politics.”⁴⁸ I take this to mean that religion is not being fit into a prefabricated form of politics, but that the realm of politics itself is being remade as religious actors re-emerge in it and assert themselves on terms that are based on strong evaluations and founded in religious traditions, not opportunism.

The rise of religious themes and the return of theological forms in literature by Catholics and other writers engaging religion is just one aspect of Secular II. The reinvention of religious activism on the left and the right, in Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Neo-Pagan, and Jewish circles all signify a growing resurgence of religion in the secular realm as well as a changing cultural imaginary.⁴⁹ The connection between activism and self-making is combined with an approach which understands religious sensibilities and traditions as living, malleable structures that can be “renovated,” and this connection has brought about conditions that could culminate in a renaissance of Western religion. This renaissance would differ from the 15th century in that it would be conducted along pluralist, rather than centralist, theological dynamics. There is, however, a series of cultural echoes between the Renaissance, Romanticism, and Secular II, which gives the critic reason to look back, but not for too long, as the contemporary scene is one that is unique and will delineate a different way forward.⁵⁰ Nature is once again seen as a

⁴⁸ Mark Juergensmeyer, “Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State” (CBC Ideas Lecture at St. Jerome's University, April 6, 2009).

⁴⁹ See for example the latest comic book franchise *The 99* (Safat, Kuwait: Teshkeel Comics, 2007 onward), which bases its characters on the 99 attributes of Allah, and has spawned a theme park in Kuwait (with four more in development).

⁵⁰ The points of similarity between the Renaissance and the Secular II are a renewed understanding of human making, and the sense that there is a confluence of sources that have emerged from a state of suppression that are being configured and affecting public influence. With Romanticism one sees an emergent paganism, coupled with theologies of immanence, and an emphasis on organic traditional forms. There is also a mainstream acceptance of a critique of enlightenment triumphalism. I caution the reader not to push a thesis of identity between the present and these past movements, but one would be remiss not to see at least some repetition. A site of repetition between these movements is the idea that

portal for grace and is not only a fractured semblance of the divine.

Because nature can be a sign of grace, and also a sign of fracture and evil, Secular II is a realm of instability. This secular is understood to be the pre-condition for human redemption and is thus understood to be a necessary development, one that has glimmers of tragedy about it, glimmers that can turn comedic in the light of grace.

With reference to the specifically “secular” location of contemporary readers, Andrew Tate argues that the instability of the post-secular is a product of textuality without authoritative readings, a point not lost on the Catholic Church of the Reformation era as it considered what to do with Luther's textual shift to reading “scripture alone.”

Tate writes:

In traditional religious experience, the worshiper needs an unwavering faith in the object of worship, whereas in the act of reading, the reader – analogous ... with the position of the believer – is not only free to exercise disbelief, but the encounter between text and reader is positively charged with the possibility that s/he might, at any time, reject what s/he is reading; apostasy, as it were, is a vital escape clause for the disillusioned reader.⁵¹

Much of what Tate argues about the relationship between text, fiction and belief also applies to the social practices that develop under a regime of pluralist democratic capitalism. A world without one dominant coercive force gives way to many coercive agents that attempt to vie for belief in products that can be converted into increased capital. In such an economic situation, the secular can hardly be purely secular, as desire for transcendence is the most useful financial lubricant. The connection between desire and concupiscence was not lost on early Christianity and once again, in the contemporary

human expression can be enchanted.

⁵¹ Andrew Tate, *Contemporary Fiction and Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 5.

Western imaginary we find the idea that the desire for God might have some relation to the desire for market items, imaginative enjoyment, and sexual satisfaction. The inherent play at work in the desiring subject and the agents who wants to motivate that desire for his gain creates a problematic that cannot deny or affirm properly religious desire.

Instability, which Augustine would locate in the subject's inner world, is, in the post-secular, the pervasive sensibility of the public imaginative terrain: "all that is solid melts into air."⁵² The constitutive difference between the paleo-secularity of medieval Catholicism and both Secular I and II is that the play of desire in I and II is not mitigated by an overarching institution that can discipline the subject to enjoy (frui) the Trinity, while subjecting all other desires to the use (usi) that the Trinity has for them.⁵³ We might say then that what makes the Catholic sensibility of the post-secular different from the paleo-secular is the need to affirm a certain act of will on behalf of the subject in the contemporary pluralist milieu.

Negotiating the market is, then, a source of the renewed religious activism in Secular II; like the hundred mile diet, religious actors are beginning to look at the context in which they make their choices and they find that in order to renovate themselves, their world must be de-differentiated. In the sphere of aesthetic production, this means that among Catholics we see a renewed emphasis on theological aesthetics. By linking the divine with created beauty the world of artistic and cultural production can be understood as full of revelatory potential.

⁵² David McLellan, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990), 244.

⁵³ See Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. Philip Schaff. (Grand Rapids: CCEL, 1890), I, 3-5 for more on his dichotomy of things to be used (usi) and things to enjoy (frui).

Theological Aesthetics

Catholic writers have inherited a long tradition of thought that links artistic production with participation in God. My engagement with the Catholic movement in Atlantic Canadian literature, brings to light the critical neglect of the religious themes that abound in these narratives. By attending to the theological aesthetics of Catholic Atlantic Canadian literature the areas of critical analysis that have been important to the Academy for the last forty years - race, gender, class, power, difference - take on new contours, nuances, and relations. However, I stand with Tracey Fessenden when she states

The last thing I would wish ... is for religion to be seen as a legitimate category of analysis in American literary and cultural history *only* insofar as it can be reconstituted in terms of the pressures it exerts on race, nationality, gender, sexuality, and other varieties of difference, for such a move would replicate the process by which religion disappears from critical inquiry by being dismissed as epiphenomenal.⁵⁴

Like the repressed, religion has returned to haunt the modern academy, a stronghold of secularism. If the academy erases this return, it will become distorted and disfigured, operating as if it is under psychosis, mis-reading the vast evidence that religion provides for understanding all ethnic groups and producing scholarship that lacks engagement with a fundamental category of humanity.

Theological aesthetics has a long history in the Christian tradition. In writings from the patristic and medieval periods, beauty is often integrated into theology;⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Fessenden, 12.

⁵⁵ See for example Gregory of Nyssa's *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Harper, 2006), Book II, which contemplates Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai before God in light of the Neo-platonic ascent toward Beauty, while critiquing the later with resources from theology. Also consider, Boethius' Lady of wisdom in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Dante's Beatrice from *The Divine Comedy*, as well as Bonaventure's thoughts on Beauty in *The Soul's Journey into God* (Ch 2, par. 11; 13), and *The Tree of Life* (particularly par. 35). Selections from these texts can be found in Gesa Thiessen's *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

however, with the rise of the reformation the critique of aesthetics as a form of idolatry intensified. Where iconoclasts from earlier periods rejected images of God without rejecting a theology that emphasized beauty, the reformations of the sixteenth century set in motion a hermeneutics of suspicion towards aesthetics, partly in reaction to the renaissance philosophies of beauty. Alister McGrath notes the oft-repeated slogan in reformation history, “Without humanism, there would be no Reformation.”⁵⁶ Perhaps Kierkegaard has best manifested the rejection of aesthetics that is implicit in the Lutheran tradition by insisting on an “either/or” distinction between aesthetics and ethics. Kierkegaard's subject must traverse through the Aesthetic phase of existence, which is marked by normative claims and morality, towards the Ethical, which places the subject in relation to her interiority and ultimately to the teleological suspension of the ethical in the Religious phase, where the subject is before God, who calls for response based on his will. Kierkegaard exemplifies the movement to a conception of a God who determines goodness by an act of will, almost arbitrarily (*voluntas simplex*), from a God whose will determined goodness in the very creation of the world – a goodness that is not negated by God's transcendence (*voluntas ordinata*).

In the mid-20th century, Christian theology and philosophical aesthetics found a renewed integration in Hans Urs von Balthasar's writings. In his essay “Revelation and the Beautiful,” Balthasar sees room in Kierkegaard's philosophy for a rapprochement with Patristic theories of beauty.⁵⁷ Indeed, Balthasar attempts to clarify the debate between the

⁵⁶ Alister McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea* (New York: Harper, 2007), 33.

⁵⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Revelation and the Beautiful,” *Explorations in Theology, Vol 1: The World Made Flesh*. Trans. A.V. Littledale and Alexander Dru. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 95-126.

iconoclasts of the reformation and the iconodules of Catholicism by asserting that the relationship between aesthetics and theology must prioritize Christology and subject beauty to the revelation of the Father in the Son. There can be no conformity of theology to a “mundane” aesthetics, but rather, Christians must see mundane “aesthetics” in light of the “supramundane” revelation of theology.⁵⁸ Following the Bathasarian route, Francesca Murphy appropriates the work of Jacques Maritain and the Southern Agrarians and emphasizes the continuity between the experience of the immediate particulars of one's situation, reflection, and the experience of the universal form.⁵⁹ With Maritain, Murphy sees resources in the Christian tradition for engaging particulars in their materiality, in order that the particular might give rise, through the illumination of the intellect, to an apprehension of the universal.⁶⁰ Thus, there is a confluence between post-structuralism's emphasis on the particular and Christian theologies of creation and incarnation. Christianity, however, cannot sacrifice the discourse of the universal, nor the transcendent, as has often occurred in contemporary theory.⁶¹

The theological aesthetic that I identify in Atlantic Canadian literature reflects the Catholic ratio of the universal and the particular, and I have emphasized this ratio in the literary work. The three traditional aspects of Catholic aesthetics at work in this literature are: firstly, the Analogy of Being; secondly, the Spiritual Sense; and thirdly,

⁵⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol. I: Seeing the Form*. Trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. Ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 79-116.

⁵⁹ Murphy, 79-80.

⁶⁰ Murphy, 68-85.

⁶¹ In fact, we have seen a turn back toward a theorization of the (post)Christian relationship between the universal and the particular in the thought of Paul Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, Ernesto Laclau, and Giorgio Agamben.

Gathered Time.⁶²

1. **Analogy of Being (*analogia entis*):** The analogy of being represents an attempt by Catholic thinkers since Aquinas to understand the relationship between God and the world. Taking up the earlier Aristotelian distinction, it refuses the absolute poles of identity (univocity) and difference (equivocity) by appealing to an analogical relationship between God and Man and putting the insights of the apophatic (negative) and kataphatic (positive) traditions of theology together in a dynamic relation. The central claim is that there exists a similarity between Creator and creation in the analogy between Being and being. It is through this analogy that all knowledge of God must pass. Furthermore, the “interval” between the analogand (God) and the analogate (Man) preserves the infinite qualitative difference between the two and incorporates the pseudo-Dionysian insight that when one speaks of God there must be a positive assertion, followed by a negation of that assertion, which is nonetheless surpassed by an excess of meaning.⁶³ This preservation of difference is in accordance with the doctrine of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) that “whatever the similarity between Creator and creature, the difference between them is always greater.”⁶⁴ The analogy of being resists foundational discourse on the one hand, while refusing absolute apophatism (of Derrida, for example) on the other. Language of

⁶² I am tempted to add a category to this partial theological aesthetics: Liberation. Bishop Champange has reminded me that the human soul longs for liberation, and this is certainly a dominant theme in the novels that I address in the bulk of this text.

⁶³ I am drawing this language of “interval,” “analogand” and “analogate” from David Bentley Hart’s *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 311. Also, what I am calling an “excess” is often referred to a “super-essential” assertion. I am indebted to Nathan Kerr’s use of “excess” in *Christ, History and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (London, SCM Press, 2009), 21.

⁶⁴ Aaron Riches, “After Chalcedon: The Oneness of Christ and the Dyothelite Mediation of His Theandric Unity.” *Modern Theology*. 24.2 (2008), 199. This is Riches’ translation of the famous line from Canon 2 of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215.

God speaks through *epektasis*, what Gregory of Nyssa referred to as an infinite pilgrimage toward the analogand that language can never fully grasp, without at the same time failing to perceive the transcendent.⁶⁵ The transcendent is, thus, engaged through the immanent on its own terms.

We see the analogy of being at work in the novels of Richards, Johnston, Kavanagh and Crummey when they describe the sacramental reality and potential of creation, principally (but not exclusively) in the Church. Coady's *Strange Heaven* is a lament for the loss of this analogy (thus this novel is negatively defined by analogy) and MacDonald's characters vacillate between a reading of the analogy that interprets it as a fable and one that see it as reality. The analogy of being treated by these authors, preserves a theological, moral, and epistemological realism, while remaining open to an ontological entity which these signs signify. These authors, thus, can be read against the ideology (too often prevailing in literary studies) that fixes the subject-object relationship in the context of Kantian idealism, rejecting the possibility of mediation between the two and tempting a conception of human perception that is ultimately illusory. Conceptions of semiotics that construe language as signifying only internal meaning are at odds with the analogy of being and the semiotics to which it gives rise. Illusion and linguistic failure are not a primary reality (the peace of created goodness), but the result of a secondary event (original sin) and this theme is manifest in the Atlantic authors studied here.

What I have described is an understanding of human nature which claims that

⁶⁵ Hart, 301.

grace, a state of peace, stands before the violence of sin and the resulting semiotic divide. John Milbank calls this an ontology of peace that stands against what he see operating in post-structuralism as an ontology of violence.⁶⁶ This theory of nature, which we might call “Graced Nature” (over against pure or totally depraved nature), is associated with the analogy of being in the figures of Adam and Christ. Christians interpret the body of Christ as a hypostatic union of God and Man. They read the two natures of Christ according to a high Chalcedonian theology which sees all humanity, the universal, vicariously taken up into Christ and atoned for in his sacrifice (this moment of atonement is, thus, the centre of time). In this sense, the second Adam, Christ, who was slain from the foundation of the world, precedes the first Adam, who corrupted his nature by choosing against God's commandment. As I have emphasized in my reading of *Secular I*, instead of reading Adam as totally depraved as their Lutheran and Calvinist co-religionists do, Catholics interpret Adam's post-lapsarian nature as already graced with the ability to know that God exists.⁶⁷ In Adam's nature Catholics see the potential for paganism to point to the advent of Christ. Thus, Hellenism and the various traditions of human mythology all contain traces of the Christian narrative, traces that Catholics believe are perfected in the Church.

We see this desire to affirm nature in the Catholic writing from Atlantic Canada; whether it be the matter of Materia in *Fall On Your Knees*, eros in *The Wreckage*, or the beauty of creation in *Gaff Topsails*, nature shimmers with the grace of God. Even *Strange Heaven*, which would seem to be the exception to this view of nature,

⁶⁶ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 278-326.

⁶⁷ Key debates focus on how to interpret Romans 1: 19-21.

romanticizes the goodness of creation; Bridget longs to go deep sea fishing and to hunt (SH 158-60). She thinks that these actions may give her life meaning.

2. The analogy of being outlined here is linked to the traditional Catholic hermeneutic principle of **the Spiritual Sense**. Developed in the writings of Henri de Lubac and Balthasar, through their reading of Aquinas, the spiritual sense expresses the spiritual leading that the Church saw at work in the New Testament interpretation of Hebrew Scripture. Accordingly, the spiritual sense is what is expressed in the four-fold method of medieval interpretation: the literal; the allegorical (doctrinal, typological); the tropological (moral); and the anagogical (mystical). It reflects the “*regula fidei*” (rule of faith) which attempts to harmonize any particular interpretation of a text or tradition with the whole of Scripture and tradition (Protestants apply this rule solely to Scripture, whereas Catholics apply this to Scripture, the liturgical tradition, and teaching as a whole). The *regula fidei* permits figurative readings of passages that do not apply to a proposition if read literally, but support the doctrine in question when read as allegory, for example: Hagar and Sarah as types of enslaved and liberated spirits (Gal. 4: 21-31).

The analogy of being allows for a hermeneutics in which existence resonates with the infinite depth of divine reality. This means that a plenitude of meaning can emerge from the simplest of texts.⁶⁸ Hart calls this “divine counterpoint,” claiming that Bach's

⁶⁸ See Augustine's *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), XIII, xxiv, par 37, p295-6. Augustine writes, “...only in signs given corporeal expression and in intellectual concepts do we find an increasing and a multiplying which illustrate how one thing can be expressed in several ways and how one formulation can bear several meanings. Signs given corporeal expression are the creatures generated from the waters, necessary because of our deep involvement in the flesh. ...I understand you grant us the capacity and ability to articulate in many ways what we hold to be a single concept, and to give a plurality of meanings to a single obscure expression in a text we have read. It is said 'the waters of the sea are filled' because their movement means the variety of significations” (296).

music demonstrates God's ability to respond to any call, for example, the thirty variations of one simple aria that are given in the *Goldberg Variations*.⁶⁹ In Richards' Madonna Brassard of *The Bay of Love and Sorrows*, we see the literal reality of the immanent opening up to the allegorical and anagogical realities of the transcendent. She sacrifices her life for the lives of others; in doing so her life becomes an analogy of the crucifixion, as well as the *fiat* of Mary. Between analogy and allegory we see the workings of identity and difference without resorting to a pure form of either; thus, Bridget of Coady's *Strange Heaven* can exist within the figurative space of Mary, while having her life run in opposition to the allegory. I develop this concept of the spiritual sense, and specifically allegory, in my third chapter.

3. The concept of **Gathered Time** is directly related to the spiritual sense and the analogy of being. Catholicism supports a view of time which sees past, present and future as continuous realities that can bleed into each other as they open up to eternity. In the biblical narrative this is exemplified in the transfigured Christ of the eschaton appearing in the garden of Gethsemane with Moses and Elijah (Matt. 17: 1-9, Mark 9: 2-8, Luke 9: 28-36). This reality of gathered time is reflected in the Catholic liturgy, as Charles Taylor explains: "the Church, in its liturgical year, remembers and re-enacts what happened in illo tempore when Christ was on earth. Which is why this year's Good Friday can be closer to the Crucifixion than last year's mid-summer day. And the Crucifixion itself; since Christ's action/passion here participates in God's eternity, is closer to all times than they in secular terms are to each other" (SA 58). Taylor develops

⁶⁹ Hart, 282-88.

the political critique latent in this concept by contrasting “higher time” with the homogeneity of time in modernity (SA 54-61). The excess of Christ's time puts in play the regimes of time that totalize modern lives. Moreover, the promise of eternity that is extended to the “great cloud of witnesses” (and the present church) connects contemporary readers of ancient stories with a present opening into the life of these characters. This is the logic of the veneration of Saints. I develop “gathered time” further in the fifth chapter, when I consider Kavanagh's use of this temporal dynamic as a literary device in *Gaff Topsails*. We can also see it at work in MacDonald's multiple resurrections of the past in *Fall on Your Knees* and Crummey's sacramental sexuality in *The Wreckage*.

Often discussion of theological aesthetics are conducted on the disciplinary grounds of philosophical theology. In this study I conduct an analysis of the effects of a realist theological aesthetic in the Atlantic Canadian novels where this aesthetic is developed. I am coupling theological aesthetics with regionalist literary analysis to provide interpretations that draw out the holistic, rather than ephemeral, nature of religiosity in these novels. While each chapter is primarily concerned with attending to the discourse of Catholicism within a particular novel, taken together, the six chapters make a compelling case for the emergence of a new Catholic voice in a post-secular Canadian imaginary (Secular II).

The first two chapters describe the theo-political imaginary of Atlantic Catholicism, where Richards and MacDonald present seemingly opposing positions (conservatism and liberalism), which, in their representations, share much in common because of similar religious commitments. In the first chapter, I consider Richard's *Bay*

of Love and Sorrows and argue that he articulates a theology of the social that is constituted through rhetoric. The social space is spoken into existence and the truth of this space depends on the trustworthiness of those who constitute it. Richard's Miramichi is constituted as an Augustinian social realm which is negated through lying and violence. We find the characters extended across a scale of truth. Tom Donnerel represents the truth teller who suffers wrongly for the sins of others, while Madonna and Michael represent two sides of the repentant Christian who loses her life for the sake of another. Silver, however, lives out the tragedy of an unrepentant soul, lost in a hell of hopelessness that is at once avoidable; and Everette plays the Satan who tempts the members of the community away from the veracity of their collective narrative. He offers, instead, narratives that would seem to offer quick relief from suffering, but lead swiftly to death. This truth that Richards centres in his depiction of social space is not foundational. Instead, we find that truth is a mystery, an entity that veils and unveils itself as it leads the members of the community to a confession of their inability to ultimately right their wrongs.

Richards' conception of truth emphasizes the importance of maintaining local knowledge formations against the imposition of abstracted, modern techniques. He values tradition and the common good more highly than individual freedom. The individual is excused for acting independently only when he or she is attempting to restore or maintain the common good. In contrast to Richards, MacDonald's characters in *Fall on Your Knees* firstly distrust community, and secondly, resort to an inward turn to find a narrative that will give life coherence. For MacDonald, there always is a spectre

that exists outside of the range of the represented which needs to be brought to the fore and integrated into that narrative for the characters to have emancipation from the violence done to them. Kathleen, the oldest Piper daughter, seems to be leading a life of straight-forward modern emancipation from her rural Catholic Cape Breton upbringing. In line with Ernesto Laclau's thought on emancipation, MacDonald quickly extinguishes this hope. *Fall on Your Knees* demonstrates that human existence rarely moves from a state of oppression to emancipation. Frances, the third Piper daughter, is the victim of incest. She cannot resign herself to Laclau's doctrine that political formations, like subjectivities, will forever struggle with antagonism. While her life is represented by a long course through the psychological trauma of sexual abuse, it is the dream of transcendent emancipation that keeps her moving up this mountain of Purgatory. At the top she meets her father, her abuser, who is reading Dante's *Paradiso* after an ecstatic experience and a vision of his transfigured mother. As Frances makes peace with her father, the narrative of her sister's rape comes to light. Through individual spiritual struggles, the family and the polis are brought closer to a true narrative of their history. As the novel concludes, we find a community of the marginalized walking from the fallen land of Cape Breton towards a conflation of the *civitas Dei* and the immanent city of New York. MacDonald, thus, keeps the pagan and the Christian, as well as the secular and the religious in constant tension and conflation, leaving the question of traditional faith unanswerable.

The transitional dilemmas that Coady and Johnston depict arise from changing social imaginaries. Coady's *Strange Heaven* describes a life lived in a Catholic

community that no longer gives rise to fulfilment. Bridget Murphy, the teenage protagonist, has just given birth to her child and has given him up for adoption. Because the birth gives way to absence, Bridget feels as though she has delivered “nothing” (nihilism). Bridget is a Mary figure whose primal wish is to cease existence. She lives in a community in which she is caught in an organic social configuration that allows little room for adolescent becoming. We meet her in the psychiatric ward of the Halifax children's hospital where she is undergoing therapy because of her extreme postpartum depression. Her mother is talking to her on the phone, telling her that it is “just terrible... the way everyone is dying” (9), not knowing that her daughter would like nothing more than to slip into non-existence. At home, where Bridget returns for Christmas, the house is swirling with the Catholic phantasmagoria of her senile Grandmother's “cobwebby mind” (101). When Bridget tries to find relief with her peers she encounters a social network that attempts to use her saga to make their lives seem more dramatic. In the end, Bridget finds no escape from this incoherent order of being, yet she recognizes that she and her Grandmother share a common belief: that there is no reality behind the Catholic cosmology.

Baltimore's Mansion is the first narrative from a Newfoundland Catholic that we encounter. This is a memoir of Wayne Johnston's father (Arthur) and grandfather (Charlie) that recounts their theological politics and the wounds that emerge around the vote to join confederation. Without understanding the emphasis that Catholicism puts on the originary goodness of creation (in its sacramentalism and in the *analogia entis*), we will not be able to conceive of the depth of Arthur's grievous wound, nor the theological

impact of the modern nation-state on cultures with an enchanted connection to the place. By attending to the narrative structure, the critique of instrumental reason, and the overall inculturation of Catholicism in the Newfoundland imaginary, I demonstrate that a theological imaginary pervades the entire texture of Johnston's memoir. *Baltimore's Mansion* is not a naive defence of Newfoundland tradition; in this critique of his father's attachment to the land and his demonization of Joey Smallwood, Johnston participates in an internal criticism of tradition that allows for innovation without a radical rupture in continuity. By locating this criticism in the "unsaid" of his Grandfather, Johnston positions the flexibility of tradition as prior to the hardening of tradition that Arthur perpetuates. Thus, Johnston's memoir gives a theological defence of democracy, as well as a sympathizing critique of his father's conservatism.

We move from Ferryland on the Avalon Peninsula up the east coast to the region of Little Fogo Island where Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails* is set. Both Kavanagh and Crummey recreate the enchantment of Newfoundland outport life in ways that directly challenge the disenchantment of naturalized secularism. As with Johnston, Kavanagh's story returns to a time before confederation (a year before) and describes the feast day of St. John the Baptist, exploring the sacramentalism and theological realism of the community's imaginary. Kavanagh, too, displaces the liberal, autonomous subject, by telling the story of his community through multiple protagonists, who represent different elements of the social spectrum. They include Michael Barron, a mute teenager; Father Gerson MacMurrough, the priest; Hestia Dwyer, the eternal mother; Mary Dwyer, the young virgin; and Kevin Barron, a school boy haunted by his emerging sexuality. The

novel is a parody of Homer's *Odyssey* and Joyce's *Ulysses*. Far from demonstrating the anxiety of these influences, Kavanagh seems to delight in the imaginative world that his forbearers prepare for him. Ideologically, however, Kavanagh distances himself from Joyce's intentionally subversive magic realism and opts to enchant this pre-confederation outport by engaging the resources of theological aesthetics. Here Kavanagh takes us farther into the meaning of the *analogia entis* than Johnston did. He does this by examining how it is that worldly beauty, truth and goodness can echoes the divine "Other," and how the creative ability of humanity can cooperate with grace. Throughout the novel, Kavanagh also provides an extensive meditation on the relationship between secular and profane time, and I draw on Charles Taylor's concept of gathered time (SA 54-61) to help us understand the rich Catholic tradition that Kavanagh represents.

Michael Crummey's narrative, *The Wreckage*, travels back and forth between the Avalon peninsula, the region of Little Fogo Island, and the global horizon of WWII. The story tells of Wish, an Irish-Catholic from St. Johns, who falls in love with Sadie, a Methodist from a Newfoundland outport. The love affair attempts to bridge the two solitudes of pre-confederation Newfoundland, the Protestant and the Catholic, which are corrupted by mutual hate. Their relationship is sacramentally consecrated by an act of cunnilingus that Wish performs with Sadie, and that returns repeatedly as a dominant theme in the narrative. As Wish lives through the horror of a POW Camp in Japan and the aftermath of nuclear devastation in Nagasaki, he continually suffers trauma while being haunted by the theological reality of his relationship with Sadie. Crummey demonstrates how original sin subjects Wish and Nishino, a Japanese Canadian, to

spiritual and physical trauma. While exploring the relationship between the loyalties to a community of belonging and the need to transcend those communities in a world marked by global mobility, Crummey returns time and again to the human legacy of sin.

Multiculturalism, according to Crummey, demands at least one truth claim; that humans suffer from the curse of original sin and a legacy of repeated traumas which disrupt external and internal peace. While positioning Wish as the allegory of the soul under the punishment of sin, Crummey, nonetheless asserts that there is a primary power at work that mends the traumas of the soul. He mediates this grace to Wish through his mystical Aunt Lily and the return of the desire of his youth, Sadie.

In the final chapter, I demonstrate that Atlantic Canadian Literature before this period was predominantly shaped by Protestant writers. We consider Protestant elements in the works of Thomas Chandler Haliburton, Bliss Carman, Lucy Maud Montgomery, E.J. Pratt, Frank Parker Day, Ernest Buckler and Percy Janes. I argue that this mainline Protestant discourse leads to the secularist tendencies of Buckler and Janes. By locating Protestantism in Atlantic Canadian Literature I attempt to resist the secularizing gaze of contemporary literary criticism in Canada and give a more theologically robust reading of the canon. In contrasting the group of Catholic writers that emerge in the 1990s against the secularist and Protestant writers that precede them, I demonstrate that the secularist moment arose out of the Protestant hegemony, and that the Catholic literary scene is attempting to emerge from the secularist hegemony. I describe the beginnings of this literary critique in Alistair MacLeod's short story "As Birds Bring For the Sun," and I describe the conflation (religion as culture) problematic that George Elliott Clarke's

writing attempts to work through. The emerging imaginary which is mapped into the nature-grace continuum of Secular II is much more amenable to all three positions (Protestant, Secularist, Catholic) and, I argue, offers the most compelling critical enterprise for approaching religious aesthetics in Canadian literature.

Violence, Deception, and the Mystery of Truth in David Adams Richards' *The Bay of Love and Sorrows*

To sketch the political landscape of Atlantic Catholicism, I turn first to the novelists David Adams Richards and Ann-Marie MacDonald. Through a close readings of Richards' *The Bay of Love and Sorrows* (1998) and, in the next chapter, MacDonald's *Fall On Your Knees* (1996) we see two religio-political visions that oppose each other on many points, yet remain adamantly Catholic. Using the relationship of the individual to the community as a litmus test, I demonstrate that Richards' theological vision promotes a decidedly conservative understanding of subject formation;⁷⁰ he undermines the (liberal) autonomy of the individual by carefully narrating the many ways that language, culture, and society are collectively sustained as necessary precursors to individuality. MacDonald, on the other hand, is preoccupied with the question of emancipation. She begins by working through modes of emancipation which privilege an autonomous individual, but the more she embodies modernist style, and the further she explores the questions of postmodernism, the more strongly she advocates for a collective emancipation. Moreover, this emancipation is worked out according to a transcendent trajectory, one that begins in embodiment and fleshly desire, but necessitates a vision that ruptures discourses of immanence. These two visions lead to decidedly different renderings of the Roman Catholic Church, her power, tradition, and moral teachings.

While Richards will see the "faith" of the Church, literally, as a sanctuary, a place of

⁷⁰ Conservative, as I use it in this chapter, does not signify a neo-liberal celebration of individualism. It signifies, instead, the productive tension between the community, the individual, and tradition, that does not allow for any one of these elements to negate the others.

refuge from a tumultuous profane world, MacDonald instead finds murky shadows and dark spectres. MacDonald's Church is cold, made of stone, and immovable; in her words, it is "a dragon I'll be fighting for a long time."⁷¹ Richard's "faith" is human and largely outside the walls of the physical building. It consists of average people, who speak in local cadences and who suffer untold passions for the cause of peace and love.

The process of close reading that I undertake with Richards and extend to MacDonald, Coady, Johnston, Kavanagh, and Crummey, demonstrates that the literary Catholicism of *Secular II* is not a monolithic, top-down endeavour. Instead, this re-investigation of nature and grace has many voices, which delineate differing visions (political and mystical). In Richards' fiction the turn toward theological activism that is implicit in "graced nature" is an important element in his transition from the stark, turgid narratives of his early career that seem to passively accommodate the depravity of the human condition.⁷² His turn to Catholicism initiates an ultimately hopeful understanding of a social theology that directs readers towards redemption, which, so he implies, comes from embracing a Christian sense of mystery.

From Existentialist to Mystic

David Adams Richards' literary conversion represents a turning of the tide, which

⁷¹ M. L. Lockhart, "'Taking Them to the Moon in a Station Wagon': An Interview with Ann-Marie MacDonald." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 35: 2 (2005) 150.

⁷² *The Coming of Winter* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992); *Blood Ties* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992); *Lives of Short Duration* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986); *Nights Below Station Street* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988) is the first novel where Richards introduces his Christian thematic, which continues in his next two instalments of the trilogy: *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991); and *For Those Who Hunt The Wounded Down* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993).

has beckoned other Atlantic Catholics to respond. With thirteen novels to his credit, one collection of short stories, two collections of essays, one biography, a tribute to fly fishing, and two plays, Richards has written his hometown of Miramichi, New Brunswick, into the very fabric of the Atlantic imaginary. His credentials have also added to his status among Atlantic Canadian writers: he was mentored by Fred Cogswell and Alden Nowlan; his talent was sufficiently recognized by his final year at St. Thomas University that he could forgo finishing his degree to publish his first novel; and his accolades are numerous and include two Governor General awards, a Giller prize,⁷³ and other awards which have come to him in spite of critical embattlement with the established literary left.⁷⁴ This too, when Richards has fought to express himself and his community without having his work reviewed as “poor dour regionalist novel[s].”⁷⁵ Richards splits his time between Toronto and Miramichi, and his work is regional only in the way that it attends to the particulars of rural New Brunswick lifeworlds, while drawing the reader always onward to universal human themes. I argue below that Richards' conception of the universal-particular relationship, which fuels his resistance to the term “regional,” is underwritten by theo-politics that are based on a Catholic Christology.

⁷³ He received his first Governor Generals Award in 1988 for his novel *Nights Below Station Street*, the other came in 1998 for his non-fictional essays on fly fishing, *Lines on the Water*. The Giller prize was awarded in 2000 for *Mercy Among the Children*, a novel which returned to public focus in the 2009 Canada Reads competition on CBC Radio One. He has also won the Commonwealth writers prize for Best Book for *Friends of Meagre Fortune*, the Thomas Raddall Prize and the Alden Nowlan Prize in 1993 for his last book in the Miramichi Trilogy, *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*, and the Canadian Authors Award for *Evening Snow will Bring Such Peace* in 1991. These awards highlight his historical reception and the sense of legitimacy that he has brought to Atlantic Canadian writing.

⁷⁴ See Frank Davey's “Discourse and Determinism in *Nights Below Station Street*.” *Open Letter* 7th Ser. 6 (1989): 17-26.

⁷⁵ Richards, “Remembering My Evaluators While Packing to Leave Home,” *David Adams Richards: Essays on His Works*, Ed. Tony Tremblay (Toronto: Guernica, 2005), 15. Hereafter Tremblay.

Critics have recognized the change in Richards' work since his early novels, *The Coming of Winter* (1974), *Blood Ties* (1976), and *Lives of Short Duration* (1981). J. Russell Perkin, who initially criticized *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace* (1990) for its anti-liberal agenda, claims that it was not until he read the Christian symbolism of *For Those Who Hunt The Wounded Down* (1993) that he knew how to interpret the previous novel.⁷⁶ The Miramichi Trilogy,⁷⁷ once introduced to me as "Richard's Christian trilogy," represents a decided contrast from the stark existentialism of his first three novels. David Creelman marks Richards' foray into religious discourse later in his career, calling *The Bay of Love and Sorrows* (1998) and *Mercy Among the Children* (2000) "Richard's Moral Romances."⁷⁸ In an interview with Tony Tremblay, Richards comments on his stylistic shift in these novels:

I am far more faith-based now than I was. I believe that there is a definite structure within the human consciousness and spirit that can help us overcome almost any difficulty. And that's the real resource of mankind. There is an interior world and an exterior world, and we all live in the interior world, the one we don't show. That's the real world. This isn't new, and it isn't new to me, and it isn't even new to my work because I was saying this as far back as *The Coming of Winter*, but I just wasn't saying it the way I'm saying it now. With *The Bay of Love and Sorrows* and *Mercy Among the Children* and this present book I am examining that inner world more deeply and in greater detail.⁷⁹

Richards has been examining this inner world all along. The difference in his later novels is that the shape of this inner world is now overtly Catholic. Through the course of his

⁷⁶ J. Russell Perkin, "Learning about the Crucifixion: The Religious Vision of For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down," Tremblay, 119.

⁷⁷ The Miramichi trilogy includes *Nights Below Station Street* (1988), *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace* (1991), and *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* (1993). Creelman argues that this should be understood as Richards' second Miramichi trilogy, following *The Coming of Winter* (1974), *Blood Ties* (1976), and *Lives of Short Duration* (1981); *Setting in the East* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003), 150.

⁷⁸ Creelman, 168; Richards, *Mercy Among the Children* (Toronto: Anchor, 2000).

⁷⁹ Tremblay, 32.

career as a novelist, Richards has traversed the ground between Iris Murdoch's two poles; he has travelled from existentialist to mystic.⁸⁰ In the synopsis that follows, it is clear that Richards is still interested in the existential problems of suffering and the breakdown of human communities, but he now infuses his existential analysis with a Roman Catholic metanarrative, inculturated as it is in his Miramichi particularities.

His critics, however, have been particularly timid about Richards' turn to Catholicism, a turn that has perhaps influenced the emergence of this Catholic moment in the Atlantic canon (which stands in contrast to the trends of English Canadian literature as a whole). In this chapter, I make the results of Richards' turn to Catholicism explicit in my reading of *The Bay of Love and Sorrows*, thereby bringing to the fore the religious content that the liberal landscape has deemed unutterable. My reading of *The Bay of Love and Sorrows* attends to the Augustinianism of the text, especially in its influence on Richards' theory of language, his concept of evil and his analysis of the effects of evil on the social fabric of communities.⁸¹ Two further aspects of Richards' approach reflect his Catholic thinking: 1) the necessity of the particular in the universalizing gaze; and, 2) the implicit critique of the liberal subject.⁸²

⁸⁰ Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter J. Conradi (Toronto: Penguin, 1999), 221-234.

⁸¹ I describe Richards' text as Augustinian, however, I situate this Augustinianism in Catholicism, and not over against it, as is sometimes signified with this term. It is Augustine's reading of sin that I am highlighting.

⁸² The marginalization of religion in texts like Richards' will necessarily compromise our analysis of the multifaceted mosaic that is Canadian secularism - a secular landscape that is strong enough to allow for the sounding of its religious voices. See the Bouchard-Taylor report, specifically the section on "Open Secularism" (45-50), for a well articulated form of secular policy that is equipped to allow for flourishing modes of public religion; Gerard Bouchard and Charles Taylor, *Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation: Abridged Report*. (Commission de Consultation sur les Pratiques D'Accomodement Reliées aux Différence Culturelles. Gouvernement du Quebec, 2008).

The Intricacies of Richards' Plot⁸³

The Bay of Love and Sorrows is the story of a small community in Lower Newcastle, New Brunswick. This community is plagued by an ex-convict, Everette, who returns from prison to manipulate the community. Everette begins to control the Brassaurds, Silver and Madonna, as well as Madonna's romantic interest, Michael Skid, when he devises a plan to pool their money and live as vulgar "socialists." Everette then spends all the money to purchase mescaline that he intends to take to PEI on Michael's sail boat. His real motive, which Michael does not realize, is to punish Michael's father, the judge who sentenced Everette, by involving Michael in criminal activity and possibly killing him.

As the story opens, Tom and Karrie, two members of the Lower Newcastle community, are dating. Although Michael is in a sexual relationship with Madonna, he seduces Karrie, creating a rift between himself and his life-long friend Tom. As an economic endeavour for Everette's "socialist" scheme, Michael and Silver cap mescaline for buyers in PEI. Using Judge Skid's sail boat, Michael and Silver set out at night to make the deal; however, the boat is approached by coast guards, and Michael promptly dumps his cargo overboard. When Everette hears this, he puts pressure on Michael and Silver, claiming that they stole the mescaline and are planning to cheat him of the money. Michael soon has a change in conscience towards Karrie and begins to avoid her. She reacts by manipulating his friends. Silver, who is psychologically unstable and addicted to speed, is confronted by Karrie on the path between Michael's house and Tom's. He

⁸³ I attend to the plot of BL in this detailed summary because the many twists and turns of Everette's manipulative plan are difficult to follow without it. I use detailed summary in this dissertation only where the texts demand our close attention to plot.

kills her, steals money she has shoved into her underwear, and robs her parents (who are skimming money from the gas station they own). Silver gives this money to Everette to pay for the lost mescaline.

As Karrie's killing is investigated, Tom eventually becomes the prime suspect and is incarcerated. In the aftermath of Karrie's murder, Tom's brother, Vincent, who has a developmental disability, drowns in a nearby brook. Intimidated by Everette and repulsed by his own moral decline, Michael retreats to his parents' house in Newcastle and begins to date Laura McNair, the crown prosecutor. They become engaged. Through a connection in the Renous prison, Everette has Tom stabbed, agreeing that he will kill Laura, who was the crown prosecutor at his friend's trial.

Constable John Delano, the police officer on Tom's case, is not convinced that Tom killed Karrie. As Delano continues his investigation, he begins to suspect Michael's involvement, eventually linking Michael and Silver to the 'bad' mescaline in PEI, which put some teenagers in hospital (this mescaline was delivered after the first batch was dumped). In the meantime, Everette's criminality is radicalized. He attracts Michael to Lower Newcastle and attempts to kill Laura at their engagement party. She escapes. Everette goes into hiding, but continues to stalk Michael and the Brassaurds.

Throughout his narrative, Richards analyses the interior life of his characters, especially as they choose lesser goods over greater goods and drift into criminality, and at this point in his story, he "raises" the mysterious hand of God.⁸⁴ Richards has Tom (199), Michael (220-1, 263), Madonna (215-7), Emmett Smith (Karrie's father, 251) and

⁸⁴ Richards has visited this theme before in *Nights Below Station Street* when Joe Walsh is providentially directed to a lost, and freezing Vye McLeod (221-5).

Constable Delano (205-6), faced with the visitations by Karrie's spirit (and sometimes Vincent). After these visits, Michael, Madonna and Emmett each make private vows to chose the "new life" (124, 216, 226-7).⁸⁵

Richards then introduces his most peculiar character: a rat. This rat stirs up Karrie's bloody clothes that Silver had hidden in his shed. Madonna finds them (228, 236-7). It also leads Gail, Everette's sister, to the place where the Smith's money was hidden (267-8). Because Delano has an intuitive, providential insight into the case (278-9), he intervenes in Everette's plan to kill Michael. Everette turns on the Brassaurds, trying to shoot Silver through a window and stalking Madonna through the woods. Madonna fights Everette with all her will, hurting him and sacrificing herself in the process. She is found leaning against a barn with her chest blown apart (290-4). Everette is sent to prison for seven years, and in prison he develops hypochondria.

Before Madonna discovers that Silver killed Karrie, she perceives that he is "in hell" (242), a state of psychological trauma. At this point she attempt to have him confess his sins and take the Eucharist. Madonna's recent confession has given her new life as well as an understanding of herself as made in the image of Christ (244-5, 248).⁸⁶ Silver refuses to confess. While Everette is stalking Karrie, Silver is hiding in the woods. He eventually comes upon rope that Tom intended to hang himself with, and Silver uses it to end his life (295-6). Because Silver's crimes have come to light, Tom is acquitted. He leaves prison and marries Nora Batersoil. Michael, without knowledge, had fathered a child with Nora in his adolescence. When he is sentenced to five years in prison for

⁸⁵ I include page references at this point so that the reader can follow the development of Richards' mysticism in BL.

⁸⁶

dealing bad mescaline (300) Delano gives him some advice, telling Michael that one day he may have the opportunity to “atone” for his actions (297). The story ends with news of a Miramichier (Michael) in Columbia who intervened when a drug cartel intimidated his town. He attempted to overtake the insurgents, was captured, dressed in women's lingerie, “paraded ... about,” given a mock trial, and assassinated with a gunshot to the back of the head (305-6). The body was extradited and buried beside Madonna's grave.

Richards' Catholic Morality: Analysing his concept of Sin

To understand Richards' mysticism, we must consider the central principles of his Catholic morality, in particular what he views as *sin*, and moreover, how he has his characters sin. To illustrate this, I will look at the beginning of Everette's maniacal plans (20-40).

The lifeworlds of Richards' characters, the local engagement with the imaginary, are the product of human creativity acting in a dialectic with the biological-natural strata and in chorus with a divine agent whose actions demonstrate sympathy with the human plight, particularly the poor and under-privileged. Thus, Richards infuses the fifth dimension of the imaginary, the spirit, with his explanation of the more materialist dimensions (height, width, depth, time). Language is chief among the world-generating activities that are available to Richards' characters, and his primary concern lies with the spiritual consequences of the art of persuasion (rhetoric). There is, then, an intimate relationship between rhetoric and social space in Richards' fiction, whereby a turn of

phrase can drastically expand or limit the social fabric of the imaginary.⁸⁷ Sin, as Richards represents it, compromises the goodness of social space by contorting its constituent elements. While persuasion seems to direct Richards' characters to substantial goods, Everette's most enticing offerings conceal his calculated omissions. These omissions allow for persons who would not be considered virtuous by their contribution to the community to manipulate the community and assume powerful positions of control. The lifeworld is not a ready-made fixture of reality, but instead a negotiable, always revisable, house of language that is sustained by human actors by virtue of their under-determination as creative agents.⁸⁸ It is a social creation and has a certain goodness (by the analogy of being), which because of the freedom of Richards' characters can be maintained for good or ill. Power is on both sides of the good and evil dialectic, and yet this power is not manifested in the same ways; Madonna's methods direct the reader towards kenotic self-emptying, while Everette attracts people to him for his purposes of domination. Sinful power is held over the head of someone else for the unmerited benefit of the power holder. Language is the primary medium through which such power is generated and sustained, although the performance of non-rhetorical acts buttresses this power. Understood in this way, violence is the result of the unmerited twisting of social space for the benefit of an undeserving character, and it occurs primarily through persuasion. Richards takes Genesis 1-4, particularly the speaker's linguistic participation

⁸⁷ This connection between space and rhetoric is at the heart of the Christian conception of creation, where the Father utters the Word of the Son, creating the "space" within which creatures are made.

⁸⁸ There is a difference here between Richards' lifeworld and what Peter Berger would call the "social construction of reality." Berger's theory is wedded to a nominalist theology which sees a fundamental rift between the constructed realm and the referent. Richards avoids this dichotomy, allowing for the continuum of the secular and the religious, nature and grace. Human action can be imbued with divine action without the human losing its agency.

in world sustenance (and negation – the Serpent and Eve), as a description of, among other things, a phenomenology of the social-creative-moral aspects of human expression.

Like Eden, the Miramichi takes on a certain structure depending on the moral use of human language of the members of that community. Paradise is lost or regained in humanity. Thus the “object” of speech is embodied in speaking itself and is not properly external to language, but internal. For example, the jar of earnings that is held in common amongst Everette, the Brasaurds, and Michael, is always-already caught up in the linguistic fabric of each speaker and also the moral intent and actions that are either “true” - in tune with language – or “false” - out of tune with the message that language is conveying. Because the social-linguistic-moral fabric of the community is sustained by the characters who participate in it, it may “fail” if the community cannot depend on its characters to be true. The significance of the jar is then stretched to include all members of the community, and meaning is located in the entire fabric, not a single atomistic unit.

In *The Bay of Love and Sorrows* Everette is the primary source of evil. This does not mean that he is essentially evil, but rather that he has a habit of effecting evil, which has been cultivated through his social interactions. Richards signifies this in his description of Everette on his release for prison and return to Gail's residence:

Now her brother, Everette, talking and happy, sat at the table. His eyes flitted here and there. He was just finishing a long monologue about religion, which he liked to discuss. These discussions invariably worked their way around to the nature of power, and what made him, Everette, violent. He was fascinated by his own violence, and always held the belief that he would commit a great crime, that he was a man who didn't like to be violent, but could not help it, since people got in his way. Any other reasoning was beyond him. Everette's most telling trait was his conviction that everything was beyond him. As if, in lacking compassion, he proved himself. (20)

This is Richards' primary character sketch of Everette's psychological disposition. Later Richards will show us how Everette's theory is practiced. "Power" and "violence" are tools that Everette uses to effect his reality. Everette abandons the pilgrimage toward truth for a malleable conceit, and his primary tool is "talk." The most interesting comment in the passage involves Everette's use of what is "beyond him" as his justification for using power against others. It is as though Richards is suggesting that Everette does not have the ability to foster peace. This proposition is negated by the next line, which highlights Everette's instrumental use of his limited constructed lifeworld. It is his "belief" that he will "commit a great crime" and his "conviction" that "everything [is] beyond him." Everette justifies his lack of compassion by speaking his fictional self, the sociopath, into existence. Everette makes himself into the violent man he is; he could be otherwise.

Everette does not work alone. He must have a social element to distort. This requires accomplices. His desired accomplice is Michael, the egotistical judge's son from Newcastle who is naive enough to consider Everette a social asset. Michael pursues Everette even after Madonna, his girlfriend, warns him to stay away from the felon: "he just got outta jail and is crazy as arse" (19). By trading Everette some hash for moonshine, Michael thinks he has cultivated social capital with Everette. Fostered by this newfound intimacy, the conversation quickly leads to Everette's desire for retribution against the young attractive town prosecutor, Laura McNair, who won the conviction that led to his prison sentence. Michael had taken McNair to a Christmas dance as a youth, and Everette's persuasive speech about McNair leads Michael to an epiphany and

awakens an Iago-like tendency in him to manipulate others for his gain: “Now, at this second, he had seen the underworld and how it *spoke* about *his* world, but he was unperturbed by this, because he felt he had the wit to side with the underworld. Men like Michael felt that by holding no judgement they could flit back and forth from one world to the other” (23, first emphasis added). Between Michael and Everette, Richards represents a naive form of liberalism - seen in Michael’s hope to transcend his given world for farther reaches - and a destructive conservatism - Everette’s intentional myopia and preference for his known modes of manipulation. Being the more experienced manipulator, Everette understands Michael and uses Michael’s desire for power against him, saying to Silver, “He don’t like to be known as the judge’s son. He pretends, don’t he?” (27). For Richards, fiction is implicated in the preservation of truthful speaking from those who would jeopardize the linguistic-political fabric through deceit.

Madonna, who is shown to have great intuition, understands Everette’s desire to have Michael in his sphere of influence. She draws out a difference between the type of boisterous, salesman-like rhetoric in which Michael participates and the insidious, forked-tongue discourse that is Everette’s speciality:⁸⁹

“We should go and tell Tom. Nip it in the bud. I don’t like this – Everette will use Michael. Michael is smart – we both know he’s smart – brilliant even – at talk. But he don’t *know*. He’s not smart the same way *we* are smart. Nor is he smart the same way Tom is smart. Everette’ll get Michael to go to jail for the exact same amount of time Judge Skid give him. We should go to Tom and get him to help us.”

⁸⁹ Peter Outbridge’s portrayal of Everette in the film version of the *The Bay of Love and Sorrows* is a particularly heavy handed demonstration of the demonic potential in Everette. Through Outbridge’s caricature of evil, the film domesticates the nightmarish depravity of Everette’s tactics. The portrayal would have been more effective if Outbridge had played Everette with more subtlety, allowing the viewer some sympathy for him, as Richards does. See *The Bay of Love and Sorrow*, DVD, directed by Tim Southam. (Toronto: Triptych Media, 2002).

“Tom is too big-feeling to help us. He won’t even look at Michael now,” Silver said. “Besides, Everette isn’t smart enough to think of a way to get Michael to spend time in jail.”

“Who says he has to think it? It’s in his nature,” Madonna answered. “A part of his blood. He’ll never be able to stop doing it.”⁹⁰ Then they both laughed at this because it seemed so true. The wind blew down the flue, the fields were raw and flat in the twilight.

Suddenly what they had just said sobered them. They both stopped laughing.

They sat in their little house in silence, as they had when they were children, frightened of the bogeyman, and of all those things that went bump in the night. (28-9)

Between Everette's self-description and Madonna's reflections, Richards gives us glimpses of the conception of sin at work in his fiction, and it is quite orthodox. On the one hand a propensity to sin is almost genetic; on the other hand, sin is also willed and cultivated.⁹¹ Sin, however, is not abstract. In an Augustinian fashion, sin is a corruption

⁹⁰ Richard's intention at this point isn't clear. Should we read Everette as essentially evil, or rather as one who chooses the evil he works, which creates in him a habit of effecting evil? Perhaps Richards brings both opinions into the text to demonstrate the polyphonic dimension of his novel: the narrator can have a different opinion than Madonna. If we want to reconcile the two positions we could say that Richards holds with Plato that the false speaker must have an equal ability to understand truth, otherwise he would not be false, but simply ignorant; in See Paul Griffiths discussion of Plato in *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 113-122. This is to say that Everette has as much capacity to do good as he does evil. If we are to read Everette as Richards instructs us to read Alex of *The Lost Highway*, then we must follow Aristotle: "So too it was at first open to the unjust and licentious persons not to become such, and therefore they are voluntarily what they are; but now that they have become what they are, it is no longer open to them not to be such" (*The Lost Highway* 339, quoting Aristotle's *Ethics*). The question of human nature, and predetermination is one that has captivated Richards for at least twelve years (between BL and *The Lost Highway*).

⁹¹ William E. Mann adequately summarizes Augustine's position on original sin: "Adam and Eve's fall ushered into the world *original sin*, which is not an event but rather a condition (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 1.9.9-1.12.15). It is the condition imposed by God as punishment on Adam and Eve for disobedience. According to Augustine the condition includes dispossession from a naturally perfect environment, the loss of natural immortality, and the acquisition of susceptibility to physical pain, fatigue, disease, aging and rebellious bodily disorders, especially sexual lust (*De Genesi and litteram* 11.32.42; *The City of God* 14.16-19). The condition is not only pathological, it is inherited, infecting every descendant of Adam and Eve. The condition is innate, not acquired; as Augustine puts it, it is transmitted by propagation, not imitation (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione loc. cit.*). Augustine's view, then, is that our first ancestors squandered their patrimony and our inheritance and – if that were not bad enough – thereby contracted a suite of infirmities that is passed on to all their progeny"; William E. Mann, "Augustine on Evil and Original Sin," *Augustine's Confessions: Critical Essays* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006) 82-3.

or privation of a good, the deprivation of being.⁹² The good in this case is the social good. Everette erodes the sinews of trust, peace, good economy, justice, self control and above all community through his willed spiral into chaos and violence. He unifies friends to mobilize on an enemy of his choosing for his reward, and he does so according to a demonic logic, by using the son to get back at the father. The asymmetry arises in Michael's complicity. Where the Christ of Scripture is sinless, Michael is shown to have privileged power over the good that he intuitively manipulates for what he considers to be his own gain.

Everette, the successful politician, convinces Michael into thinking that he will not need to get a job through the quasi-socialist plot to put money in a jar at Gail's house. Ideally it is a jar that all (Silver, Everette, Michael) will contribute to and all can take from as they need. It is a system of trust. Their primary mode of economy is drugs. As Everette increases his "legitimacy" through such games, he asks Michael to commit more and more to "good causes," such as appealing to his father for leniency on the behalf of one of Everette's friends, who raped a blind and deaf woman (36).⁹³ Everette edges Michael ever closer to what Clifford Geertz calls "deep play": "play in which the stakes are so high that it is, from [a] utilitarian standpoint, irrational for men to engage in it at all."⁹⁴ Soon Michael finds himself riding to Chatham, from the story's lower Newcastle

⁹² For Augustine sin is the *privatio boni*, the privation of the good, and has no being. God is the source of being and is maximal being himself (Griffiths 47). All existence participates in God's being. Sin is non-being.

⁹³ This detail may have been based on one of Allan Legere's crimes. Legere (1948-) terrorized the Miramichi when he escaped from a Moncton Hospital in 1989 and was not captured for seven months. During this time he committed at least four murders, with suspicions of a fifth, as well as multiple sexual offences (rape). Richards' analysis of evil characters takes a darker turn after Legere's killings, with characters like Everette committing murder. See Rick Maclean and Andrew Veniot, *Terror's End: Allan Legere on Trial* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992).

⁹⁴ Clifford Geertz. "Deep Play: Notes on The Balinese Cockfight." *Daedalus* 134.4 (Fall 2005), 71.

setting, to steal back Everette's Harley from Ken, who did some bodywork that Everette does not wish to pay for. After Everette requests Michael to steal from Ken, the narrator tells us of Michael's reaction: "Michael formulated a vision of Ken as a conniving, machiavelian, unprincipled man who was trying to steal Everette's bike and ruin the Hutch reputation. ... He felt for some reason he did owe Everette at least one favour. He did not know why he felt this. He felt in fact that he owed him a great deal" (39). Because Everette's persuasion has been successful, and Michael has accepted his despicable depiction of Ken, Michael rationalizes his actions as a form of vigilante justice. He agrees to do this one favour for Everette and then be "done with *all of this*" (39).

As Everette and Michael approach Ken's shop the door is open. Everette remarks that the paint job is done wrong, implying that nothing is owed to Ken, and the two thieves load the bike on the truck. As they pull away Michael asks "Won't he know you took it?" (40). Everette responds, "Don't worry, Michael Skid, I got something good on him" (40). The narrator fills in the subtext:

What Michael did not understand, what Silver and Madonna and possibly Tom Donnerel did, was that Everette Hutch kept tapes on certain of those whom he considered his well-to-do friends – for future embezzlement and blackmail – such as the tape he was wearing at the moment, inside his left boot, as he smiled. (40)

Deep play indeed. This is the sort of twisting of the social fabric that makes Everette Richards' father of lies; this is not to say that there is something inhuman about Everette, but to highlight exactly the opposite: that he is human, all too human.

For Richards, then, sin primarily abuses truth telling and authentic living, since

speaking and living must be of an integrated unit. Violence is primarily linguistic, as language conceals a privation that enters the linguistic texture of the imaginary unnoticed, which, in turn, initiates a process of deterioration in the whole of the social fabric. Physical violence and criminality follow from this linguistic privation. Language is central in the imaginary. Without language and intentionality, the money jar remains a mundane jar, but through intentionality, which is made social through language, it becomes a social-economic symbol. Moreover, as the jar is given this social life, its existence changes, and it becomes vulnerable to a new type of symbolic distortion that it did not have before it was situated socially. This symbolic-linguistic role is not a fiction so much as it is a reality, and linguistic violence is done to this jar when it is made to function for one symbolic purpose – the welfare of the community – while also deprived of this function by Everett's criminal subtext. The jar is an example of this dynamic worked out on an inanimate object, but this work of privation and dissimulation takes on monstrous complexity when it is mapped directly onto a person, as Everett does with Michael, Silver, and Madonna. Indeed, this pattern of linguistic privation changes the whole social landscape, allowing for the equivocation and resulting violence that threatens the viability of the community.

A Deeper Magic: The Ontology of Peace

Richards' attention to the development of sin through deceit, manipulation, addiction, and physical and sexual abuse, may lead readers to think of him as a chronicler of violence without rivals. To some extent this may be true, particularly in his penetrating

analysis of violence in *Mercy Among the Children* (2000). Yet in Richards' theological aesthetic violence is secondary. For Richards peace is primary, and in the end, more highly prized.

None of Richards' characters are innocent, but Tommie Donnerel, the anachronistic farmer of Lower Newcastle, is perhaps the closest we get. The blossoming relationship between Tom and Karrie, which Richards begins to narrate in the first lines of the book, begins in peace.⁹⁵ Tom and Karrie share common loves and can communicate with each other without semantic breakdown. Their relationship reflects what John Milbank calls an ontology of peace. To counter the ontology of violence that prefigures Nietzsche and his followers, and which underwrites the political form of liberalism, Milbank argues that there is a need for an alternative *mythos*, that is "equally unfounded, but nonetheless embodying an 'ontology of peace,' which conceives differences as analogically related, rather than equivocally at variance."⁹⁶ According to Milbank's argument, meaning does not fall victim to sheer *différance*, and power is not necessarily corrupt and abusive. If Tom and Karrie's relationship had a mythical setting, it would be the pre-lapsarian Eden. But Richards' aesthetic is too attached to realism to preserve the idyllic character of Tom and Karrie's relationship. The relationship runs into trouble when she attends community college in Bathurst, where Tom sees a "boy" flirting with Karrie (BL 32-34). Their relationship is further strained when Tom snaps at Karrie while working at the stubborn clutch on his old tractor. She leaves in anger, and on her way

⁹⁵ Both the novel and the feature film of *The Bay of Love and Sorrows* make much of the edenic state that Tom and Karrie enjoy. This all changes when Karrie begins to desire Michael, and Everette starts manipulating the community. Everette's character is very much influenced by Milton's Satan, and Richards is a good reader of Milton.

⁹⁶ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 297.

trips and cuts her ankle: a symbol of her fall from grace (50). Michael, who was once good friends with Tom, but has since turned into a nemesis of sorts (a relationship that loosely corresponds to Cain and Abel), sees a chance to hurt Tom by seducing Karrie. Michael helps her when she is hurt, and Karrie, who harbours a grudge against Tom, begins to warm to Michael. We find out later that Michael had bet Silver that “he could fuck her by her birthday” (83). Michael achieves his conquest on her birthday while they sail to Prince Edward Island; he sleeps with a drunken Karrie in the hold of his sailboat, even though his girlfriend, Madonna, is on the deck above (75).

Karrie's actions – actions that Michael's reputation seems initially unmarred by – lead to her exclusion from the linguistic texture of the community: “No one spoke to her again, and she felt very lonely. She kept trying to talk to them, but it became quickly apparent she had done something that they all thought was dishonest, or at least she felt they did” (76). Her brief sampling of this corrosive underworld leads quickly to her death; but before her death she functions as a scapegoat for the group, where she is read as the contaminant. This allows the group to avoid the real problem, a problem that is given shape in their deceptive use of language, and which leads them further down the spiral of Everette's sublime rhetoric of violence.

Earlier Richards presented readers with an insight into the role of “the rebel” in this political-linguistic structure: “Tom believed in the Orwell aphorism, without ever having heard of it or Orwell. That is, that so many who were rebels against the status quo were often rebels against a sense of integrity in their own natures. He believed this about Michael Skid” (48). Richards’ leads us into the realm of Karrie’s self-consciousness,

where he makes it clear that her affair with Michael follows Orwell's logic and is a rebellion against the "graced nature" that is at work in her "sense of integrity," or wholeness. When she ruptures the conventions of dating she observed with Tom to be with Michael, Richards emphasizes that resistance for resistance's sake erodes the latent wisdom of tradition. As Michael led her into the cutty, "She looked at his face and it was filled with a quiet strength. She could understand why he was likable. And all the *rude* things she had thought about him. But she now felt Tom had told her those things. But she was free of Tom, if she wanted to be" (74).⁹⁷ Karrie, the neophyte, is useful to Richards as an example of the origins of voluntarism, as she gives us a view of how sin, will, desire, death, and deception all conjoin in the subject's failure to chose the good.

As Karrie was deciding between Michael and Tom, Karrie's manipulative step-mother attempts to persuade her to choose Michael:

She had not meant to meet Michael [the day of the fall], but it was destiny. This is what she told herself. It was what her stepmother had told her the week before.

"It's just destiny, dear. Don't fight it"

"But I feel some bad about it," Karrie said, at that particular moment not feeling bad at all. "We're s'posed to start our instruction at the church." And she blessed herself.

But Dora snapped her fingers quickly in front of Karrie's eyes, startling her. "Think for once of what *you* want. People like you and me never think of ourselves, dear – think of yer own self - " And she suddenly smiled, snapped her gum, hugged her stepdaughter coldly, and her lips quivered slightly, so Karrie had to look away.

Now Karrie remembered Michael as a young boy who swam out from the wharf without a thought to get a wounded seagull – and it seemed as if she'd always been attracted to him. Yes, she was the one who always took his side, and never allowed people to talk about him.

Her step mother had bought her a new silk blouse that she had worn

⁹⁷ On a prior boat trip Michael had flirted with Karrie, leaning in and kissing her, but she brushed him off, resolving to go back to Tom.

on her birthday.

Karrie had also been singing the song lately: "*Many a tear will a fall – but it's all in the game of love.*"

She did not tell herself that his family was well known and wealthy – with political connections in Fredericton, and uncle who was a senator in Ottawa, and sailboats and trips to the Bahamas – her stepmother did. (70-1)

The subtle modes of agency and self-deception that Richards laces through this passage are the hallmark of his literary technique; for instance, Karrie's comment that she feels "some bad about it," and her genuflection are points in the narrative where he shows the reader how inauthenticity develops through subtle dissimulation. He points readers to the exact moment when he sees his character deviating from their understanding of the truth for what they foolishly think will bring them happiness and power, but often deprives them of both.

The logic of Richards' narrative privileges the ontology of peace, which depends on fidelity to the real,⁹⁸ through human relationships based on trust, fair exchange, and transparent communication; however, he spends most of his time illustrating how a different ontology enters into his world: the ontology of violence. In this violent imaginary, the autonomous liberal subject is king. Everette is able to manipulate the community because he does not need to acknowledge outward sources of the self; he is a self-made man. Consider Silver's comparison of Michael and Everette: "You [Michael] have never been on your own – he [Everette] has been on his own from the time he was eight. You care about what people say and think of you. He don't care what people think – it's not in his nature. He don't care if the police are chasing him – or if others think he

⁹⁸ This "real" referent has a transcendental quality to it that keeps Richards' realism from falling into a flat empiricism. What is real for Richards' is not exhausted by what can be sustained through a foundational mode of examination. As I argue below, the real is directed towards an object that is not exhausted by epistemological constructs and is as a result "bottomless."

is kind. He don't. You do. He has real power. You don't" (219). Michael is hampered by his cares, community cares, while Everette is released from such obligation. Though David Creelman argues that Richards' heroic individual is a Lockean subject, I would respond by claiming that Creelman has overlooked Richards' most clearly delineated, unencumbered, and Lockean subject: Everette.

Politics and Richards' City of God

On Richards' politics Creelman writes, "Richards's simultaneous devotion to the concept of individual freedom and suspicion of state and community institutions aligns him with the assumptions of individualist liberalism."⁹⁹ Contrary to Creelman, I contend that Richards privileges healthy community first and only secondarily advocates that individuals stand against negative communities in the pursuit of their integrity. This is why Richards makes multiple side comments about how the community could be different if Silver and Madonna had only approached Tom in the beginning, or if Michael had listened to Mr. Jessop as he urged him to be a good influence on the Braussards. This is also why Richards shows us how to avoid the logic of Karrie's affair by resolving conflict and dispelling misconceptions. He is showing readers how to perform the ontology of peace and avoid the ontology of violence.

When Creelman claims that Richards is a Lockean liberal he overlooks the epistemological concerns that are central to Locke's subject and politics. According to Locke the subject perceives an object through an idea; this idea is the product of the

⁹⁹ Creelman, *Settings in the East*, 149.

mechanistic action of the mind on “insensible particles” of data that are impressed on the senses.¹⁰⁰ In the beginning the mind is a blank slate, but through experience the mind acquires simple ideas that act like atoms and that can be combined like building blocks to form complex ideas.¹⁰¹ Locke's epistemology is in step with his political theory, as both the object and the community are preceded by nothing and are used instrumentally.¹⁰² In the garden Adam is to dominate the land and use it instrumentally, privileging his private ownership and his ends because no transcendental ends can be reliably known. This type of autonomous figure that is an icon of modernity is resisted in Richards' biography of Max Aitken, *Lord Beaverbrook*.¹⁰³ In this colloquial biography, Richards makes several comparisons between himself and Aitken. However, where Aitken writes, “In a word, man is the creator and not the sport of his fate. He can triumph over his upbringing and, what is more, over himself,”¹⁰⁴ Richards often emphasizes how Aitken's character was formed by the community of Newcastle. While Aitken is busily promoting the ideology of the self-made man, Richards, not an enemy of great individuals, is constantly pointing

¹⁰⁰ Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2.8.13. See also Charles Taylor's critique of Locke in *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 166-67.

¹⁰¹ Locke, 2.12.1.

¹⁰² See Locke's argument against innate principles which relies on their inaccessibility by “Children and Idiots,” 1.1.5. Locke promoted a representational psychology which was at pains to explain how a divine actor may be involved in the representation, mediation, and illumination of ideas. He is, thus, representative of shifts away from earlier cosmological/ontological paradigms, and is influential in establishing the ideological foundation for a reading of human understanding that “carries disengagement to unprecedented lengths”; Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 170. Richards' Catholic understanding of real mystery pervading the world through the mediation of Christ pre-exists and imbues the subject-representation-object triad; we see this in the mystical detective work of John Delano, on whom I elaborate below. Locke's individual builds up a world out of his own logic with conceptual atoms, and entertains innovative modes of scepticism that distanciates the subject from the “real.” Richards “real” is caught up in an immanent-transcendent dynamic that is available to all, yet unable to be mastered, and his characters demonstrate their ability to recognize objective good and either choose the good (Madonna), defer (Michael), or reject it (Silver, Everette).

¹⁰³ Richards, *Lord Beaverbrook* (Toronto: Penguin, 2008).

¹⁰⁴ Lord Beaverbrook, *Success* (London: Stanley Paul & Co, 1921), VI.

to the junctures where the “man” is made by the community. Thus, Richards' individuals are shown to be palimpsests of local culture and linguistic norms. These individuals are formed from the fabric of the community and share a rich tapestry of local knowledge to which all contribute, but which would be impoverished if each were to ignore the benefit of being formed and reformed in each other's image (and ultimately in the image of God).

This is the real danger behind befriending Everette – his gravitas is such that it could come to reshape the very character of promising youth (Michael, Madonna, Silver) that the community has worked hard, with scarce resources, to give opportunities to. While the church building is always skirting the edges of Richards' settings, we are often in the company of its spiritual members, members who give the community a wholesome tinge, and who point to the way of redemption for the individual in collective salvation. This is the work of the “faith” rather than the “Church” as Richards describes in his interview with Tremblay:

TT: ... You are consciously exploring different types and layers of morality in your latest novels, generally Christian and more specifically Catholic nuances. Do those formal religious programmes play a part in your intentions as a writer?

DAR: Catholicism plays a very big part, but I'm almost always angst ridden over the church and have almost always embraced the faith. Even when I was a kid, irreverence toward any faith bothered me because I thought it was shallow. Irreverence toward the organization, however, could often make me laugh hilariously. The organizations themselves not only were full of bombast but at times were irreverent to the faith. So you see it was the faith of Elly in *Mercy* that I could cry over, but the faith of the priest, Father Poirier, the embodiment of the church hierarchy, is something that I've always questioned. And what does the church tend to do? It tends to dismiss people like Elly.

I don't want to give the impression that the difference is black and white because it is not. However, faith will create a Saint Bernadette and the church will create the Catholic Women's League and the College of Cardinals. There is a big difference between those, between the saints and the

bureaucrats. Conrad said that religion is for women and God is for men. In some ways that's completely wrong, but in another way absolutely true, because what Conrad meant is that organizational structures are domestic, whereas striving for faith and even martyrdom, regardless of gender, are militaristic activities, I mean internally. So we are dealing with a very strange duality here. On the one hand a blood in faith, and on the other a kind of domestic sanctuary. It is the blood in faith that I want to explore in my work. The criminality of the church is tragic but the faith will continue to exist. There is no Cardinal that can usurp the faith, and no buggering priest can do it either.¹⁰⁵

Richards' valorization of "faith" is not equatable with the ideology of the autonomous individual. Instead, he is describing a certain resistance to bureaucracy and reification (we might say *Gemeinschaft* versus *Gesellschaft*). The saint is the individual who resists this reification in order to preserve the moral-linguistic-political life of the community.

Richards manifests his aversion to Lockean liberal ideology when he lampoons Michael's newspaper article, an article which is intended to expose the corruption of his boarding school (191). In classic Richardsian irony he writes of the book contract that

¹⁰⁵ Tremblay, 33-4. Richards is articulating an ecclesiology in which the visible church is not necessarily the truest Church; instead, the true Church is found in what he calls "the faith." Though he fully opposes the Manicheism that reads the institution as evil and the lay practice as good, he tends to utilize a dialectic that privileges lay practice. His critique of authority figures is not confined to the Church's representatives, the authority figures in his communities (Judges, social workers, business owners) are also often characterized by lacklustre virtue. According to Richards, the truest representations of Christ are characters like Madonna, not priests. While the realism of Richards' approach to ontology would likely cohere best with a realist view of ecclesiology, such as that articulated by Carl Schmitt in "The Visibility of The Church"; see Carl Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, Trans. G. L. Ulmen, (Greenwood Press, 1996), 47-59. Richards tends toward a view of laypeople that is highly influenced by Luther's "priesthood of all believers" and the invisibility of the Church. This, in turn, reflects his location as an Atlantic Canadian Catholic that is situated in the democratic norms and nominalist theological politics of our (secular)-Protestant ethos (Secular I, as argued in the introduction). Still, at the end of the novel Richards has Madonna tell Silver to go to a priest, rather than having her administer the sacrament of penance (confession). In urging Silver to go to visit a priest, Richards demonstrates the limits of his sympathy with lay agency and the lingering adherence to hierarchy. On this faith-Church binary see also the character of Alex Chapman in *The Lost Highway*, whose chief failure is to chose the priesthood over his love of Minnie tucker, and his faith in his graced sexuality (47). Alex's choice against his true desire (conceived as a Dante-Beatrice embodied love which transcends finitude), leads him to a life long spiral into increasing depravity and an early death.

Michael is offered, implying that Michael is only leading the community away from its authenticity:

Michael was then offered a contract by a publishing house in Toronto to write a book on Karrie Smith, the events of the summer, which had briefly made the national news and pricked something in the national consciousness [as had the Legere killings]. He said yes, and set about, he felt, to tell the truth as best he could about the murder [the reader knows that Michael does not know the truth, only the public conviction]. Not to spare anyone and to ultimately show that his values – the values of the new man – were much superior, say, to the values of his old friend Tom Donnerel. He felt that he was a moral representative of his age group. *There were those young men and women who were liberal and believed in what had to be done to secure equality for everyone and there were those who still clung tenaciously to the repressive dogma of a former time, of community and church.* Michael believed more than ever that he belonged to the former group, the best group, the more inclusive group. (192, emphasis added)

This is the sound of Richards mocking the then emerging liberal hegemony of the Trudeau era, the story's setting, as well as the Chrétien era 'progressives' that he comments on often in interviews.¹⁰⁶ From Richards perspective Michael's naivety is their naivety, his egoism is their egoism, his smugness, theirs, and his opportunism, theirs too; and all of these vices lead to the deterioration of the social fabric. It could be worse, from a Richardsian perspective that is: they could be New Democrats. Richards lampoons New Democrats in his Miramichi trilogy as they come to Ralphie's downtown apartment,¹⁰⁷ and as Vera writes her book.¹⁰⁸ Just to let his loyal readers know that his political opinions haven't changed, Richards includes Laura McNair's friend in *The Bay of Love and Sorrows*, describing her as "A female member of the NDP, who used her womanhood to evoke privilege" (154). New Democrats, university Professors, over-

¹⁰⁶ See Tremblay, 40-41. Odd that Richards and Charles Taylor share such philosophical and theological affinity and yet Taylor was influential in forming the NDP.

¹⁰⁷ *Nights Below Station Street*, 49.

¹⁰⁸ *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*, 169.

enthusiastic students, meddling, vindictive social workers, and 'progressives' of all shapes and sizes are the butt of Richards' jokes and the object of his scorn.

But of all Canadian institutions, it is the CBC that bears the brunt of Richards' criticism:

The outrage over my novels comes mostly from these types – academics or intellectuals who work for the CBC. Their criticism of my work can be self-serving and hypocritical because it says that Dave Richards is not allowed to say this and that about us, but we can say anything about his characters and him.... [T]he CBC, the most outrageously politically correct organization in the western world, only pretends to know its country; in fact, it dictates to the country what it feels the country should know. If you happen to find that false, as some do, then you are going to be heckled or shunned, neither of which is helpful for the artist. What is really unfortunate about this is that so many don't find fault with it.¹⁰⁹

For Richards the CBC signifies an institution that flattens Canadian identities, disciplining those rebellious voices, like his own, which do not toe the party line.

Whether he is correct in blaming these problems on the CBC or not, it stands as a national symbol for local problems. When the CBC enters his novels it takes the shape of someone like Vera, who scorns local mores and nuance and attempts to perfect the world without recognizing its own destructive impulse. Not accounting for one's ability to erase diversity becomes another of Richards' characteristics of evil. This tendency provokes his critics, Armstrong and Wyle, to decry Richards' construction of the welfare state as an agent of epistemic violence:

Throughout the trilogy, premeditated social concern is consistently portrayed as compromised, contradictory, and whimsical ... Richards's narrative discourse is resolutely overdetermined in its characterization of [Vera] as calculating and self-aggrandizing; Vera's project is framed as entirely self-serving.... a sociological vocabulary is constructed as an instance of middle-

¹⁰⁹ Tremblay, 40-1.

class, educated violence against the verbally unsophisticated Bines...¹¹⁰

If, from Richards' perspective, the welfare state benefited local communities and not the nation-building project that effects a certain erasure of difference, things might be different. But representatives of the welfare state, particularly social workers and professors, are continually shown to be privileged manipulators of local knowledge fields, destroying local epistemologies and praxis like a developer might green space. Richards is defending local *haeccitas*, "this-ness", what Lyotard points us to in his theory of the differend, and he is correct in seeing a threat to particularity in indiscriminating movements of social "progress."¹¹¹

This concern about diversity is a longstanding aspect of Thomist thought. For example, William Lynch argues in his classic critical work, *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination*, that "the univocal man" is a "vice, a disease" that creates simplistic answers of complex issues for the purpose of moving quickly toward intellectual mastery. "These pretensions," writes Lynch,

lead it again and again, under many different guises, to return to shape the real, the truly human orders according to its own forms and single-minded passions.... The basic drive behind the univocal mind is the tendency to

¹¹⁰ Christopher Armstrong and Herb Wyile, "Firing the Regional Can(n)on: Liberal Pluralism, Social Agency, and David Adams Richards's Miramichi Trilogy" *SCL/ELC* (22:1) 1997, 10-11.

¹¹¹ Armstrong and Wyile's critique of Richards is complex. On the one hand they lament Richards' turn from "phenomenological realism" (5) to "traditional formal realism --'character, action, morality, representation of reality,'" which is coupled with "overt editorializing and didacticism" (13-14). On the other hand, they at once sympathise with Richards' critique of liberalism, while seemingly chastising him for his characterization of social workers and academics. Both the aesthetic critique and the political critique seem muddled from my perspective as a scholar of religion, because Armstrong and Wyile hesitate to give a close reading of Richards' Catholic morality. While there is room to critique Richards for his heavy handed aesthetic – which only gets worse as he keeps writing, I am certain that the major impetus in his aesthetic transition is theological. He rewrites characters and scenarios repeatedly in an attempt to totalize his theological vision. I fundamentally agree with Armstrong and Wyile that his aesthetic has been compromised, but I would argue that the qualitative drop comes after *Mercy Among the Children*, not before the Miramichi trilogy (and this despite the didacticism).

reduce everything, every difference and particularity in images, to the unity of a sameness which destroys or eliminates the variety and detail of existence. In its descent into existence, therefore, the univocal idea is superficial or destructive.¹¹²

Richards calls the “univocal man” (or subjectivity) “Vera” (or the “CBC”): “[Jerry Bines] had never met a person like Vera before, who was so sure of herself when it came to someone else.”¹¹³ The politics of Richards' Miramich trilogy should be placed in the context of this Thomistic critique of univocity.

Richards' critique of social workers (Vera, Deirdre Whyne) is best understood as a scandal of competing interpretations of universals, rather than a rejection of charity. Richards critiques universal values that are constructed from afar and are then transplanted onto another a marginal/regional locality with the support of bureaucratic forms. We gain an insight into Richards' approach to charity and his critique of universalized “charity” through Charles Taylor’s reading of the radical priest Ivan Illich (SA 737-43). Illich reads the parable of the good Samaritan as holding the promise for reactivating forms of charity that have been socialized. If we generalize the goodness of the Samaritan to the injured traveler we find a rationale for the modern welfare state, but Illich claims that if we read the parable thus, we miss the point. The Samaritan’s act of agape/charity is a scandal to the ethnic constructs of his day. His act of love is not legislated by the collectivities of his contemporaries, the formations of social solidarity, “socialized action,” the conventional friend vs. enemy structures permitted (ie: Jew vs. Samaritan). By cutting through the reified structures of ethno-religiosity, the Samaritan

¹¹² William Lynch, *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1960), 113, 117.

¹¹³ Richards, *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*, 169.

loves the particular traveler and begins to construct an alternative universal. This universal ruptures constructed universals while recognizing its own universal through its love for particulars.¹¹⁴ This is the notion of a universal that lives in particulars, and in Catholicism this philosophical quandary is located in the person of Jesus Christ, who is at once a particular human and also the second person of the Trinity.

Thus, viewing Richards' fiction since 1988 according to a dialect that pits so-called progressive politics against so-called regressive politics, as Armstrong and Wyile seem to argue, is not a productive way to read Richards' corpus from the *Miramichi* trilogy on. Where Armstrong and Wyile are correct in asserting that Richards is a conservative (15), they are wrong to semantically leap to the term "neo-conservative."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ If we are tempted to read a form of individualism in Richards' work it is because of this dynamic. One could see how a conventional notion of conservatism differs from Richards' Catholic conservatism, as the event of particular love for a stranger ruptures the "particularism" of group identity. Thus we are right to see a tension between individual and collectivity, but this tension is not adequately approached through an ideology of individualism and may require a pneumatology, that is a theology of the Holy Spirit, to understand how a theological entity would mediate such particular agape. Richards insinuates this in the spirit filled ending of *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*, where we see the redeemed Nevin (a despicable coward before) building the steeple at the local Pentecostal church he's joined (214-22).

¹¹⁵ See for instance the associations Armstrong and Wyile make between Richards, regression, and neo-conservatism in the following quotation: "The polemical qualities of the *Miramichi* trilogy place Richards in a delicate, if interesting, position. Richards's resistance to contemporary literary and sociological discourses, those of liberal progressive thought in the institution and in the nation at large, should not be confused with the postmodern interest in keeping aesthetic and political questions in literary texts open, although the postmodern condition may be the opportunity of such resistance working in the name of a regressive politics. Rather, Richards's trilogy appears set on revaluing the keywords of a largely discredited humanism -- dignity, self-reliance, self-sacrifice, and moral action -- an apparently regressive project which puts Richards in danger of being lumped in with the contemporary neo-conservatives clamoring for the dismantling of the welfare state and generating a backlash against a demonized, progressive political correctness. Indeed, there's a certain validity to such a charge, but at the same time, it is possible to look at Richards's reinvestment of those keywords of conservative thought more positively: as an attempt to value the lives of the ostracized outside of the framework of a regionalized, pluralist state, in non-voluntarist, unreflective, and essentialist terms" (15). Lawrence Mathews critiques lines from this paragraph by writing "Armstrong and Wyile base the position on assumptions whose validity is so obvious (to them) that they need not be argued for.... Humanism is 'discredited.' Writing which affirms the contrary is 'regressive.' We all agree about 'what needs to be challenged.' Didacticism is bad. Closure is bad. These truths are self-evident... Where do they get this stuff?"; in Tremblay, 134. I claim that the slippery associations above are a product of critics who do not know how to approach a "post-secular" text because the critical mores of secularism

For when Richards opposes the influx of “socialized agency” (Vera being his prime example), he is not attempting to destroy the welfare system so that the economy can have free rein without state intervention. He is, instead, resisting inflowing modernization by way of privileging local knowledge, particular linguistic forms, organic family formations (rarely is there a nuclear family in Richards’ fiction), geographical patterning and land use. Conservative is a term that must be dissected, but to do so reduces its demonizing function for the left, precisely because we find that certain leftist opinions are at base conservative (including the epistemological sensitivity that Richards is calling for).¹¹⁶ It may be more useful to see Richards as a red-tory of the George Grant school than it is to call him regressive. But associating him with Grant would be a useless manoeuvre if one did not emphasize that both men hold to religious dogma which is remarkably similar – Richards as a Roman Catholic and Grant as a Anglo-Catholic.

That Richards’ has resisted the term “regional” is now a canonical part of all his biographies. There are three reasons for his reluctance to adopt this label. Firstly, he rightly sees “regional” as a term that privileged the centrist powers in the Canadian literary world. Secondly, he did not want to be seen as a writer with parochial interests. Thirdly, Richards has always been interested in the universal aspects of humanity. This last reason is the most important of the three, though critics have often concentrated on

are ingrained in the practise of literary criticism.

¹¹⁶ See Lawrence Mathews “Richards Demonized: The Academy as Greenpeace” in Tremblay. Mathews argues that Wyle and Armstrong take the following philosophical basis as already agreed upon: “Humanism is ‘discredited.’ Writing which affirms the contrary is ‘regressive.’ We all agree about ‘what needs to be challenged.’ Didacticism is bad. Closure is bad. These truths are self evident” (134). He continues “As Greenpeace preaches to the converted in its anti-sealing campaigns (“Citizens of Toronto, New York, London, send in your cash; shows those uncivilized wretches who’s boss), so Armstrong and Wyle know how to work their common-room audience. Where do they get this stuff?” (134). As you might imagine, Mathews claims that in Wyle and Armstrong’s eyes Richards is the sealer (133).

the first two. Many compare Richards to William Faulkner.¹¹⁷ They claim that his Miramichi is like Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. However, Richards shares more similarities with the philosophical and theological underpinnings of the Southern Agrarians: John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Caroline Gordon.¹¹⁸ The Southern Agrarians, like T.S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," describe the social fabric of the South, the collective mythology, the everyday imaginary, as incomprehensible outside of tradition:

The "Humanists" are too abstract. Humanism, properly speaking, is not an abstract system, but a culture, the whole way in which we live, act, think, and feel. It is a kind of imaginatively balanced life lived out in a definite social tradition. And, in the concrete, we believe that this, the genuine humanism, was rooted in the agrarian life of the older South and of other parts of the country that shared in such a tradition. It was not an abstract moral "check" derived from the classics - it was not soft material poured in from the top. It was deeply founded in the way of life itself - in its tables, chairs, portraits, festivals, laws, marriage customs. We cannot recover our native humanism by adopting some standard of taste that is critical enough to question the contemporary arts but not critical enough to question the social and economic life which is their ground.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ See Tremblay, 79-80; Armstrong and Wyle, 14; Ray Robertson, "The Outsider: David Adams Richards Gives Voice to the Hopeless." *Quill&Quire* (June 2000), para. 11, http://www.quillandquire.com/authors/profile.cfm?article_id=1818 (accessed December 18, 2008).

¹¹⁸ A significant number of Southern Agrarians were Catholics who connected theological concerns with political protest. For more on the theo-politico-economic thought of the Southern Agrarians see Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (University of North Carolina Press, 2001). The Agrarians featured in *I'll Take My Stand* described their fight in economic terms as "agrarian vs. industrial," and they linked this economic form to moral and social commitments; see Donald Davidson et al, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006, 1930), xli-xliii. Richards' narration of Catholic orthodoxy can be seen as a resistance to the "transvaluation of values" that is the dynamo of Capitalism. In this respect, the commonalities between the Southern literary movement and Richards' Catholicism may be linked to common forms of economic production, and the types of valuation that are necessitated by such production. Richards' Miramichi is not dominated by farmers, though Tommy Donnerel's integrity is linked to farming, but we might look to his woods men for this connection, like Ivan Bastarache, and Sydney Henderson. There is also a deep respect for the small business owner who provides essential services to a rural community without falling prey to monopolization; thus the virtuous James Chapman, and Janie McLeary (servants and artists), and the Machiavellian Leo McVicer (monopolist).

¹¹⁹ Davidson, xlviii.

There is also a sensibility in Allen Tate's poetics that a writer sacrifices the essence of poetry if he/she loses the view of where the imaginary meets the soil. Thus, strikingly, these Darwinians sided with the Creationists during the Scopes Trial of 1925, because they saw the trial as a venue for the reformation of Southern tradition by Northern liberals and their poetics were intimately tied to this particular social imaginary, even while insisting that their claims could be universalized: "The communities and private persons sharing the agrarian tastes are to be found widely within the Union. Proper living is a matter of the intelligence and the will, does not depend on the local climate or geography, and is capable of a definition which is general and not Southern at all."¹²⁰ As literary Catholics the Agrarians had affinities with two twentieth century Thomists, William Lynch and Jacques Maritain. Allen Tate expresses this literary Thomism most clearly when he claims that the universal is to be found in the particular,¹²¹ that by coming close to a region's particularities a poet comes closest to those aspects that are most universal in human experience: "The history of the 'earth' of the South became the archetypal image through which the Fugitives [the Agrarians] perceived the transcendentals. This earth acts on its inhabitants as a concrete given: a fence, and a boundary for the imagination, as a well as a means of transcendence. To imagine it is to be drawn into a dense, singular fact."¹²² The Thomism that underwrites Tate's poetics of the sensible world appeals to the doctrine of hylomorphism (forms inhering in matter), which holds that the particular

¹²⁰ Davidson, xliii.

¹²¹ Murphy appeals to Balthasar when delineating this aspect of Tate's poetics, 162-3. Balthasar writes, "Herein lies the solution to the theological problem of universals. The life of Christ, as was said, is the 'world of ideas' for the whole of history. He himself is the Idea made concrete, personal, historical: *universale concretum et personale*," *A Theology of History* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 89.

¹²² Murphy, 70.

flower possesses in it the universal form of flower, which is mediated to the intellect through natural light and expressed through the interior divine illumination (the form is impressed on the passive intellect and expressed by the active intellect).

Richards does not articulate his theory in such terms, yet his desire to attend to the local, while also demonstrating that what happens locally has universal resonance, shares a similarity with the Catholicism of the Agrarians. Richards makes this universality explicit by showing the “local” tendencies in foreign individuals: Terrisov, the Russian sailor that seduces Myhrra in *Nights Bellow Station Street*, and the Columbian gangsters that kill Michael Skid in *The Bay of Love and Sorrows* (300-1).¹²³ Richards passes through the nuances of hylomorphism and attends to the kernel of theology that motivates this realism: the two natures of Christ.

We find Madonna attempting to rescue Silver from his sins by awakening in him his identity as one made in the “image of Christ,” which he was taught as a youth at church (248). As she comes to understand that she is made in the image of Christ, Madonna is freed from self-preservation and is able to sacrifice herself to keep Everett away from Michael and Silver. Here, Christ is the universal form of humanity that is echoed throughout the species. Michael shares in her awakening, “‘You are made in the image of Christ,’ he said. ‘You are and always will be’” (248). This signals Michael’s turn toward the “new life,” while pointing the reader to the figuration of Madonna as a Christ-type; she gives herself up that peace might enter the world. She functions here as a complex symbol. She represents Mary, the mother of Christ, in her name, as well the

¹²³ Alistair MacLeod uses a similar device to link Cape Breton Gaels with Masai warriors, *No Great Mischief* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1999), 231.

image of the Son. She represents the Virgin, while she acts the whore (Magdalene). Yet, and here is an interesting complexity to Richards' reading of sin, Madonna entices Everette to sleep with her, and she manipulates his understanding of the real to work good by sparing Silver and Michael. By exalting Madonna as the pre-eminent Christ figure of the narrative (Tom and Michael are also images of Christ), Richards complicates the relationship between rhetoric, authenticity, and reality.¹²⁴ Madonna constructs a fiction which is empirically false in order to create conditions for truth telling; she faces a corrupt agent, Everette - who would also kill Michael - and refuses to subject "authentic" speech to the violence that Everette would use it for. Here, Richards demonstrates that truth, reality, is not mastered by the immanent referent, but has a transcendental quality, which is not overcome by violence.

The Real of "Miraculous Realism"¹²⁵

In as much as Richards writes realist fiction, and his chief narrative strategy is to expose the human propensity to choose lesser goods over greater goods - that is, false consciousness over reality - he privileges a reading of "the real." This is unfashionable for a writer who published during the height of postmodernism's popularity. For most

¹²⁴ Paul Griffiths, in his analysis of Augustine's strict ban on lying, claims that a consequentialist interpretation of lying, which uses countervailing sins to avoid even greater sins is strictly banned by Augustine too: "...[R]ather than committing countervailing sins you should always avoid sin, even if such avoidance means that another will commit a worse sin that you would have committed yourself had you sinned countervailingly" (98). Augustine's logic is as follows: if a Christian is being remade in the image of Christ and Christ a person of the Trinitarian Godhead, and the Godhead has no duplicity and is pure being, emanating Goodness, Truth and Beauty, then the Christian always sins by deviating from being remade in this sinless image. By exalting Madonna as the pre-eminent Christ figure of the narrative (Tom and Michael are also images of Christ), Richards deviates from his Augustinianism, highlighting his support of consequentialism.

¹²⁵ Andrew Tate, *Contemporary Fiction and Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 126-9

postmodernists, the real is always-already at a disjuncture with subjectivity and is mediated, unreliably, by representations (or not at all). Before we condemn Richards for postmodern heresy we need to attend to his presentation of the real. Firstly, when Richards' characters choose a lesser good over a greater good, they seem to be oriented to this reality by a mystical intuition. It is not as though they have an unmediated grasp of the objective, but rather that they have a mysterious sense that what they are doing is somehow wrong. We see this clearly in Michael's descent into Everette's world of manipulation and Karrie's desire for Michael. Madonna and Tom have, perhaps, the clearest orientation to the real, but it is intuitive on both of their parts, not empirical. Secondly, Richards includes in *The Bay of Love and Sorrows*, as he did in *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* a detective fiction.¹²⁶ Constable John Delano's frustration with Tom Donnerel's sentence leads him to further investigate the case, as well as the bad mescaline deal on PEI. But Delano doesn't have privileged mastery of the real either, instead he follows his intuition. As Delano investigates the Smith's robbery and the picture of Karrie's corpse, he seems to have otherworldly light illumine signs - Karrie's jewellery box, the burn on her thigh from Everette's Harley - that lead to a better understanding of what really happened. The "real," or the truth, is never fully present; it is only accessible through trace (or as Augustine would put it, the *vestigium*). Thirdly, the legal and empirical understandings of reality are shown to be insufficient. While Michael

¹²⁶ J. Russell Perkin draws our attention to the role of Richards' detective fiction in the voice of Andrew of *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*; see Tremblay, 119-27. Richards' returns to the detective character in the native RCMP officer Markus Paul of *The Lost Highway*. Interestingly, Paul's analysis is less mystified, as Richards puts more emphasis on Paul's critical use of reason. This has the effect of avoiding stereotypical portrayals of natives (as mystics), while also drawing attention to a renewed focus on reason in Catholic apologetics.

has sought all summer for a rustic Eden in Lower Newcastle, what he has built is a personal hell (his house as he sits there with Karrie's bloody clothing). Although Michael is about as close to Karrie's case as one can get, he supposes that his understanding of it is true and designs to tell the world the truth through a book of investigative reporting (as highlighted in the above quotation from page 192), yet, the reader already knows his interpretation is mistaken. The real that is sought for is not an account of facts, but rather a site of mystery. It is in Madonna's spiritual dissatisfaction and subsequent quest that the location of Richards' real is most clearly displayed – in the Eucharist (244), as well as the mimicry of Christ:

“Do you want to go take the Eucharist?”

“The what?”

“Take the host at Communion?”

“Everette has figured things out – the money – he'll use it to destroy you – so destroy yourself first, and become something new. Destroy what you were and become something brand new. Put on the vestments. Not bad drugs and blood that you've been living with for four months, and I've been living with, but the new vestments. Before you are destroyed.”

“What do you mean? Nothing can destroy me,” Silver said. (244)

When Silver has most lost sight of his good human potential, Madonna offers to take him to Church for the Eucharist, which is for Catholics the only human sign with absolute fidelity: Christ is invested in the divine substance of the bread and wine. While Silver resists Madonna's appeal, she continues to try and persuade him of this immanent-transcendent reality:

“You would have to go to confession – there is still time – we could both go. I will stand beside you – if you do twenty-five years, you'll still be in your forties. I promise I will wait for you – we will have our own place, and cause no trouble. Just come with me to church.”

His body looked distant. His eyes glittered, and his fingers were sweating.

“It’s good theatre,” he said, because he had heard Michael say this one Sunday afternoon and he suddenly felt very sharp repeating this. He laughed at her.

“I don’t believe in the church,” she whispered. “I don’t believe in the cardinals with their red hats and pomposity, or the priests. But I do believe in the faith. I believe in our Virgin Mary – our immaculate conception, the body and blood of Jesus Christ.” (245)

It is quite clear at this point in the text that Richards has put his aesthetic realism to the service of theological realism (the analogy of being). These two forms can be at odds, as realism is often aligned with what is natural, and religion is understood to be cultural, but Richards is synthesizing nature and culture here under his perception of the immanent-transcendent “real.” Many critics are tempted to describe this as magic realism, which is an extremely problematic term in its uncritical use of “magic” and “realism,” but also in its practice which is usually wedded to preserving empirical conceptions of fiction/non-fiction and fact/value. Richards’ literary representation of the analogy of being complicates such binaries, pointing to reality in fiction and constructing “facts” as already imbued with an active mystical force. We might instead adopt Andrew Tate’s term miraculous realism, or, as I prefer, deal directly with the theological terminology of the specific religious tradition(s) in question. Thus the Catholic mystery that is the reality of Richards’ realist fiction is best understood through theological aesthetics, even while these aesthetics entertain a rich conversation with the literary apparatus that is attached to the secularist endeavour.

Conclusion

Reading Richards as an author who owes much of his thought to the Catholic

tradition not only resists the romantic conception of the individual, but it also helps to make contemporary literary criticism more sensitive to the religious narratives they often overlook. As my reading of *The Bay of Love and Sorrows* has made clear, Richards' Catholicism is our entrance into his politics, moral sociology, and his metaphysics. Without theological literacy critics tend to regionalize Richards, producing a version of his narratives that recognize their relevance according to a postcolonial rendering of the national power configurations (margin-centre). While understanding Richards' work in context adds depth to his literature, critics must attend to the aspects of his narratives that dwell in universals, even as those universals are only accessible through particular linguistic norms, cultural practices and conceptions of place. His title reminds us of these two poles, for "the bay" can only refer to the bay of Miramichi, but "love and sorrows" are not so easily penned in.

Secular Purgatory: Between Dante and Ernesto Laclau in Ann-Marie MacDonald's

Fall on Your Knees

When stories are not told, we risk losing our way. Lies trip us up, lacunae gape like blanks in a footbridge. Time shatters and, though we strain to follow the pieces like pebbles through the forest, we are led farther and farther astray. Stories are replaced by evidence. Moments disconnected from eras. Exhibits plucked from experience. We forget the consolation of the common thread – the way events are stained with the dye of stories older than the facts themselves. We lose our memory. This can make a person ill. This can make a world ill.¹²⁷

This passage from Ann-Marie Macdonald's *The Way the Crow Flies* serves as a useful introduction to the argument in this chapter. In the previous chapter, I argued that Richards' narrative exploration of the emergence of evil is strongly tied to the way that language is used, and that the individual's use of language affects the imaginary of the entire community. MacDonald is also focused on the effects of evil, but her narrative attention is primarily directed to the emancipation of the individual from this evil, and she is only secondarily interested in the community. While Richards puts the emphasis on the persuasive power of a charismatic individual, MacDonald describes the psychological response that individuals have to trauma, outlining the function of narrative in achieving emancipation (as seen in the quotation above). In *Fall on Your Knees*, a novel owing much to Freud's theory of repression, MacDonald develops an analogy between

¹²⁷ Ann-Marie MacDonald, *The Way the Crow Flies* (Toronto: Knopf, 2003), 518. Much of the form of emancipation that I outline in *Fall on Your Knees* can also be seen at work in *The Way the Crow Flies*. In fact, MacDonald is clearer about her “post-secular” orientation in the later novel, pushing at once Madeleine's atheism and her religiosity, and contrasting this with Mimi's Acadian Catholicism; In *The Way the Crow Flies* see particularly the moon as a “Communion host ... flavourless” (51), Froelich's atheist prayer (300), Claire's death as a paschal sacrifice occurring on Easter weekend (347-74, 450), Madeleine's descent (katabasis) into her subconscious (543), and Mimi's relationship with the “Blessed Virgin” (603).

subjective repression and political suppression that is implicit in the discourses of both psychoanalysis and political theory. The repressed of the subjective and public unconscious both presuppose a conception of human nature that can, if significant techniques are deployed, be represented transparently. According to the initial logic of MacDonald's Freudian politics, the suppressed of human nature has been offended by the regnant culture. Culture, as a particular political regime, a particular hegemony, has mapped over the collective and the individual with a partial schematic that continually represses the 'natural' urges of humans. But the hope lies in the immanent future for a moment where the impossible will occur: the revolution; the messiah's return; the completely transparent political society. Accordingly, the 'Satanic' legacy of hegemony, the partial story, will be forever defeated by the hero, whether that hero is born of the *cosmos* or of nature, is divine or human, or both, or is, again, the collective cooperation of the entire public in solidarity with one another. Ann-Marie MacDonald's first novel, *Fall on Your Knees*, dwells in this horizon of politics and subjectivity.¹²⁸

I argue that while the textual surface of *Fall on Your Knees* promotes emancipation, there are wrinkles in MacDonald's narrative structure that signify her identification of the problems with the classic secular emancipation narrative that Ernesto Laclau has described in his work *Emancipation(s)*.¹²⁹ Laclau critiques a concept of emancipation that has underwritten the American, French, and Russian revolutions by

¹²⁸ My point in this introduction is that this progressive formulation of emancipation is too simple and immediate. The properly Christian problematic details a paradox where subjects are "already, but not yet" emancipated. This describes the play of an immanent initiation of emancipation that is only accomplished in full in transcendence. The tension in *Fall on Your Knees* results from the desire to affirm the progressive formula, while the text also implies that the later paradoxical formulation is more likely.

¹²⁹ Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (New York: Verso, 2007), 1-19.

asserting that a free society comes from overthrowing an oppressive political formation. He argues that classical emancipation is illogical because it posits a ground “real” – nature, the proletariat, the people – which can transcend the “opacity” of the oppressive political symbolic to create a fully transparent political structure. Laclau claims that this process is thwarted by the necessary arrival of another partial hegemony, which is disjointed from the real and continues the legacy of opacity. The revolutionary group is partial and does not represent the whole precisely because it needs to suppress the former regime and its supporters. This regime represents at very least, another oppressed entity.

A secular, *progressive* politics of emancipation leads subjects in solidarity through all unjust impasses to a final political solution; a version of this emancipation is at work in certain statements by Marx¹³⁰ as well as the politics of the social gospel movement and revolutionary politics at large. Another version of emancipation is found in the democratic paradigm, whereby emancipation from a tyrannical sovereign is avoided through regular elections, which prevent a community from being ruled by the same representatives for great lengths of time. Emancipation in the model argued by Laclau is a tenuous, partial affair. A Christian politics of emancipation, however contradicts these modes because emancipation is found in and through Christ, as the community is atoned for to the Father.¹³¹ Emancipation in Christianity is caught between an “already, but not

¹³⁰ Ernesto Laclau, “Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics” *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (New York: Verso, 2000), 45. Laclau is quoting Marx's claim that “for *one* estate to be acknowledged as the state of the whole society, all the defects of society must conversely be concentrated in another class; a particular estate must be looked upon as the *notorious crime* of the whole of society, so that liberation from that sphere appears as general self-liberation. For *one* estate to be *par excellence* the estate of liberation, another estate must conversely be the obvious estate of oppression”; found in Karl Marx “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (London: Lawrence & Wishart 1975), 184-5.

¹³¹ North American Evangelicals, of course, put the emphasis on individual atonement, rather than

yet” tension, that is supported by a paradox of immanence and transcendence.¹³² This metanarrative holds that God came to humanity in Christ, the Logos, and humanity is being taken to the Father, who is beyond our ontological and epistemological capacity. Christ is with the Father, but has sent the Spirit to dwell with the Church, and Christ is with the Church when it is gathered in his name, especially in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Baptism. The Christian model of emancipation is total, but only experienced in partiality in finite time; however, it is always transcending finitude and is thus never containable. It is mysterious. MacDonald’s representations of emancipation vacillate between these three models, depending on the speaker. In the end however, *Fall on Your Knees* supports a slow but steady progression toward emancipation and in doing so, displays traces of Catholic soteriology and eschatology.

The Catholic, traditional, and pedophilic power structure that MacDonald purposes her characters to transcend is formative of the linguistic horizon in which she writes; her characters live, move, and have their being in a Catholic ethos. While a “pure” Catholicism is not MacDonald’s fictional “real,” the secular reality that MacDonald privileges is soaked in the religio-cultural tonic (symbolic) of Cape Breton Catholic tradition. In this respect MacDonald’s literary religiosity is closer to the partial faith that McClure sees in the post-secularity of Pynchon and DeLillo, than it is to

atonement in the body of Christ as the Church.

¹³² Within the workings of this paradox of immanent and yet transcendent emancipation (which is thought through by way of analogy), two dialectics operate. Immanent emancipation makes no sense unless we contrast it with the concepts of both immanent slavery and transcendent emancipation. Kathleen is given over to transcendent emancipation and Frances exists in immanent psychological slavery before she makes peace with James. Milbank suggests that dialectic works within analogy in *The Monstrosity of Christ* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009), 160-73.

Richards' "[B]lood in faith" Catholicism.¹³³ *Fall on Your Knees*, like her play, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*¹³⁴, and her second novel, *The Way the Crow Flies*, is a lapsed Catholic narrative that implies (through a "structure of feeling") that Catholicism can be transcended, while also demonstrating that such transcendence is impossible. Readers are, thus, brought before the dilemma of secularity in Canada, where subjects are invited into "neutral" public space to annunciate their identities and create themselves, while finding that such new identities must be formed from the ruins of the culture that they are attempting to transcend. In his classic analysis of the emergence of secular progress, *Meaning in History*, Karl Löwith, identified this double bind of emancipation:

The communities of modern times are neither religiously pagan nor Christian; they are decidedly secular, i.e., secularized, and only so far, by derivation, are they Christian. The old churches of modern cities are no longer the outstanding centers of the communal life but strange islands immersed in the business centers. In our modern world everything is more or less Christian and, at the same time, un-Christian: the first if measured by the standard of classical antiquity, the second if measured by the standard of genuine Christianity. The modern world is as Christian as it is un-Christian because it is the outcome of an age-long process of secularization. Compared with the pagan world before Christ, which was in all its aspects religious and superstitious and therefore a suitable object of Christian apologetics, our modern world is worldly and irreligious and yet dependent on the Christian creed from which it is emancipated. The ambition to be "creative" and the striving for a future fulfilment reflect the faith in creation and consummation, even when these are held to be irrelevant myths.¹³⁵

In MacDonald's fiction she negotiates this double bind firstly, by negating the cultural assertions of Catholicism and secondly, by recovering the formations of Catholicism that are beneficial by negating the pure secular. This negation of the negation, which is found

¹³³ Tremblay, 34.

¹³⁴ Ann-Marie MacDonald, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (Toronto: Vintage, 1998, 1990). This play was awarded the Governor General's award for Drama in 1990.

¹³⁵ Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 200-1

in her narrative form and substance (as I delineate below), recovers a concept of emancipation that the Catholic tradition expressed through purgatory. In purgatory a soul is refined by negations of negations (evil acts), which do not extinguish individual difference in achieving their end - the purification of a transcendental positivity (the soul). Dante's *Divine Comedy* is the most readily available narrative example of this process and one which MacDonald utilizes as an intertext. In paradise the soul remains distinguished from God, while it participates in the life of God. Purgatory is invoked as an existential state which problematizes the overly simplistic movements of classical emancipation, while preserving the possibility of an emancipatory end; purgation is, ironically, MacDonald's mode of secularity.

Emancipation in *Fall on Your Knees*

Our democratic imaginary is underwritten by many discourses of emancipation: the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt; the Christian doctrine of salvation; the various chords of reformation revolt, the modern revolutions (1776, 1789, 1804, 1917); the emancipation of Blacks from slavery and the fight for civil rights; and, of course, the Comtian emancipation of the secular from the religious.¹³⁶ The modern version of secularism (later Secular I) is founded on the Comtean triumph of the positive scientific

¹³⁶ Comte argued for a metanarrative of the West where a society based on the positive scientific knowledge emerged from earlier stages of cultural evolution. The first phase was the *Theological*, where society was dominated by fictitious supernatural beings that ruled its political, cultural and philosophical life. In the next stage, the *Metaphysical*, the cultural relied on a unified power-base, nature, that contains abstract principles that dictate the cosmos. In the final stage, the age of *Positivism*, "the mind has given over the vain search after Absolute notions, the origin and destination of the universe, and the causes of phenomena, and applies itself to the study of their laws" ; see A. Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte, Vol I*, transl H. Martineau, (London: Trubner, 1875), 2. This leads to a demystification of the empirical world and a transparent relationship vis-à-vis the object studied and the observer.

community over the “falsehood” of religion and metaphysics. *Fall on Your Knees* reiterates this emancipatory spirit through the novel’s first protagonist, Kathleen Piper, who flees from the crusty hand of tradition, rural Cape Breton, Catholicism, poverty and incest, to the glorious cosmopolitan New York and the bed of her African American lesbian lover, Rose. This flight from the repressed to the emancipatory moment functions as the primary narrative frame of the novel. Emancipation is cut short, however, because *Fall on Your Knees* is written in a postmodern gothic genre, and MacDonald foreshadows, even before Kathleen is born, that her father, James, will not spare this child. The narrative structure is grounded in Kathleen’s trajectory of emancipation, which is quickly negated after an initial triumph. In fact, the path through MacDonald’s narrative leads us to Kathleen’s death before it tells us, in detail, of her emancipation. In effect, she is dead from the start – “the lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (*KJV*, Rev. 13.8) – and resurrected in the end to a celebratory tune. MacDonald provides her readers several negations: first, the negation of Kathleen’s life by her mother Materia, which is followed by her coming of age in New York, which leads to, secondly, the negation of her innocence, as James (the violent face of rural tradition 7, 15, 34) rapes her and brings her back to Cape Breton.¹³⁷ The third instance of negation, the resurrection of Kathleen’s story through the rediscovery of her journal, negates the previous negations by extending Kathleen’s legacy beyond death.¹³⁸ The journal reinforces Kathleen’s central role in the

¹³⁷ Like most members of the Piper family, James is a polyvalent symbol. Both he and Mr. Mahmood are associated with the dominating hold of patriarchy, and this, in turn, is positioned as a problem that is carried with “oldworld” traditions, whether they emerge from Gaelic Scotland or Catholic Lebanon (15). James is also the sign of the rural proletariat, the war hero, the bootlegger, a scab, and he is often given mythological nuances (Ouranus, Adam, Joseph, the pilgrim Dante).

¹³⁸ The section of the novel where we read Kathleen’s journal is titled “Hejira.” This is the name given to Muhammad’s journey from Mecca to Medina in 622.

ongoing Piper narrative as it is passed to her nephew Anthony at the end of the novel.

Kathleen is revealed as a messianic figure who is sacrificed on the altar of the furnace room by her mother (FK 69, 101). She is an offering to Pete, the demon, to keep James away from Materia's second child, Mercedes.¹³⁹ By pushing *Fall on Your Knees* to its mythical limit, we can begin to understand the meaning of the novel's stylistic borrowings. Whether from *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, *Jane Eyre*, or *Little Women*, these intertexts point to corrupted relations (cultural, political, moral) that are experienced at the family level and that affect children (female in this instance) psychologically and physically, often violating their integrity.¹⁴⁰ The complex layers of narrative that we piece

¹³⁹ To interpret MacDonald's fiction according to the genre of realism, as Creelman does, tells us very little about their particular styles; see Creelman, 195. As Jennifer Andrews argues, *Fall On Your Knees* shares much in common with magic realism, though Andrew's analysis of supernatural happenings in the novel would be more useful if it addressed Catholicism; see Jennifer Andrews, "Rethinking the Relevance of Magic Realism for English-Canadian Literature: Reading Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall On Your Knees*," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 24.1 (1999), 1-20.

¹⁴⁰ See Pilar Somacarrera, "A Mad Woman in a Cape Breton Attic: *Jane Eyre* in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, (39:1) 55-75. MacDonald has Frances and Mercedes reference *Little Women* (199-200). I explore this below. MacDonald explicitly borrows the conventions of the fairy tale as she weaves her story; she links this to the influence of Catholicism in an interview, which I quote at length: "At the personal level, they exerted such an influence over my own life as a Catholic, right? But then, you know, I've grown up and I've gone through my first howl of rage, and rejection and reassessment, etcetera. And then I realize in fact, that it has a place in the world and that it is larger than myself; that I can bring my personal experiences to bear on the stuff that I have learned as a grown-up via research and situate all of this in a larger world. So for me, it's always about taking the raw materials of my experience and learning so much more about it, and contextualizing it, and enlarging it. Now, the Catholic Church is extremely powerful. People who aren't Catholic know that it's a powerful thing. It's also extremely dramatic, extremely theatrical, and I think that had something to do with why I went into theatre in the first place. There's a great deal that is beautiful and terrifying, and it's very narrative. And it's pagan—this is my persistent point of view! In fact, I feel very lucky to have been raised in a religion that I finally realize is pagan. It is rife with minor gods and goddesses who are the saints, and there are all these stories of miracles. And it's also very fairy-tale oriented because, obviously, when Catholicism swept through Europe it had to replace paganism and a world of fairy-tales. It just took over, substituted. Cast of saints, and miracles. That appeals very strongly to my imagination. So I was able to identify what I love, at that very earthy, folk level, and at the dramatic level. You know, fourteen stations of the cross, five wounds of Christ, the three days of the death and resurrection, the forty days and nights . . . All those things are extremely powerful, extremely dramatic, extremely schematic—I mean, that's drama. You don't have to ask how many acts there should be, you don't have to ask on what day the climax occurred—it's all there. It's a narrative structure, it's really charged emotionally, it's lurid. The kind of Catholicism I grew up with is practically lurid. And I loved that. Now, the other aspects of it, the oppressive ones, I think I've probably made myself clear on what I

together the Piper family history from are an analogy of the mnemonic cycles of post-traumatic stress. The emancipation narrative of the first book (MacDonald' division in FK) is complicated by the stories of the younger sisters, Mercedes, Frances, and Lily. Kathleen's emancipatory flight, the dominant theme of this fugue-like musical, finds countersubjects in Mercedes' service as a nun, Frances' struggle to stay at home and make peace with her father, and Lily's role as storyteller.¹⁴¹ After the theme is uttered by Kathleen, Mercedes, Frances and Lily echo this theme and play off each other's voices. While Kathleen's theme has a trajectory from Cape Breton to New York (at its simplest form¹⁴²), Mercedes' leads to a monastery, where she finds little resolution, Frances wrestles with her trauma through a long tumultuous relationship with her father, and Lily embarks on a noble quest for the true narrative.

Emancipation from what?

"The church is full of examples of men like him [James], who thought themselves damned and yet were saved." (FK 170)

As we saw with Richards, Edenic intertexts signify that the author is attending to the origin of sin. In "Book I: The Garden" of *Fall on Your Knees*, MacDonald also uses

think of that. So the Catholic Church is really a huge influence for me personally, and I recognize that's also a huge influence in the world." See Melanie Lee Lockhart's "Taking them to the Moon in a Station Wagon," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 35:2 (2005), 139-157, 148.

¹⁴¹ See M. L. Lockhart, "Taking Them to the Moon in a Station Wagon: An Interview with Ann-Marie MacDonald", *Canadian Review of American Studies* 35: 2 (2005) 145; T. Salah, 'What Memory Wants: Broken Tongue, Stranger Fugue in *Fall on Your Knees*', *Canadian Review of American Studies* 35: 2 (2005) 231-249. Trish Salah has written on the fugue-like qualities of *Fall on Your Knees* as well; however, Salah does not attend to the way that the fugal structure of the novel is related to the Christian metanarrative.

¹⁴² Kathleen's trajectory in its complexity is as follows: New Waterford to Sydney to New York, captured and brought back to Cape Breton, death in childbirth/murder by Materia(?), then at the end of the novel the repeated flight to New York and capture, with most emphasis on the flight.

the biblical narrative as an intertextual frame. James and Materia are the central characters here, and they parallel Adam and Eve, as well as Joseph and Mary. They are the parents of trauma and hope. Like the Israelites fleeing Pharaoh, James “got on [his] blind pony and rode out of Egypt,” Cape Breton (8). James’ object of desire, Materia, is a twelve year old Lebanese-Catholic girl. The theme of pedophilia originates here and it resonates throughout the fugue-narrative like a bass chord. On the night of their Protestant wedding, MacDonald laces lines from the *Song of Songs*, “*thy lips, O my bride, drop as the honeycomb, honey and milk are under thy tongue*”, with their actions, “he sang her a Gaelic lullaby which made him cry because, if such a thing was possible, he loved her more in his mother tongue”(15). This is a short lived romance. Just as Materia represents the earth, James is a conflation of the penetrating, raping force of the protestant work ethic (34) and Ouranos, the sky god of Hesiod who hovers over Gaia, fathers Titans and imprisons them in the underworld. Soon MacDonald imports the Presbyterian, James, into the Catholic Church:

It wasn’t so much that the piano tuner was “*enklese*”, or even that he was not a Catholic or a man of means. It was that he had come like a thief in the night and stolen another man’s property ... There was no taking her back, she was ruined.

But God is merciful and so was Mr. Mahmoud. He allowed James to convert to Catholicism in exchange for his life. (17)

Having forced James into the Catholic Church, MacDonald has him cursed by Mr.

Mahmoud: “may God devastate his dwelling...well perhaps not the dwelling. As for my daughter. May God curse her womb” (17).

Mahmoud’s curse works; he has a vengeful God on his side. Even though James is the sign of patriarchy, he is also victim to it. The curse affects Materia too. After the

birth of Kathleen when Materia is thirteen, Materia appeals to the Madonna on behalf of her daughter, yet “Our Lady had still not answered her prayer. Materia still did not love her child, and she knew the fault lay within herself ... Materia released the Child. It was no good. God could see past Materia’s actions, into her heart. And her heart was empty” (39). Mr. Mahmoud’s curse foretells the devastation that will befall the Piper household. James’ pedophilia is a symptom of the sickened hegemony of pre-WWII Cape Breton. Because the sexual transgressions remain unutterable, submerged below the political unconscious, the culture maintains an opaque understanding of itself. *Fall on Your Knees* is an exercise in uttering the unutterable of sexual abuse.

James is a ticking time-bomb. When his beloved Kathleen, in a fit of pubescent rebellion, strikes a chord on the piano while James is working on it, he “springs up and around, though the hammers barely winged him, belts her with an open hand then a closed fist before he realizes who it is and what he’s done, and how he’d never, not even Materia, God knows-” (60). Violence lies just under the surface, and it is James’ constant temptation. Yet, James feels remorse and attempts to sooth his daughter, “ ‘Don’t cry... Hush now’ ...he must shield her from -- what?... From all of it. From it all” (60). As he continues to sooth Kathleen, his daughter’s twelve year old body takes him back to his wedding night:

Her hair smells like the raw edge of spring, her skin is the silk of a thousand spinning-wheels, her breath so soft and fragrant, *milk and honey are beneath your tongue*.... Then he shocks himself. He lets her go and draws back abruptly so she will not notice what has happened to him. Sick. I must be sick. He leaves the room and bolts through the back door, across the yard, over the creek, to the garden, where he calms down enough to vomit. (60)

As a growing sense of imminent danger looms below the surface (his erection), it is as

though James sees his dark future, just as his mother-in-law had before, when she looked into the tea leaves (16). The fullness of MacDonald's narrative is latent in the beginning, when Lilly looks through the family photo album ("Silent Pictures" 1-4). All the clues are there, distilled, waiting to be expressed by some illuminative power. The gestalt form arrives, but disclosure takes time. Oddly, evil and good seem to have changed places since Augustine's formula (privation). Evil transcends time and space, good actions erode evil substance, but evil is plentiful. It is this moment of transcendent evil from which MacDonald's characters seek emancipation.

Materia and James separately label his lapse a "demon" (63-5). In the chapter, "The First Solution," Materia attempts to appease the demon by conceiving Mercedes (named after "our lady of mercies") "only to prevent a greater sin on her husband's part," knowing full-well that "lust in marriage is the same as adultery" (63). After Mercedes is baptized, Materia prays before the Virgin, "But Materia doesn't look up. She looks straight into the eyes of the grinning serpent dying under the Virgin's foot. Materia offers it a sacrifice" (64), her piano playing. Kathleen had identified and named this presence, "Pete," the scarecrow. Just after the house was given to Materia and James, MacDonald tells us, "just because it was new, doesn't mean it wasn't haunted" (18, 43). Eleven months after Mercedes' birth, Materia gives birth to Frances, yet she worries that "the goodness in her womb hadn't yet been replenished" (64) at the time of her conception.

At this point in "The Garden" narrative we have seen the Man and the Woman, as well as the Serpent; God has been absent, yet symbolically pervasive. Instead of God, we have the ideal young woman, Kathleen, with the voice of the gods. Materia has identified

the danger in James, who releases the tension of the Piper household by enlisting to serve in World War I. Despite his recklessness in the field, he seems fated to unleash violence. On Armistice Day, 1918, his violence overtakes Kathleen, as James rapes her in her New York apartment. As we find out in subsequent books, the exotic war has been brought home. Kathleen then returns to Cape Breton, pregnant, and is sacrificed for her children by her mother on the “altar” of the furnace room (135). This sacrifice is made to Pete, the demon,¹⁴³ in a parody of the *Christus Victor* theory of atonement, in which Christ is seen to pay a ransom to the Devil and victoriously rescue the fallen from sin and death.¹⁴⁴ By the end of “The Garden” narrative, readers suspect violence, but the flight to New York and the promise of its splendour, is still resonating with the resilience of a major cord.

Kathleen

Whereas James represents the conservative, violent hand of tradition, Kathleen signifies the bright, sassy hope of modernism (and, indeed, she personifies the later Secular I). Her voice, a gift that James/tradition recognizes, carries her from the scab’s house in New Waterford (James crosses strike lines to mine coal) to Holy Angel’s Catholic school in Sydney (41), then to the stage of the Orpheus Society of Sydney, where she confirms her glory, and upward to the great Zion of modernity, New York, for

¹⁴³ Jesus says to Peter, “get behind me Satan” (Mark 8:33). This may be the logic behind MacDonald’s name for the demon. It would also echo the ambivalence of her representation of the Catholic church. The rock on which the Church is founded is also the medium of Satan.

¹⁴⁴ See G. Aulen’s *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, transl. A. G. Herber, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003); David Bentley Hart’s *The Beauty of the Infinite*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2003) pp. 360-94; Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 4.3.1, trans G.W. Bromiley (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 1961) pp. 165-273; Hans Urs Von Balthasar’s *Theo Drama II* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1990), p. 159-63.

voice lessons and a chance at the Metropolitan Opera (72, 117, 122). This individualist, expressivist ascent¹⁴⁵ moves from the 'oppressive' mores and economy of Atlantic Canada to the "open" cosmopolitan jazz culture of New York (462-3). For a moment, Kathleen's dream is realized, as she basks in the adoring eye of Rose, her accompanist and lover. This hopeful narrative is the musical theme of the novel. If the story ended here, we could claim that it represented a movement from an unsavoury opaque ground where violence and oppression lurk (Cape Breton) to the clear, transparent politics of the cosmopolis (New York): a tidy emancipation. This is how Kathleen conceives it:

Kathleen is truly and utterly and completely Kathleen in New York ... She's got plenty of personality and no history... This [city] air is what the gods live upon. The gods who get things done. Not the gods who mope on ancient promontories and exhale fossil vapours, waiting for someone to fill in the fragments of forgotten sagas that have come unravelled with age. Those gods have sagged so long on their rocks, they are well on the way to turning to stone themselves [Cape Breton].

But the new gods. That bright baritone chorus. They inhabit every steel support, every suspension bridge, every gleaming silver train, all things vertical and horizontal, all glass, gravel and sand. They take big breaths and they make big sounds and with every breath and sound they open up more sky. (123)

This is the myth of progress. Kathleen's arrival in the city, after her time in the backwoods is the consummate *künstlerroman*; her narrative of development, however, cut short as it is by James, subverts progress. In this subversion MacDonald seems to be giving expression to Laclau's point about the classical theory of emancipation - that it is illogical:

... there is no emancipation without oppression, and there is no oppression without the presence of something which is impeded in its free development by oppressive forces ... the classical notion of emancipation in its many

¹⁴⁵ For the ascent theme see FK, 462-3

variants, has involved the advancement of the incompatible logical claims ... *either* emancipation is radical and, in that case it has to be its own ground and confine what it excludes to a radical otherness constituted by evil or irrationality; or there is a deeper ground which establishes the rational connections between the pre-emancipatory order, the new 'emancipated' and the transition between both – in which case, emancipation cannot be considered as a truly radical foundation.¹⁴⁶

Classical, radical emancipation requires an irrational hegemony that the revolutionary force ruptures in order to bring about a transparent political sphere. From Kathleen's point of view her mother and Cape Breton tradition represent this irrationality, which she transcends in an act of individual emancipation by moving to New York and joining an emerging political sphere, the jazz scene.

Laclau argues that classical emancipation theory masques the real process by which the emancipatory ground is created, hegemony: “... if the founding act of a truly rational society is conceived as the victory over the irrational forces of the past – forces which have no common measure with the victorious new social order – the founding act itself cannot be rational but is itself utterly contingent and depends on a relation of power.”¹⁴⁷ MacDonald, thus, attempts to have it both ways. On the one hand, she represents the home (tradition, Catholicism and Cape Breton) as an opaque hegemony that is a function of power to be overcome by the transparent forces of the “queered” society (developed in the last book of the novel “Hejira” 456-536), while on the other hand, she recognizes that emancipation does not happen according to the “secular eschatology” of classical emancipation, where the “progressive” regime overcomes the “religious” regime by force of logical supremacy:¹⁴⁸ thus, the necessity of the a damaging

¹⁴⁶ Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (New York: Verso, 2007), 1-4.

¹⁴⁷ Laclau, 4.

¹⁴⁸ Laclau, 2.

letter from “an Anonymous Well-Wisher,” claiming that Kathleen is participating in miscegenation (FK 131, 235, 548, 552).¹⁴⁹ This letter represents the unassimilated resistance to the transparent political regime, which itself emerges from the site of the supposed transparent regime – cosmopolitan New York. It exposes the racist and political dimension of the secular and is designed to provoke James to intervene. James barges in on Kathleen and Rose, who he initially thinks is a man, but soon realizes is a woman, and the sight of Kathleen draws him back to the moment when he held her after she had scared him while working on the piano (60-1). He then rapes her, MacDonald tells us, not out of anger, but rather because “he loves her too much”(549). Kathleen is the victim, Christ on the cross.¹⁵⁰ Her emancipation is negated when the irrational, incestuous tradition brings her back to Atlantic Canada where her mother murders/sacrifices her to the demon during childbirth (135-9). The “holy night”¹⁵¹ of Kathleen’s death is MacDonald’s Good Friday, and “on the third day,” Materia “cleans the oven” (139) committing suicide through gas inhalation. This demonic Easter of child sacrifice negates the classical emancipation of cosmopolitan New York through the insinuations of a racist

¹⁴⁹ One of the great surprises of the novel is the disclosure of the anonymous well-wisher: Rose’s mother, Jeanne (552, Rose is Kathleen’s partner in New York). Until we meet Jeanne, Rose’s blackness goes unquestioned (like Kathleen’s whiteness to Rose before she sees the Piper family picture). Jeanne, however, is a white Jazz singer from a wealthy family. She is addicted to heroin, and prostitutes herself nightly. Jeanne also seems to imply that like Kathleen she had an incestuous father (527). That Jeanne, the cosmopolitan, should be the one to call on James’ wrath thwarts all straight-forward readings of racism in this novel, for it was Giles, the Cape Breton exile in NY, who readers initially imagine as the anonymous well-wisher. Furthermore, Jeanne complicates the theme of emancipation. Jeanne is the failed cosmopolitan, who is empty like a ghost, alive on earth with a soul that is “already in hell” (518). From the residue of the Jazz scene, the devil emerges again, proving the transcendence of the heavenly city.

¹⁵⁰ This is implied through several themes: the Mary and Joseph types for parents; her exceptional status which leads her from the rural (Nazareth) to the city (Jerusalem), where she experiences her greatest suffering – being raped by the father, only to be killed in childbirth by the mother. Her story, however, is given over to her community of mourners, who spread out across the world with her memory as their motivation. More over, her story brings healing to Frances and sets James free.

¹⁵¹ “Oh Holy Night” is the title of the chapter that tell of Kathleen’s death (135-9).

letter and the actions of an incestuous father. However, because classical emancipation operates as the musical theme of MacDonald's fugue it must live on. After the crescendo of Kathleen's journal, which Lily, her daughter, reads, Kathleen's flight, the great hope of queer politics, is Lily's gospel – to be told and retold to a community of followers. As I have stated above, according to the narrative structure of the novel, Kathleen's musical theme emerges, is negated by death, resurfaces in letters and traces, is sung vibrantly through the journal, is negated by James' rape, and emerges again in Lily's family narrative (176-7, 566).

MacDonald's reluctance to surrender the hope of total emancipation is attached to a latent Catholic theology of transcendent emancipation in the victorious city of God.

This doctrine is articulated in *Lumen Gentium*, Ch. VII:

The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which we acquire sanctity through the grace of God, will attain its full perfection only in the glory of heaven, when there will come the time of the restoration of all things. At that time the human race as well as the entire world, which is intimately related to man and attains to its end through him, will be perfectly reestablished in Christ.¹⁵²

Where *Lumen Gentium* professes collective salvation of the Church as Christ's body, MacDonald's omniscient, liberal-democratic narrator puts the emphasis on individual salvation. Yet, MacDonald's theory of the relationship between the individual and the community bears witness to her temporal situation between the fields of second and third wave feminism; she narrates individuals with multiple connections to a broader political horizon.

¹⁵² Pericle Felici, *Lumen Gentium*. Ch. VII (Vatican II Document)
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (accessed December 18, 2008).

At certain points in MacDonald's novels she exemplifies what Lacan and Žižek call "extimacy." Extimacy denotes a connection of the interior to the exterior that ruptures interior autonomy by distending the individual into the polis.¹⁵³ Žižek uses the moebius strip as an analogy of this self, because the moebius strip appears to have two sides (interior and exterior), when in fact it is one unending unit. Frances, the "whore clown," is overtly extimate when she acts out her inner turmoil and repression on stage at Jameel's Speak Easy¹⁵⁴: "For example, she may strip down to diaper, then put her thumb in her mouth. 'Yes my heart belongs to Daddy, so I simply couldn't be ba-ad'" (FK 350, 293). The individual's secrets, secrets kept even from the individual, leak into the public, and the public leaks into the individual.¹⁵⁵ Thus, we find Louise Brooks in Frances (288,

¹⁵³ See Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 33; Jacques-Alain Miller, "A and a in Clinical Structures" *Acts of the Paris-New York Psychoanalytic Workshop*. Trans. by Stuart Schneiderman. 1987, 14-29. Reprinted in *The Symptom* 6, (Spring 2005), http://www.lacan.com/symptom6_articles/miller.html (accessed July 19, 2009); Tony Myers, *Slavoj Žižek* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 41

¹⁵⁴ We should note that Jameel's Speak Easy is also a Catholic Church, built on his body guard, Boutros: "The name Boutros means Peter. And Peter means rock. And upon this rock, Jameel has built his booze can" (330). One wonders how much MacDonald is reading an urban notion of cosmopolitanism back onto a rural, yet, multicultural Cape Breton. For instance, I have never heard of a speak easy in Nova Scotia, though I am certain that there are many "kitchen parties." I tend to side with George Elliott Clarke's rendering of the so-called "speak easy" as a shed, or a backwoods cabin, or a home, where there is always a musical instrument being played; see *Whylah Falls* (Victoria: Polestar, 2000), "Four Guitars" 104-18. This, however, hardly serves the typology that MacDonald wants to extend between Jameel's Speak Easy and the Mecca in New York.

¹⁵⁵ Jacques-Alain Miller described "extimacy" in his lecture "A and a in Clinical Structures": "The word 'extimacy' tries to transcend this opposition [between exterior and interior]. Beginning with the word 'intimacy.' [sic] Which refers to the most private, the center of privacy, this intimacy is at the same time a forbidden zone for the subject. And, in some way, it was known from Augustine's time, for instance, that at the center of yourself, in the most intimate of your intimacies, as Augustine says in his Confessions, there's God. There is not you yourself absolutely. In some way God exemplifies this extimacy that is, at the very center, intimacy. That is to say, to drive a wedge into the argument, the most cherished of your intimacies is at the same time the most alien," see Miller, §VI, Par. 2. David Bentley Hart's analysis of Augustine's idea of the soul shares similarities with Lacan's extimacy; indeed this may be where Lacan gets extimacy, as he does his semiotics, and traces of the Mother/ Monica. "The *imago Dei* is not simply a possession of the soul so much as a future, a hope; the self forever displaced and exceeded by its desire for God is a self displaced toward an image it never owns as a 'substance'"; Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 114. What is simply the exterior in Lacan is God in Augustine – the soul is extimate with God.

348). Likewise, we find Catholicism, a particular kind of public, strewn throughout the interior of MacDonald's exterior text, *Fall on Your Knees*. Like Maurice and Frances' whore clown, this Catholic performance is not without its baggage.

While MacDonald does not reference Vatican II, she implies that New York is the icon of emancipation, the paradiso. In a CBC televised interview with Peter Gzowski, MacDonald states that she kept Dante's *Divine Comedy* at the forefront of her mind while writing *Fall on Your Knees*.¹⁵⁶ She makes this clear in the text. When James "retires," after his multiple strokes and settles into some reading, "[h]e knows what he intends to read first, however, he has set it aside accordingly for the pinnacle of his wall: Dante's *Paradiso*. Having gone through *Inferno* years ago, he has decided to cheat and skip over *Purgatorio*, eager for the beatific vision and the reunion with Beatrice"(428). MacDonald is implying that the novel can be read according to these three parts: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, *Paradiso* (much like Puccini's *Il Trittico*). James' wrestling match with his demon, pedophilia, and his three major failures (Materia, Kathleen and Frances) comprise the *Inferno*.¹⁵⁷ The sections from book 2, "No Man's Land," MacDonald's historicized image of limbo, to book 7, "The Bullet," comprise the *Purgatorio*, during which James makes no progress, while Frances climbs the whole way. Book 8, "Hejira" (implying Muhammad's escape to Medina, Kathleen's jazz bar, Mecca), is the *Paradiso*. Like

¹⁵⁶ Peter Gzowski, "Interview with Ann-Marie MacDonald." *Gzowski in Conversation*, (PIKA Productions), first broadcast on *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, 18 August 1998. In this interview, MacDonald also talks about reading drafts of *Fall on Your Knees* to her aunt and her friends in Cape Breton, who are nuns. She tells Gzowski that the nuns were enthralled with the story and would often suggest ways that MacDonald might improve it.

¹⁵⁷ MacDonald extends her association of Dante's cosmos with recovery from psychological trauma to *The Way the Crow Flies*. Madeleine, a stand up comedian who was molested as a child, asks an imaginary audience: "If you had to make Dante's trip into the *Inferno* nowadays, would you go with Virgil or John Candy?"; *The Way the Crow Flies* (Toronto: Knopf, 2003), 543.

Dante, MacDonald also demonstrates that the revolutionary spirit is not enough for total emancipation. In Dante's *Inferno*, Farinata degli Uberti (Canto X), the Ghibelline war-chief and agent of Guelph expulsion from Florence, finds his home in the sixth circle of hell, and Canto XXVIII narrates the eternal return of a horrible *contrapasso* (retribution/divine justice) for revolutionaries like Mosca de Lamberti, who renewed the Guelph-Ghibelline bloodbath in 1215. It is instead, the exile, the poet-theologian-politician Dante, who finds his slow way up the mountain of Purgatory to Paradise. MacDonald agrees with Dante by demonstrating that no matter how hard one fights, Paradise is gained only by an act of grace – James and Frances must put away their inner revolutionaries to experience the gift of peace. By including Dante's salvific trajectory, the theme of classical emancipation, which promises political liberation in finitude, is superseded by purgatory.¹⁵⁸

Il Passaggio

“Il passaggio is another word for limbo...It seems il passaggio is inhabited after all. Haunted is more like it. Full of ghostly sighs and groans.” (FK 460-1)

Il passaggio is the “no man’s land of the voice...above middle C between E and G” (460-1); it is also where Kathleen is confined by her voice coach, Kaiser, for a week. Kathleen calls this vocal location limbo. The passage, however, would be better understood as purgatory. In purgatory we find three children, Mercedes, Frances and

¹⁵⁸ The figure of Beatrice is also echoed through MacDonald's interplay of eros and emancipation. Kathleen, with her early death, is a lesbian Beatrice whose legacy leads the family to peace. Like a cubist object, Beatrice is refracted repeatedly. Rose is Kathleen's object of affection and is both Dante and Beatrice. Teresa is Frances' icon of incarnated beauty. All of these lesbian relationships resemble the Beatrice mythos.

Lily. They are children of ideological liminality, existing as Lebanese-Scottish Canadians, living outside of the city Sydney, in New Waterford, under the rule of the town's outsider, strikebreaker (scab), and bootlegger. Their exiled mother taught them Arabic, they ate kosher meat, lived in a haunted house on the eastern edge of the western world. In the midst of their fluctuating identity, Catholicism is a dominant text that they are formed by and form themselves around. Our lady of Mercy is Mercedes, who is, ironically, the least merciful of the sisters. She steals Frances' child, Anthony, because she fears that her motherly identity will collapse if Frances is a mother (393, 417, 436-7). In Frances, we might see St. Francis Xavier, the adventurer missionary, who explored the margins of the world. Lily, according to Mercedes, is a saint in the making (444-5). None of these identities are in any way "pure," fixed or whole. All are being negotiated, just as their emancipation itself is neither wholly received, nor totally absent.

When they read the Protestant texts of the English cannon they project themselves into them. *Little Women* becomes Catholic, and Catholicism is performance, drama:

Even though the Little Women in the book were Protestant, "Let's say they're really Catholic, okay?" and Frances and Mercedes would do extreme unction on Beth in her death-bed and apply a holy relic to her burning forehead, "Let's say it's a piece of the Shroud of Turin, okay? No, let's say it's Saint Anthony's tongue" ... They played "Little Women Doing the Stations of the Cross." (199-200)

Frances and Mercedes are reading the hegemonic Protestant ethos against the grain in a game of competing interpretations and border-crossings. Mistaking this liminal passageway as an end in itself, Laclau's theory effectively severs the *Inferno* and *Paradiso* from the *Divine Comedy* and claims that contemporary politics have to come to

terms with “finitude” as the truth of existence.¹⁵⁹ Accordingly, politics would forever be caught in one competing ideology after another – which is the truth of finite politics, but not the truth of the “already, not yet” dynamic in Christianity. In contrast, attempting to accomplish an infinite transparent political regime under the conditions of finitude leads only to revolutionary slaughter likes that Robespierre perpetrated. Laclau argues that the dialectic of freedom/unfreedom in finitude condemns humans to be, at once, “true creators and no longer passive recipients of a predetermined structure” and also social agents of “concrete finitude” in which “nobody can aspire to be the true consciousness of the world.”¹⁶⁰ If we read emancipation through the analogy of being, however, we can see how the partial liberation that Laclau describes is exceeded by the transcendental end, which draws us onward. This allows for one to say that God's freedom, understood through his self revelation in Christ, is a promise of human freedom, even while such freedom is only experienced by finite agents in trace. If we remain in Laclau's purgatory, however, we begin to write our stories without any hope of finishing them.

Critics interpret *Fall on Your Knees* as a text where Laclau's hegemony is the real, where representation is a “war of all against all” and is only a function of power and expression.¹⁶¹ According to this reading, the *Little Women* drama would be an

¹⁵⁹ Laclau, 18.

¹⁶⁰ Laclau, 16.

¹⁶¹ See Katarzyna Rukszo, “Out of Bounds: Perverse Longings, Transgressive Desire and the Limits of Multiculturalism: A Reading of *Fall on Your Knees*,” *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, 2 (2000), 17–34; as well as C. Frost “Intersections of Gender and Ethnic Performativity in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*,” *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 35: 2 (2005) 195-213. Although Frost's article has much to recommend it, his political theory is based on an ontology of violence that interprets violence as a necessary attribute of the polis and not a deviation. Peace, or Paradise, in this reading, is a possibility produced by disjuncture with the past – it is not an actuality that redeems all time: “...in *Fall on Your Knees*, the liberating moment of Kathleen's blasphemous, gender- and cultural-border-crossing redefinition of self occurs in a time that exists, briefly, in-between a dissolved past, represented by the repressive traditions of the Old Country, and a deferred future” (Frost

appropriation and subversion of a dominant Protestant narrative by girls who find themselves the site of colliding discourses, all of which are separated from the real of existence and are simply constructs, the symbolic. Such interpretations do not attend to MacDonald's formulation of truth as found in the novel. As mentioned above, MacDonald utilizes a conception of events that are mediated as a whole, but then take years to process and illuminate in their entirety. Like the pilgrimage toward emancipation, truth is available, but not in its teleological fullness. The full conception of a story is always-already before us, but only approached in finitude. Laclau is correct on this point. Where he strays is in excluding the potential for infinitude, which is already incorporated in finite expressions. "Silent Pictures" the series of vignettes assembled from a fictional photo album at the beginning of *Fall on Your Knees*, contains the entire Piper narrative, yet only over time is this hidden content made manifest (1-4). The story, which extends politically from the family to the town, is approached through the uncovering of lost experiences in a pilgrimage towards fullness. Frances and James, two who come to peace with the past events through story, are never complete. Frances is ruptured by the supposed loss of Anthony, and James is still progressing in knowledge of Dante and the Catholic narrative. However, they are not at sea in a meaningless existence, but are progressing towards love. Certainly angst, absence and lies are a part of this experience, but they do not play the part that Laclau articulates. We are not cut from the world, at a gap from reality, but are instead, caught between the analogy of God and humanity, which is only ever approached through figuration – containing a positive

that is negated in its inability to contain the transcendent. Still, this figuration propels the approach, the pilgrimage towards emancipation - the full fugue, played in paradiso.

Frances – From the “Lost Girl” to “the Girl Guide”

“If her father chooses to drive himself over a cliff, so be it. And if Mercedes burns an extra millennium in purgatory as a result, that’s simply the cost of doing business with God. The bottom line is that she has rescued Frances. Finally. Mercedes is neither a saint nor a sinner. She is somewhere in between. She is why purgatory was invented.” (FK 388)

So far we have concentrated on unpacking the meaning attached to the prima donna of the text, Kathleen, but we have not focused on the minor voices. In fact, Kathleen is constructed with such broad strokes that nuances of her character are not readily available until we find her journal. Perhaps the most complex character is Frances. In Frances, we find MacDonald recouping the resources that Catholicism has developed under the discursive location of purgatory.¹⁶²

Contrary to Kathleen, Frances is loved at birth. Yet, from a young age she is burdened with an unspeakable trauma, which she manifests in multiple narratives told to Lily. At the age of eighteen, she rehearses the family narrative as she has assembled it so far, and readers understand that her version represents the events “through a glass darkly.” She is motivated to rehearse this narrative because she has found lingering memories:

On her narrow journeys up the attic stairs by night Frances has seen a picture she did not know she owned: Kathleen with a black red stomach, sweaty hair, two tiny babies alive between her knees. There is no one else in the picture except the person who is looking at it – *that must be me*. There is a voice way at the back of Frances’s mind, hollering into a wind. She can’t make it out yet, it’s just a sighing sound, it’s sighing a question. The question is, *how did*

¹⁶² The narrative of Purgatory is laid out in “Diary of a Lost Girl” and “The Girl Guide” (283-412).

the babies get in the creek, Frances? The voice is getting closer.... (322-3)

Her psyche, too, is mapped to the polis through extimacy and the importance of freeing the memory has significance for the family and town. Rehearsing the narrative becomes a confession of faith that redeems Frances through a process of purgation; through her, the grace of truth is extended to the community:

Frances murmurs aloud, quickly and under her breath like Mercedes saying the rosary: *Kathleen is Lily's mother, Ambrose drowned because we don't know why, Kathleen was not married, she had a tumour in her belly but she didn't really, there was a secret father, it was Ginger – he drove her and they fell in love on the way to school, that's why Daddy says don't play that coloured music from the hope chest – he sent Kathleen to New York Town but Ginger followed in his truck, Daddy took her home again but it was too late, she died of twins – do you know the Ginger Man, the Ginger Man, the Ginger Man, do you know the Ginger Man he lives in Ginger Lane. Amen Lily and Ambrose.* (322)

In this slow process of emancipation Frances begins to see herself more fully than she could by reading the impressions on her memory. For instance, she tells Lily, “Lily. We are the dead ... except we don't know it. We think we're alive, but we're not. We all died the same time as Kathleen and we've been haunting the house ever since” (295). This process of recovering memory is also the praxis that MacDonald leads her readers through as they encounter her narrative.

The truth of Frances is not assembled, but recovered or illuminated. In a devastating revelation we find out that James has molested Frances, and Mercedes has witnessed it. The young Frances is rebellious toward James because she has inwardly recoiled against him; but the direction of her attack already contain the possibility of reconciliation. As she fights James, she nears the source of truth. Purgation is the recovery from a trauma as well as recovery from the method of recovery. The method

Frances chooses involves rupturing the form of Kathleen's lingering note – classical emancipation. Where Kathleen sang opera at illustrious locales, including the Met, Frances' perverse performances at Jameel's speak easy are polarized against her sister. Frances continuously conflates the sacred and profane by performing sexual favours while wearing her communion glove for “protection,” and adhering to a strict sexual ethic, never allowing any of her customers to take her “technical” virginity (295, 352). Of course, technically speaking, her virginity has already been taken by James. Her sexual performances are a heuristic device for uncovering the mystery of her childhood loss. She identifies traces of her past by once again becoming the object of destructive sexuality. The apex of her physical assent occurs when she lures Ginger Taylor, perhaps because she thinks that Ginger fathered Kathleen's progeny, through unlikely seduction techniques: She poses as a battered woman. She then seduces him in an underground location, the French mine - symbolizing unexpressed memories - and regains control of her sexuality from the ground up. There is a mystical element to Frances' seduction of Leo Taylor, and this seduction begins after his mind has been broken by jazz. Attentive readers will discover that this mysterious jazz was played by Rose and that her song was “incarnated” by Kathleen's sacrifice. This jazz that was played in New York, is an earthly analogy of the canticles of canticles sung in paradiso (323-4).¹⁶³

While Frances is pregnant with Anthony, her body enters into a redemptive process that gives her the strength to come to peace with her soul and forgive her father.

¹⁶³ It is worth considering how Frances, who desires her own emancipation by loving herself, however perversely that may be acted out, is contrasted with Camille, her cousin, who has “abandoned all hope” (315-17, 338-40). Desire (eros) is thus the root of emancipation. Abandon desire and hope is lost, discipline desire and hope finds full sail.

None of these actions are reduced to the normative finitude that MacDonald usually projects; indeed, both the redemption of the body and the soul are surrounded by mystery: Ginger thinks Frances is a Ghost; and the text leads us to believe that Frances is transcendently impregnated by Teresa (324-5). However, this redemption is not devoid of human agency, a fact that places MacDonald squarely in the Catholic camp of soteriology. This is why she desires to talk to James, who her readers would imagine she should hate.

James has undergone his own conversion. After blowing up his bootlegging operation, James has a stroke. During the stroke he has a vision:

... the stroke itself was blissful. He had a dream, only more so. He saw his mother... she is accompanied by distant but everywhere music. An old-fashioned tune on the piano, ineffably sweet and full of meaning, unnameable and yet as familiar as the beating of his own heart. He knows his mother is in the music... she speaks to him, calling him by his Gaelic name, *Hello, Seamus. Mo ghraidh. M'etudail*. His tears soothe his face, parched to kindling.

He speaks to her. He tells her he is sorry... he knows she is healing him, but he also realizes that with this she is preparing to send him away from her, "No!" (418-9)

Upon his return to the Piper house, Mercedes is disappointed, "The one thing Mercedes hadn't counted on was that her father might return a penitent. Such a thing might interfere with her plans. She had no energy left to be the daughter of a good man. She had only energy enough to be the head of this family" (420). With Frances pregnant and recovering from being shot and James recovering from his stroke, the two attempt to find peace and work out their salvation (420). Meanwhile, Mercedes is giving herself over to full repression (she also witnessed the molestation of Frances), arrested emotional growth, and devious uses of the Catholic tradition (440). In this intimation of paradise,

MacDonald goes so far as to make the lion (James) lay down with the lamb (Frances), while Mercedes misses “the one thing necessary” (Luke 10: 38-42) and continues to toil for what she mistakes as the good of the family. She toils even to the point of apprehending Frances’ child - whom Frances claims was immaculately conceived when she was shot by Teresa (425). James now turns to Frances and begins his confession by giving her Kathleen’s journal (432-3). The two sit on the veranda like quaint country folk while he tells her a version of the true Piper narrative; like creation, “it takes six days” (433). When James dies a short time later, presumably on the rhetorical ‘seventh day,’ he has the *paradiso* in his hands (449).

Frances, who was told by Mercedes that her child died in hospital, then takes the money/ merit she earned working out her salvation/emancipation at the speak easy and gives it to Lily, telling her she must leave, along with Mercedes (449-51). When Lily reacts violently by striking out against her post-partum sister, Frances takes Lily and breast-feeds her (451). This awkward scene is perhaps included to evoke the eternal peace of Madonna and child conflated with the sorrow of Michelangelo’s *Pietà*. We sense, however, that Frances is beginning to take the self-emptying form of a saint by sacrificing her own desires for the health of another.

With money from Frances, new boots from James (a product of his penitence), and the journal under her arm, Lily leaves singing the folksong *Farewell to Nova Scotia* (451). Lily’s emancipation from Nova Scotia is the fulfilment of Kathleen’s ill-fated flight from the region; her individual, provisional salvation is the product of a collective effort. We should note that not everyone makes it to the promised land: Mercedes is left

behind.

Conclusion

MacDonald, thus, fluctuates between supporting classical, Laclaudian, and Catholic views of emancipation. Kathleen, especially in her journal, iterates the hope of classical emancipation, where a clean break from a repressive past leads to a bright future. Though MacDonald negates this voice, there is a positive note that lives on – the negation of the negation. Secondly, MacDonald realizes, with Laclau, that freedom conceptualized according to classical emancipation is impossible according to the law of finitude. Because there is no transparent emancipated ground in which to have being, emancipation is partial and a product of compromises. We hear parts of this chorus in the sisters' voices, Mercedes and Frances. The dominant emancipation narrative, however, adopts Catholic conceptions of teleology, pushing the emancipated ground beyond the finite and demonstrating moments of grace, which bleed through the boundary between the finite and the infinite. Out of Kathleen's horrific end, emerges her daughter (Saint) Lily who lives through the inferno of James' lust and is a beautiful product of his destructive sin – a "Felix Culpa." Lilly goes on to tell Anthony the Piper narrative, a narrative mediated through spiritual (Ambrose) and physical (Frances and Rose) family members.

Central to this story is Frances' struggle with sexual trauma, her purgation and purification, and her reconciliation with her father. This peace, however, is partial; it is a moment of grace provided by the illumination of truth (the Piper narrative). It is soon ruptured by Mercedes, who is lost to her own spiritual needs. Likewise, Kathleen's

lesbian love affair, the bright note sung in a multicultural polis which finds its way back to the margin Cape Breton, is ruined by Rose's addict mother, Jeanne. Absolute emancipation and peace is pushed beyond the finite horizon. In the quest for this peace, the beatific vision is echoed through New York, Teresa, Ginger, James' mother, and sublimated in the unfolding of Piper family lore. This new family includes Rose, Lily and Anthony, who are all unofficial fragments of the Piper lineage. Rose has no legal status, but is grafted through spirit. Lily is a bastard child of incest. Anthony is an illegitimate child of adultery. All three include genealogies from different ethnic groups. They carry a narrative that tells of the struggle with ignorance and destructive sexuality that produced them. And yet, it is clear from the end of *Fall on Your Knees* that they are the city of man in pilgrimage toward the city of God. They represent the hope for an emancipated society, and this society is based on recovering narratives that are hidden, having been pushed below the conscious surface and only recovered by exemplary individuals who were not afraid to rupture conventions of family, culture, music, ideologies of self and sexuality, to lessen the opaqueness of the political hegemony.¹⁶⁴ Like Richards' mystical real, MacDonald's emancipatory end remains transcendent, a distant site of narrative, moral, and political pilgrimage.

MacDonald's theological celebration of the cosmopolitan polis leads us to a very different representation of Catholicism than Richards puts forth. *Fall on Your Knees* mobilizes a stronger critique of traditional forms of authority, be they found in "the folk,"

¹⁶⁴ Notice that MacDonald's characters rupture tradition for the purpose of self-love and self promotion, yet when the trauma has settled, her characters retrieve resources from tradition. When subversion is performed, as in Frances' case, it is not a final end, but serves a healing/purging function. Subversion is a healing process, but it is not a location for being, peacefully.

the old world, of the idols of culture, yet MacDonald's "against the grain" sensibility of culture critique does not overcome the need for a theo-political end that is not eclipsed by death. Thus, against readings of *Fall on Your Knees* that interpret MacDonald's engagement with Catholicism as solely ironic, a superficial discourse, we find the most coherent reading if we attend to her mobilization of Catholic symbols; her irony is then seen as a technique used to dwell in a house of language that approaches totalization. At times MacDonald's use of Catholic resources appeals to their functionality (purgatory as the phenomenology of PTSD) on a immanent, finite horizon; however, MacDonald's doubt of her doubt opens moments of the text to the infinite where mystery slips in.

Blinding Ennui: Post-Augustinian Nihilism and the “Redemptive” work of Allegory in Lynn Coady’s *Strange Heaven*

In her essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Virginia Woolf analyses two styles of fiction, the Edwardian and the Georgian, and claims that the two ages of writers approach “reality” through different conventions. The Edwardian, Woolf argues, searches for character in exteriority, details, and material description, but fundamentally does not attempt to look at “Mrs. Brown,” a humble woman riding in a carriage with Woolf, as a “character in [her]self.”¹⁶⁵ Woolf implies that Arnold Bennett and the Edwardian writers lost sight of the eternal Mrs. Brown, “for Mrs. Brown is eternal, Mrs. Brown is human nature, Mrs. Brown changes only on the surface, it is the novelists who get in and out.”¹⁶⁶ Having cut loose of the overly typological and prescriptive characters of allegorical works like *Pilgrim's Progress*, the Edwardians took refuge in threadbare conventions. “For us those conventions are ruin,” Woolf tells her audience, “those tools are death.”¹⁶⁷ Already, and over against the esteemed Joyce, who is busily “break[ing] the windows” of convention with *Ulysses*,¹⁶⁸ Woolf is attempting to find the middle road between the endless details of mundane material and the otherworldly allegory of vulgar Platonism. Woolf approaches the proverbial “Mrs. Brown” from the inside, by narrating subjectivity, and working through insight rather than convention.

Those of us who have the privilege of reviewing Woolf’s analysis with almost a

¹⁶⁵ Virginia Woolf, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” *Collected Essays*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. Vol. 1. (London: Hogarth, 1966), 326.

¹⁶⁶ Woolf, 328.

¹⁶⁷ Woolf, 328.

¹⁶⁸ Woolf, 333.

century of hindsight can see how Mrs. Brown turned out. After a century where the emphasis from the literary “avant-garde” has been on stories and not story, characters and not character, values and not virtues, differences and not identities, a thirst has emerged for a reintegration of the many and the one, a thirst, one might add, that is already evident in Woolf.

In the Catholic literary tradition some have found new paths to the waterfall (to borrow Raymond Carver's line).¹⁶⁹ Admittedly the regnant discourse of textual criticism is anti-allegorical. Whether the subject is the American novel, Shakespeare, or deutero-Isaiah, critics have advocated a practice of examining the text within the context in which it was produced in order to describe how that text is constellated by other texts, practices and political realities that existed in that particular time and space (or those of its various readings). In biblical criticism this has come to be known broadly as the historical critical method. In literary criticism we find various flavours of historical criticism: from Said, Greenblatt, Foucault, to the spiralling of Derrida and the historiography of Hayden White.¹⁷⁰ There has emerged, however, a reaction to the historicising gaze by those who

¹⁶⁹ Raymond Carver, *A New Path to the Waterfall* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994).

¹⁷⁰ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Toronto: Vintage, 1979); Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Michel Foucault, “What is an Author,” *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 101-20; Jacques Derrida may seem like an odd inclusion here. There is, however, a tendency in his pursuit of the trace, in his exhaustive readings of an author's corpus, and his use of “marginal” texts to inform “central” works to emulate historicism. Derrida's methodology has in it a bias towards the historicization of constructs, even while it deconstructs. This is to say that the refusal of the event of language, and the preference for chasing the trace, has as an effect the initiation of a type of historicization that is not linked to the underpinnings of historiography. See for example, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and The Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 99-113; Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). White resists the autonomy of history from literature, and the empirical justification of historical foundations. He argues instead that history cannot escape the tropes of literature. As Alun Munslow puts it: “According to the formalism of White's tropic model, history is a process of continuous intertextual reinscription composed and conducted by the historian – it is primarily an act of literary creation. Because the character of historical interpretation resides in its narrative structure, historical

see something valuable in allegory, whether it is advocated by Paul in Galatians 4: 21-5:1 (Hagar and Sarah), John Cassian, Augustine in *The Confessions*, Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, or, in the contemporary world, by Cormac McCarthy and the Coen Brothers in *No Country for Old Men*, or Christopher Nolan in that latest Batman, *The Dark Knight*.¹⁷¹ Allegory has returned as a mode of investigating spiritual and theological forms through hypothetical constructions. Allegorical readings locate the contemporary meaning in the context of their theological correlates and the traditional schematics of layered (diachronically) intertexts: they resist the totalized materialist locations of the real, while at the same time challenging nominalist understandings of constructs and literature. Balthasar describes the allegorical method as the “spiritual sense” of the Church, which gathers time and community together through shared access to a “spiritual solidarity”,

The physical substratum of spiritual solidarity in the Church (which derives not only from the Eucharist, but also from the physical unity of Mother and Child) re-enforces a trait which we noted earlier in the Old Testament: the experience which one member has can be considered by the others as

knowledge is generated by the constant debates between narratives (interpretations) rather than the primeval, unscripted and uncontextualized traces of the past”; *Deconstructing History* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 161.

¹⁷¹ Origen, Cassian, Augustine, and Gregory the Great, all stand as representatives for the Christian appropriation of allegorical hermeneutics in the patristic era, often called the four-fold method of interpretation: literal, allegorical, anagogical, tropological: “Jerusalem, according to history, is a city of the Jews; according to allegory it is the Church of Christ; according to anagoge it is that heavenly city of God which is *the mother of us all* (Gal 4:26); according to tropology it is the soul of man, which under this name the Lord often threatens or praises”; Smalley in Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1993), 143. For an overview of the “return to allegory” in biblical hermeneutics see Jason Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1-53. See also, Peter J. Leithart, “The Quadriga or Something Like it” in *Ancient Faith for the Church's Future*, eds Mark Husbands and Jeffrey P. Greenman (Downers Grove: Intervarsity-Academic, 2008), 110-26. The Coen brothers' film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's novel, *No Country for Old Men* (2007), is one face of the popular return to allegory in Hollywood, Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008) is another. The Coens recreate the grim reapers in the character of Anton Chigurh, and Nolan personifies Justice (Batman), Chaos (Joker), and Chance (Two-Face) in the post-9/11 context of terrorism. Allegory has become a popular form through which to analyse the American response to collective trauma, as seen in Ronald Moore's 2003-09 *Battlestar Galactica* series.

belonging to them. In Moses, the whole people was in the cloud. In Samson, Gideon, and Samuel the whole people was tested and confirmed in its faith. In Job and in the servant of Yahweh, the whole people recognises its own suffering through faith. ... It is almost a matter of indifference whose lot it is to be graced with an archetypal experience: certainly, this person has been singled out in a privileged sense, but, precisely for this reason, he belongs all the more intimately to the community and to each individual within it.¹⁷²

What we might describe as participation in a collective imaginary that provides many forms to be copied and appropriated is for Balthasar something that has being in the life of the “great cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12: 1-2).

Catholicism takes the opposition of the many and the one and introduces a paradox – that the many are convertible and that the one is plural. The Trinity is thus one God and three persons. Those three persons, however, “dance around” (*perichoresis* or *circumsessio*) such that each person is entwined with the other and no person is exclusive to another. All persons are perfectly communicated to each other and yet paradoxically, difference is preserved in unity. Augustine argues that the inner life of the convert is an analogy of the Trinity, with memory, intellect and will. Catholicism has internalized this principle to such a degree that its rites, practices and imaginary are suffused with the paradox of identity and difference. We find the one body with many members, the one thing necessary and the many works of charity, the providential hand of the spirit in co-operation with the pilgrim Church. When reading the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, events and characters take on allegorical significance, even for Protestant critics of Catholicism. Karl Barth writes: “Have I experienced anything more important, incisive, serious, contemporary than this, that I have been personally present and have shared in

¹⁷² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Vol 1: Seeing the Form*, trans. E. Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 342.

the crossing of Israel through the Red Sea...?”¹⁷³ Without overlooking their differences, the contemporary critic can see strong theoretical parallels between the sociological, political, and moral insights of Christian allegorical hermeneutics and theories of the intertextuality of the subject in the postmodern era. These two modes of interpreting the formative influence of narrative have meet again in the narratives of *Secular II*.

This leads us to our Atlantic Canadian (con)text, *Strange Heaven* (1998), by Lynn Coady. Coady's narrative embodies the “third way” of Catholicism, charting a course between the formalist allegory of John Bunyan and the fluctuating realism of Mrs. Brown. In Coady's work, this course takes shape through an extended analysis of the allegorical figure of the Virgin Mary through a ironic, yet “realistic” portrayal of Bridget Murphy. The epigraph to *Strange Heaven* is instructive; it is taken from John Donne's “A Litany”:

¹⁷³ The context of Barth's statement is useful for understanding how Coady use of allegory is mapped into the Christian hermeneutic tradition: “It is said that H. F. Kohlbrügge once answered the question: When was he converted? by the laconic reply: On Golgotha. This answer, with all its fundamental implications, was not the witty retort of an embarrassed and unconverted man, but the only possible and straightforward answer of a truly converted Christian. The events of faith in our own life can, in fact, be none other than the birth, passion, death, ascension and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the exodus of Israel from Egypt, its journey through the desert, its entrance into the land of Canaan, the outpouring of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost and the mission of the apostles to the heathen. Every verse in the Bible is virtually a concrete faith-event in my own life. Whether this is actually the case, whether with my own life I have been present at this or that event here testified to me, this and this alone is what I am asked by the Word of God which bears witness to me of God's revelation in and through all this, and in every single verse of Scripture. In comparison with this, what can be the value of the various more or less reliable insights which, apart from these testimonies, I may have in myself? Is there a miracle story that I can relate from my own life, which, especially if it is genuine, will not be totally dissolved in this divine miracle story, and which therefore will hardly be worth relating *in abstracto*? Have I anything to testify about myself which I cannot testify infinitely better if I make my own the simplest ingredient of the Old Testament or New Testament witness? Have I experienced anything more important, incisive, serious, contemporary than this, that I have been personally present and have shared in the crossing of Israel through the Red Sea but also in the adoration of the golden calf, in the baptism of Jesus but also in the denial of Peter and the treachery of Judas, that all this has happened to me here and now?”; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Volume I: The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part 2*. trans. G. W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, (Edinburgh : T. & T. Clark, 2004), 709.

For that faire blessed Mother-maid,
Whose flesh redeem'd us; That she-Cherubin,
Which unlock'd Paradise, and made
One claime for innocence, and disseiz'd sinne,
Whose wombe was a strange heav'n for there
God cloath'd himselfe, and grew,
Our zealous thanks wee poure. As her deeds were
Our helpes, so are her prayers; nor can she sue
In vaine, who hath such a title unto you. (V. The Virgin Mary)

We turn the page and are introduced to the protagonist, Bridget Murphy, a seventeen year old who has just given up her first child for adoption. Bridget is the central point of contact between the metanarrative of Catholicism and the otherwise realist portrayal of a small town in Cape Breton with a Catholic majority (perhaps a fictional Port Hawksbury, Coady's hometown). Bridget, the analogy of the Virgin Mary, is estranged from her boyfriend Mark, the father of her nameless male child - "wah-wah" (SH 124). She thinks that the two of them function for her friends like "Sid [Vicious] and Nancy [Spungen]" (159), the turbulent punk couple of the infamous *Sex Pistols*. As a child, Bridget wanted to be a priest. The irony of this aspiration is a tangible fact of this deconstructed bildungsroman, as Bridget is caught between a desire to transcend the social limits of her community and the lack of a transcendental signifier in the image of which Bridget's "bild" could be remade.¹⁷⁴ The tension between the imaginative possibilities of Mary's realm of saints and Bridget earthly terrain accounts for the *strange* in this heaven.

The story can be broken up into three acts: 1) Bridget in the psychiatric ward of the Izaak Walton Killam hospital in Halifax (IWK); 2) Bridget when she returns home to

¹⁷⁴ Petra Rau reminds us of the etymology of "bildunge," which was primarily a "theological term used to describe the relationship between man and [G]od in the composite since of 'imago dei'" (*imago, imitatio, forma, formatio*); "Bildungsroman" in *The Literary Encyclopedia*, <http://www.litencyc.com/php/topics.php?rec=true&UID=119> (accessed July 19, 2009).

Cape Breton for Christmas; and 3) Bridget as she refuses to be the community's source of melodrama (150) and consequently feels trapped in a life with no exit – a “world without end.”

Strange Heaven begins *in media res*. The birth has already happened and we are shown Bridget in the aftermath of this event. The IWK is her sanctuary away from the “insanity” of her home. Here she is annoyed and accosted by Bryon, befriended by Mona and Maria and tended to by Gabby (“Nurse Ratshit,” the friendly Newfoundlander, 20) and Dr. Solomon (68). While Bridget is in the IWK with “the disfunctionals” (81), the narrator fills in the story, telling us about Bridget's relationship with Alan Voorland, an engineer from Guelph who sees himself as a lay anthropologist, and her friends, Mark, Daniel, Stephen, Chantal, and Heidi, who Alan describes as “Maritime ... white trash” (92). The Murphy family is continually evoked in lore and legend. When they meet in person there is often tension. Bridget returns home around Christmas without her child. She has awkward encounters with the women of the town (118) and her peer group who don't know how to address her. Throughout the Christmas season, Bridget's family is awaiting the death of her senile grandmother, Margaret P. They are also trying to help Bridget acclimatize to home-life again. Margaret P. has a son, Rollie, who has Down Syndrome. Bridget's father thinks Rollie is a “religious artist” (77), and Rollie's wooden creations are sold at his shop for top dollar. Rollie is as lost in the cosmos as is Bridget. Margaret P.'s “cobwebby mind” (101), full of Catholic phantasmagoria, is the nexus of chaos around which the family spins. While it seems that Margaret P.'s delusions are

evidence of her dementia, her diagnosis of Bridget's "subjective death" is uncanny.¹⁷⁵ She thinks Bridget is dead and complains of her smell when Bridget is in the room (130-1). Not only is Bridget dead, but according to Margaret P. she is stuck in purgatory. Margaret P. vows to keep a constant prayer vigil to push her through to heaven (100-1). Bridget's father's answer to her adolescent predicament is to blame her for being too "stubborn to stay a child" (128). Yet, it is Margaret P. that is the stubborn one. She has a firm grip on life, even though death is at her door. Bridget comes to the conclusion that Margaret P. will not die because she knows that the Catholic imaginary that she rehearses unceasingly is really nothing: "But [Margaret P.] would not die, Bridget knew. Because there wasn't any of that" (198).

According to Yuri Lotman, plot is created when a protagonist moves from an existing situation to a new situation where the central semantic conflict has been transcended: "The movement of the plot, the event, is the crossing of that forbidden border which the plotless structure establishes. It is not an event when the hero moves

¹⁷⁵ By "subjective death," I am attempting to give expression to the abject status that Bridget assigns her own life. Aside from Margaret P., all her family members think Bridget has a hopeful orientation to the future. But in her dementia Margaret P. sees the internal abjection that Bridget experiences and reads it as her external condition. In the supplemental short story "Look, and Pass On," where Coady describes Bridget's trip to the University of Guelph with Alan, Bridget is described as "the thing": "The thing was eighteen and she wore her dead grandmother's underpants"; Coady, *Play the Monster Blind* (Toronto: Vintage, 2000), 89. Alan describes his repulsion from Bridget's abject subjective status: "...all she ever did was wait for everything to be over. It was grotesque. It was grotesque to think about the car and doing things with people who didn't care if you did them or not...Dangerous to have this kind of realization on a highway in the middle of Canada. He had wanted to drive into an oncoming truck, and *the thing*, he knew, would not have spoken as he did" (102, emphasis added). It is this lack of self regard, this self abjection that I call Bridget's "subjective death." Perhaps, however, death is misleading, as Coady, using an intertext from Dante's *Inferno*, Canto 3.51 "non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa" ("let us not speak of them, look and pass on"), structures Alan and Bridget as "the wretched souls who lived without disgrace yet without praise" who "have no hope of death and their blind life is so abject that they are envious of every other lot"; Canto 3. 46-48, Robert and Jean Hollander, *Inferno* (New York: Doublday, 2000). This "death" is made worse because death will not come. This is one reason why Bridget wears Margaret P.'s underwear; she and Bridget are cut from the same cloth, and Bridget is destined to live out her desire for death which will not come (though it does).

within the space assigned to him.”¹⁷⁶ The hero is the one who passes from one semantic field to another, a difficult event which is “altogether impossible for everyone except the agent [hero].”¹⁷⁷ At the outset, *Strange Heaven* appears to have no plot. Coady's Bridget is left in limbo, with no resolution of her existing situation. At the beginning of the story, the baby, the messianic exception, is already given away. Bridget's beginning point is postpartum depression, and her end point is another form of depression that ensues from her inability to escape structures of control. Furthermore, the beginning and the end of *Strange Heaven* are both meditations on death: the first is the death of Jennifer MacDonnell, Bridget's classmate, which has come too early, and the second is the death of Bridget's Grandmother, Margaret P., which will not come. The central tension that motivates this Bildungsroman must be found in the movement from Bridget's apathetic faith in God (22) to her embrace of atheism (198). In this movement Bridget is able to reconcile the disorder she sees in an supposedly ordered world with her new cosmology – a firm belief in the ultimacy of nothingness.

In *Very Little ... Almost Nothing*, Simon Critchley describes the effects that nihilism has on philosophy and literature; and his construal of their interplay relates to

¹⁷⁶ Yuri Lotman, “The Problem of Plot” *The Structure of the Artistic Text*. (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Contributions, 1974), 238.

¹⁷⁷ Lotman, 241. According to Lotman's theory this impossibility is a necessity of plot: “the mobile person is distinguished from the immobile persona because he is permitted to act in certain ways forbidden to others” (243). There is here a relationship between the norm and the exception that gives birth to narrative. Lotman claims that a phone book is a plotless text because it is defined by only one semantic field. If say, a phone book had an entry which defied the rule of all other entries and morphed into some unexpected entity, then a phone book would have a plot. “Thus an event always involves the violation of some prohibition and is always a fact which takes place, though it need not have taken place,” writes Lotman. “For a man who thinks in terms of the categories of the criminal code, an event is an act of transgression; from the perspective of traffic laws, jay-walking is an event” (236). There is much in common between Schmitt's thought and Lotman's, as in both it is the exception that reconfigures the very form of the norm.

dynamics in Coady's text:

Nihilism is the breakdown of the order of meaning, where all that we previously imagined as a divine, transcendent basis for moral valuation has become meaningless. Nihilism *is* this declaration of meaninglessness, a sense of indifference, directionlessness or, at its worst, despair that can flood into all areas of life. For some, this is the defining experience of youth, for others it lasts a whole lifetime.¹⁷⁸

Critchley conceives of the primary task of philosophy as “the militant resistant to nihilism,” but because philosophy is complicit with the nihilism it attempts to resist, it must resort to other means.¹⁷⁹ “Philosophy begins in disappointment,” Critchley argues, and it can take on at least two forms: the religious or the political. Religious disappointment, such as Bridget experiences, arises from the lack of an experience of faith: “...religious disappointment is godless, but it is an uneasy godlessness with a religious memory and within a religious archive.”¹⁸⁰ Critchley claims that this religious disappointment is confronted with the question of meaning and the problem of nihilism, which in turn, leads to active or passive nihilism. Both of these forms need to be resisted, so Critchley claims, through a rediscovery of ethics; a useful medium for this in Western modernity is literature: “the anti-nihilist discourse in relation to which I attempt to think through religious disappointment is literature... literature is the name of that place where the issue of religious disappointment is thought through. After the death of God, it is in and as literature that the issue of life's possible redemption is played out.”¹⁸¹ Literature, as Critchley argues, can delineate nihilism such that it is not overcome, but rather seen

¹⁷⁸ Simon Critchley, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing: Revised Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2004), xix.

¹⁷⁹ Critchley, xx

¹⁸⁰ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (New York: Verso, 2008), 2.

¹⁸¹ Simon Critchley, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing: Revised Edition*, xix-xx.

“from the standpoint of redemption.”¹⁸² For Adorno (who Critchley is critiquing), this redemption is fictional, (in the sense that Badiou's Christ is a fable,) yet it is nonetheless necessary, and given this necessity, “the question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters.”¹⁸³ This is another way of saying that the reality of redemption matters so much that even if it is false, this falsity is a necessary corrective to abject matter. Here again we see how Coady's black comedy functions; because Bridget's abjection is so horrifying, it must be shown for what it is from a comedic stance. The tragedy of *Strange Heaven* is contained in the impulse to laugh. Thus, for both Coady and Critchley, religious disappointment leads to nihilism, and nihilism provokes a literary response.¹⁸⁴ In Critchley's hands, then, literature has a quasi-sacral status, which however, is epiphenomenal.

A meditation on the title, *Strange Heaven*, helps us to see how nothingness is located in Coady's allegory of the Virgin Mary. The title is borrowed from John Donne's stanza on Virgin Mary in his poem “Litany,” and Coady's inclusion of the stanza as the

¹⁸² Ibid, 21-22; Critchley draws the quotation from Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia* (New York: Verso, 2007), 247.

¹⁸³ Adorno, 247.

¹⁸⁴ Critchley recognizes that his definition of literature is one that is limited to modernity: “as some of my reviewers reminded me... this is an essentially modern conception of literature that works in the wake of the Copernican turn”; *Very Little ... Almost Nothing: Revised Edition*, xx. I agree with Critchley's reviewers while maintaining that Critchley's formulation of the ‘religious disappointment – nihilism – literature’ trajectory works especially well with Coady, and helps critics to grapple with the post-secular impetus that resonates in her work, and the work of Cormac McCarthy – *No Country for Old Men*, *The Road* – in Secular II. Both of these lapsed Catholic authors wrestle with the spectre of post-Augustinian nihilism by interrogating the religious strata of the imaginary. Consider the confession from the protagonist's suicidal wife in *The Road*: “What in God's name are you talking about? We're not survivors. We're the walking dead in a horror film... As for me my only hope is for eternal nothingness and I hope it with all my heart”; *The Road* (Toronto: Vintage, 2006), 55-7. The father of the young boy, however, has a different hope, a hope to contain nihilism in the apocalyptic landscape: “He knew only that the child was his warrant. He said: If he is not the word of God God never spoke” (5). Notice the double iteration of the word God – something which awakens to reader to McCarthy's aesthetic which provokes theology by negating the good.

epigraph to the novel invites us to contemplate the allegorical paradox between Donne's Virgin Mary and Coady's Bridget. Donne's "strange heav'n" of the Virgin's "wombe" is strange in an entirely different way than Bridget's. In Mary's case the womb is made the site of impossibility, but Bridget's womb is merely the result of possibility (we are not lead to believe that Bridget is impregnated by the Holy Spirit). In both cases, however, the womb is directly linked to the cosmos and the power that moves the cosmos. Mary's womb is home to the Logos that orders everything. It is at once her internal organ, the image of a microcosm, and also, the Church, where Christ's body is present: "Mary, by bearing and giving birth to her Son, the Head of the Church, encloses all Christians within herself and brings them forth from herself along with the experience of faith, and this is a relationship with them which is somehow physical".¹⁸⁵ Bridget's womb is filled with a body, but the body brings no meaning to her life. Her womb gave birth to nothing (subjectively speaking); it was the nothingness of her soul and the cosmos that emerged. Nothing is at the base of the cultural forms that motivate Bridget's imaginary, and she is alone in this realization, as her family and her friends give assent to the form of

Catholicism inculturated in the Cape Breton mythos.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Vol I: Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), 340.

Balthasar also describes the loss of meaning that Mary (as representative) experiences on account of her faith: "Mary's whole experience, as it develops from its earliest beginnings, is an experience for others – for all. It is an expropriated experience for the benefit of all, the experience not only of being dispossessed of her Child (beginning when he was twelve years old, continuing through his public life, and culminating in his Passion and in the founding of the Church), but of being dispossessed of experience itself, as if the Mother must increasingly renounce everything vitally personal to her for the sake of the Church, in the end to be left like a plundered tree with nothing but her naked faith ('Behold, there is your son!'). Progressively, every shade of personal intimacy is taken from her, to be increasingly applied to the good of the Church and of Christians, to be bestowed on these together with the grace of Christ, a grace which is both human and divine and which is, therefore, replete with Christ's human experiences of God" (340-1). Both Coady and Balthasar work through the symbolism of Mary's womb along similar paths; however, Balthasar is much more inclined to encourage faith, where Coady laments the experienced emptiness of such faith. Bridget is, in a sense, a failed Mary.

¹⁸⁶ David Creelman gives *Strange Heaven* a brusque reading in *Setting in the East* (Montreal: McGill-

In his article, “Augustine on the Nihil: An Interrogation,” Gavin Hyman argues that the *nihil* has a complicated legacy in philosophic discourse.¹⁸⁷ There are two important places where the nihilism has emerged and influenced the Western tradition significantly. On the one hand we have Nietzsche and his commentators, Heidegger and the neo-Nietzscheans, but on the other we have the legacy of Augustine in his anti-Manichean apologetics.¹⁸⁸ The Manicheans described the cosmos as a war zone between two opposing and equally matched supernatural entities, God and the demi-god of creation. They aligned spirit with the true God and flesh with the rebellious demi-god. Augustine sought to refute the Manichean rejection of the body by arguing that material in the first instance was created good, out of nothing (the nihil). It was only after creation that evil entered in as nothing. Evil does not have a substance as it does in the Manichean worldview, but is rather the negation of the good that is sustained by God. Hyman argues that when the conditions for believing in God are undermined, as they are in Bridget's case, Augustinianism gives birth to a particularly disturbing type of nihilism: “The ‘nothing’ does not appear from ‘nowhere’ but is, in effect, the trace of the death of God. When God departs, the ‘nihil’ spontaneously emerges, even if, like God, it emerges

Queens, 2003), quickly filing the novel in categories like “constrained individualist liberalism,” and “a woman's right to determine her own identity” (192). The feminism of this novel is overplayed by Wyile as well. Both Creelman and Wyile think that *Strange Heaven* is a hopeful novel – a quirky reading to say the least; Wyile, “As For Me and Me Arse: Strategic Regionalism and the Home Place in Lynn Coady's *Strange Heaven*” *Canadian Literature* (2006: 189), 85-103. Even while Creelman conflates characters – see “the anorexic Mona” (191) – he does note the novel's nihilism (189), though he completely erases the Augustinianism that is so crucial to Bridget's worldview, and for that matter, an interpretation of the novel.

¹⁸⁷ Gavin Hyman, “Augustine on the Nihil: An Interrogation.” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 9.1 (Winter 2008): 35-49.

¹⁸⁸ Given the strength of Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank's characterization of Hegel as a nihilist who sees the dialectical movement of matter as emerging from nothing (and works this out through trinitarian form), one should add Hegel as an important precursor to the Germanic philosophical turn to nihilism. See Žižek and Milbank's *The Monstrosity of Christ* (Boston: MIT Press, 2008), 148-9.

without ever 'appearing.'"¹⁸⁹ When this nihil emerges, everything that was believed to be sustained by God is shown to be contingent, bottomless, and without first principles.

Consequently, the order (logos) and the providence (telos) of the cosmos melt away. The first lines of *Strange Heaven* speak to this predicament: "It seemed as if things were happening without much reason or point. There were no warning bells going off anywhere to announce: This is going to happen. And once things did happen, there was no discernible aftermath" (9). The narrator goes on to describe the murder of Bridget's class mate, Jennifer MacDonnell, by her boyfriend, Archie Shearer, in front of a local coffee shop. Her mother is telling her this over the phone while Bridget is in the psychiatric ward of the IWK, and her mother keeps remarking that it is "just terrible ... the way everybody is dying" (9). Her mother's concern is usually met with mutual agreement: life is good, death is bad; death is the *nihil*, life is sustained by God. Bridget sees death differently. Death is a gift that would rescue her from the absurdity that she has experienced through postpartum depression and the process of giving her child up for adoption. At the end of the conversation Bridget realizes that the murder of her peer by her peer had vanished from her mind: "even though they were her neighbours and close to her in age. It was still like a thing on a screen. Now that it happened and she knew of it, it didn't concern her any more. That was what other people's dying meant" (10).

Hyman's assertion is poignant here: "... nothing meaningful can be said about

'nothing.'"¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Hyman, 35. I should note that I use "Augustinianism" here to highlight the origin of Augustine's highly influential discourse on evil as non-being, which is taken up within the Catholic tradition. I am not trying to pry Augustine from a tradition that includes Aquinas, but rather locating an emphasis that occurs in Augustine most forcefully.

¹⁹⁰ Hyman, 41.

As readers of *Strange Heaven* will recognize, I have been accenting the “minor chords” of this very funny novel. As with the best of dark comedy, Coady draws hilarious moments from the bleakest of existential predicaments; the void of nihilation does not keep Coady from provoking laughter. Here Critchley and Coady's path rejoin: “it is my belief that acknowledging that there is very little, almost nothing can also be the entrance ticket to the world of humour, which is – as many of its best practitioners can attest – a rather dark world.”¹⁹¹ Coady uses the dark comedy as a technique for containing the nothingness. However, she particularly avoids the classical form of comedy, even though she has the proper characters, Mark and Bridget, in place. Coady refuses to end the novel in reconciliation. Bridget is like an Antigone who is not ousted from her city by the king, but rather contained within it interminably, to be haunted by the absurdity of the nothingness only she perceives. In contrast with other popular representations of Nova Scotia, the darkness of Coady's comedy is tempered by an unusual sympathy for the characters she portrays, even the antagonists.¹⁹² This sympathy does not go so far as to refuse what seems to be an authentic representation of an adolescent's perspective on the region. While Coady tells us that Bridget's father was a magnanimous city councillor, part of the “dynamic duo” that takes on the corrupt Mayor (183-4), she doesn't hesitate to

¹⁹¹ Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing*, xxvi.

¹⁹² Consider the heavy handed satire of *The Trailer Park Boys* which renders its subjects ridiculous, and the oppositional class angst of *Margaret's Museum* which drives a wedge between two factions in Cape Breton's economy. *The Trailer Park Boys* is a parody of reality TV, a “mockumentary,” set in a fictional Dartmouth, NS, trailer park, and playing on themes that are prevalent in Maritime communities. *Margaret's Museum*, DVD, directed by Mort Ransen. (London: British Screen Productions, 1995), is a feature film that was adapted from Sheldon Currie's *The Glace Bay Miners' Museum: The Novel* (Wreck Cove, NS: Breton Books, 1995). There is, however, an uncanny similarity between *Strange Heaven* and the film *New Waterford Girl*, DVD, directed by Allan Moyle. (Toronto: Sienna Films, 1999). In *New Waterford Girl*, Moonie Pottie tries to escape her stifling town to attend art school by pretending she is pregnant (and, thus, in need of closeting).

mock his inability to see his woodworking as artistry. No, councilman Murphy sneers with disdain at the frivolous activities of artists: “‘Ar-teests,’ he’d spit, whenever the subject came to mind, making flitting gestures with his short yellow fingers. ‘Arse-tits is more like it’” (74). Here Coady has captured to the loving/sneering tone of a witty daughter. Her relationship to her father mimics Coady’s approach to Cape Breton, while preserving the tradition, she emerges as one of its strongest critics.¹⁹³

This comic theme leads back to Coady’s persistent use Catholic allegory, which keeps the idealism of the saintly realm in tension with the realism of Cape Breton in the (ironic, hypermodern) eighties. While we are accustomed to allegories that encode the “factual” realm in the “fantastic,” Coady reverses this approach, haunting the factual world with the fantastic. The fantastic is not a conceit that we play along with in Coady; it is instead the normative Catholicism of her locale. Far from being a simplistic subversive heroine, however, Bridget, at times, longs for nothingness not to be her “real.” The irony of *Strange Heaven* is not bitter, or triumphant, but assumes the form of a lament. Bridget defends Catholicism when Mona implies that communicants are vampires (13), and is loyal to her youth as a time when she desired sainthood, having found out that the priesthood was denied her (19): “Bridget was very interested in God at

¹⁹³ “Books That Say Arse,” Coady’s editorial introduction to the short story collection, *Victory Meat* (Toronto: Anchor, 2003), 1-5, is interesting in this regard. She claims that Atlantic Canada is victim of economic forces that reshape the region anachronistically (fisherman, lobster traps) to entertain the desires of tourists who want to experience the close exoticism of the North American Atlantic coast. Part of the interest in Atlantic Canada that Coady is ambivalent about is, I suspect, related to the discourse on Catholicism which is both “other” and yet a return of the “same” for a secularized Protestant readership in Canada’s English urban centres. Books that say “arse” describe a different relationship to the body, which has resisted the disembedding trends of modernity in ways that the urban centre have only returned to at a point of fatigue. Thinking of the physicality involved in Catholic practice and the theology of the Eucharist, it seems that saying “arse” signifies a respect for an embedded, embodied conception of enchantment.

that age because religion seemed to embody the only stories of magic and complete improbability that everyone actually believed in – children and adults alike” (13).

Religion, it seems to Bridget, is the realm in which humans explore their imaginative possibilities. Here the bitter irony is that Catholicism, coupled with local secular practices, prohibit Bridget from attaining (or even entertaining) possibilities. A significant theme in Coady's lament then, is her displeasure with the home; Cape Breton is the sow that eats her own farrow. Time, in her case, will not become full. “Generation X” is transplanted from Douglas Coupland's West Coast and placed in a region that is steeped in tradition, steeped all day on a hot stove and brewed stronger than perhaps it should be.

Into this Cape Breton kitchen, home of fiddle music and Gaelic pride, comes the TV, mediating the flashy images of capitalist urban locales. Self-consciousness with a national horizon is projected onto the faces of Bridget and her peers. Remembering the murder of her schoolmates, Bridget imagines what must be going on at her school:

School was just starting, the school from which both of them might have graduated, and so vans and cars from the CBC and other local stations were parked out front for the first couple of days, distracting everybody. Bridget supposed that if you managed to position yourself just so in the main hall or out front, you might have seen yourself on the news that evening. Or heard yourself on the radio saying that it was just terrible. (9)

Mediated self-consciousness was felt throughout her society, and the agent that provokes an objectified “Cape Breton tradition” is the CBC. Like Richards then, Coady attends to the effects that dislocated forms of media and art (British Punk) have on local populations. While Coady is as critical of “univocal man” as Richards, she does not take up his militant stance of resistance; instead she directs a critique of the power formations inward and outward: inward toward the micro-dynamics of power (the lifeworld) which

work to encode Bridget as the Virginal Mary (117) and situate her in the town's always circulating narrative, and outward toward the macro-forces (the system) that "place" and configure Cape Breton and seek to control her (the health care system). While Bridget is aware of cultural movements that extend beyond the regional imaginary, her father so entrenched in parochial concerns that even his defence of Cape Breton vis-a-vis the centrist powers takes on a contorted form – placing the Goler tragedy (which occurred in the Annapolis Valley, NS) in Newfoundland¹⁹⁴:

... a national news magazine included the incident and the prom picture in a story called "Killer Kids" and tried to understand it. Which Bridget's father would find foolish because, he said, kids were killing each other back and forth up there in Toronto all the time, and there was no need to come down here and set us up to look like a bunch of backwoods freaks just like the Golars down there in Newfieland. Nobody within hearing distance ever corrected him about where the Golars were from.

What was happening to the young people? This, according to the news, was what people of the area were asking themselves. (11)

The maintenance practices of a rural Cape Breton imaginary are her subjected to the homogenizing forces of the national media. Because of this Bridget and her peers feel pressure to be other than they are - other places, other people – yet the return of the local prohibits their desired dislocation.

Near the end of the novel, Bridget's friend Daniel holds what he calls "The See You In Hell Party" (168) and he had a banner over the bar with those words on it:

¹⁹⁴ Herb Wylie's article on *Strange Heaven* usefully identifies the extent that Coady's regionalism is instrumentalized: "whereas typically the critique of the small town implicitly invites the critical gaze of the outsider, *Strange Heaven* turns that gaze back on the observer in a fashion that foregrounds the cultural politics between centre and periphery. In the process, the novel provides a good example of Atlantic-Canadian literature's increasing and subversive self-consciousness, foregrounding and deconstructing the way in which Canada's eastern edge tends to be framed from outside"; "As For Me and Me Arse: Strategic Regionalism and the Home Place in Lynn Coady's *Strange Heaven*" *Canadian Literature* (2006: 189), 85. Alan Voorland assumes the form of the outsider who fetishizes Bridget and her town and becomes the externalized face of inter-regional interpolation and desire.

He said to Bridget, "Because this is hell, and I see you in it."
 "Really?"
 "No."
 "Then what?"
 "Because I don't think I'm coming back here any more."
 "Are you going to live with the nuns?" asked Bridget.
 "No."
 "Are you going to take pottery? In Florida?"
 "No."
 "Well, I don't see what it is you're going to do, then," she said. (168)

In this friendly interrogation Bridget rehearses all of the escape routes she knows: Mark went to live with the Monks to dry out, and Bridget's father suggested she join the nuns; Mona wanted to study pottery and had run away from her father to Florida where she did copious amounts of cocaine and stripped for a living.¹⁹⁵ Here Coady exposes the helplessness of Bridget and Daniel: this is hell and none of us know how to escape, or what to escape to.

Why has this imaginary become hellish? Is it the place alone, the traditions, or the particular development of adolescence in late modernity on the margins?¹⁹⁶ While Coady does not resolve the tension between form and content, place and culture, she does illustrate that Bridget's alienation is interconnected with those of teenagers and young

¹⁹⁵ "At sixteen...Mona ...[drove] to Florida all by herself, without telling anybody. She stayed there for five months, making friends and doing coke. She said she met all these men who were being put up in a hotel by the FBI, ...[the tale] ended with Mona getting the living shit beaten out of her by these hotel men because she had taken all their cocaine. The police found out about it and sent her home, and her father sent her here. And there sat Bridget talking about priests" (14). Coady's names are significant for their normative associations with the biblical narratives – Mark and Daniel – but also many contain a kernel of allegorical significance: Mona – meaning "alone," highlights her extreme individualism; Maria, and Margaret P. – both are derived from Mary and associated with Bridget's allegory.

¹⁹⁶ For a narrative of the development of adolescent culture in modernity see Jon Savage's *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (Toronto: Viking, 2007). Savage traces the roots of our current understanding of this age category to the late 19th century category of the "Juvenile Offender" (9, 41), the rise of youth gangs, and the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud (232-26). Certainly the Buildingsroman plays a role in this development, though Savage chooses to emphasize how published journals, like those of Marie Bashkirtseff, influenced our constructs of youth (4).

adults in other regions, thus pointing toward a problematic that cannot be isolated to one region and implicating the entire imaginary. The problem is that Catholicism offers no formulaic solution to Bridget's limbo. Coady's analysis, however, betrays a latent theology of incarnation in her thought about the postmodern problematic of Cape Breton (perhaps derived from Catholic integralism): form and content are fused together like the two natures of Christ, God and Man. Bridget has been raised a realist, and yet the real presence will not reveal itself: both form and content betray *nothing*. She, like John Updike in the third Rabbit novel, *Rabbit is Rich*, subjects the Christian metanarrative to the spirit of capitalism, with mundane sex, Mcjobs, and a reified, irrational engine – *the* economy. The difference, however, is that somehow at the end of his long, infamous, absentminded sex scenes, the culmination of which is anal sex with a friend's wife, Rabbit experiences and attests to “real presence” as he holds his newborn granddaughter.¹⁹⁷ For Updike the sublime emerges from degradation. The way down is also the way up. But Bridget has no recourse to the “starry skies above and the moral law within”¹⁹⁸: both the

¹⁹⁷ When Rabbit meets his granddaughter at the end of the novel it is as if he is approaching the altar: “... Teresa comes softly down the one step into his den and deposits into his lap what he has been waiting for. Oblong cocooned little visitor, the baby shows her profile blindly in the shuddering flashes of color jerking from the Sony, the tiny stitchless seam of the closed eyelid aslant, lips bubbled forward beneath the whorled nose as if in delicate disdain, she knows she's good. You can feel in the curve of the cranium she's feminine, that shows from the first day. Through all this she has pushed to be here, in his lap, his hands, a real presence hardly weighing anything but alive. Fortune's hostage, heart's desire, a granddaughter. His. Another nail in his coffin. His.”; *Rabbit is Rich* (New York: Knopf, 1981), 467. This gift of the granddaughter is the answer, it seems, to Rabbit's loss of his infant daughter in *Rabbit, Run* (1960).

¹⁹⁸ Simon Critchley writes about nihilist experience, “This night is not the starry night that frames Kant's moral law or the night into which the romantic poet sings, but is rather the night of our dying, the vertiginous knowledge of our finitude that we keep close to us, as if it were a secret. What this suggests to me [...] is the experience of atheist transcendence, a transcendence without God, God-equivalents or gods, but simply the ringing void at the heart of what there is and who we are” (*Very Little ... Almost Nothing* xxv-xxvi). This “atheist transcendence” that Critchley speaks of is not similar to Bridget's experience. Critchley betrays a latent Christian hope (xix), where Bridget displays a void where that hope would be.

cosmos and the neo-stoic inner light of God (rationality) ultimately and immanently amount to nothing.

Yet, and this is an important point, Bridget is not anarchistic. There is no desire for violence at the core of her disclosure of nothingness. Psychological violence may be the bi-product of her actions, actions that have lead her to this understanding (adoption vs. abortion), but the logic here, is not to cooperate with destruction. Chaos and nihilism do not meet in the character of Bridget, though they do meet in other characters which represent pure types (Mona, Maria, Margaret P.), as is fitting for a narrative with a strata of allegorical meaning. In fact, she spends much time constructing a schema of chaotic characters and locations where chaos emerges. David Bentley Hart claims that the myth of chaos has appealed to a certain “postmodern romance” that is associated with the Dionysian impulse that Nietzsche outlines and which is found in Žižek's unconscious “night of the world”; in both cases chaos precedes order and functions as a dismembering, churning, violent origin (of the cosmos, or the subject).¹⁹⁹ Hart rightly claims that Christianity confesses *creatio ex nihilo*, a theme that I will demonstrate is important to Bridget's post-Augustinianism, as she seeks to distance herself from chaos, in favour of nothing. Chaos is found in three locations:

1. the psychiatric ward
2. the peer group in Cape Breton
3. the home, the core of which is Margaret P.'s dementia

In the psychiatric ward, Bridget compares herself with Mona, her roommate, as well as

¹⁹⁹ See David Bentley Hart's *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 125, 257-59. Hart claims that Genesis takes up the myth of chaos to deconstruct it and demonstrate that chaos is not a necessary force but “only a will toward chaos” (259). See also Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (New York: Verso, 2000), 29-33, 39-40, 46-66.

Maria, the most dedicated anorexic of a persistent group of non-eaters. Mona is the seventeen year old daughter of a German lawyer who lives in Toronto. Her favourite movie is Kubrick's anarchistic classic, *A Clockwork Orange* (69). Most of her life choices turn on their ability to provoke her powerful father,

Mostly Mona only talked about her father. It seemed she was obsessed. She would do sit-ups and push-ups in front of Bridget, raving about him all the while. She said she thought he was the devil or at least really, really, really evil. Like, an Evil Force. She would spread her arms and make her eyes wide when she said her father was an Evil Force. Mona never tried to explain to Bridget what it was her father did. Bridget asked her to once and she couldn't. "It's control. And it's, like, the great almighty sanctified privilege of being an asshole. And treating people like shit! Like the shit that comes out of the asshole." This was as far as Mona could go with regard to her father before she started really raving, raving about this eyes and his mouth and his German accent and his second wife and his navy suits. (30)

Here we can see some affinity between Mona and the female personas of Sylvia Plath and Sharon Olds, particularly Old's *Satan Says* (1980).²⁰⁰ Coady plays with these constructs of second wave feminism, while distancing the "blinding ennui" (62) of Cape Breton from the Freudian inspired confessionalism of her American counter-parts. Mona represents the female warrior: the Amazon gone berserk. Bridget stumbles upon one of Mona's fantasy novels that she believes was left for her, "the kind that described a lot of buxom, sword-wielding amazon women, with whom [Mona] could identify, partaking in equal quantities of sex and violence. It was called *Women of the Trinity*, which Bridget thought sounded blasphemous" (80). The margins of the book served as something like Mona's diary, brimming with poems and manifestos:

*Chewing on carrion Chewing on carrion
existing exciting eternal in*

²⁰⁰ Sharon Old's *Satan Says* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980).

*Glorious liquid shit
But most of all
Chewing on carrion and sucking everything out* (80)

and “IF I COULD GROW MY HAIR AS LONG AS RAPUNZEL THE FUNNIEST FUCKING THING IN THE WORLD WOULD BE TO ASK SOME ONE TO CLIMB UP IT AND THE CUT IT ALL OFF BEFORE HE GOT THERE” (80).

Perhaps as a tribute to her wild days of cocaine usage and exotic dancing in Florida, Mona breaks out of the ward and unleashes herself on Halifax: “she had gone to the punk bars and met millions of fucking awesome people. She had gotten toasted with the band and had sex with a guitarist who had hair down to his bum” (59). Her father heard of Mona's antics and “descended and took her away” only after he “bawled out Dr. Solomon” by calling her “healing environment” “a facility” with “inmates” (66). After this Mona sends a post card to Bridget:

WHAT I WANT TO KNOW IS ONLY THIS
ONE THING: WHICH DO YOU THINK IS
WORSE: WHEN SATAN LOVES YOU OR
WHEN SATAN HATES YOU. AND ALSO:
WHICH DO YOU THINK IS ACTUALLY THE
CASE.

YOURS TRULY MONA.

PS IT'S THE SAME THING MAYBE.
(97)

The chaos that Mona participates in has no higher moral principle (the good), and yet, while the good has no essence, the world is motivated by a positive evil force, and her father is the representative of this force. In Mona's chaos, evil is something, while good is nothing.

In contrast with Mona, Maria's brand of chaos is paradoxically orderly. She is

systematically destroying her body by denying one meal at a time. A four year veteran of the ward, Maria is only now fifteen. Bridget thinks she resembles a “Holocaust victim” though she is aware of the cliché (63). She tells Bridget:

“They told me that if I don't eat I'm never going to get out of here. They've been telling me that for years. And I don't care. I'm never going to eat.” If you asked her why, she couldn't tell you, her brain had probably deteriorated so much that she couldn't remember. All Maria knew was that she was sticking to her guns, *non-consumption was her raison d'être*. (63, emphasis added)

Maria is the personification of willed self-destruction (she longs for her “etre” to be nothing). Under her command the very order of her mater breaks down. Her singular focus implies a sense of stoic discipline; it is radically unhinged from any median point. Her extremism denies life the sustenance it needs to order itself. Remembering Maria's firm grip on her will as she marches on toward death, Bridget attempts to channel some of her power – much like should would call on the Virgin Mary:

Maria in her thoughts all day and still was. Closed her eyes on the toilet in contemplation of Maria. ... Maria was resolute, always. Maria did not know guilt. Maria would never feel sorry for those who had made her life difficult. Maria would never give in to bribes or begging or be moved by someone else's pain. You could lead Maria to water, but you could not make her drink. You could stick tubes into Maria's hands and arms to pump in glucose, but it wouldn't count. Maria would always win out.

Braced against the inexorable will of mankind, of God and of nature, Maria comes out on top. Disintegration on her own terms, Bridget thought. She had used to think Mona was the powerful one, but that was just because Mona was big and loud. Maria had the strength of the invisible. (134-5)

Maria's destructive focus on annihilating herself in the pursuit of a lost, inarticulate self image, becomes a hagiography in Bridget's hands. Where Maria adopts Pauline discipline to win her crown, Bridget understands that her end is nothing, and in relation to this nothing, she shares Critchley's discomfort. Her nihilism, like Critchley's, is the result of

“religious disappointment”²⁰¹ that generates from an anti-epiphany of the monstrosity of the real that discloses the emptiness of abject matter. In the aftermath of this disclosure, Bridget experiences the perceived failure of Catholicism to properly contain “nothing,” yet she refuses to embrace chaos (or “active nihilism”) as Mona does; while she admires Maria, she does not adopt her determined practice of consuming nothing. She is, instead, passively moved along by life.

Augustine's contrast between his ontology of the good and its negation is echoed in the stark contrast of John Paul II's critique of the “culture of death” on behalf of the “civilization of life.”²⁰² This Catholic theology of life is present in Bridget's mind even though she finds life to be “horrible” (54):

It seemed like, even if you didn't want to, or even if you paid no attention to it whatsoever, life, existence, whatever it was, carried on and it carried you with it. Like your body, it was indifferent to you. That's what Bridget thought. Her body was part of life and life was life and always took you along for the ride and you never had any say ... Whether you want to or not. God could

²⁰¹ Critchley argues that “Religious disappointment is born from the realization that religion is no longer (presuming it ever was) capable of providing a meaning for human life. The great metaphysical comfort of religion, its existential balm, surely resides in its claim that the meaning of human life lies outside of life and outside humanity and, even if this outside is beyond our limited cognitive powers, we can still turn our faith in this direction. For me, philosophizing begins from the recognition of the literal incredibility of this claim, that the possibility of a belief in God or some God-equivalent, whether vindicable through faith or reason, has decisively broken down. Of course, the proper name for this breakdown is *modernity*, and the task of *philosophical* modernity, at least in its peak experiences – Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger – is a thinking through of the death of God in terms of the problem of finitude”; *Very Little ... Almost Nothing*, 2-3. Certainly Critchley's reading of modernity is common, but by no means uncontested, both in the West, by figures like Rodney Stark and Charles Taylor, and globally, by those who articulate modernities that are not atheistic; see Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

²⁰² See for instance, John Paul II's speech to Bishops of California, Nevada and Hawaii: “Above all, society must learn to embrace once more the great gift of life, to cherish it, to protect it, and to defend it against the culture of death, itself an expression of the great fear that stalks our times. One of your most noble tasks as Bishops is to stand firmly on the side of life, encouraging those who defend it and building with them a genuine culture of life”; “Bishops Must Stand Firmly on the Side of Life.” Ad Limina Address. Delivered October 2, 1998. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1998/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19981002_ad-limina-usa_en.html (accessed December 18, 2008).

make a sign for all the souls about to be born unto the Earth to take under advisement: “Whether you want to or not.”

But perhaps even then you didn't have a choice.

And all the people who went to see Mother Theresa that day had signs that said: Choose Life – as if you could ever do anything but. (54-5)

After this passage Bridget remembers a joke that her “dead Irish grandfather used to tell” (55) that directs us to the infinite jest that Bridget thinks she is victim to: “Grampa ... used to stick his long purple-veined nose in her face and say: 'Do women have souls, do you think?' ... 'Yes.' ... 'Why, do you think?' ... And the punch line was: 'So they can be dammed!' (55). Her Grandfather told this joke in a dead-pan style, with a serious face as if the “funniest thing he [could] do [was] behave very gravely towards children” (55). Bridget implies that her Grandfather's dead-pan, the comedy of which she didn't discover until she was twelve, is analogous to the face that “life” shows her. She is a victim of infinite jest, having been promised by “nature” the fulfilment of her desire for meaning - “nature being known in some circles as God” (22) – yet, meaning has not presented itself. During the “tit fiasco” when Bridget suffers from the beginning phase of lactation, having given away the child the milk was to feed, her aunt gives her epsom salts and sends her to bed. When she arose in half an hour in great need of the washroom, she was shocked. Alan Voorland, the friend she was telling the story to asks, “Didn't you know Epsom salts are a laxative?” Bridget responds: “No, I was totally not expecting it. I thought it was God again, adding insult to injury” (37).

This God/nature conflation that makes Bridget the butt of its jokes returns when she considers the nadir of her existence, “The Birth” (124). Under the haze of Christmas lights, Bridget has a series of nightmares. When she awakes she is contemplating her

death wish:

The words in her head were: How do you be dead? - which was the first thing she had thought after The Birth. But it hadn't really been a thought at all. It was bigger. It was this primal, fundamental wish that the sentence didn't do justice to. The word that came closest to doing it justice wasn't even God. There was no word. Just this prehistoric need to turn herself off. There had been crying (not from her, the wah-wah) and heated sheets which felt so good and people saying she could hold it, hold him, hold the wah-wah, and all she could think about was this thing she wanted that wasn't even God. (124)

Bridget's wish is for peace, the eternal state of *paradise*, forever free from the disorder of being. When the good is overcome by nothing, Christian paradise becomes a wish for nothingness. There is, perhaps, a theological intuition here. Coady's elaborate play with the good and the nothing illustrates a cultural frustration with the binary oppositions of "onto-theology": the sign of life and goodness - the messianic child - is refused. Instead, she is left with nothing, thereby creating a disjuncture between being and goodness, "To overlook the noughting of Being in favour of essences which with it help attain the power to be," writes Balthasar, "is inevitably to blind oneself to the mysterious shining which inheres within Being ... Being itself is 'not the light' but gives 'witness to the light' in so far as it points to it by virtue of its own non-subsistence."²⁰³ This is to say that being cannot be the ultimate end. Bridget's intuition must be honoured as both the height of natural speculation, which is evidenced in her lowness, and also the beginning of the search for more than the plenitude of being.

Chaos is a problem associated with any philosophy of being; in contrast, nothing is characterized by eternal rest. When Bridget was in the psychiatric ward the "cuckoo's

²⁰³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol. V: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*. Trans. Oliver Davies et al. Ed. Brian McNeil et al, (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1991), 632.

nest” (she has many allusions to Ken Kesey's classic) is chaotic, but when she returns home, the chaos of the IWK pales in comparison:

Bridget had to re-acclimatize herself to all the chaos she'd forgotten about, especially now that she had the empty echoing ward to contrast it against. She had read somewhere that people who are colour-blind all their lives find it too overwhelming, once their eyes are operated on, to experience the world in colour. They lose all perspective and are terrified and lost and sometimes get physically sick. This was kind of what coming home was like (102-3)

Augustine advocates a communal existence, the *civitas Dei*, in which people celebrate common loves, “...a people is an assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of their love ... in order to discover the character of any people, we have only to observe what they love”.²⁰⁴ In contrast, Bridget, like her “Saint” Maria, is willing to renounce that community, as she thinks it is caught up in the chaos of being.

The chaos of being is perpetuated by her brother, who considers himself to be the moral centre of the family. He lectures Bridget on the importance of a chaste life while decrying any woman that will sleep with him at University as a “tramp”:

“Have you come across this sweet virginal douche bag you've been touting for the last five years?”

... “These girls aren't like that. For the most part, they're all tramps”...

... “Well the fact that they are tramps doesn't seem to stop you from fucking them.”

“Well, what else are you supposed to do with tramps?” (113)

Not understanding why Gerard does not categorize her as a tramp, Bridget confronts him:

“No” he said. “I mean, maybe, once, you could have been called that. But not anymore.” This was not exactly Gerard trying to be kind. This was the mathematics of Gerard's mind. She could almost hear the calculations going

²⁰⁴ This is Augustine's definition of “a people” from *City of God*, Book 19, Ch. 24. He wrote this in direct opposition to Cicero's definition of a people as “an assemblage associated by common acknowledgment of right and by a community of interests” (ibid).

on.

“Why not?”

“Because ... you're, like. Redeemed.”

“How?” she asked, holding her breath at the word, at the thought.

“You're better now. You've, like. Learned your lesson,” he said. (113)

If Gerard can bestow redemption on Bridget, it would seem that the liturgical order of the social has lost its centre. Here the act of writing that Coady enacts is made with the faith that there will be a reader who can somehow appreciate the multiple ironic turns of a community that sees itself founded in reason, yet, permits such chaos. Here again we should separate Coady and Bridget by noting that Coady effectively contains nihilism in her narrative while Bridget lives nihilism.

A slim slice of this chaos can be blamed on the market economy. Bridget's father sells his overpriced woodworking to tourists who are on the look out for kitsch. When he isn't making souvenirs out of golf balls, or a endless series of sublime, yet, identical duck decoys, he is marketing Rollie, his handicapped brother. When Rollie's school shut down, Robert took Rollie into his shop and soon discovered that Rollie had a divine gift for sanding pieces of scrap wood into representations of religious archetypes: “from 'Jesus Heals the Sick' to 'Saint Paul on the Road to Damascus’” (77). “In a flash of inspired business savvy” Robert put up a sign in his shop:

Religious Wooden Statues.

Done by Retarded Man.

Twenty-five dollars a piece. (78)

They became his best seller. Drawing our attention to Bridget's allegorical referent, Rollie gives Bridget a “Virgin and Child” statue for Christmas, while Gerard received a “Jesus Heals the Sick” (117). She suspects her father was behind the selection. When

she and Gerard were growing up, Robert thought that “girls liked Mary and boys liked Jesus just as girls liked Barbies and boys liked G.I. Joes” (117). This is to say that Rollie may have a better grip on the supernatural than Robert. Of course, Bridget thinks both have no grip at all, as she is convinced there is nothing to grip.

If there is no respite from the chaos at home, the community only amplifies the phenomenon. Like her family, the community begins its torture while she is in the IWK. When Stephen and Daniel visit her she suspects they are using her mental illness to increase their social capital: “Bridget thought ... You feel that I'm more interesting now that I've had a baby. And because I'm in a mental ward. I'm living the dream of Pink Floyd fans everywhere. I've trapped into the Great Sadness, and you want a piece of it. So that you can write songs, and poetry” (70). The chaos has a trace of Catholic social teaching. Stephen and Daniel lobby on behalf of Mark to bring the couple together. Bridget is quite aware of her social function and tries to swim against the current. When talking to Stephen at the Dairy Queen, Bridget has an epiphany:

His eyes were moist and grey with sincerity, and Bridget was aware that he was trying to lead up to something big and melodramatic and she didn't want to encourage it. Like everybody else, she would have been overjoyed to see a melodrama on the horizon. Something to do. Something to talk about. A crisis with which to occupy your thoughts. People were still using her for that she guessed. (150)

Looking this social role in the face, “she knew she did not want to be taking part in things any more, that was the one certainty she had taken away from the whole ordeal. The one course of action she felt right” (152). Yet, somehow, after listening to “The Ballad of Jenny Mac” and drinking homemade Irish creme with Heidi (166), Bridget finds herself at “The See You in Hell Party” without a bra (167-8). At the party, the local bully who

grew up to be a “jock,” Troy Bezanson, attempts to seduce Bridget, wrongly thinking she is in Gerard's category of “the tramp.” When a fight breaks out, Bridget takes the opportunity to slip home, but her friends all think she left with Troy. The narrator tells us “Bridget was so much in it” (175), implying that Bridget's attempts to avoid attention have inadvertently positioned her at the centre of the gossip reel.

Meanwhile back at home (the second chaotic setting), Margaret P. is convinced she has prostate cancer. She tells Rollie that she'll die soon which upsets him:

And she never sugar-coated it with the Christian rhetoric the way Bridget would have expected, saying she was about to be carried off on the wings of angels, or that she was going to meet Our Saviour at the gates of paradise. When Bridget was a child, Margaret P. used to go around saying that sort of thing all the time. She was old back then, too, but back then it seemed as if she couldn't wait to die. She walked around with a rosary and Bible, wearing her saint's medals like someone dressed for a journey. (175-6)

As she approaches death, however, her perception of the Catholic imaginary thins, and God becomes a bitter judge rather than a victorious beneficiary. With Rollie lamenting her immanent death (Margaret .P's representative role for Catholicism must not be forgotten here), she tells her son, “This is what life comes to. This is how Our Lord repays His most faithful servants. He makes us die and rot from our prostates, God bless him” (176). When Bridget and her Father try to console her and Rollie, Margaret P. retorts “Fuck you ... People like you will go directly to hell for what you've done to me. And burn. The Lord won't have it” (177). It seems that Catholicism is not only senile and deathly, but also dangerously hurtful. The lurid sandbox of the imagination that stimulates so many children lead Bridget to the crisis of her adolescence, The Birth. She tells Alan, when he asks her advice about his fiancé's unplanned pregnancy, that he should

save himself the anguish of an unwanted child and abort (153).

When Bridget's family doctor offers her the same advice - should she find herself with an unwanted pregnancy again - she is repulsed. The narrator directs us away from the ethical dilemma and toward the idea of unnamed individuals “thinking about her and thinking. Thinking some more about her, beyond what they already had on their roster. Making suppositions and surmises. People you scarcely even knew. The idea was, for some reason, nauseating” (181). Here again, Bridget and Coady are distanced, for Coady as a novelist wants her readers to think and think about Bridget, but Bridget rebels against her role as a character – a character being a part of a fiction that readers think about (sometimes endlessly, in the case of critics). Bridget is nauseated by the process of the community sharing “common loves” and working to support those loves through habitus and face-to-face encounters. Bridget is repulsed by exactly that part of the community that Augustine would see as the good, and this is because she doesn't think the good goes all the way down. The good of neighbourly concern is the same impulse that motivates the social melodrama that makes people like Jenny Mac into something that they aren't (164).

This, of course, is a discourse of authenticity that privileges a self that is posited solely on the self as the venue of the real. Augustinianism, properly understood, undermines this self-positing by erecting an “infinintely revisable, multiplicit, self-contradictory text” in the face of the infinite Good – the Trinity.²⁰⁵ Without such a transcendental object where can Bridget think her self is grounded? Nothing comes from

²⁰⁵ See Hart, 114.

nothing. Instead, we must point to a larger community construct, the ideology of liberalism – seen at work the autonomous self, that has retemplated Bridget and made her local community look parochial and dangerously out of date. This is simply to question the salvific narrative of liberalism, which suggests that if one puts individual concerns and voluntary choice ahead of collective concerns and coercion, one will achieve liberation. To question this salvific narrative is, however, in line with Bridget's own ambivalence. When faced with Halifax or Cape Breton, adoption or abortion, family or friends, Bridget cannot say one choice is that much better than the other. She thinks in terms of authenticity, but she doubts that liberation of the self is possible. Even “Look, and Pass On” deconstructs liberal hope. It is a short story that gives us a glimpse of Bridget on the way to university in Ontario. The title is taken from Dante's *Inferno* Canto 3.51, which appears just after Dante and Virgil have passed through the gates of hell, where they read “Abandon all hope, you who enter here” (l. 7). Dante is instructed to “Look, and Pass On,” when he asks Virgil about the wailing waverers (also called “neutrals”) who are suffering because they were “neither rebellious to God nor faithful to Him” and “chose neither side, but kept themselves apart” (l. 33-4). Bridget (Dante) sits in Alan Voorland's (Virgil) car wearing Margaret P.'s underwear, and as they drive through Montreal, Alan suggests he replace them with a thong. Because Alan is much more at home in a liberal capitalist milieu, he remarks to Bridget “I never worry about going to hell... Ever since reading *Inferno*.”

“Uh? Why? It doesn't sound so bad?” Like she'd been shaken out of sleep.

“No, it's bad. But it tells you how to get out.”

“It tells you how to get out?”

“Oh yeah, it's a fucking road map.”

“That doesn't sound right,” she said. “I wouldn't think they'd let just let you walk out.”

He said nothing for the next ten minutes because she was right. Alan thought about the winged demons poking the souls back beneath bubbling pitch; and liars sunken up to their mouths in shit, and she was right. Dante had only been visiting. They were compelled by You-Know-Who to let him pass. The remark about not being afraid to go to hell was one he had often made in the company of well-read friends. Now he knew he couldn't make it anymore, and was embarrassed at having said it so many times already. Because of her and her common-sense Catholicism. He pictured her mind at work, trying to reconcile the image of Alan taking a leisurely stroll through the pit – Dante under his arm to be consulted every now and again for directions – with what had been seared into her brain since childhood. That hell is not for tourists.²⁰⁶

The paragraph before Alan's clever quip gives us a glimpse of his thoughts: “He didn't know what world she lived in. Sometimes the words out of her mouth could be diamonds of the purest common sense.” Other times, Alan tells us, she “gazed around herself, never meeting anyone's eye and retreating into her accent and monosyllables. The casual observer might dismiss her as retarded.”²⁰⁷

Does Lynn Coady turn the irony of secularism on secularism itself, highlighting the despair of an anti-teleological conception of humanity? Certainly in *Strange Heaven* we have ironic approach to Catholicism: the demented grandmother, Margaret P., who exchanges the rosary for a folk song about four girls named Mary; a paterfamilias who thinks Jesus is for boys and Mary for girls; and a Mary figure who has no Christ child. The loss of the Christ child is no laughing matter, even though there are many hilarious moments in this dark comedy. Secularism is the nothing that Bridget performs – it is the truth that she must live out, even while her parents think it is only a phase that can be

²⁰⁶ Coady, *Play the Monster Blind: Stories* (Toronto: Vintage, 2001), 96.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 96.

overcome through stubbornness. Bridget seems, however, to exhibit a tiredness towards a secular sensibility, even while she finds no meaning in the religious. Coady's written, contained form of Bridget's nihilism tames *nothing* by making it seem like something that can be moderated by comedy. Secular II in *Strange Heaven* and "Look, and Pass On" is a depressing locale for which a liberal secularist neutralization of religion is not an effective escape. Bridget is condemned to be free, but not too free. Coady is in agreement with Ernesto Laclau on emancipation: "Freedom is both liberating and enslaving, exhilarating and traumatic, enabling and destructive" and must be worked on in terms of a duality of "freedom/unfreedom"²⁰⁸ (19). Coady's novel, which resists the very form of plot as Lotman constructs it, is opposed to MacDonald's retrieval of telos and emancipation in what comes after finitude (not really infinitude but weak infinitude perhaps). "Look, and Pass ON," which might be expected to give us a final sense that Bridget has made a transition, refuses this convention of development. Bridget is travelling, yes, but as Alan's suicidal thoughts make clear in the final line of the story, Bridget is still caught up in self-abjection: "He wanted to drive into an oncoming truck, and the thing [Bridget], he knew, would not have spoken as he did."²⁰⁹

In *Strange Heaven*, Bridget develops her technique of renouncing the self in order to neutralize the gaze of the community, and the chaos of being. At the height of her conflict with Mark, he threatens to unleash chaos by suing her family for allowing his son to be adopted without his consent (a case his social worker supports):

Bridget smiled at the emergency lighting. A fortune in wooden ducks and

²⁰⁸ Ernest Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (New York: Verso, 2007), 19.

²⁰⁹ Coady, *Play the Monster Blind: Stories*, 102.

Religious Statues Done by Retarded Man. ... "Do whatever you want," she said. She felt suddenly benevolent and saint-like. She was allowing herself to be yelled at and abused just to appease the tortured soul across from her. It was for the greater good. He would feel better afterward. She was above it all. She was like Saint Catherine of the Wheel. She didn't even know who Saint Catherine of the Wheel was, but she had always like the image of a saint and a wheel. (194)

Here Bridget wonders if the saintly life is the truth of nihilism. That everything must be disavowed to give rise to the nothing. Even in the light of this epiphany the absurdity of the Catholic imaginary presents itself to her. When she returns home, her father is standing in his underwear angry that she has rejected a common code of humanity – not to go out alone in a storm at four in the morning (196-7). The narrator tells us "This was the Chaos": the TV is on full volume, broadcasting the test pattern against her incensed father and her insane grandmother (197). This is the setting for Bridget's declaration of atheism while she piously attends to Margaret P. Margaret P. has thought Bridget has been dead since she went to the IWK, bequeathing her a spectral existence and attributing to her the smell of death. Bridget stands by her nonetheless and considers her grandmother's life:

And once she had known Bridget, but then she started thinking Bridget was other people, that everyone was somebody else, and then that everyone was a stranger. And once she had said prayers to the Virgin and the Son and even the Father in her more presumptuous moments and sung songs about fish and bonnie lassies and the cool snow that covered Glencoe and murdered the house o' MacDonald, and now she sank into her bed twisting the rosary into the flesh of her fingers and making banshee noises, the word "God" interpretable from time to time. If she did die, she would of course be pleased – seeing all the cherubs flying about, and being with the old people who were once her friends, and meeting God who would remind her of her father. God would remind everybody of their fathers. And Jesus would remind them of their fathers, too. Margaret P. would take one good look around and know that it had all been worthwhile.

But she would not die, Bridget knew. Because there wasn't any of

that. (198)

This last paragraph of the novel resolves Bridget's crisis of faith, beyond these gates she abandons all hope. Ironically, having adopted atheism and facing Margaret P., her grandmother takes on the aura of Dith, Dante's Satan, creating a whirlwind of chaos at the base of hell. Here the post-Augustinian nihilism can find no other name. The negation of the good does not undermine the memory of the Catholic imaginary and the cosmos that it erects. Even when nothing is embraced, the sacred canopy remains. This, perhaps, is the point Bridget makes to Alan in "Look, and Pass On" - even though Margaret P. does eventually die, and Bridget seems to pass beyond the Inferno of Cape Breton, the imaginary travels with her. She is still a Mary figure who has given birth to nothing, and this nothing threatens to take over the world, colonizing even Alan's secularized hope and optimism. Allegory, in Bridget's construction of Secular II, is a device used to demonstrate the latent power religion has even when it is not believed in.

Conclusion

The passive nihilism that Coady depicts strangely contradicts the anarchy in Europe that erupted from anarchistic nihilism.²¹⁰ In this respect, Bridget still longs for the peace of Christ, even while she doesn't feel Christ. Wyile and Creelman find a kernel of hope in *Strange Heaven*: "As David Creelman contends, 'the last pages pull us back

²¹⁰ Paul Berman argues that European nihilism led to the assassination of Arch Duke Ferdinand and has since been the engine of terrorism and suicide bombing; *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 2004), 22-51. Berman gives a persuasive genealogy that leads from the anarchists of Russia to the Nazis in Egypt and the Marxists in Iran and Iraq to the contemporary Islamists that utilize "nothing" for political clout. This is the active nihilism that Critchley identifies as one of three ways to respond to disappointment: active or passive nihilism, or ethical subjectivity; *Infinitely Demanding*, 4.

from the abyss of meaninglessness' when Coady affirms, against the nihilistic tide of much of the novel, 'that an identity is possible, though it is available only when the protagonist freely produces it from her own, painful, emotional experience'.²¹¹ While this reading is surely mistaken, it is true that Coady's humour is difficult to account for unless it is mapped to a latent hope in the reality of redemption. Here I sympathize with Critchley's delineation of literature's redemptive poise in the face of the abyss. In Coady's literary humour she shares much more with Flannery O'Connor grotesque Catholicism than she does with the subversion of Catholicism in a play like Chris Durang's *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains it All For You*.²¹² O'Connor's humour arises out of her understanding of the *felix culpa*, that because of sin the greater redemptive laugh of Christ arises from the tomb of tragedy. In reading Coady's pessimistic Augustinianism, we must remember that *nihil* is his word for sin. This is the result of Coady's bleak reading of Cape Breton, all she sees is depravity – the work of nothing. She can give no reason for her comedy: it stems from an unknown source. It is because of this source – a source that Coady often ironically positions – that she appeals to allegory and the figure of Mary. The irony is that Bridget, at her moment of nativity, is filled with the grief of Mary on the peak of Golgotha. This is part of the strangeness of Bridget's earthly heaven – the secular is hegemonic with a strangle hold on the Catholic life world, yet the normative assumption that a spiritual hope should be fulfilled is maintained throughout Coady's

²¹¹ Wylie, "As For Me and Me Arse: Strategic Regionalism and the Home Place in Lynn Coady's *Strange Heaven*" *Canadian Literature* (2006: 189), 192. Coady has told me of her own displeasure with this interpretation, which overrides the novel's intentional stasis (limbo) by opting for transformation and a completed bildungsroman form.

²¹² See Chris Durang, *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains it All For You and, The Actor's Nightmare: Two Plays* (New York: Dramatists Play Service 1982). Sister Mary is not a subtle character. She is found wielding a machine gun shooting her grown up students in the final scene of the play.

ironic disavowal of that hope. Christ has died, but perhaps, in the higher, gathered time, he is in the process of harrowing hell.

Imagining the Spirit in the Rock: Wayne Johnston's *Baltimore's Mansion* and the Catholic Imaginary

Until 1949, Newfoundland was its own “country” (*BM* 43). While technically still a colony of Britain, Newfoundland effectively gained self-rule in 1832 when the House of Assembly was established. It was not until 1855 that Newfoundland achieved a “full grant of Responsible Government.”²¹³ Still, between 1855 and 1934 Newfoundland established a legacy of self-determination, a legacy that nearly flowered into a country before it settled to become a province of Canada. Wayne Johnston's Aunt Freda gives us the context:

“Once we had a country, but because we made a mess of it, the British took it back.” Freda's words. She said that from 1855 to 1934, Newfoundland was a self-governing colony of Britain. “Just a fancy phrase for a country,” his father [Charlie] said. Since 1934 when it had, because of helping Britain win the war, not a penny to its name, the British were “in charge.” ...

[Charlie:] “Things might not be any better if we get it back,” his father says. “They might be worse.”

[Arthur:] “They'll be better,” he says.

“Will they? You got it all figured out?”

He nods solemnly.

His father laughs. (*BM* 43)

It might surprise some to learn that confederation barely happened. The independence movement lost the vote by less than one percent. Johnston's memoir, *Baltimore's Mansion* is a lament to the loss of Newfoundland nationhood. This lament finds voice through his family narrative, which describes the life of his Grandfather, Charlie, his father, Arthur, and himself. In the course of the narrative, Johnston discloses

²¹³ D.W. Prowse, “Historical Sketch of Newfoundland” *Canada: An Encyclopedia of the Country* (Toronto: Linscott, 1898), 471.

that while Arthur was vocally opposed to confederation, Charlie likely voted for it, causing a rift between father and son. This rift represents more than a slight difference of opinion, as Johnston constructs a philosophical impasse between Arthur and Charlie over the relationship between their theological and political self-understandings.

Furthermore, both of these theological and political positions come to terms with modernity and the rise of technology differently. As Arthur sees it, a pro-confederation ideology is also complicit with the destruction of unique lifeworlds, the erosion of Catholic metaphysics, and the abstraction of his people's sovereignty. Arthur's critique, as seen through the eyes of Johnston's autobiographical persona "Wayne," has a particular cogency that I will unpack in the second section of this chapter. In the third section we will consider the mysterious ending of *Baltimore's Mansion*, which involves Charlie's pro-confederation vote as imagined by Wayne. This re-imagined past serves as a critique of Arthur's theo-politics. Wayne's narrating voice is caught between the lament of his father Arthur, which has a powerful logical force, and his speculation at Charlie's prayerful actions in the voting booth. Mysteriously, in the end, Wayne registers the legitimacy of his father's spiritual wound, while also locating the salve for this wound in Charlie's vote for change. What Arthur sees as an inauthentic mode of being is, from Wayne's perspective, the authentic voice of tradition. Through this Trinity of Johnston males, Wayne describes the ideological aftershocks of Newfoundland's decision to join the confederation of Canada, the event that ushered in the ancient-modern transition to this commonwealth borderland. By giving an account of Johnston's theological realism I will demonstrate that his memoir participates in the Catholic imaginary. This imaginary

is structured by the *analogia entis* (analogy of being), the Catholic doctrine in which humanity's relationship with God is understood to hinge on a fundamental similarity of being between God and humanity. Theologians Erich Przywara and Hans Urs von Balthasar argue that the analogy between God and humanity is the basis of Catholic thought.²¹⁴ As Andrew Greeley writes, a realist Catholic view of the incarnation sees God active in creation: "God is sufficiently like creation that creation not only tells something about God, but, by doing so, also makes God present amongst us."²¹⁵ We will see that Johnston's ancestors saw Newfoundland as they might see the consecrated Eucharist: a land invested with God's grace. I argue that if we don't attend to the emphasis on the original goodness of creation that Catholicism emphasizes in its sacramentalism and in the *analogia entis*, we will not be able to conceive of the depth of Arthur's grievous wound, nor the theological impact of the modern nation-state on cultures with an intimate connection with the land. By attending to the narrative structure, the critique of instrumental reason, and the overall inculturation of Catholicism in the Newfoundland imaginary, I demonstrate that theological themes pervade the entire texture of Johnston's memoir such that they cannot be seen as the "residue of particularity."²¹⁶

Johnston's writing can be seen as a redemptive act that attempts to restore the mystery to Newfoundland's ruptured sacramental imagination. In *The Sacred Canopy*, Peter Berger makes an argument about the fragility of sacred worlds:

²¹⁴ As argued in my introduction, advocates of the analogy of being problematize the similarity asserted by analogy by adhering to the doctrine of the Fourth Lateran Council which asserts that the difference between God's being and created being is always greater than the similarity ("Canon 2").

²¹⁵ Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 6.

²¹⁶ Ernesto Laclau, "On the Names of God." *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*. Ed. Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 143.

The reality of the Christian world depends upon the presence of social structures within which this reality is taken for granted and within which successive generations of individuals are socialized in such a way that this world will be real *to them*. When this plausibility structure loses its intactness or continuity, the Christian world begins to totter and its reality ceases to impose itself as self-evident truth.²¹⁷

Berger's understanding of the social construction of reality is underwritten by a nominalist conception of signs, which locates the meaning of a sign wholly in the minds of the language users rather than in a dialectic between the subject and the object. Berger's insistence on the fragility of such sacred canopies is duly noted, even while the imaginary that Johnston participates in has much more in common with the realist position that Taylor articulates in his theory of the constitutive power of language. "The fear of language going dead, of its losing its resonance, is recurrent in modern culture," Taylor writes. The dominance of the semiotic unit of the single word is partly to blame for this problem, Taylor claims, because the coming together of being cannot be positively located in a single unit (the sign), but calls on the broader semiotic context, the imaginary (SA 759-61):

Just as resonance occurs not in the single poet but between him/her and a Thou, so the power to make us resonate builds through a whole constellation, before erupting (as it may) in a single word or phrase. Just as the poem as a whole can make us resonate, but only thanks to the whole inter-textual setting; the kind indeed, that we constantly try to build anew so that our classics can continue to live for us. (SA 760)

²¹⁷ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor, 1967), 46. On the topic of fragile semiotics John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock write, "the question of desire for God should not be taken merely in an individualistic way, but rather in collective and historical fashion. Human beings have only been able to believe in God through the mediation of signs conveying His reality which they believe they can trust. Indeed, one might describe our fallenness as a situation of the absence of such trustworthy signs"; *Truth in Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 93. Johnston's writing involves restoring the legitimacy to the semiotics of human religious imaginaries, even while he critiques those imaginaries that have become idolatrous.

The classic that Arthur would like to keep alive extends beyond language into the pre-understanding of what makes Newfoundland, and specifically Ferryland, uniquely meaningful and yet also a site of universality. Taylor describes the general causes of Arthur's grievous wound when he claims that that "the loss of this [linguistic] power means that we can indeed, deal instrumentally with the realities which surround us, but that their deeper meaning, the background in which they exist, the higher reality which finds expression in them, remain ignored and invisible" (SA 761). Johnston attempts to to restore power to the Catholic imaginary by addressing Arthur's grievous wound and charting a course beyond it. He does this by placing, at the beginning of his narrative, a mythological origin for the specific sense of incarnation that the Catholic community in Ferryland receives.

Incarnation

Baltimore's Mansion begins, like Genesis, with two myths: the myth of the Virgin Berg, a Marian apparition in the form of an iceberg; and secondly, the Arthurian legend. These myths frame the stories of Charlie, Arthur, and Wayne. Wayne describes the micro-imagination of Charlie's household: "My father grew up in a house that was blessed with water from an iceberg. A picture of the iceberg hung on the walls in the front rooms of the many houses I grew up in....My Grandmother, Nan Johnston, said the proper name for the iceberg was Our Lady of the Fjords, but we called it the Virgin Berg" (BM 2). Charlie's house is blessed with "droplets of water that thawed after ten thousand years" and were later consecrated in the Church basement by a bishop (5). According to

Catholic doctrine, nature can be invested with grace; nature is a plane through which God can move without involuntarily restricting his presence. Thomas Aquinas wrote that “grace does not destroy nature but perfects it,”²¹⁸ and for Catholics the regnant symbol of the perfection of human nature is found in the Virgin Mary.

Johnston’s narrative of the Iceberg that bore an “undeniable likeness to the Blessed Virgin Mary” (*BM* 2) is told with great humour, but this humour emerged over time. For those “thousands” that caught a glimpse of the mammoth “apparition” the primary emotion was awe. On June 24, 1905, Charlie was among the crowd that fell on their knees to this living replica of a Marian statue: “Charlie imagined that, under the water, was the marble pedestal... and her head was tilted down as in statues to meet in love and modesty the gaze of supplicants below” (3). For the generation of Catholics that are of Nan and Charlie’s age and stratification this event was evidence that the divine creator of the world was invested in Newfoundland and speaking to Newfoundlanders. Charlie’s mother fell on her knees and said “the Hail Mary over and over and blessed herself repeatedly, while his father stared as though witnessing some end-of-the-world-heralding event” (3). Charlie, at twelve, was terrified. When he saw the puff of smoke rise from the photographer’s flash he thought the Virgin had had the “mechanism confounded”: “Even then it seemed to him that the Virgin must have lent the man’s machine the power to re-create in black and white her image on the paper, the same way she had willed the elements to fashion her image out of ice” (4). Fisherman attended to the apparition to collect ice and water that was later stored in the Church basement and

²¹⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

“used sparingly as holy water in the sacrament of Extreme Unction and in rare cases, in baptisms and the blessings of houses” (5). The family forge was blessed with some of this invested water, “My father told me this as if it were self-evident why a blacksmith should be so honoured” (5). Nan claimed that the stains from the Holy Water lasted for thirty years (5).

Young Wayne, who was told of this story at Catholic school by Nuns, had vivid daydreams about the Virgin Berg (6). The berg had appeared on the feast day of St. John the Baptist, after whom the city was named, which was also the day Cabot discovered Newfoundland in 1497: “That June 24 was also the day of Cabot’s discovery of Newfoundland left no question in the minds of Catholics that the iceberg was a sign in confirmation of the fact that God was one of them and a sign to Protestants of God’s disfavour” (6). In an imaginary where God is a vast abyss of being out of which nature and humanity derive their being, any aspect of nature can become a sign of God. Through such signs and wonders, the temporal world becomes the stage of an overarching analogy of the eternal realm. It is no wonder that a boy like Arthur, growing up with the certainty of this miraculous event in the age of positivism, would have thought that all signs that are related to this nodal point of meaning would be endowed with a sacred aura and a false sense of immanent eternity. Under the sway of this portrait of the Virgin Berg the signs of the Republic of Newfoundland, Ferryland, Blacksmithing and the like seem to glow red hot with enchantment and purpose. The citizens of Ferryland were not as unique as they might seem; the era of Charlie and his son Arthur’s youth was alive with ethnic nationalism. Michael Ignatieff tells us that “ethnic

nationalism claims ... that an individual's deepest attachments are inherited, not chosen.”²¹⁹ Catholicism walks a line between voluntary and inherited belonging, having both child baptism and confirmation at the age of consent. Inheritance could easily slide from the economic discourse to the religious.

The Virgin Mary, sanctified, according to Catholic doctrine, by the future redemption of all humanity by her Son (immaculate conception), is the symbol of the Church's wisdom and humanity's unblemished glory. In Johnston's world the incarnation is the primary fact of this imagination, a fact that influences his political view and has structured his family's relationship to work, land, and self. “The image, the imagined, the imaginary,” Arjun Appadurai claims,

– these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as a social practice... the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work*, and a form of *negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility...* The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order.²²⁰

When Arthur's imagination is ruptured by the loss of Newfoundland nationhood, Johnston compares him to King Arthur, claiming that he has suffered a “grievous wound”. Appadurai accounts for such wounds with a poetic phrase: “One man's imagined community is another man's political prison.”²²¹ This is to say that the constitutive power of language and practice to sustain a social imaginary is directly related to the legitimating structures that are supported by a broader social consensus. When

²¹⁹ Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (Toronto: Penguin, 2006), xv.

²²⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996), 31.

²²¹ Ibid, 32.

individuals like Arthur hold onto a former version of the imaginary, it becomes a form a melancholia, which creates an inward wound.

Arthur is dealt his grievous wound while living in a land named the Avalon Peninsula – Avalon being the mystical land where no suffering is supposed to enter. Lord Baltimore, who first christened his new-found-land “Avalon,” commissioned a mansion in Arthur’s hometown in the 1620s. Baltimore had been fleeing persecution in England and intended Avalon to be a Catholic colony. He spent one scurvy ridden winter in Newfoundland and returned home. Describing the architecture of the analogy, Johnston writes: “So there were two Avalons, the Avalon where we lived and the Avalon to which, like King Arthur, we would travel when we died” (*BM* 10). Baltimore’s wishful naming of Avalon signifies a desire for the eternal in earth, a desire Arthur Johnston manifests when he resists the vote to join Confederation with Canada. Arthur's desire for the eternal realm causes him to collapse the difference between Being and being. Theologian David Bentley Hart argues that when the two poles of the analogy of being are confused we are left captive to the anthropological turn that Kant's theory of subjectivity represents; accordingly “the most eminent truth of our being is inverted to the ground of the I,” from which “springs all the grandeur, melancholy, and cruel impotence of metaphysics in its ‘nihilistic vocation’”²²² The “I” that is divorced from transcendental meaning in the cosmos is faced with the sublime potential of overcoming obstacles through inward resources, and also the converse truth – that these inward resources in humanity are the only thing in which humans can hope. Johnston perceives this nihilistic doppelgänger of

²²² David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 245.

theology and narrates two Arthur types, his father – Arthur - who desires a fixed eternal essence for Newfoundland, and his grandfather – Charlie – who recognizes that while moments in Newfoundland may be consecrated, the eternal exists beyond. To use another analogy, Charlie ascends the mountain and shields himself in the cleft of a rock while Yahweh passes; Arthur, on the other hand, sees his grief and suffering as the result of the deterioration of a necessary ontological foundation and so he attempts to rebuild this foundation in the form of a golden calf.

Epistemology and Instrumental Reason

Charles Taylor has argued that with the loss of classical views of reason, which he calls “ontic logos,”²²³ the enlightenment world shifted its focus from teleological causes to efficient causes, giving rise to the technological culture we have today. By occluding the transcendent end and focusing on the efficient end, the innovators of the inductive method, Galileo, Francis Bacon, Descartes, Newton, created an “episteme”²²⁴ that gives

²²³ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 186-7.

²²⁴ Foucault defines “episteme” as “the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems; the way in which in each of these discursive formations the transitions to epistemologization, scientificity, and formalization are situated and operate; the distribution of these thresholds, which may coincide, be subordinated to one another, or be separated by shifts in time; the lateral relations that may exist between epistemological figures or sciences in so far as they belong to neighbouring, but distinct, discursive practices. The episteme is not a form of knowledge (*connaissance*) or a type of rationality which, crossing the boundaries of the most varied sciences, manifest the sovereign unity of a subject, a spirit, or a period; it is the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities”; Michel Foucault, *Archaeologies of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2001), 191. Foucault’s anxieties manifest themselves here, as he attempts to foreclose the possibility of an analogy between an episteme and a Gadamerian interpretive horizon. (Gadamer argues that meaning arises from an horizon, which is more than its constituent elements, and which is collectively maintained). I do not share Foucault’s latent loyalty to Marxism, and find the analogy quite useful. Foucault would also likely be uncomfortable with the concept of the “social imaginary.” I see the episteme at work legitimating practices in the imaginary.

an aura of certainty to the immanent and a ghastly, confused cast to the transcendent. Taylor, along with Hart, claims that as the imaginative connection to the transcendent logos is severed, reason becomes increasingly instrumental. Reason as the ontic logos was conceived as something that had being: “The Ideas ...are not just objects waiting to be perceived; they are self-manifesting; the Idea of Ideas is itself a source of light, following his master image. The logos is ontic.”²²⁵ According to the logic of Christendom, this Reason was Christ himself, and when the mind interacted with material, it reflected on the representations of that material through the illumination of Christ.

In Johnston’s narrative the ancient-modern rift is attached to the emergence of the automobile and the influx of Canadian federalism. His Grandfather, Charlie, was the blacksmith in Ferryland, a vocation that Johnstons had held for four-hundred years. But one fateful day Charlie goes to the forge, strikes the anvil, and it shatters under his blow. Arthur accompanies his father to St. John’s, where they buy a new anvil. On the way back to Ferryland, Charlie tells Arthur that “They’ll be no more need for blacksmiths soon,” and that he will have to fish for his living (*BM* 37). Arthur eventually leaves Newfoundland to study agriculture in Nova Scotia. When he returns the project is a failure. Farming is impossible in Newfoundland and Arthur finds himself working for the Canadian Fisheries department compiling arcane knowledge of fish.

Arthur’s despises the fact that he is a civil servant working for the “Fisheries Research Board of Canada Biological Station” (34). Johnston tells us that

²²⁵ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 257.

Newfoundlanders intuitively knew what such highfalutin bureaucratic officialdom meant: “The Station was regarded with scornful amusement by the people of St. John’s, who, while they had no idea what went on inside it, were sure it was a variety of high-flown nonsense never heard of in Newfoundland before Confederation. Its long, ponderous name alone was proof of that” (125). This “high-flown nonsense” was strange to Newfoundlanders because of its ideological underpinnings: scientific progress and instrumental reason. Moreover, certain technologies had blended into the “ancient” structures of the outport lifeworld, like the train, but the broad scaled launch into “progress” that occurred under the name of Canadian nationalism did not, and it gave rise to a fervent response. This political debate, as Johnston relates it, is staged on grounds where organic “authenticity” is pitted against apostasy and “inauthentic” reinvention (or visa versa). Arthur's tirade before the “fact facing bus-boomer” (79) when he defends the endangered train from the pro-bus mummer is indicative of the larger associations that this problematic engendered:

“We're a country of fact-facing bus-boomers,” my father said, grinning, looking out the window [of the train].

“A province,” the fact-facing bus-boomer said. “We're a province now, not a country. Never were a country, really. If you know your history.” I heard in his voice a politeness that was meant to be transparently insincere, patronizing, the tone of someone who held in reserve a trump card he need never play. I could just see it. A riot on the train fought over a matter decided twenty years ago.

“I know *my* history,” my father said. “A province of progress, is that what we are?” “A province of progress” was once of Joey's last slogans.

“Better than a backward country,” the fact-facing bus-boomer said.
(79)

Arthur, having redoubled his effort to reverse history, internalizes the theo-political debate and refuses to accommodate himself to the new, (protestant) Newfoundland in a

way that might give rise to a fuller experience of being. This, the story implies, is up to Wayne.

The resistant Newfoundlanders, like Arthur, sensed that they were losing the traditions that keep a culture rooted. As federalism remade Newfoundlanders into Canadians, modernity threatened to alienate them from the land they knew, loved, and blessed. “The loss of rootedness,” claimed Heidegger in his “Memorial Address,” “is caused not merely by circumstance and fortune, nor does it stem only from the negligence and the superficiality of man’s way of life. The loss of autochthony springs from the spirit of the age into which all of us were born.”²²⁶ This spirit challenges the tightly knit conceptions of tradition, place, creation, and grace that are at work in the Catholic imaginary of Arthur’s Newfoundland. He internalizes both federalism and modernity as he attempts to resist confederation, and while he feels that his plight is a particular evil brought on by Joey Smallwood, he isn’t able to see that the loss of tradition is a general condition of modernity. From the givenness of blacksmithing, Arthur is condemned to the freedom of an individual identity, a mode of subjectivity that occludes group cohesion, yet allows the individual to self-create. As Arthur sees it, the incarnational imagination according to which Newfoundland-as-infused-with-grace is wholly severed by the anti-Christ premier Joey Smallwood and his minions: modernity and federalism.

Johnston points to a double bind that Arthur’s polemic disguises: he can’t choose his desire, which is for a sense of rootedness and vocation, but he doesn’t want another traditional job either (the fisheries). He ends up choosing to study fish to avoid the

²²⁶ Martin Heidegger, “Memorial Address” *Discourse on Thinking: A Translation of Gelassenheit*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund. (New York: Harper, 1966), 49.

fishery, but in making this choice he is complicit with federalism which he adamantly opposes. As much as he wants to preserve his imaginary, he doesn't really want to take up fishing. The narrator claims that Arthur's choice to study fish was his method of avoiding fishing itself:

It was some sort of an escape from fishing itself, this knowledge that he shared with me and whose acquisition was not required by his job. Sometimes it seemed that he was contriving a fascination with the ocean that he did not feel, as if he was trying to fool it into thinking that it didn't really have him, or that it did but that he didn't mind, that even if he were free to choose he would live the way he did and his lack of choice was therefore irrelevant. (*BM* 127)

On the other hand, Arthur's freedom to self-create has parameters that keep him from experiencing the sense of vocation that he desires; his father had the smithy, but he had to choose another profession. Arthur longs to have a calling that is "voiced" by deep, even eternal, continuity with the past, but instead he is simply 'technologically efficient.' The forces behind the economy, which to Arthur are federal forces, pre-empt his agency and construct him as a scientist, who is supposedly freely to choose his identity. The scientific method and the episteme it underwrites, is problematic for Arthur, as his knowledge alienates him from his people, even as he attempts to use it to fit in with the local fishermen:

My father always took great pride in answering no when the fishermen asked him if he would like to have his fish cleaned and filleted. He would always do something to impress the fishermen, demonstrate some skill or knowledge that even they did not have. By lifting it by the gills with one hand, he would estimate a cod's weight within a few ounces. He was usually so close to the weight that showed on their scales that the fishermen shook their heads in disbelief. (135)

Arthur's profession leads him to develop new forms of knowledge that the average

fisherman, at a distance from the scale, has little use for. He can be likened to Don Quixote who, taking the abstraction of knighthood in fiction for knighthood itself, became the fool in front of those he attempted to impress.

Technological efficiency, in Arthur's case, is not practical: the fisherman have no need for the cod's weight. This type of efficiency is disembedded from the context of the practice in an attempt to improve the fisheries by utilizing abstracted knowledge to reform the "folk" practice.²²⁷

Taylor argues that modern technological knowledge practices are not innocent, since they develop interpretations of "reality" in which belief is difficult because the correspondence between inwardness and the external cosmic order ("ontic logos") has been undermined. They are also founded on a rupture between the subject and the object which necessitates mediational constructs which have only instrumental worth. Hart claims that when the transcendent locus of "truth"²²⁸ is occluded as is the case with "closed world" construals of scientific method (SA 551), what occurs is also a removal of

²²⁷ The true dark side of this technological epistemology is seen in the efficient methods of fishing that over-fish and cause a crisis for rural fisheries. By adopting modern fishing practices instead of traditional practices the ability to build a life on the fisheries is endangered.

²²⁸ Truth in this context has little to do with foundationalism or positivism. Truth is an non-totalizing apprehension that is mediated through an overarching and always malleable imagination. Even revelation appears through the course of history and emerges in a temporal, and thus contextual imagination. Thus the ambiguity over Christ's statement, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). What does "the truth" mean for a Hellenistic Jew of the first century CE? Certainly it is not a positivistic statement. If we had a biological specimen of the man it would not yield a quantity of the truth. The truth must be found in the fulfilment of an aesthetic – a theological aesthetic. There may be an analogy here between a theological aesthetic and what Derrida has taken to calling a "perhaps"; Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (New York, Verso, 2007). In Derrida's language the truth is able to be loved but never represented – "the friends of the truth are without *the* truth, even if friends cannot function without truth" (43). Yet the condition of being-in-the-world necessitates an imaginative, mystical conception of the truth (the hot question is: what is that imaginary's ontological status?). Every politics has a hypergood, whether it is disavowed or not, as Taylor argues using teleological arguments in *Sources of the Self*; see particularly 70-71 where Taylor addresses how it is that even formulations that disavow truth as Foucault does, rely on a hypergood, which functions as a truth.

the subject from immanent truth. What occurs is a “tragic annihilation of the immanent,” that is caused by “a merciless reduction of the exterior to an interior so absolute as to have no outward contour.”²²⁹ The self (Arthur) is locked inwardly, unable to find an objective fit with the world because the world has no immanent face of transcendent Reason, no analogy of being. The problem here for Catholics like Arthur is that a cosmology which prioritizes ontology over epistemology has been replaced in modernity by an anthropology that reverses this priority. Hart continues, elaborating on the effects that the recourse to identity has on truth and scientific positivism:

The reduction of truth to identity (no less than its reduction to absolute alterity) is already nihilism, and ultimately must reveal itself as such; the most high is the infinitely desolate, the most true is the nothing. Thus, again sounding the Nietzschean alarm, we can say that the abolition of truth as a value was always already secretly inaugurated in the search for truth as positive ground.²³⁰

As our imaginative capacity for the analogic relationship between “Truth” and “truth” dwindles, Hart claims that the search for a positive site of truth increases. As Richards demonstrates in *The Bay of Love and Sorrows*, this truth is inextricably tied to mystery, such that when mystery is sundered from the equation, truth cease to be a useful category and must now be understood a function of power and violence. Thus, the search for totalizing knowledge of the true in objects is already the operation of the will to power. In *Baltimore's Mansion* this is illustrated through the episteme that Arthur performs with the fisherman on the dock; it is little more than a wager in an complex and ongoing power game, which Arthur loses – by adopting the reified knowledge of methodological study.

²²⁹ Hart, 246.

²³⁰ Hart, 246.

He then attempts to use this knowledge as a class advantage that he thinks will cast him as a leader of fishermen:

Then he would overdo it, and tell them how old the fish was, and how you could tell how old it was, and in what depth and temperature of what it had lived and been caught. 'You know your fish, sir,' they'd say more politely then admiringly, for this was not fisherman's knowledge that he was displaying, not knowledge that would be of any real use to a fisherman. (*BM* 136)

But Arthur's game for supremacy is based in his loss of rootedness and his double bind; he is no longer a son of the soil: "He had been one of them once, and a part of him really did want to impress them and win their admiration and acceptance" (136).

Wayne senses Arthur's liminality, his loss of meaning, and starts to manifest a similar desire for fit. We see this as he envies the young boys who sell cod tongues for a dime a dozen. These boys have a connection to the land that young Wayne romanticizes, but the older narrator reveals their reality: "they were selling the tongues for their fathers and probably did not have a cent to call their own, but I either didn't know this or didn't stop long enough to consider their existence" (135).

Arthur's crisis of nationalism, tradition, and profession is at heart a spiritual crisis that many moderns face. Johnston makes an emblematic claim about Arthur: "he lived in denial of these contradictions" (124). After leaving the dock, after having faced the fruit of such contradictions head on, Arthur would experience the pain of rootlessness: the grievous wound. The trips to Petty Harbour were "painfully awkward" as Arthur "tried to be both things at once and could not completely pledge himself to either, the lab man of the 'New Newfoundland' and the fisherman he used to be. The drive home was always made in silence" (136).

Because Arthur could not logically find his place in the world as his father could, notions of the incarnational presence and vocation, which made sense according to Charlie's pre-modern imagination, caused great distress for moderns. While pre-moderns experienced great dissonance as the hegemony shifted from the church-fed imagination to the social reality of the post-confederacy market place, moderns like Arthur were being pulled apart by the contradictions that they grew up under.

Trinity

The analogical relations of *Baltimore's Mansion* do not end with the notion that creation's being is found in God and that humanity is invested with God's being.

Johnston also employs an analogy of the Trinity in his description of Father, Son, and Narrator. Hart supplies us with a description of the eternal Trinity:

The Father forever sees and infinitely loves the whole depth of his being in the Son, illumined as responsive love in the fullness of the Spirit, and in the always determinate infinity of his triune being God begets all the riches of being – all that all things might ever be – in the image and light of his essence; and thus God himself is already his own analogy, his own infinite otherness and perfect likeness.²³¹

Johnston's memoir is underwritten by a shadow of this peculiar structure. After beginning with what are as close to creation stories as a new *found* land can sustain (the genealogy, the Virgin Berg, the Arthurian legend, the first settlers of Newfoundland and Ferryland) Johnston proceeds to unfold his story as the story of his Grandfather and his father, with what Lawrence Mathews calls a "self-effacing" technique. Mathews claims that Wayne takes "centre stage only when it becomes absolutely necessary for narrative

²³¹ Hart, 248.

coherence.” Mathews then adds, “In places, though, [Wayne’s] own position crystallizes.”²³² This provokes us to ask whose story this is? Is this the story of Charlie, Arthur, or Wayne? Some might like to answer that it is a story that lives in the intersubjective spaces of family and community. While that answer is appealing, it leads us to inquire as to why the rest of Wayne’s family is given so little narrative space. After all, he does mention that he had at least three brothers and a sister (*BM* 174, 234).

The structure of Johnston’s memoir only becomes coherent when we read it as an analogy of the Trinity. Like the Trinity it is at once the story of three persons who are a unity of one (Wayne’s narrative). Moreover, the story is primarily centred on the relationship between the Father, Charlie, and the Son, Arthur. Wayne, as Mathews claims, appears to float through the text. Wayne is the temporal analogy to Charlie and Arthur, of the Spirit’s bond of love between the Father and the Son; he is the unifying, synthetic presence of love and communication. The story’s development also follows the trajectory of Biblical revelation: the father first, the son second and the spirit third, while all three are eternally co-equals. But before we ask too much of Wayne, we must remember that the Johnston Trinity is an analogy of the divine Trinity. It is a fallen shadow of the real.

This reading could be sidelined as mere conjecture, but I believe there is textual evidence for it. For one, Arthur’s wound is similar to Christ’s passion. It is an excruciating, vexing struggle on a personal as well as collective level. Arthur must work out his identity so that he can pass it on to Wayne, so that Wayne is not caught with the

²³² Lawrence Mathews, “Charlie’s Choice”: Review of *Baltimore’s Mansion*,” *Canadian Literature* (170/171), 222.

burden of imaginative dissonance. Secondly, the story of Arthur's ice accident (108-121), which is told as much in mythic time as the stories of the Virgin Berg and King Arthur, encodes the wound the son receives with the passion of Christ. Arthur ruptures his spleen, obtaining a grievous wound, but miraculously making it home. Consider the analogical tone of the following lines:

His father will not leave him, not even if he dies. He will tell himself his son
is only resting and sit beside him in the snow. And so he can only save his
father if he saves himself.
He feels himself rising.
He must be lifting me... (120-1)

The story also seems to encode the Crucifixion's typological narrative of Abraham and Isaac. The father and son go into the wilderness with horses, the son comes under trouble, and miraculously, the father and son make it out alive.

Thirdly, Wayne's experience in the abandoned island church makes little sense unless it is a localized retelling of the Holy Spirit descending in the form of the dove (Matt. 3:15-16, John 1:32-34). Wayne has decided to experience the coming storm in the dilapidated church not far from his cabin. After the storm has been raging for some time, "a seagull glides down from the choir loft" flies out the window, back in the church rising until he lands beyond the balustrade in "a show of grace, a show of force" (224). The bird repeats the action, and Wayne interprets his thoughts:

He thinks that like him, I have taken refuge here and lack the sense to join
him in the loft, where it must be warmer and where there is no snow, which he
wants me to do, not out of any concern for my welfare but because he knows
that sooner or later I will discover the loft. He is telling me, before I try to
chase him off, that he is willing to share it.
I have no intention of spending the night in here, but I accept his
invitation. (225)

Wayne sits near the gull, but not so close as to send him off. Then he falls asleep. When he awakes he is frightened at the danger of his was in of freezing to death. He descends the stairs with haste, startling the gull, who flies among the rafters again. Wanye's experience strangely reverses the story of the Holy Spirit as a dove revealing the Son of God. Instead we find that Wayne is associated with the Spirit, which is localized as a seagull like a symbol from a Wallace Stevens poem. Because Wayne dwells with the spirit, rising to sit with the gull, rather than the gull descending to him, we understand, if we are thinking analogically, that Wayne is the spirit of this Trinity; which, fundamentally, fits the narrator's role well, but also gives Wayne a third presence to the work, which he does take at times when the narrative focuses solely on him.

That the gull descends at all must have some relationship to Christ as well. Though Johnston is primarily a shadow of the Spirit, he is, in the sense that his father's search for identity is also his own, confirmed by grace and force that his future will come together. The seagull is a sign of divine blessing, as well as providence. It also counters the rupture with nature that Arthur felt so keenly. Wayne's imagination can once again sense the spirit in (graced) nature. This is why it is Wayne, filling his Grandfathers shoes, who flies to Avalon to welcome his identity stricken parents home. Somehow he is able to heal his father - at least this is his role as the bond of love between Father and Son.

Politics of Theological Realism

As I have demonstrated, this thoroughly Catholic novel is done an injustice if it is read without a conception of incarnation. The incarnation brackets the story from the outset, but also runs through the whole. My purpose here was not to explicate the

nationalist turned regionalist politics of Arthur Johnston, but rather to demonstrate how his existential crisis of identity is rooted in a theological shift that occurs as modernist patterns of thought, politics, and aesthetics colonize the pre-modern imagination and its rendering of the incarnation. A brief glance at the interwoven constellations of Catholicism and politics leads us farther into this problematic.

Because the land and its traditions have, for Arthur, a latent eternal/spiritual quality to them, change to these conventions becomes almost heretical. Arthur's desire for rootedness feeds his deep-seated resentment of shifting social forces, even while these social forms allow him to escape the determinism of traditional economies (i.e.: fishing, blacksmithing). When his resentment turns to resistance, Arthur's first cultural weapon is the spliced form of kitchen party humour and Catholic catechism that he performs with Wayne (65-6, 179-81). The object of these catechisms is always to defame Joey Smallwood. "The Enemy was 'Joey,'" Johnston claims,

To us, he was a bow-tie wearing despot, who by the time I started school had been ruling Newfoundland for fifteen years. He was regarded with a mixture of terror and scornful amusement. He was the only premier Newfoundland had had since Confederation. Confederation had entered the world with Joey; he had led Newfoundlanders to it and tempted them to partake of it as surely as the serpent had led Eve to the apple. And we had thereby fallen from a state of grace that could never be recovered, been banished forever from the paradise of independence. (183-4)

At Smallwood's resignation in 1972, Aunt Eva claims, "It's a happy night in heaven" (184). This is because Smallwood is figured as both the Anti-Christ (245) and Satan himself, ruling over Newfoundland from his "secular basilica" (242). The only method of overturning his legacy was to be brought by a Newfie Messiah:

Q (Arthur): Does he, pretender, occupy the throne?

A (Wayne): He does.
Q: Has he who will displace him yet come into the world?
A: He has.
Q: In what most favoured region of the country does he dwell?
A: Avalon.
Q: Is he known to us?
A: Perhaps.
Q: He knows his destiny?
A: Not yet.
Q: Who might he be?
A: He might be anyone. He might be me. (180-1)

To Arthur, who asks the questions, the messianic presence is an undisclosed signifier, a being ready to overthrow the confederacy's hegemony, but he hopes for "the perhaps" to come from his line (which would double his royal signification by adding an allusion to David). And yet Arthur's word of resistance isn't eternal; his father Charlie, who Wayne imagines voting for confederation and against his son's (theological) politics, saw the voting booth according to the grammar of Catholicism as a sort of confession. "He wondered later if his hand was God guided to do what to him seemed and always will seem wrong" (245). Charlie felt divinely moved to make a shift that would problematize his community's imaginative understanding of the world. Johnston's speculative narration of his grandfather's vote for confederation is extremely important for understanding how the rhetoric of tradition functions in the text. Where Arthur sees himself as the great defender of tradition against the modern turn that Smallwood brought on, Johnston circumvents his father's legitimacy as the voice of tradition through his grandfather. Charlie's vote for confederation is seen as the legitimate, authentic choice of a traditional man, the symbol of ferryland's connection to Lord Baltimore's colony. However, Johnston leaves Charlie's choice open, forever a mystery, which, we must point

out, is in opposition to his father's attempt to posit a definitive Newfoundland in the republic of Newfoundland.

Wayne has the key to a theological interpretation of such a monumental change: “Something, some thing, a shift, a swing, a fall took place that would have taken place no matter which side won” (239). He continues by refuting his father’s plan of reclamation, “There is no point, in his case, trying to remember, or in mine to *imagine*, how things used to be” (239, emphasis added). Indeed, it is Wayne who narrates his grandfather’s voting ritual as a choice baptized in prayer: “Bless me, Father. In one hand he holds a pencil...” (244). One of Johnston’s goals is to retrieve from his family legacy, some method of understanding how such a violent cultural shift could have been blessed by the hand of God. Johnston accomplishes this goal through story telling, through reconfiguring the imagination, narrating the shift, and thereby restoring the theo-logic. Likewise, Wayne’s move to the mainland leads the way for his father to move later in life. But the most crucial choice Johnston makes is to narrate his Grandfather’s passage into heaven, having died with what Arthur had labelled the unforgivable sin – apostasy of the nation and the land. Johnston rediscovers God’s blessing for he and his family by reaching into his father’s chaos, retrieving order, and promising eternal fixity somewhere on the horizon of life. The last words of the memoir narrate Charlie’s intimate localities, after which the phrase comes: “All are fixed in a moment that for him will never pass” (272). Johnston imagines that the afterlife can be reconfigured as the territory for Arthur’s fervent nationalism and the answer to his desire for fixity.

Before that passing, however, even images of divine blessing like the Virgin Berg,

Newfoundland independence, and Charlie's anvil, must be transformed by further developments that emerge through time. Unless an imaginary shifts, moves, and gives way to the dynamo of forces constituting it, it will die, but if those who maintain relinquish their grip on particular moments and let those constellations of meaning pass, those that come after, like Wayne will be able to explore the possibilities for future authenticity.

**Enchantment in a Secular Age: The Ineluctable Modality of the Metaphysical in
Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails***

*Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.*²³³

*Because...the medieval Church thought in terms of the 'intermingling of time
and eternity, the Kingdom could exist both in history and in the hereafter'.
There is then an analogical tension and an 'overlap' between the times, but
not an 'antithesis of the world of time' to that of eternity, such as is found in
Luther's writings.*²³⁴

If we are to engage Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails*, we must understand the context in which it was written; by this context, I do not only mean Newfoundland, which undoubtedly shapes this novel, but the context of Western secularity – secular I. To expand on this secularity we must understand how our imaginary is biased towards explanations of culture, society, religion, biology, physics that axiomatically occlude Christian transcendence. This is effected by what Charles Taylor calls “the immanent frame” (SA 539-44).²³⁵ We are now at a point in my overall argument where we can

²³³ T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (London: Faber, 1970), 1. 1-10.

²³⁴ Francesca Murphy, *God is not a Story: Realism Revisited* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2007), 299.

²³⁵ We should acknowledge the debt that Taylor's argument owes to the tradition of critique among Thomists of various stripes who decry univocal readings of being and advocate for analogical understandings of the relationship between being and Being. Taylor gives little credit to this tradition, but whenever he mentions the immanent frame it shares a sensibility with William F. Lynch's description of the univocal mind: “The basic drive behind the univocal mind is the tendency to reduce everything, every difference and particularity in images, to the unity of sameness which destroys or

review the underpinnings of the post-secular re-engagement with religion, which, I claim, is fostering a new form of secularity – secular II. This form of secularity proposes a retrieval of the natural-supernatural continuum, while preserving a non-coercive and pluralistic public. This retrieval is evidenced in the texts I have interpreted thus far. In our reading of Richards' *Bay of Love and Sorrows* we saw how linguistic expression, morality, and mystery, inter-penetrate the narrative throughout, and I argued that these are brought to fulfilment in Madonna's praise of the Eucharist. In MacDonald's *Fall On Your Knees* readers are engaged in a narrative critique of enlightenment and anti-teleological conceptions of emancipation that culminates in a renewed emphasis on a transcendent locus of salvation. In Coady's character Bridget Murphy, we find a description of the melancholy that emerges from the lack of an experience of the analogy of being. Coady then attempts to contain the emergent nihilistic vision through the literary form of dark comedy. In contrast, Johnston investigates the theological underpinnings of his father's lament for a nation and finally bi-passes Arthur's melancholy by describing an authentic Catholic agent (Charlie) who votes for confederation. An analysis of *Gaff Topsails* is useful at this juncture because Kavanagh is highly conscious of his situation in the immanent frame and aims to have his post-secular Catholic vision disclose itself to the

eliminates the variety and detail of existence"; Lynch, *Christ and Apollo* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 113. See also Milbank's critique of ontological violence as a conjunction of nihilism and univocity in *Theology and Social Theory* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2006), 304-9. Critics often contrast the views of Taylor and Milbank as opposing views of Christianity and secularity; see Alexandra Klaushofer's "Faith Beyond Nihilism: The Retrieval of Theism in Milbank and Taylor" *The Heythrop Journal* 40.2 (1999): 135-149. Taylor also attempts to distance himself from Milbank in the epilogue to *A Secular Age*, identifying the program of "Radical Orthodoxy" as the "intellectual deviance" (ID) metanarrative of Western modernity (774). I think, however, that the shift in Taylor's vocabulary between 1988 and 2007 owes much to Milbank, and judging from the plethora of dust jacket comments by Taylor on the back of Milbank's books, he has followed the Intellectual Deviance metanarrative very closely. Far from erasing their differences through a univocal understanding of the two, I am simply arguing for a strong parallel between their arguments.

larger imaginary in such a way that it will expose the thinness of a purely immanent imaginary.

I have described the purely immanent imaginary – the “immanent frame” – as the result of the success of Protestant, and in particular, Calvinist conceptions of secularity (secular I). The Calvinist separation of the religious and the secular is inverted such that religion and teleological structures in general are interpreted as corruptions of a pure secular realm. The form of subjectivity that arises in this situation, the “buffered self” (SA 539), theorizes all cultures and religions as human constructions that have no participation in the divine. Reason and time are severed from infinite sources and are consequently thought to be constructs that originate internally as subjective (and sometimes collective) devices used to navigate the particulars of a disenchanted materialism. Beauty becomes difficult to appreciate, as it is thought of as a function of ideology and not an event which discloses the real. As a consequence, when beauty emerges from another being, concern arises that the appreciation of this beauty is always complicit with the violence of the gaze and is not an appreciation of creation's analogical reflection of transcendental glory.²³⁶

Kavanagh challenges the ontological presuppositions that betray the distancing of nature and grace at work in Secular I. *Gaff Topsails* represents a Catholic theological aesthetic in which the nature-grace continuum is the metaphysical structure of a pre-confederation Newfoundland outpost imaginary. His recreation of this theological aesthetic is not an attempt to put secularity back in a Christendom shaped box, but rather

²³⁶ Elaine Scarry, in her book *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), is particularly adept at defusing arguments which interpret the appreciative gaze as a violation of the beautiful object. See particularly pages 57-124.

a restatement of Catholic themes to a readership that has enculturated to Secular I. This retrieval of sources is designed to open secular I to the nature-grace continuum, without putting secularity under erasure; Kavanagh, thus, ushers in Secular II, in which the dichotomies of public and private, secular and religious, are de-differentiated.

This is to say that *Gaff Topsails* is a novel written for a readership that is awash in the homogeneous time of our secular age, and it is designed to pierce finite economies so that they open out into the infinite. The result is a fictional world that is pervaded by an incarnate God that is neither limited to creation, nor remote from it, but rather closer to the core and the surface of all elements in creation than creation is to itself. This theological aesthetic is often quickly overlooked by literary critics, and I argue that to correct this oversight we must allow a text like *Gaff Topsails* to speak in its full post-secularity. *Gaff Topsails* is “aware” of its situation in the immanent frame and the secularity that would dominate and restrain its transcendent desire; thus, to read it without reference to the text’s “transgressions” of immanence is to refuse to engage the novel.

I demonstrate that Kavanagh transgresses the immanent frame through an interpretation of the novel that attends to the sanctifying gaze of the crucifix, the ringing of the church bell which unifies the community, the appearance of natural and supernatural beauty, the ascent to God, the relationship between human self-making, fiction and truth, and the opening of mundane time to the infinite economy of sacred time. We must keep in mind that Kavanagh, while transgressing the immanent frame, is situated in it; thus, his religious imaginary is secular, and his secular “voice” as an author

is religious.²³⁷

Gaff Topsails: Summary and Cast of Characters

Gaff Topsails describes the feast day of St. John the Baptist in a Catholic outpost near Little Fogo Island, on the North East tip of Newfoundland. It begins in the morning darkness of June 24th, 1947 (6),²³⁸ a mere twenty-one months before Newfoundland would join confederation, and it ends that night with a celebratory bonfire. Confederation had achieved popular support through the work of Protestants in St. John's, the odd Catholic (as Johnston has conjectured) and the overwhelming political force that was Joey Smallwood. The feast day of St. John the Baptist was not only a religious holiday, but also Discovery Day, Newfoundland's provincial holiday. The symmetry between state and church is not to be overlooked here. The *state* of the situation is overwhelmingly Christian, with a Catholic ethos making up the majority and Methodists (United Church),

²³⁷ Here the title to Derrida's work on Augustine's *Confessions* is useful: *Circumfession*. Composed of "Confession," "Circumcision," and "Circumincessio," which is the Latin translation of perichoresis – or fullness of the presence of each person in the other in the life of the Trinity, "Circumfessions" implies that Derrida is in Augustine and Augustine in Derrida like the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father. Now whether Derrida's erasure of being is in Augustine is another question. For the point I am making with regards to Secular II, it suffices to say that the secular and the religious interpenetrate each other and are not properly dualistic. Saba Mahmood has recently made a similar point in her essay "Is Critique Secular," where she claims that answering with certainty in the affirmative or negative will foreclose questions that arise around the shared ground of religious and secular life-worlds: for example, the bastion of liberal democracy that is the United States is also an extremely religious nation. Most religious "subjects" formed in such a situation will bear marks of internal pluralism from public school systems, childhood religious education, and various other capitalistic desires and leisure loyalties (sports teams, music interests, etc.). Here the religious and secular are continually sublated to increasing complexities. Kavanagh, who worked as a translator of Joyce's "secular" masterpiece *Ulysses* into Mandarin, who studied Religious Studies at Duke and Memorial Universities, and who wrote the overtly Catholic *Gaff Topsails*, is a prime example of such a complex subject. If the subject is plurally constituted, then the relevant questions become more "Schmittian": out of the multiplicity, which one decides on the exception; which one is sovereign?

²³⁸ Page 376 implies that the date is 1948, not 1947, and the back cover says this as well: "The silence reminds Michael of the afternoon, three year ago, ...an old woman rowed out in a dinghy to announce to the men that the war was over, and every sound stopped" (376). Three years after 1945 is 1948.

Anglicans, Pentecostals and the Salvation Army composing the plural Protestant minorities.

Much like James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the story follows several characters through the course of a June day. Michael Barron, a seventeen year old, is accompanied by his friends, Wish Butt and Gus Gallant, on an overnight fishing expedition. His younger brother, Kevin Barron, is a nerdy fifth grade student who has a secret wish to be a priest (GT 297) and who is incredibly conscious of God, faeries, and a lurking darker presence. Next we have Mary Dwyer, Michael's love interest, who, along with Alice and Moira, and at the urging of Mary's mother (Hestia), performs folk rituals to see if she can identify her future husband. The story is also carried by three adult characters. Hestia (265),²³⁹ the matriarch of a busy household, can be seen breast feeding from a chair that she has nailed to her roof (the Pegasus chair, 368), where she looks around the village, watches for her husband at sea, and narrates the community's happenings through an endearing series of monologues. We also follow Father Gersam MacMurrough, a suicidal priest who has just arrived in the parish from a life of missionary work in New Guinea. He replaces Father Fran, an alcoholic who was a "man for the fun" (362), and who seems to be the complete opposite to Father MacMurrough. The sixth character is the mangled village drunk, Johnny the Light, who works the lighthouse at the point, fills children with fear, smells like piss and death, yet also represents heroism for those in the community who can

²³⁹ "Hestia" is the name of the Greek goddess of the hearth, who orders the family, and the civic family that is the polis (her Roman approximation is "Vesta," god of the public hearth). She is the daughter of Cronus and Rhea. Kavanagh's Hestia is also a Penelope figure, who perpetually waits for the return of her drowned husband, who himself, is one of many Odysseus figures. See the interview "Ulysses in the Outports – Sandra Gwyn interviews Patrick Kavanagh" *Books in Canada*, http://www.booksincanada.com/article_view.asp?id=95 (accessed June 12, 2009).

remember the sealing disaster of 1914.

Unlike Joyce's *Ulysses*, *Gaff Topsails* is not a text that deconstructs Catholicism. In marked contrast to Stephen Dedalus, Kevin Barron is a child who will serve the church. The Catholicism of the novel, however, is not that of a naive fifth grader, but a Catholicism of second naiveté. It is the Catholicism of an author who has read Joyce's subversive engagement with Catholicism with sympathy and yet turned to a similar text, Catholic Newfoundland (an "echo of Ireland", *GT* 305), and found a living faith with vibrant, full universals. Whether this "text" exists solely in Kavanagh's imaginative memory, or has a sociological existence "on the ground" is another debate. For the purposes of this investigation, the story and its narrative of faith will be taken seriously; it will not be interpreted as the chaff that must be negated before the "true" kernel can be presented.

The Sanctifying Gaze

"The trees, sister Mary, soon you will see them genuflect." (*GT* 355)

The story begins with Michael Baron floating in the darkness below the morning stars on an open punt. While contemplating the cosmos he is overcome with such an expansive sense of eternity that he feels as though he is falling upward, losing his "foundation" as it were (2), having been launched off into the eternal pilgrimage toward the divinity – what the Greek fathers would call *epektasis*.²⁴⁰ Yet, Michael is not only

²⁴⁰ David Bentley Hart elaborates on the meaning of "epektasis" in *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003): "Theology's analogical speech should be understood as *epektasis*: language, drawn on by the beauty of the Word who is the distance containing all the words of creation, traverses the analogical interval between God and creation (of which God himself is the distance), between creation's proportions and the proportion of peace that belongs to God's infinity; and so there can be no

impressed by the beauty of the infinite, but also the demonic sublime. Kavanagh writes:

Pop said to him one time: If you wants a man to believe in God, get him to spend a night in an open punt, off a good ways, off in the deeps beyond the ledge, way out where anything can happen. But Michael Baron already knows well enough the face of God. And whatever is this thing in the dark, it is not God. It is something other – something menacing. (2)

As any good Catholic tale must, this story includes pagan “powers” (or constructs) of good and evil, which dwell in the forests and the dark depths of the sea. The pagan, as Balthasar tells us, functions as the Old Testament's Doppelgänger, a dual mode of inquiry into God, negotiated through heterodox ritual and doxologically formed rationality.²⁴¹

Where the Hebrew scriptures speak of revelation and covenants with YHWH, the Greeks and Latins fostered a rich natural theology – a stumbling block for many Protestants. By looking on the pagan as part of the historically contingent tale of God's salvific work, Kavanagh appeals to the Catholic lineage of sanctifying “the spoils of Egypt,”²⁴² and founds his sacramental world view in pagan enchantment: ferries, daemons, the “old hag”²⁴³ (15) and the like.

From the beginning of *Gaff Topsails* the natural, the secular, and the mundane (sometimes synonyms) are all overseen and blessed by the Crucifix: “The crucified Christ, on vigil, blesses the iron tabernacle of the Waterloo ... blesses the cracked canvas floor ... the firebox, the poker. ... He blesses the wellingtons ... the sooty kerosene lamp ...

end to the progress of language toward God – so long as it is governed by the measure of charity revealed in Christ – nor any 'comprehensive' portrayal of the interval” (301).

²⁴¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol. IV: The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, trans. Brian McNeil et al. Ed. John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 320, 170-1, 102-6.

²⁴² See Ex. 3:21-2; 12:3, 5-6. This phrase signifies a discourse on the “pagan” goods that Christianity appropriates, such as the Greek discourse on being.

²⁴³ The “old hag” is a condition where a person wakes from sleep but is paralysed, supposedly under the control of a evil spirit, who can victimize the liminal person. Many Newfoundlanders complain of it.

the radio gaunt and brown ... the Doyle's calendar June 1947, the yellow teeth drowned in the yellow mug, ... the biscuit box, the jamjar, the cups ..." (6). These items are the trappings of everyday life, but everyday life is not something thought to be beyond the sacred calling of God. Through the course of the novel these mundane things are thrice blessed; as light moves across the room the crucifix resides at the apex of this microcosm of creation (321-2, 452, similar mundane items are sanctified by the fire 440-1).

Kavanagh writes: "the Christ gazes down on all these things and sanctifies them" (322). Even the propagation of the race is brought under this gaze: "overhead, the bed creaks restlessly, but soon the house falls silent" (453). For Kavanagh, nature is invested with life, and life in nature is an analogical echo of the life of the Trinity. God's gift of capelin, the awaited foretaste of the returning messiah (which goes so great with tea, 363), smells of sperm as it arrives on the landwash (446, 119).²⁴⁴ Hestia, the keeper of the marriage myth, tells us near the beginning of the story that "even a priest needs a woman next to him ... it's the same with them nuns ... a crowd of women is not that same as a husband, now is it. The way they treats them youngsters, you know deep down they want one of their own ... I tell you there's no denying nature. All the religion in the world can't stand in the way of nature" (73). For Kavanagh the sacralization of everyday life is tied to the centrality of the eschatological marriage symbolism of the church (the bride of Christ united with Christ in eternity), which is, in turn, tied to procreation and the need of companionship (the cause of Father MacMurrough's despair 20, 72,). The mythical voice

²⁴⁴ This is an allusion to Hesiod's account of Aphrodite's birth from the severed testicles of Ouranos. It is Cronus who castrates Ouranos. This theme of time severing the eternal plenitude of the sky father from the earth, and scattering this plenitude through the sea resonates with Kavanagh's exploration of "gathered time" throughout *Gaff Topsails*. See Hesiod's *Theogony*, l. 176-206.

of Sheila nGira, which, as Kavanagh tells us, cries out in the sound of the surf, forever pines for Tomas Croft (386).

By the end of the first two chapters of the book, Kavanagh has re-enacted the first creation story and concludes with a Joycean line: “The eight-day grandfather tick-tocks” (6).²⁴⁵ God has blessed the secular and the secular was found to be good, not as the secular, but as the natural already graced and blessed a second time. Kavanagh's description of daybreak is deeply Homeric, “reaching hands streak and mount the night, and push aside the black ... the sea horizon flashes with green, then bubbles up red. The sunshine leaps and flares, and like a shout from God it spills out at last on top of the broad water” (5). The self-conscious wordplay of the story-teller humanizes the landscape that exceeds linguistic grip and tells us what Homer would by saying, “When young Dawn [Eos] with her rose-red fingers shone once more / the true son of Odysseus sprang from bed and dressed.”²⁴⁶ This is a Homer baptised and blessed, speaking in an Irish accent that occasionally waxes nostalgic about the pagan truth that remains. Kavanagh is channelling Homer (nature) through Joyce (secular) and attempting to sanctify them both.

As Michael weathers the ecstasy of the night on the water, he and his shipmates smell a change in the air and witness a great mystical iceberg emerge from the fog. The iceberg is an occasion for Michael to evoke a genealogy of other similar mystical

²⁴⁵ Kavanagh rehearses the creation story again at the beginning of Ch. IV, when he accounts of the creation of Newfoundland. “In the beginning God says: Let there be light.... On the seventh day, God rests” (24). One should also read the sexuality – procreation – of the text as participating in this act of creation on a microcosmic level. Both the creative acts of writing and reading, as well as the act of conception draw the reader back to spiritual and natural modes of impregnating.

²⁴⁶ Robert Fagles, trans, *The Odyssey* (Toronto: Penguin, 1996), Book II, l. 1-2, p. 93.

remnants, such as the white apparition piloted by a bare breasted woman and the “Virgin Berg” of June 1905, appearing in the “precise form of the Virgin, so perfect it must have been carved out by God Himself” (*GT* 9).²⁴⁷ Michael ties the present iceberg to a sacred setting. As he “studies the ice,” the worn pine of the rowboat “becomes the smooth varnished mahogany of the church pew, and before him blazes not the iceberg at all, but eyes blue behind a veil” (10). The “natural” itself has more to it than “pure nature” and is the portal through which the pre-ontological background of religious intuition meets the imaginary mediation of the eternal, which is supernatural. The ancient form that the frozen molecules of water have taken as they melt and recede down the warm Atlantic current (presumably from global warming) becomes a sign that points to an unseen reality (a sacrament) and ultimately the beatific vision. This intimation of immortality resonates with Michael inwardly, through his flesh (8), in a Marian tone – as the height of human potential and also the marriage of humanity to the Trinity through Christ.

Maria, the Bell: the Universal and the Particular

While his brother engages in mystical contemplation at sea, young Kevin Baron sets out on the mundane task of ringing the church bell and getting the day going for the town folk. Kavanagh describes this as ringing the *Angelus*, which calls the parish to prayer three times a day (6am, noon, 6pm) and calls attention to Gabriel's message that

²⁴⁷ This is the same event that Johnston described in *Baltimore's Mansion*. Sandra Gwyn remarks to Kavanagh that his text is set seventeen days before the vote for confederation. We see then, a confluence of subjects in these authors' texts: the Virgin Berg and incarnation; confederation as a rupture in time; a return to the moments before confederation as a way of coping with the secularization and alienation of modernity. One suspects that Johnston had read *Gaff Topsails* and was participating in Kavanagh's enunciation of latent themes in the mythical imaginary, just as one Jazz artist might take up the the last notes of the previous solo (or another recording).

Mary will conceive the Son of God.²⁴⁸ The bell, however, is obstinate, and he must jump up into the air and put all his “weight”²⁴⁹ on the line to unsettle its inertia. This time-piece symbolizes the threshold between the limited economy of humanity and the exceptional, sovereign, and eternal time of the Trinity's gratuitous household: “Pulling on the bell, the boy decides, is like pulling a heavy anchor, not up from the depths of the sea, but down out of the nether regions of heaven – it is like bringing a little bit of heaven to sanctify this sinful earth” (12). The bell has been christened Maria (11). With Maria, Kevin daily “sanctifies” the town by tolling this blessed bell that hearkens back and forward to Christ. The homogeneous time of secular modernity is impregnated with impossible possibilities – or should we say – actuality.²⁵⁰

Hestia Dwyer, the eternal mother, sees this actuality in the sunlight: a classic notion that equates the energy of light and the sun with the good and its emanations.²⁵¹ She tells her young son, “Dr. John Thomas Molluck” (15, one of many nicknames), that this energy²⁵² is directly connected to God and his love: “Look there – not a cloud in the shy, not a breath on the water. A wonderful grand day is bestowed upon us, thank God.

²⁴⁸ See Gwyn's *Books in Canada* interview.

²⁴⁹ We should read this image of Kevin's weight, hanging on a line from the sky, in all its Augustinian richness; weight is the taxing hold of the flesh on the spirit that must be brought into the divine through 'impossible' merit – merit extended to the weighty by the one who was light on his feet – able to walk across water. Augustine wrote: “My weight is my love. Wherever I am, my love is carrying me” (Confessions 13.9.10); and “The specific gravity of a body is, in a manner, its love; whether a body tends downwards by reason of its heaviness or strives upward because of its lightness” (City of God 11.28); these quotations are drawn from Lucy Bennett's thoughts on the theme of weight (*pondus amoris*) in *In the Light of Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006), 114.

²⁵⁰ Aquinas, following Aristotle, conceives of God as pure act, and positions actuality as prior to potential. Aristotle argues that for something to have potential the end must be in sight. But if that end is in sight, it must already be in existence. It follows then that any true potential is preceded by the actuality of that potential in perfection. These perfections are located in the mind of God. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Book VIII; Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1.16.

²⁵¹ See Plato's *Republic*, 507b-509c.

²⁵² “Actuality” as used here is the English translation of “*energeia*” the concept Aristotle contrasted with “*dynamis*” or potential (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book VIII).

Can you feel the sunshine, my love? The sun is for you. Now you see why the Lord made you, don't you? He made you so the sun would have somebody to warm" (16). She interprets the world as an entity that is purposeful and personal.

As Kavanagh introduces the narrative and the daybreak through the tolling of Maria the bell, he exemplifies the Christian ratio of the many to the one, the Trinity, by demonstrating that the town folk experience the real toll of the bell according to their individual differences, but in essential unity. Like Richards, Kavanagh emphasizes communitarian social forms and resists atomistic interpretations of the self. The external world is taken axiomatically as real, an objective reality, that is only perceived subjectively, through the mediation of Christ. The sound of the bell is not invested with Cartesian scepticism. It binds the community together through shared reason, derived from experience: a *sensus communis* (12).²⁵³ The sun rising for each member of the community and also the community as a whole is this same trinitarian ratio expressed through another real symbol, or vestigium.

There is, however, one doubting Thomas: Father MacMurrough. He is caught on the toilet at daybreak as the bell blesses the community (the incarnation of Christ's body), and the priest is not buying it. He even interpolates the kind of theology I'm drawing

²⁵³ In his examination of the "*sensus communis*" in Vico's writing, Hans-Georg Gadamer claims that the "*sensus communis* obviously does not mean only that general faculty in all men but the sense that founds community. According to Vico, what gives the human will its direction is not the abstract universality of reason but the concrete universality represented by the community of a group, a people, a nation, of the whole human race. Hence developing the common sense is of decisive importance for living. ...[T]his common sense for what is true and right...is not a knowledge based on argumentation, but enables one to discover what is evident (verisimile).... This is the art of finding arguments and serves to develop the sense of what is convincing, which works instinctively and ex tempore, and for that very reason cannot be replaced by science"; see *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 19. Gadamer is clearly associating common sense with something palpable in a community of people, something incarnate, a spiritual sense.

from by saying “The church bell rings near and loud. *Vox Dei*, the priest says to himself – and chuckles feebly at the notion” (18). *Vox Dei* is the second clause in the latin phrase “*Vox populi, vox Dei*,” the voice of the people is the voice of God. Yet, when the priest listens to the bell tolling for the people, he “hears nothing but hollowness” (18).

Kavanagh continues, adding a nominalist flair to the priest's sentiment: “he cannot tell if the hollowness inhabits the sound itself, or if his soul has merely painted it so, in the way the face of a stranger, casually encountered, is sometimes infused with one's own emotion, one's particular feeling of the instant” (18). The priest doubts the sacramental reality of matter. He is stricken by the modern malaise, that the universals seem empty, and he suspects that the origin of all valuation is the individual psyche, which projects value on the things it desires. As Kavanagh will tell us through the narrative trajectory, the priest is sick in heart and soul and needs the help of the community, particularly the town drunk, Johny the Light, to experience what Taylor calls “fullness” (SA 5-14). Even though Kavanagh narrates doubt as sickness we should not overlook the dialogic nature that the priest brings to the story. “To be a philosopher at all,” argues William Desmond on dialogism, “is to invite the atheist to take up lodging in one's soul. One wants to understand – understand even what one's understanding does not endorse ...I do not doubt that this guest can dislodge much superstition and obfuscation. I do not also doubt that, alas, much of true reverence can also be unhoused”²⁵⁴ Through the inner-life of Father MacMurrough, Kavanagh describes the dynamic of internal otherness. By scripting this atheistic movement in the psycho-drama that the reader undergoes, the reader either

²⁵⁴ William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), xi.

recognizes an identity with MacMurrough's doubt, or an identity with the faith of, say, Michael Barron (or some place there between). The secular reader is, thus, acknowledged and shown to be redeemable as MacMurrough is redeemed.

Father MacMurrough's doubt represents the atheist option in modernity, which reads the universals as empty in a way that was alien to the ancient world.²⁵⁵ When we talk about universals the discussion often slips into abstractions, but Kavanagh draws us to the location where these universal values are intimately tied to everyday existence – the community. Maria, the bell tolls, and she unites the community, but MacMurrough represents the exception who cannot perceive of the content of the universal faith (Coady's Bridget figure). The reader, however, has naturalized the privatization of secular I and sees MacMurrough not as the exception, but as the rule. As we read MacMurrough's nominalism, which leads to suicidal tendencies, we see him and his representative theo-philosophical position as the conflict to be solved. His perception of the goods – particularly existence – is disordered, and we long for him to be reformed. It is a paradoxical position in which Kavanagh puts the naturalized secular reader, and one that points to the emergence of the nature-grace continuum of secular II.

Leaving this theme of universality to be developed below, we must consider the narrative structure and how it unfolds. One of the distinctions of Catholic theology that

²⁵⁵ It could be argued that Protagoras, a sophist of Athens, held that the universals were empty, and that man was the measure of all things (Plato's *Theaetetus*). However, to argue for the identity of Protagoras's position and that of late scholastic nominalism would erase the differences of their ideological contexts. The specifics of the late scholastic nominalism are related to a Trinitarian God whose voluntas (will) is absolutely unlimited. Protagoras's argument is made in the context of Greek pluralism. Nominalism after Christendom led to devastating political turmoil; see Diarmaid MacCulloch's *The Reformation*, (Toronto: Viking, 2003). Considering the universals as empty has been divorced from the church context to such a degree that it has become normative for secular modernity (Secular I), especially those who have embraced the hermeneutics of suspicion.

seems alien to those of us shaped by liberal democracies is the refusal of individual salvation that is central to free church Protestantism. Against individual salvation, there is a central Catholic emphasis that it is the church - the body of Christ - as a whole that is saved,²⁵⁶ and that individuals reside in that body as a sailor might a ship. In recent years critiques of the liberal subject in political theory, post-structuralism, and hermeneutics²⁵⁷ have emphasized the inter-subjective nature of individuals, whether this be manifest in the celebrated death of the author, the Foucaultian discursively constituted subject, the “dialogic” identities of contemporary Hegelianism, or the more pragmatic formations of communitarianism. Regardless, the thrust of these critiques have unearthed a symmetry between critiques of liberal individualism and Catholic thought on soteriology, which prioritizes the unity and perfection of humanity in Christ, and sees individual humans in the Church as personal hypostases that obtain only because of Christ's salvific work and being.²⁵⁸ Kavanagh's narrative structure should be read in light of this theological

²⁵⁶ The church fathers often used the phrase “outside of the Church there is no salvation.” The Catholic teaching on this phrase can be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part 1, Section 2, Chapter 3, Article 9, Paragraph 3, §§846-8.

²⁵⁷ See for instance Charles Taylor's *Multiculturalism and The Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) and his insistence on dialogic identity, which is derived from Taylor's readings in German dialectical idealism. See also Taylor's account of the dialogic “language animal” (72) in “Hegel's Ambiguous Legacy for Modern Liberalism” in *Hegel and Legal Theory*, ed. Drucilla Cornell et al, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 64-77; For a brief overview of post-structural critiques of the autonomous subject see Foucault's “What Is an Author” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 101-120, Roland Barthes “The Death of the Author” *Aspen* (5&6), and also Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David Allison (Northwestern University Press, 1973) in which the issue of deconstructing “to be” is always already caught up in an anxiety about the power of words as they silence the writer or speaker. Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer, et al, (New York: Continuum, 2006), 267-304, and Heidegger's *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: SUNY, 1996), 308-334, are representative of the critique on a disembedded subject from the hermeneutic tradition.

²⁵⁸ See for instance John Zizioulas, “Eucharist and Catholicity” in *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 143-69. For a variety of this communitarian argument that delineates why the Church community is problematic for the liberal state see William T. Cavanaugh's *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

preference for community.²⁵⁹ The community, however, does not erase the individual, the *vox populi* is instead expressed through each individual's experiences. Each character in *Gaff Topsails* is a window through which the community can be seen.²⁶⁰ Even mute Michael Barron opens out to the community, while Father MacMurrough's inward fixation edges closer to the downward spiral of solipsism (this is contrary to his teachings, 229-30). Notably, only Hestia is locked in first person narration, and even her interlocutor is eclipsed by her voice, as she weaves a tale of the village, her children (analogies of Penelope's suitors), and her husband at sea (an Odysseus/Christ type, thus firming up the Hestia- Penelope-Bride of Christ typology). Every other character is approached through third person narration that differs per individual: sometimes widening the perspective to include an omniscient view (46, for example).

Certain characters contribute to the community from an excluded space. They are exceptions to the community which nonetheless define the community through their separateness.²⁶¹ For example, Father MacMurrough's first name is Gersam (80), which

²⁵⁹ Kavanagh has stated that along with Joyce's *Ulysses*, Dylan Thomas's *Under Milkwood* influenced his narrative structure; "An Interview with Patrick Kavanagh," *Penguin Website*. http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/gaff_topsails.html (accessed May 28, 2008). The similarities between the community of Gaff Topsails, and Thomas' community are striking. Both stories are set in fishing villages, whose narratives are told through polyphony, emphasizing the communitarian over the punctual self.

²⁶⁰ After a conversation with Scott Kindred-Barnes it became apparent to me that Newfoundland has a homegrown artifact that might serve as a symbol for Kavanagh's narrative structure in *Gaff Topsails*: the tig. Found during excavation of Lord Baltimore's settlement in Ferryland, the tig is a mug with three handles that are set equidistantly. The three handles allowed for the mug to be the property of a group, rather than an individual, as it was passed around from one drinker to another. The tig is ridiculous if used by one person, simply an anachronistic oddity, but situated in a context where the "narrative" is shared, the tig is an axis around which the community revolves – or more aptly, the tig spins through the desiring hands of the community. It is a common love that unites the commonwealth.

²⁶¹ The narrative also includes exceptions to the general style and form. Ch. II, is a description of the dawning of the sun, and the Crucifix that sanctifies the household; Ch. IV is a Newfoundland creation narrative, and Ch. V follows it as a consecration of the natural form of the land through harsh weather; Ch. VI ends with a flashback to the Ireland of Father MacMurrough's youth and tells of his lost love (86-94), a second flashback occurs in Ch. VIII with the youthful MacMurrough at the Cahirciveen

means “an alien there,”²⁶² a stranger or an exile in ancient Hebrew (*The Harper Collins Study Bible* Ex. 2:22, note). Adrian Fowler argues that the *unheimlich* plays an important role in *Gaff Topsails* as a conception of the unassimilable.²⁶³ We might add that the *unheimlich* functions as a symbol of the dark sublime (as opposed to the divine sublime), that is foreign, deathly, unknown, and threatens to bring about chaos. MacMurrough, as an Irish priest suffering culture shock in an “echo of Ireland,” is experienced as *unheimlich* and experiences the *unheimlich* in this Newfoundland outpost. This contributes, as well, to his suicidal desire. Other notable community others include Martha the witch and Johnny the Light, both of whom excite the imaginations of children with terrible apparitions.

Tomas Croft

Kavanagh's Catholic narrative is latent with both Christian and pagan enchantment. This becomes apparent through the myth of Tomas Croft, the son of an Irish monk who died eating only the Eucharist. Croft, who has dabbled in cannibalism to survive famine, finds his way on to a fated ship from Bristol, the *Trinitie*. There he is mocked for his piety and his Gaelic tongue and is held in the ship's hold as they cross the

monastery (170-4), followed by several more flashbacks in Ch. IX (180 – lost love, 1,3 - monastery); and Chapter VII, “The Kingdom of God,” tells the story of Newfoundland's discoveries and the Tomas Croft narrative (97-149). Tomas Croft is the ultimate outsider of the narrative, and serves as the archetype of the masterless man (140), the first man (116-21), the pirate, the saint (146-7, 449 Johny echoes this), the evil one himself (140-1).

²⁶² Gershom is the name of Moses' first son (Ex. 2:22). See *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, NRSV. ed. Harold W. Attridge, (New York: Harper, 2006), Ex. 2:22, note. The theology that feeds Father MacMurrough's doubt, nominalism, was taken up and advanced by Jean Gerson (1363-1429), whose family name is etymologically related to Gersam.

²⁶³ Adrian Fowler, “Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails* and the Myth of the Old Outport.” *Essays on Canadian Writing* 82 (Spring 2004), par. 28.

Atlantic in search of fish. The Trinitie sails toward Newfoundland, encountering mermaids, sirens, an infinite bank of fog and the eternal voice of lamenting women. To keep the ship from the grip of hell they call on St. Elmo, St. Peter Gonzalez, and pray *Christe eleison*. The year is 1482 (101) and they have sailed to the edge of Christendom, filled, at times, with decrepitude, greed, fear and trembling. The Trinitie passes through the palimpsest of *The Odyssey*, *The Aenid*, the Latin mass, and Gaelic piety, yet, it blazes a new trail: the permanent settlement of the West. The Trinitie's voyage marks the third passage to Newfoundland. It follows the Gaelic monks who sailed five centuries after "the torture and execution of the Nazarene [John the Baptist]" (97) and a team of Vikings, who hear of the monk's voyage while sacking Irish monasteries (99). The monks were searching for an Avalon, a blessed island:

A green flash at sunset lured the monks to abandon their Kerry hermitage and venture Westward on the sea. They have come in quest of an enchanted island, a land of purity and grace where sins of the flesh have never been committed. The chronicles call this place the Isle of the Undying, the Promised Land of the Saints. For seven years in an open coracle the holy men have suffered the storm winds and waves.

The monks have navigated by faith. Their crossing has been filled with the wonder of God. (97-98, 114)

These monks are not so excited about what they find in Newfoundland, realizing very quickly that it is not a promised land, but "the Land God Gave to Cain" (98). Still, a blessing negated retains some of the enchanted residue.

Interspersed with the discovery narratives are vignettes that recite key events in global history: "... Chaucer writes *The Canterbury Tales*. English archers rout French knights at Agincourt. Berbers take Timbuktu. Lisbon markets sell African slaves. Denis the Carthusian defines beauty as light [a key detail for Kavanagh's theological aesthetic].

Turks take Constantinople ..." (101). Tomas Croft emerges out of this historical metanarrative like a new-found man, and this is no coincidence:

[*Gaff Topsails* needed] some kind of historical underpinning Rather than draw on the Bible or ancient Greek or Roman texts, I invented the legend of Tomas Croft. ... I wanted to poke gentle fun at the orthodoxies of history we were taught in high school: that everything in Newfoundland was riot and chaos until the Church arrived and civilized the place. Incidentally, the names are drawn from historical figures. Tomas Croft was an Englishman living in Bristol who, around 1480, dispatched a fishing fleet that returned reporting land in the West. Sheila nGira was an Irish "princess" and one of the first Europeans to settle in Newfoundland.²⁶⁴

Critics who are eager to explore the political unconscious of this novel from a post-colonial position must take into account the extent that Kavanagh is problematizing at the same time the "pure" theological metanarrative, the progressivist colonial metanarrative, as well as the ideology of the secularist reader who sees "through" these constructs. Jennifer Delisle's reading of the *Gaff Topsails* tends to flatten the post-secularity of the novel, while implicating the Tomas Croft narrative in what Paul Gilroy calls "postimperial melancholia."²⁶⁵ For Gilroy, this melancholia results from the unresolved and "discomforting ambiguities of the empire's painful and shameful but apparently nonetheless exhilarating history."²⁶⁶ Delisle argues that the Tomas Croft narrative is an origin story that "reconfigures the colonial moment as a myth of indigenous birth" while also distancing "Newfoundlanders both from colonial exploiters and from the Canadian identity that looms beyond this moment on the eve of Confederation."²⁶⁷ Accordingly,

²⁶⁴ "An Interview with Patrick Kavanagh," *Penguin Website*.

²⁶⁵ See Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia, 2005), 121. Gilroy targets Britain's inability to create a discourse on ethnic and cultural difference that does not involve a problematic and insufficiently reconciled allegiance back to a "pure" colonial identity: "Wherever nationalism is politically engaged, all the violence perversity of race thinking will not be far away" (111).

²⁶⁶ Gilroy, 100.

²⁶⁷ Jennifer Bowering Delisle. "Nation, Indigenization, the Beothuk: A Newfoundland Myth of Origin in

Croft functions to satisfy a lack of historical claim to the territory of Newfoundland by Europeans. But this is a partial explanation, as Kavanagh's necessity for a beginning has metaphysical underpinnings that are not exhausted by the explanation of postimperial melancholia.

The truth lies in the "landwash" (the favoured metaphor for liminal space in *Gaff Topsails*) between Kavanagh and Delisle. Ethnically, Tomas Croft differentiates from the colonial exploiters because he is Irish and they are British; he Catholic, they Anglican.²⁶⁸ As an Irish settler he is colonized and colonizer, especially when old world tensions arrive in Newfoundland. Yet, on the mythical level, he is also a figure of Adam, the first man who is made present in all men, and Cain, the second man who kills the third man. Croft, who "looks like a Celtic river god" (126) after many years alone, encounters a "heathen" (126), a Beothuk, who reaches for his visibly different "flaming red hair" (127), alarming Croft in the process: "without thinking he wheels his blackthorn swiftly and clubs the man until his brains spill out of his skull and onto the snow" (127). Croft mourns the man, gives him a Christian burial and "begins to feel lonely. No longer is he one with his new world. Somehow, his is broken and incomplete" (127).²⁶⁹ Here the metaphysical

Patrick Kavanagh's *Gaff Topsails*." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 31.2 (Summer 2006), 24.

²⁶⁸ The dates for Anglican settlers are a bit off here. The English Reformation is not underway until 1533, and Tomas Croft arrives in Newfoundland in 1482. This means he survives on his own in the wilderness for 51 years before Anglican settlers arrive, making him close to 70 when he meets Sheila nGira.

²⁶⁹ Delisle writes: "To dismiss the Beothuk in this way, even as they are driven from their coastal territory to starve in the interior, is an attempt to justify their absence from the narrative. But a reconfiguration of history into myth can simply repeat the colonial relationship of conquest and domination. To render the Beothuk invisible is also to render their violent extermination invisible. It is no accident that the chapters that describe the creation of the island and the visits of the monks and the Vikings make no mention of any indigenous people, but in fact emphasize the emptiness and "desolation" (91) of the place. Terra Nova becomes Terra Nullius. As Lawson writes, "empty land can be settled, but occupied land can only be invaded. So the land must be emptied so that it can be filled, in turn, with both discourse and cattle" (25). The reign of the indigenized Irish settler, it seems, is Kavanagh's "Kingdom of God," his idealized teleological development of the island of Newfoundland, a Newfoundland that

theme of original sin is conflated with the colonial transgression: Croft has fallen from a state of grace and is in danger of being damned. Colonial aggression is equated with the fall, fracturing the peace that could have been. Thus, far from distancing Newfoundlanders from colonialism, it makes them complicit with it by locating this action in the quasi-eternal myth of Croft.

Under the grip of a rediscovered original sin, Croft's humanity continues to erode. He raids British camps, steals women, and fosters a brood of masterless men. When an English commander refuses to condone his piracy "he slices open the man's back, pulls out his lungs, spreads them like wings, and kicks him into the sea. Still breathing, the Englishman bobs away like a bloated fish into the stream" (140).

Kavanagh has a special dispensation for Croft; he delivers a Priest to the pirate colony, who instantly converts this lapsed Catholic and his family through the sound of Latin, which takes Croft back to his youth in the monastery (141): "Soon everyday life in the cove is timed to the rhythms of prayer" (144). It would seem that this missionary Priest resurrected Eden, yet it is the Priest himself who spoils the newfound state of grace, coercing Croft into secrets of buried treasure. Croft misleads the Priest, jumps in a punt, like Johnny the Light, and sails into the horizon, never to be heard of again (146). Except, that is, in the resonance with his typological referents throughout *Gaff Topsails*.

persists as an "imagined community" despite the threats brought on by Confederation. But by privileging sacred destiny and mythical origin over the reality of colonial conquest, Kavanagh commits one final act of violence against the Beothuk people" (40). What are we doing as critics when we adopt such an interpretive stance? I would suggest that we are deluding ourselves by thinking that violence can be eradicated through human truth telling. But isn't this metanarrative naively optimistic, reliant on a progressivist political achievement that will one day stop such violence? There is nothing final about Kavanagh's story. His will not be the "last" violence; and further, to recount historical violence is not necessarily to do violence.

The satiric theme that runs through Kavanagh's analysis of Croft's life demonstrates that he is aware of the irony of his origin story, yet equally attentive to the necessity for an account of origins for his metaphysical project. In fitting *Gaff Topsails* too easily into a well-trod critique of colonialism we miss Kavanagh's more prominent and developed discourse on spirituality.²⁷⁰ Croft's story is as much an admission of sin as it is a cry for grace, and for the reader, it signals the universal human need for a mature theological aesthetic.

“The Sublime Moment” (397)

Kavanagh develops his theological aesthetic through the classical mytheme of ascent, a type of mystical pilgrimage that is adapted to the local topography by appropriating the image of the iceberg. Gregory of Nyssa interpreted Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai as an allegory of the soul's ascent into the unknowing of God. Likewise, John of the Cross writes about the ascent of Mount Carmel into the dark night of the soul. In both cases positive experiences are renounced as so that experience itself can “become transparent in the unique, obscure light of God.”²⁷¹ Kavanagh draws heavily on this theme of the perilous spiritual pilgrimage through the apophatic unknowing into the sublime. Michael Barron's ascent up the iceberg, however, emphasizes both the

²⁷⁰ In their readings of *Gaff Topsails*, both Jennifer Bowering Delisle and Adrian Fowler tend toward the quest for the 'kernel' rather than dealing with the 'surface' of the text (my emphasis), which requires an adequate theological aesthetic. The blame should not fall solely to them. Their arguments are victim to the force of a certain theory of ideology, graced by the conflation of Marxism and Freudianism, which is prominent throughout the study of literature. Accordingly, the surface is a thin veneer which is always hiding contradictions. But isn't it true that what one finds under the coded images of *Gaff Topsails* – colonial guilt and sexuality – is very prominently addressed on the surface?

²⁷¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol. III: Studies in Theological Lay Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth et al, ed. John Riches, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 168.

contingency of religious forms and also their inherent value as contingent forms. The iceberg is described in terms of high ecclesial art, having murals (219), the architecture of a cathedral (227), and “charming columnar temples” (227). As Michael travels through these shifting forms he is “surprised at the ease of his ascent” (227), and even “imagines an invisible hand, warm and inviting, drawing him ever higher” (227). While Michael climbs a physical object, Kavanagh manoeuvres through this long tradition of spiritual allegory, and with the likes of Plato (*The Symposium*) and Dante (*Purgatorio*), Kavanagh emphasizes moving from the lowly and common discourse of Wish and Gus, who are sacrificing a seal at the base of the iceberg (227), up onto the high vaults of universality:

From this apex he can take in at once the whole of the ice. The part visible above the skin of the sea is immense enough, but the boy's eye penetrates the water and deciphers the hidden mass too, the deep draft of the mountain, the bulk that surges below the surface in deadly ridges and trenches, all in cathedral shades of blue. This is what God sees: this is the topography of love. (232)

Kavanagh situates himself in the secular age, after the “spiritual super-nova” of Christendom (SA 300) and the “galloping pluralism” of modernity. His understanding of the ascent to God is, thus, a traverse across and up contingent surfaces, temporal constructs. Moreover, Michael's mysticism is one that appreciates the “skin” (surface) while also “penetrating” the “hidden mass” (depths). While the ice melts in Michael's mouth like “the Eucharist” (228), (appealing to the universality that Catholics confess is present in the ritual), it seems to Michael that the accidents of this sublime event are deeply important: “clearly the ice was put here just for his benefit. He was meant to arrive here” (232). Michael's particularity and the uniqueness of revelation as he sees it is not to be occluded by a discourse of universalism, yet his particular route up a particular

iceberg while it shifts under the strain of the summer sun, leads to a universal perspective: what God sees. While atop the berg, as Michael looks around the village, across the sea and down the coast, a vertigo overtakes him. He sees his heart's desire walking along the beach, Mary, who he thinks waves to him: "The hand sweeps down – was that a wave? If it was, then nothing on this earth can be certain. All the truths Michael Barron believes in are groundless, are mirages" (244). This truth of change in worldly circumstances, be it teenage love or St. Paul's Christophany, is the innermost truth of human nature: that radical change can occur. Michael's sublime ascent is made in a moment on a blessed day, it is not attached to the very geography of the world, as is Dante's mount purgatory. The iceberg comes crashing down. Michael ascended in God's presence, but his ascent was made in sheer particularity, and he guards his individual experience from his friends (243). Michael is not captivated by a necessarily empty universal that is filled by a hegemonic particular, nor is he a "militant of the truth" of a past event; he experiences truth in its particularity and that particular statement is not to be infinitely relativized by the universal, but lifted up to it with its particularity intact.

Kavanagh's portrayal of Michael's access to the universal through the particular, contingent topography shares commonalities, while registering important distinctions, with Alain Badiou's influential reading of Paul's universality. Badiou disparages communitarians on the one hand and advocates of pure difference on the other, arguing that the logic of each occludes universal truth by exaggerating particularity: "only a homosexual can 'understand' what a homosexual is, only an Arab can understand what an

Arab is... such minoritarian pronouncements are genuinely *barbaric*.”²⁷² He claims that the event of truth in its universality engenders a “indifference that tolerates differences.”²⁷³ The important point for Badiou is that the universal truth trumps particularity. Kavanagh provides a less univocal reading of universality by appealing to the analogy of being, which, as John Milbank has recently argued, celebrates paradox.²⁷⁴ Because the analogy of being holds that the universal became (and becomes) particular without relinquishing either pole, it leads the human mind into paradox. To speak of the universal, one must use a particular, but the particular falls short of totality by definition, yet it does so without despairing of some access to universality. By holding the particular and universal in tension, the analogical/paradoxical aesthetic that Kavanagh practices allows for much more nuance than does Badiou's Platonism, which continually severs Pauline paradoxes – faith/works; flesh/spirit; death/life; righteous/sinner – for one sided readings – ie; faith instead of works, etc. This paradoxical tension of the analogy of being, pervades Kavanagh's theological aesthetic in *Gaff Topsails*.

²⁷² See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of the Universalism*. trans, Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 12.

²⁷³ Badiou, 99.

²⁷⁴ See John Milbank and Slavoj Žižek, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 160-177. Milbank sums up his critique of Žižek's dialectics by advocating for paradox that emerges from thinking analogically: “The argument, therefore, against Žižek and following [William] Desmond, is that not the dialectical but the metaxological [which entails the analogical and the paradoxical] is the framing transcendental reality for any given scenario apparent to human beings. If the univocal is dominant, then the equivocal is ultimately denied. The same applies in reverse if the equivocal is dominant. But if the dialectical is dominant, then (as with ultimate equivocation) the univocal and the equivocal move toward mutually assured destruction. Only a metaxological framing allows all three other logical aspects to remain and not to be overruled. There is the same and the different, and a continuously creative (or contingently disruptive) tension between the two, because what holds sway without holding sway (kenotically, as it were) at the ultimate level is the analogical, which is itself nothing other than the interplay between the one and the many, and the interplay between their peaceful coexistence and their creative conflict.” (166) .

The Topography of Love (232)

At the very same moment that Michael makes his ascent, Father MacMurrough lectures his brother's fifth grade class on the two poles of God's love, the inner and the outer (community). After quizzing the class about the uniqueness of St. John the Baptist's feast day – that it is on his birthday, not his day of martyrdom – MacMurrough tells them: “It was Saint John who taught the most important lesson we need to know: that the light of our souls is God Himself...the light is Almighty God – Christ Himself – in all His wisdom and majesty and goodness” (229). He then tells the class that “the light of our souls is also ... something else” (230). While he is unveiling the heart of Catholic social teaching through the mouth of a heart-sick Priest (dramatic irony), Kavanagh is also speaking on a metafictional level about his narrative technique, which tells the story through a community:

“The light that I speak of is also ... people. It is our fellow human beings. It is our brothers and sisters. That means not just our family, not just our blood brothers and sisters, but our friends too. And our classmates. It means even, my dear children, even our most bitter enemies.

“It is people who brighten the darkness of the soul. It is human contact. It is the link with others, the bond with another soul, the touch of someone outside ourselves. (230)

Theology, in this setting, is also Kavanagh's narrative theory, his community narration, yet it is theory with content – the dogmatics of Catholicism - not the empty form as dictated by the dichotomies of Lacanism. The priest is also speaking about himself and adding another layer to the busily worked theory of the sublime:

“The highest form of contact, my children, is love ... love can be the holiest, the most glorious experience you will know in the span of your life. Love can be the most majestic and splendid, the most hallowed and sacred of God's blessed sacraments.

“But love can be overwhelming – even frightening. Many who come face to face with it will run from it. They will fly in panic, as though from some terrible monster. Many will retreat. Many will vow upon their souls never to approach this monster again. That, my children is what you must have the courage to avoid.

“If the light of love should visit you, you must not fly in shyness and fear. No matter how frightening is your love, whatever you do, you must embrace it. It is the most exalted of God's spiritual joys. It is nothing less than the way, the road to your soul's salvation, and you must reach out and grip it firmly – and never never let it go.” (232)

Here again Kavanagh returns to his critique of celibacy, placing regret for Father

MacMurrough's lost love in his speech to the emerging generation. Reflecting on his love, the priest

consoled himself by insisting he had lost nothing, because love and loneliness are only different degrees of the same want – love is the aching for a particular other, loneliness the aching for a generalized other. He recognized that the solitude of the collar offers a certain beauty, a purity and clarity that are impossible to achieve in the complicated world. Most of all he foresaw the occasion for continuing atonement – everyday penance for the sin that he knew his entire life would surely become. (184)

The pious theological rationalization that Father MacMurrough repeats above seems like brittle logic in the face of his fervent message to the youth to embrace love, rather than pass it up, as he fears he did. His lack of love is present throughout the narrative, to all who see him, especially Hestia, who reads his pain clearly and hopes to lift his strange burden with tea. Father MacMurrough is a man who has left the love of his youth to travel across seas and wage wars of the spirit. Like Odysseus (and Dante), returning home to one's loves is a difficult art to accomplish, especially, when one's life is not one's own, as Father MacMurrough is wed to the most sublime of Catholicism's bewitching spirits - Christ.

Two figures of Odysseus

Perhaps the grandest gift Homer bestows Kavanagh is the narrative of the odyssey at sea, in which Odysseus encounters beautiful and sublime things and yet always erotically pines for Penelope and his home in Ithaca. This play with the Homeric referent continually draws the intertextually aware reader to the aesthetic of graced nature, which sees Homer's "pagan" wisdom as already impregnated with the "hidden mass" of Christ's veiled revelation.²⁷⁵ In Michael Barron, Kavanagh creates an analogy of this story, which is temporally compacted like Joyce's *Ulysses* to the limits of one day. Michael's stay at sea in the punt with Wish and Gus, his ascent of the iceberg, the rapture and the revelation of his true love, Mary, the "weaver" of pagan rites, clearly alludes to the erotic tension that draws Odysseus home through the workings of supernatural beings: Athena and Zeus. Yet, there is a second frequency where resonance can be heard between the two narratives.²⁷⁶ When Odysseus returns to Ithaca, Athena transforms him into the shape of a vagrant, so that he might observe the suitors without being noticed and reveal his true glory at the ripest point in time. This role is mimicked by Johnny the Light, who Kavanagh describes as repulsive, smelling of urine, a drunk, and a leper – on account of his frost bit fingers. On first read, Johnny fills the novel with suspense and gives the slow progression of the day a slight propulsion. When we read about young Kevin's

²⁷⁵ It is difficult for the reader on this side of Christendom, not to see an analogy of Christ's eschatology and divine judgement in Odysseus's return to Ithaca and his slaughter of the parasitic suitors. This is not to read Christ's second coming as necessarily violent event, but rather a righting of all wrongs and a final reordering of creation, which is the result of Odysseus return (at least as Homer tells it).

²⁷⁶ There is no need to limit the traces of Odysseus to two. Father MacMurrough should also be interpreted in light of Odysseus, especially in his experience of being forlorn, displaced, and abandoned. MacMurrough also visits the Graveyard in Ch. IX which is an analogy of the katabasis, or a "descent" into the underworld that was taken by Odysseus, Aeneas, and Dante. Kevin Barron's trip through the enchanted woods also resonates with the underworld mytheme.

molestation at school, we are led to think that this must be the workings of Johnny; likewise, when Johnny enters the church, we read his presence as a sign of desecration, especially when he drinks the communion wine. He functions at this point as a sign of evil, a sign that the narrative, in its fullness, inverts, problematizing human judgement in the process.

As we continue to read about Johnny we hear that he is a hero, but his heroic actions are mysterious and hidden. We are also told that he is pagan, in a derogatory tone, yet his pagan quality, like Odysseus's cunning on the battle fields of Troy, is also his most Christian quality. This is because Johnny sacrificed himself in the great sealing disaster of 1914. When he and his crew were separated from their ship he forced them to walk until they were rescued. He kept them moving to save them from freezing to death. In this way Johnny, who is a sign of death, is doggedly determined to live, a legacy that was true of his past heroics. This spirit is not limited to the past, but can be seen in the grotesque Johnny that is haunted by the fractured memories of the event (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). It is Johnny the Light who saves the priest from his morbid obsession with the darkness of the sea, suicide. When the priest confesses his doubt that "The whole world is empty" (351), the nuns tell us that Johnny faced the same emptiness during the sealing disaster (358), yet, he clung to his love of life such that he was "the salvation of others" (359). Therefore, it is fitting that Johnny, the "fool for Christ" (1 Cor. 3:18-19), runs the light house.

We cannot ignore the paradoxical aesthetics of these two figures of Odysseus. Where the youthful Michael experiences the fullness of natural beauty, which is graced by

supernatural revelation (the universal perspective of God and the vision of his lover Mary, 232) and ecstasy, Johnny represents what Stephen Fields calls “the beauty of the ugly.” This is the sort of beauty we see in Grunewald's *Crucifixion*,²⁷⁷ where the grotesque figure of Christ, covered with the markings of syphilis for patients with syphilis, is also the most beautiful figure because of his willingness to endure suffering for others and his promise of overcoming death.²⁷⁸ Fields, interpreting Balthasar's aesthetics, writes that the intramundane beauty of the natural world - the iceberg, Mary, the sunlight - is, at the most essential point, centred by the ultramundane beauty of Christ: “however much the cross of Christ sets the standard for beauty, it cannot be understood to destroy the integrity of worldly aesthetics. It must somehow give this integrity its center.”²⁷⁹ The revelation of Johnny's gift of self-emptying (*kenosis*) beauty (which is signified by the stigmata 260), the most beautiful form of humanity, perfects the youthful beauty of Mary and the beauty of creation that shimmers in the gratuitous spectacle of the iceberg. It is precisely this grotesque beauty that is hardest to see, and Kavanagh makes it clear through his Homeric intertext that although this form was fully revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, it was accessible to the pagan world.

Johnny's heroics become slightly more complex and take us back to the continuum between fiction and revelation. As Hestia tells us, the medal he got from the king for saving a “watch of sealers” was “a trophy for lying. He gave his mates nothing but deceit” (368). She then tells Father MacMurrough the story:

²⁷⁷ Isenheim Altarpiece, closed centre, 1512-16.

²⁷⁸ Isenheim Altarpiece, right wing, first view, 1512-16.

²⁷⁹ Stephen Fields, “The Beauty of the Ugly: Balthasar, the Crucifixion, Analogy and God” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (9:2), 175.

This blizzard catches them straight out of a mild day – just like this one was. All of them in their shirt-sleeves. Not one with a proper warm coat. They gets lost from their ship, and for two days the storm batters away. Horizontal sleet. But Johnny, he sings out: There's our ship, lads. And he sets off across the ice, hopping the pans, and his men, they follows behind him. And when the went along, miles and miles across the ice, there's no ship nowhere. So he sings out: No, lads, she's over this way. And they walks along again, another two or three miles through the gale, back to where they were in the first place. Johnny never lets them stop, even when they were near froze to death. And in the end, that's what kept them alive.

They found their vessel after all. Spotted the St. Elmo's lights blazing in the gaff topsails. They said it was like a crucifix on fire. So Johnny and his own little band was saved, while all the rest of the crew perished, standing up dead in their tracks or kneeling at their last prayers. Froze like statues. (369)

Hestia makes the problem even plainer: “The salvation was by deceit” (369). She then proceeds to critique the catechism's position that a lie is always a sin, no matter the circumstances:

“You know, Father, the catechism has a question in it, and I learned it off by heart: *Is it lawful to tell a lie for a good purpose?* You knows the answer yourself: *No purpose, however good, can excuse a lie, because a lie is always sinful and bad in itself.* Father, that makes no sense to me. I don't see how Johnny the Light can be a sinner in the eyes of God, after the wonderful good thing that he done.” (369)

Hestia's question draw the reader to three related themes; firstly, Johnny's heroism; secondly, the nature of religious imaginaries; and thirdly, to the role of fiction in disclosing truth and cultivating hope. By constructing Johnny as a Christ analogy, Kavanagh ushers us into the problematic of post-secularity as McClure constructs it – that our faith may be in a fiction-, yet the force of Johnny's salvific role in the novel (as saviour of the sealers and Father MacMurrough) directs the reader to the life giving substance of hope. Johnny's deception is used to reinforce the hope of salvation, which, as his final appearance in the text signifies, is in a transcendent source. Moreover, this

source is not without immanent resonance. His fiction must not be seen as sin, but rather the ability for a semiotic form to signify its own freedom, which reflects the human ability to create imaged scenarios. This freedom that fiction symbolizes is always paradoxically related to the material conditions which are already determined. Thus, Johnny's fiction (as well as Kavanagh's and the imaginary), is not severed from the material "real" as in the case of a postmodern self-referential system, but is, rather, a foretaste of the human ability to transcend material determination without leaving material behind. As with Johnny, this human ability is only available through a theological aesthetics that is founded on Christ's exemplary status as the human who overcomes the norm of death. The human participates in God's final end for humanity by imagining what may come through the exercise of human freedom. The fictive element of the imaginary, which cannot be cordoned off from the non-fictive, is, thus, a sign of grace – the ability for humans to participate in God's analogy of self-creation (which is paradoxically tied to our recognition of ourselves as created).

Fowler's reading

The force of Kavanagh's examination of a graced nature which promises a final unity between the "skin" (surface) and the "hidden mass" (depths) is compromised by Adrian Fowler's one-sided Freudian reading of *Gaff Topsails*. Fowler emphasizes the disjuncture between the Christian ideology of the surface and the sexual imagery latent in the coming of age stories of Mary Dwyer and the brothers Kevin and Michael. For Fowler the village is primarily pagan with a Christian "moral" veneer. The disconnect

persists even though Fowler identifies a “religion-sex” parallel; this is because he fails to explore the Christian theological element with any depth:

...the image of hands folded in prayer...inexplicably troubles Kevin Barron in the same way as the shaft of the stained glass window in the church that “levitates skyward and narrows to a soft gentle point.” That Kevin is being terrorized by images of the vagina becomes clear even to him when he superimposes them one upon the other: “He remembers his unease during the Rosary, his unease at the sight of his own joined hands. He recalls finally the contours of the pitcher plant, the lips curling purple round the gaping maw to come together, to touch, softly, at the tip.”²⁸⁰

According to Fowler's reading the energy of the novel is motivated by Freudian themes: Kevin's repulsion by his own sexuality, his fear of a haunting vagina (424) which is located under the hem of Martha the Witch's dress (213, 338) in the residual image of a pitcher plant (347, 424) as well as the shape of his hands as he prays. For this reading to work, Fowler must overdetermine the sexual imagery as Freudian, while downplaying its relationship to the overarching theological aesthetic: “The spirituality of the villagers is complex, a mixture of Catholicism indoctrinated by missionaries and paganism imbibed from the place. For generations, it is paganism that holds sway.”²⁸¹ Because he is committed to reading the paganism of the village as authentic and the Catholicism as some sort of control mechanism (Super Ego; The Law; The Symbolic) that attempts to weed out the impulses of life, he overlooks the marriage symbolism that is central to the themes and form of the novel. Marriage is the juncture where “hidden mass” and “skin” are brought together; the juncture where opposites may conceive new life. Mary and Michael are not “really” motivated by a pagan ritual that uncovers one's future partner

²⁸⁰ Fowler, “Patrick Kavanagh's Gaff topsails and the Myth of the Old Outport,” para. 11.

²⁸¹ Fowler, para. 22.

and are only superficially attached to a sacramental view of marriage. Instead, Kavanagh's Catholicism is a "complexio oppositorum" ("complex of opposites") which encounters no "antithesis it does not embrace."²⁸² This paradoxical frame allows for the exuberance and terror of sexuality to mirror the sublime experience of beauty. When young Kevin is running through the enchanted wood trail from the Landrigan death house, while also fleeing from the otherness of his emerging adolescent sexuality, we should not only think of Freud, but also the thanatos-eros mytheme that precedes him.²⁸³ Accordingly, sexuality functions as a paradoxical sign which produces new life, but also signifies the limit of an individual's life in death, which requires the perpetuation of the species. When Hestia entertains Father MacMurrough, we see the complex of opposites take form, as Hestia is the fertile mother of numberless children (who has lost her husband to the sea), and MacMurrough is the love-sick celibate who took his vows against his better judgement. She has embraced sexuality and life, and yet death has marred her; he has denied sexuality and lived a life of loneliness, haunted by suicidal thoughts and apostasy. Kavanagh's sympathy is directed toward Hestia, which he emphasizes through her soliloquy on religion and sexuality – "all the religion in the world can't stand in the way of nature" (73). But her position is not without complication. Sexuality must refer beyond sexuality to the soul's desire for God, without conflating the two loves (Beatrice and God), otherwise sexuality is overcome by the endless repetition of death.

²⁸² Carl Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, trans. G. L. Ulmen. (Westport: Greenwood, 1996.), 7.

²⁸³ Certainly Christian celibacy attempts to uncouple death and desire, by placing all desire in God who overcomes death. The object of eros then becomes the final Word.

Epektasis and the Big Other

Fowler's Freudian reading leads us to believe that Kevin, Mary and others in the community are commanded and bound by what Žižek calls a "big Other." This is a God-structure that is imagined, which functions as the origin of law for the community and creates the possibility for enjoyment as subjects transgress the libidinal pressure it exercises on subjects. The big Other is the symbolic apex of the imaginary (the Symbolic written largely), which forces itself on subjects by their naive faith in its existence, their practices, their language use, their social order.²⁸⁴ If we were to read *Gaff Topsails* for images of collective focal points which shape the town's practice or surveying eyes that return a gaze we would find many: the crucifix; the "throbbing" church steeple; the floating seagulls; the Pegasus chair; the peek of the iceberg; the bonfire of St. John the Baptist and Discovery Day. However, to explain the town's religio-political form in terms of nominalist readings of ideology, we would project the impassable divide between the

²⁸⁴ In his article, "The big Other doesn't exist" Žižek makes the relation between the big Other and God explicit: "The big Other is somewhat the same as God according to Lacan (God is not dead today. He was dead from the very beginning, except He didn't know it...): it never existed in the first place, i.e., the 'big Other's' inexistence is ultimately equivalent to its being the symbolic order, the order of symbolic fictions which operate at a level different from direct material causality. (In this sense, the only subject for whom the big Other does exist is the psychotic, the one who attributes to words direct material efficiency.)"; "The Big Other Doesn't Exist." *Journal of European Psychoanalysis*. 5 (Spring-Fall 1997), § 2. Milbank comments on Žižek's theory of religion, which is, in my opinion, the leading materialist understanding of religion: "...his theory of religion embodies a Hegelian modification of Marxism: religion is not so much, as for Marx, a meta-illusion which disguises the necessary illusion of the State and the commodity as, rather, a primarily necessary human illusion which allows human subjectivity to come into being at all, and then further permits the necessary illusions of State and market to be realized"; *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic*, 179. This big Other precedes the individual, and is the symbolic form against which the individual perceives the real of nothingness, and senses their own individuality. This shifting three dimensional plane gives rise to the gap between the "real" and the "Symbolic." Žižek calls this the "parallax view" appealing to the visual effect that occurs when a subject moves its position with regard to the object in view and sees that object "change" in relation to the background.

symbolic and the real, the sign and the signified, into a text that refuses this divide at the outset.²⁸⁵ The latent metaphysics/semiotics/sacramentalism of the text are brought into focus as Michael stands beside Mary under the enchanted moon (the moon he has his hand on in the opening) and gazes on the mundane picket fence of his front yard:

He is distracted by the picket fence.

It is the same fence that has always fronted this house. The palings are the ones that he himself painted only this spring, white with green points. The posts and longers are white. The posts are sunk into cement foundations, and are decorated with plain beachrocks. He could not imagine a plainer sight, a more ordinary thing.

Yet, this moment [a trace of the fullness of time] the simple everyday fence appears so strange to his eye that it terrifies him. The more he studies it, the more unsettled he becomes. The palings, the posts and longers, the beachrocks, all have adopted a bizarre, monumental quality, a strange texture, as if they have become harder, somehow more real than real.

... Michael Barron would like to wake his grandfather and look into his eyes and say to him: Pop, help me, for I am far off. I am beyond the ledge. I am outside, farther from shore than I have ever gone. Help me. (435)

The sublime reality that Michael encounters in his everyday objects impresses him. The absence of the positive light of the sun allows the fence to take on a strange texture, which speaks of the goodness of creation through the slightest reflected light of the sun, bounced off the moon, distilled into the earth's atmosphere, touching the fence, and impressing itself on Michael's passive intellect, such that it is expressed by his active intellect as the "more real than real." This is far from the real in the symbolic that Žižek

²⁸⁵ Žižek's concept of ideology has three aspects: *doctrine*, ideas; *belief*, the material manifestation of ideas; and *ritual*, the internalization of doctrine; See Tony Myers, *Slavoj Žižek* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 71. I have no criticism of this tripartite structure. My qualm is with Žižek's ideology of ideology, in which he argues that there is a primary and originary break with the real that creates an internal "night of the world"; Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 2000), 124. This primary rupture is configured as a pseudo cosmic source of violence – the subconscious – which dismembers representations and infuses chaos in the symbolic. In delineating his ideology of ideology, Žižek makes the turn from philosopher to metaphysician; however, his religion celebrates internal, necessary violence in a way that sits awkwardly with the apathetic theology of Christianity.

articulates in David Lynch's films, the “night of the world” where symbolic units – bodies – are dismembered by the “unrestrained reign of the violence of the imagination,” leaving a head here, a hand there.²⁸⁶ This is the sublime moment of the analogical imagination, which “splits open the rift in being,” allowing us a trace of “the vertical axis of the cosmos,” a spark of fire brought back by Prometheus from “the highest regions of Olympus.”²⁸⁷ Kavanagh is a master of this Catholic aesthetic. As Father MacMurrough, having weathered a dark night of the soul, looks down into the sea, the undersea horror that earlier haunted him gives way to

...the three-dimensional texture of the heavens.

The stars yawn toward him, reach out to embrace him, the way a woman might do. His flesh sweats. He is not sure whether he is looking down into a bottomless pit, or looking up into the sky. He glimpses a line of floating coffins. Noises pound inside his head with the relentless thump-thump-THUMP of *kundu* drums.

The moon spirals down upon his head.... (432)

Just as Michael has lost his foundation looking in the stars in the darkness of the morning (2), MacMurrough loses his footing only to find the gesture of embrace on the waves of being, an expression of love “the way a woman might do.” This is the epekestatic movement of language and being toward the divine; that is, language with a transcendental end, an end with no end, that is drawn on throughout infinity, through wave upon wave of beauty, which is followed by troughs of love, justice, goodness, and the never ceasing divine music. This is language that leans in the direction of the beatific vision, while in a limited economy of time. The glimpse of the light from a star is enchanted by the logos, who brings limited time in line with eternal time, such that the

²⁸⁶ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 57-9, 30

²⁸⁷ Francesca Murphy, *God is not a Story: Realism Revisited* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2007), 319. Murphy is quoting Louise Cowan.

infinite bleeds into the finite.

Gathered Time

This temporal effect emerges at the bonfire of St. John the Baptist and Discovery Day, where the community burns their earthly possessions, converting matter into heat and light, from whence it came, singing their favourite folk songs and anthems (Newfoundland Anthem), while drinking and waiting on the Messianic arrival of the capelin.

Father MacMurrough drinks. The liquor slides down his throat to his hollow stomach and settles there, a little hearth fire warming his midsection pleasantly. He allows himself to be mesmerized like the others, ravished, by the spectacle of the fire.

The flames bound across the surface of the pile. Like the celebrant at Communion, elevating the Host before receiving, the fire illuminates for adoration those holy things it will presently consume. (440)

Traces of the all consuming fire of God (the analogate), which the church triumphant centres around, are found in the lower analogue of the outport fire and the inner analogue of the warming spirit in Father MacMurrough's belly. His emptiness is made full through faith, the "substance of things hoped for" (Hebrews 11:1). Pope Benedict XVI has recently interpreted this passage in a way that resonates with Kavanagh's 'onto-theology':

Faith is a *habitus*, that is, a stable disposition of the spirit, through which eternal life takes root in us and reason is lead to consent to what it does not see. The concept of "substance" is therefore modified in the sense that through faith, in a tentative way, or as we might say "in embryo" - and thus according to the "substance" - there are already present in us the things that are hoped for: the whole, true life. And precisely because the thing itself is already present, this presence of what is to come also creates certainty: this "thing" which must come is not yet visible in the external world (it does not "appear"), but because of the fact that, as an initial and dynamic reality, we

carry it with us, a certain perception of it has even now come into existence.²⁸⁸

Benedict speaks here with the *vox Dei*, Kavanagh as the *vox populi*, but both highlight the central feature of the sacramental tradition in Catholicism: that the divine reality pervades the earthy reality, especially in the sacraments of the church, but also in experiences of nature and the community. Christ's time and Adam's time are not fixed polar opposites, but form a “constitutive tension...a contrasting relation” across which a shared likeness obtains,²⁸⁹ such that Adam's time is real within the purview of Christ's time.²⁹⁰ Human time is enfolded within God's time (experienced in Christ), which has no beginning and no end, and which allows human time to expand in fecund moments – glimpses of the fullness of time. Even wasting time on nothing cannot diminish the reality of full time.

“What happens in time matters,” Taylor claims, “God enters into drama in time. The Incarnation, the Crucifixion happened in time, and so what occurs here can no longer be seen as less than fully real” (SA 56). He continues by elaborating on Augustine's theory of “lived time” as discussed in *Confessions* XI:

His instant is not the “nun” of Aristotle, which is a limit, like a point, an extensionless boundary of time periods. Rather it is the gathering together of past into present to project a future. The past, which “objectively” exists no more, is here in my present; it shapes this moment in which I turn to a future, which “objectively” is not yet, but which is here qua project. (SA 56)²⁹¹

²⁸⁸ Pope Benedict, “Spe Salvi.” Encyclical Letter, para. 7. Delivered 30 Nov. 07. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi_en.html (accessed 14 Dec. 08).

²⁸⁹ Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic*, 163.

²⁹⁰ Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 33-8.

²⁹¹ Taylor offers an interpretation of how this scheme of gathered time affects everyday life: “This creates a kind of simultaneity between the components of an action; my action knits together my situation as it emerges from my past with the future I project as a response to it. ... There is a kind of extended simultaneity of the moment of action or enjoyment, which we see also, for instance, in a conversation which really engages us. ... Augustine holds that God can and does make all time such an instant of action. So all times are present to him ... So rising to eternity is rising to participate in God's instant. Augustine sees ordinary time as dispersal, distensio, losing the unity, being cut off from our past and our

Taylor argues that the church of the middle ages combines a Platonic idea of eternity (time and eternity in opposition), with Augustine's gathered time and adds to that a folk conception of "a time of origins" (Eliade's theory).

[T]he church, in its liturgical year, remembers and re-enacts what happened in illo tempore when Christ was on earth. Which is why this year's Good Friday can be closer to the Crucifixion than last year's mid-summer day. And the Crucifixion itself, since Christ's action/passion here participates in God's eternity, is closer to all times than they in secular terms are to each other. ... A time that has fallen away from the eternal paradigms of order [liturgical] will exhibit more disorder. A time-place which is closer to God's eternity will be more gathered. At the pilgrimage centre on the saint's feast day, it is the time itself which is hallowed. (SA 58)

Taylor, Walter Benjamin, and Benedict Anderson argue that this concept of eternal time is transformed through modernity into "homogenous, empty time" (SA 58).

It is exactly this phenomenology of empty time that Kavanagh is trying to contrast with the sacred time of *Gaff Topsails*, and nowhere is this demonstrated more clearly than in Johnny the Light's departure into the unknown country, while the community is waiting for the capelin in collective effervescence. Consider how time is gathered as Johnny approaches the unstable iceberg, naked in an open punt as though Adam were returning to God:

Johnny the Light has forgotten that he fears the sea.

In the beginning [Gen 1:1], he rows so clumsily that his paddles stumble even on the calm. Now and then the oarbutts slip from his maimed hands altogether. But soon his arms recall the ancient rhythm, and the punt glides smoothly towards the east. ... His eyes detect sparkles of light dancing on the waters. Presently the bonfire itself floats into his gaze.

The great flame, majestic on the height of land, flashes as brilliantly as the sanctuary lamp. The sight makes his tongue recall the taste of the

of touch with our future. We get lost in our little parcel of time. But we have an irrepressible craving for eternity, and so we strive to go beyond this" (SA 57).

sacramental wine. He drops the oars and reaches for the rum that he stored in the midship-room, and he drinks. He imagines the flame warms his naked body. He stares into the fire until it hypnotizes him, until the whole universe spins round the hub that it forms. He hears the voices singing and his mind mixes up the two, so that he fancies the voices are coming out of the fire itself [participation in the divine]. (445)

Johnny then sings some folk songs, perhaps those he sang with the sealers, and changes the course of the punt away from the fire, and the voices fade.

The moon threatens over his shoulder. Now he can hear, deep in the sky, the music of the spheres – the cosmic octave. Time comes unhinged for Johnny the Light. As far as he is able to tell, this day could be yesterday. This year could be a million years in the past. For all he can say, his soul already has passed into eternity.

... [H]is nose catches ... a heavy odour, saltier even than the smell of the sea. The old man smiles. From the depths of his memory it returns to him: the smell of his own sperm. (446)

Kavanagh turns our gaze to Michael as he gives an ancient ice phallus to Mary, which slips from her fingers: “The flaming ice falls against the land and it smashes there into a thousand diamonds” (446). Next we follow Kevin into the church where he overhears a couple making love, “the two figures lean close against the wall. They could be statues, some timeless scene preserved in plaster. They could be something holy” (447). He knows that something is happening there, but he can't tell what it is. He hears the woman whisper something obscene, which shocks Kevin as it seems unfitting in “this holy place” (447). From this sexual odyssey, we return to the waters as they are alive with capelin about to arrive on shore, and find Johnny caught in the gathering of time as he relives the sight of a flotilla, the White Fleet, on a Feast day of Saint John the Baptist from his youth. He gazes at the fires alight in the many outports and imagines that “the open Atlantic too is a sea of flames, that all the world is embraced by fire” (448). We return to Kevin who

sees “every last corner of God's holy church” sanctified by “moonglow” (448), then back to Johnny, who hears “the moan of a widowed mermaid,” senses a sublime presence, feels a chill and hears a “blue voltaic hum” just before the iceberg comes crumbling down on him. We must assume the Marian berg has him in her “womb”; earlier Gus recollected the boy's mystical trip into the eternal womb (376-84) saying, “And then we ran the punt up the iceberg. Straight into her. Right up her smelly cunt” (407, perhaps the most profane line in the novel).

Sexuality and sacred time are inter-penetrating, convertible experiences in the last chapter of *Gaff Topsails*. As the foretold messianic capelin (Ichthus – the Christ fish) arrive on shore Kavanagh characterizes it thus: “They heave and surge up onto the beach and ejaculate into the sand and the landwash is wet and sticky and luminescent with their seed. Time is short and no one bothers with boats” (451). This analogy of Christ's return, which refracts all creation, Christ's entrance into human nature, and the pleroma of the Trinitarian infinite economy is full of wedding imagery and consummation. And then, “As if God had clapped His hands, the capelin vanish. The sea is empty” (451).

Conclusion

In the end, what does the plentitude of *Gaff Topsail's* sacramentalism tell us? It tells us that there is no exit from metaphysics. This celebration of a theological aesthetics targets the “postmetaphysical” norms of later Secular I and alters them so that they open up to the possibility of a nature-grace continuum (Secular II) that is the promise of the analogy of being (and which unites skin and hidden mass). This continuum offers an

interpretation of humanity that participates in the divine being, just as the bonfire at night participates in the lighting of darkness, which is only overcome by the emergence of the sun at dawn. This conception of humanity challenges the subject of the liberal capitalism to see self-creation as only partially satisfied by an empty conception of universal justice, or the accumulation of power (monetary, political, intellectual), and only truly satisfied as it is re-figured by participation in God. The God that Kavanagh describes is not approached through an individualist mode, but requires a renewed connection to other humans, a connection that must find a way to build trust in cultural forms that overcome the constant and often justified suspicion of violence. The sign on the road of redemption is still caught up in deferral and relies on the differences of other signs and objects for a fuller understanding, but it is not, as a consequence, left with nothing as it progresses. Augustine's simple formulation of the sign offers us a pathway to Kavanagh's bonfire: a sign is something signified by someone. This prioritizes the genealogical link between signifying beings, which relies on memory as a semiotic storehouse and pushes semiotics toward a dialogic theory of testimony. With testimony we find the responsibility, at some point, for a signifying being to trust the other communicator. This trust, however, must be taken up in love, with knowledge that the human propensity to destroy trust and deny love has inner and outer sources that are never at rest. Kavanagh's interpolation of the secular age then, with its idealistic reading of the pre-secular Newfoundland outport, is usefully tempered by Crummey's reading of a similar outport that demonstrates the effects of original sin. Crummey's portrayal of the outport, which we move to in the next chapter, directs the reader to the tensions between a Catholic conception of redemption

along the nature-grace continuum and the doctrine of original sin, which was well evidenced by the tremendous human evil of the twentieth century.

Natured Grace: Michael Crummey's *The Wreckage* and the Sacrament of

Cunnilingus

It was a Catholic thing, he decided. Twelve disciples. Forty days and forty nights. The numbers were talismans, no different than a crucifix or rosary beads. Logic didn't come into it. (TW 279)

[E]verything that ever happened to Wish seemed part of some mad joke designed to be the end of him. (346)

[W]ishing such a fate on them had made it so. His wish alongside the wish of others like him. (Wish's thoughts on the horror of the Nagasaki bombing 345)

Michael Crummey's *The Wreckage* is a hybrid concoction of three established genres: a romance novel after the form of Nicholas Sparks' *The Notebook*; a late-modern global narrative with resemblances to Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*; and a screen play - it is a novel engineered to be easily adapted to the cinema. These forms are not “seamlessly” integrated into the structure of the narrative, so the reader encounters moments where the transitions between a rural romance and the global tragedy of World War II create a strong sense of aesthetic dissonance. Nonetheless, *The Wreckage* has a certain verve that is not to be overlooked. Amid the clichés and the templates of genre (star crossed lovers who are ripped apart by forces beyond their control), Crummey busily searches for the place where the ready-made forms that the novel appropriates open out into the complexity of being-in-the-world. The novel's title speaks as much about the carnage of twentieth century events – the bomb in Nagasaki, the tidal wave in Renewa (clearly borrowed from the tsunami of 12.26.2004), the “modernity bomb” dropped on communities everywhere (306) – as it does about its own structure. Like his protagonist, Wish Furey, whose first job is salvaging the flotsam and jetsam of shipwrecks on the sea,

Crummey assembles his story from fragments found in diverse textual sources, colliding generic formations and multiple ideologies. The master archive that Crummey returns to time and again is Newfoundland Catholicism and particularly, its tensions with Protestantism. Crummey uses these tensions to illustrate the destructive force of prejudice on various levels: interpersonal; national; international. Yet, Catholicism functions as more than an example of an “us” formation that becomes the focus of idolatry, which, to paraphrase Jean Luc Marion, is a closed system of meaning that never arcs beyond self-formations in search of fecund otherness.²⁹² Catholicism also gives form to the cosmological imaginary of *The Wreckage*, an imaginary that attempts to open out into otherworldly reality: in other words, an iconic imaginary.

Catholicism, as Crummey sees it, must be retrieved from the fractured form of Christendom. During one of Wish's salvaging trips to a wrecked Spanish vessel, he finds a statue of “Christ on the cross” (118) which he brings home at the request of his parish Priest. Wish's actions in this episode form an analogy of Crummey's approach to the twentieth century; out of the many levels of wreckage the Catholic “reality” is salvaged and reconfigured as the truth of human desire (*eros*) and also the only suitable anthropology for multiculturalism (original sin). Crummey's presentation of a version of multiculturalism that is erected on top of a collective confession of depravity is presented to readers as the only post-WWII political form that can foster human peace.

We see the first of the novel's claims, that Catholic sacramentalism is the truth of *eros*, enacted in the narrative of Wish and Sadie's life-long love. The second claim of the

²⁹² Jean Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Text*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 9-19.

novel, that the only suitable anthropology on which to build a multicultural ethos attends to original sin, is derived from Crummey's analysis of the twin prejudices that Wish and Nishino embody - prejudices that emerge out of moments of trauma during their formative years. In retrieving these two fragments from the archive of Catholicism, Crummey fuses salvage pieces onto the hull of liberalism, creating political-metaphysical tension that verges on incoherence. This incoherence is most transparent in the "sacrament of cunnilingus" (67) performed by Wish (with Sadie) in an aura of sexual innocence that seemingly trivializes the rich representation of sin that is found in Crummey's account of WWII. However, the disjuncture between ideologies innocence and guilt is indicative of the novel's situation in a post-secular imaginary, which is at once formed by the structures and doctrines of liberalism, while also straining under the problematic dichotomies of the liberal metanarrative (public/private; religious/secular).²⁹³

The Liturgy of the Narrative

Although the majority of *The Wreckage* is set in Newfoundland, the story begins in the jungles of South Asia. There we follow Japanese soldiers as they stalk American forces. We are introduced to the pivotal character Nishino, a Japanese-Canadian who has

²⁹³ Seyla Benhabib directs us to the axiomatic "super-liberalism" of postmodernism: "Postmodernism presupposes a super-liberalism (in italics), more pluralistic, more tolerant, more open to the right of difference and otherness than the rather staid and sober versions presented by John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin and Thomas Nagel. As far as I am concerned this is not troublesome. What is baffling though is the lightheartedness with which postmodernists simply assume or even posit those *hyper-universalist* and *super-liberal* values of diversity, heterogeneity, eccentricity and otherness"; See Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism and Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 16. Benhabib's diagnosis of this inability for postmodernism to transcend liberalism, and, one might add, capitalism, is useful for my attempt to theorize why the religious has returned in the post-secular imaginary. The religious stands as a sign of contradiction to the uniform rule of modernity. Crummey's engagement with Catholicism is another example of the need to retrieve visions of theological alterity for the benefit of the future of those imaginaries that are totalized by modernity.

concealed his Canadian identity so that he could fight for Japan. After this brief introduction we are whisked away to a coastal setting (“the Cove”) on Little Fogo Island, at the Northeast tip of Newfoundland in 1940. Aloysious (Wish) Furey (b. 1922) is setting up a movie projector in a community hall when sixteen year old Mercedes²⁹⁴ (Sadie) Parson catches his attention. After initial banter, she goes home, only to return with her family later that evening.

Wish is employed by Hiram Keeping, who travels with him from community to community to show films like *The 39 Steps* (17). Wish grew up in Renew, an Irish Catholic outpost, but he has since left to live in St. John's with Hiram, whose addictions to alcohol and gambling are only tempered by his jovial entrepreneurial spirit.

When Sadie returns to the hall to see the film, Hiram recognizes the sexual tension between the Methodist girl and the “mick” (15): “You know what they'll do to a Catholic boy sniffing around the women out here,” he said. ... “Don't say I haven't warned you” (16). Although Wish and Hiram are staying with Mrs. Gillard, they are invited to Sadie's house for tea, where they visit with her mother and father, Helen and Aubrey Parson. Wish thinks he is the first Catholic to enter the house, and Crummey uses this opportunity to introduce the parochial tensions of Newfoundland religious identities:

They had likely never had a Catholic sit in their Kitchen before, he knew. Some people on the northeast shore had never met a Catholic before encountering Wish and it was always hard to say how things would go. Hiram appeared to be oblivious to the sudden change in the room, taking out his tobacco and papers to roll a cigarette. Though Wish knew he was paying attention and enjoying himself. Hiram took some kind of pleasure from observing the flustered civility, the consternation, the outright hostility of

²⁹⁴ Mercedes name is given an explicit Marian connection in the novel, “It's Spanish. Nuestra Señora de les Mercedes ... It means compassion or tender mercy. The Spaniards call Mary Our Lady of Mercies” (137).

people unexpectedly confronted by Wish's religious affiliation. He said it was like throwing two strange dogs together to see how they'd get on. (19-20)

Aubery, the father, has an admiration for Catholics, who “got nothing against a scuff on the floor, or a drink” (20). As they are leaving the Parson's house, Aubery asks Hiram if he would have a dress made for Sadie in St. John's. Hiram agrees and Aubery gives him a string with Sadie's measurements tied in a series of knots. Hiram gives this to Wish, knowing Wish's desire for Sadie will make her measurements easy to care for. After these initial encounters, Hiram bets Wish that he cannot sleep with Sadie before they leave the outport (309).

With this religio-sexual wager in mind Wish attempts to rupture Helen and Aubery's Methodist prejudice against Catholic suitors for their daughter. He picks blueberries with the women of the community to get close to Sadie (27-30). Anti-Catholic antagonism emerges as Helen Parson tells Wish that her “daughter is not going to take up with you ... or anyone of your kind.” (34). To Helen's chagrin, she finds Wish at her house, alone with Sadie, just after the two have made sexual advances: “he reached with one hand down to her bare thighs and then up into the startling heat and wet of her” (45). Sadie then tells him, “don't make a whore of me” (46, 344), a detail that becomes more important after Hiram's wager comes to light (309-10, her father's advice 97). Hiram is, thus, a representation of the “invisible hand” of the market that creates the opportunity for two “enemies” to meet, while also creating ideological havoc of their lives.

Wish, however, resents Hiram's antics and quits his job that night. The next morning as he attempts to return to St. John's, news arrives that Aubery Parsons is

missing at sea (51). Wish stays in Little Fogo Island to help with the search. They find a young boy who was missing, but Sadie's father remains lost. Under increasing sexual frustration and the trauma of the community tragedy, Wish's Catholic rituals - genuflecting (57) and getting drunk at the wake (58) - become the focus of animosity, yet he continues to pursue Sadie (60). They decide to meet at "The Spell Rock" (61-3). Wish remembers his religious aunt Lilly telling him in his youth "There will come a day when everything that's happened to you will seem purposeful" (65). Crummey uses this theme of destiny to give momentum to the narrative.

Wish contemplates his desire for Sadie, which he distrusted earlier, discovering that it feels "pure and proper now, almost chaste" (66). Acting on this desire he waits for Sadie by the outhouse. When she comes out to use the outhouse, Wish catches her attention:

They walked awkwardly to the sidewall holding each other and kissing and he leaned her against the rough lumber. He could feel her heart against his chest. He lifted the skirt of her dress in handfuls until he was underneath it, fingers touching bare skin, the fine bristle of her pubic hair, and it came to his mind to kneel in front of her. ... It was an act of surrender, a kind of penance he thought the girl was owed. (67)

Having performed what I am calling the "sacrament of cunnilingus," Wish wakes up the next morning and thinks about the 23rd Psalm, which reinforces the link between the sexual and theological: "*Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me*. He thought briefly how Mercedes found something of the same comfort in his company, though he couldn't avoid thinking of his cock in connection with *rod* and *staff*" (68). Soon after, Wish's drinking partner, Clive Reid, finds Aubery's corpse in his cod trap. While Wish attempts to comfort the Parson family, he experiences more anti-Catholic intolerance, feeling that

“[e]very soul in the cove stood against them,” and calling his adversaries “*Fucking Protestants*” in his inner monologue (75). He recites the “Hail Mary” over Aubery, praying the rosary while also hoping to instigate a fight (75).

His prayers are answered the next morning, when Sadie's brother, Hardy, comes by the rooming house where Wish is staying; he wants to intimidate Wish and send him back to St. John's. When Hardy grabs Wish the two fall down the stairs together. Hardy is knocked out from *the fall* and Wish thinks that he has killed him. He flees the cove with “a voice in his head shouting *Run. Run. Run*” (79). This impulse to flee guilt, leads to estrangement from his first love.

Realizing that Wish has fled for St. John's under fear of murder charges, Sadie comes after him. There she meets Amy (Amina) Basha and her Lebanese-Catholic family, who help her look for Wish (100-8). Amy introduces Sadie to the smooth-talking, jazz trumpeter Johnny Boustani, who is a Lebanese-American stationed at the Air Force base in St. John's (109). Together they travel to Renew's to speak with Lilly Berrigan (113), Wish's aunt with “the second sight” (118), who they hope will be able to lead them to him. She is cloistered by the local Priest, but Tom and Patty Keating find access to her (121-2). Earlier Sadie had gone to Hiram to track Wish, but Hiram, thinking Hardy was dead, mislead her. Sadie returns to Hiram, who now knows that Wish is clear of criminal charges. He tells her that Wish has fled to Halifax to enlist with the British Army.²⁹⁵ The logic of the narrative progression tells us that parochial conflict leads to organized global warfare.

²⁹⁵ This story also rehearses the political differences before Newfoundland joined confederation. Wish enlists with the British because he is a British citizen.

The story then returns to Nishino, who is wounded in the back and is in hospital being questioned about his English skills by a Lieutenant Kurakake. Here parts of Nishino's experience of racial injustice in Canada come to light (discussed below). The story then shifts to 1945, when Wish is a POW in Nagasaki Camp #14. Wish was stationed in Singapore when it fell to the Japanese. In this prison narrative the figure of Mary is repeatedly evoked as a sign of universal human potential (137, 224, 281-2, 295-6), but her symbolism is contrasted by the mutual prejudices of the Allied forces and the Japanese: "They were an army of lady-boys with tiny cocks, they held hands as they marched. They cut off the heads of civilians and raised them on stakes, they used women and children for bayonet practice" (142). Wish writes, "*I thought you Protestants were a sour crowd Mercedes but I never seen the like of these*" (145). At Nagasaki #14 the parochial tensions of romance novel and linked to the global narrative of war. Here the self-hating interpreter, Nishino, is known by the name of "lefty" because he beats prisoners with a bamboo rod using his left hand, due to a wound he received in combat. Wish is one of his subjects.

Wish forms friendships with two fellow POWs, Anstey and Harris. To pass time Wish makes moonshine, which he trades with guards and prisoners. His desire for Mercedes is often on his mind; he mulls over the meaning of the sacrament of cunnilingus, wondering why the memory is persistent even though he is too exhausted to be sexually aroused (164). Back in St. John's, Sadie is staying at Hiram's rooming house and thinking about the sacrament of cunnilingus, which she figures, "must be a Catholic thing" because no "soul in the Cove would [have] any truck with the like" (176). By

linking sexuality and the sacraments, Crummey demonstrates a version of the nature-grace continuum, which radicalizes the extent that nature is graced. Crummey, thus, links erotic experiences to eschatological fulfilment. For instance, Sadie remembers seeing Wish naked and having him tell her to wait for consummation until marriage, joking that their previous intimacy was “just a taste ... of things to come” (178).

When Sadie's brother, Hardy, visits her in St. John's to bring her back to the outport, she refuses and chooses to wait for Wish (178-81, 183). Here Hiram tells her about Lilly's nascent knowledge of Latin and her experience of the stigmata (181-2).

The story returns to Japan and continues the theme of human depravity: Anstey is dieing of malnutrition while Nishino, who has Red Cross reserves under lock and key, enjoys his suffering (192-200). Wish thinks Anstey looks like “something the world had swallowed whole and shat out” (203). Word reaches the camp that Hiroshima has been bombed and that an American invasion is imminent. Because of Nishino's sadistic practices and his involvement in POW murder rituals that were practiced by the Japanese, his commanding officer advises him to adopt a civilian disguise and go into hiding (212-4).

When news of Hiroshima's destruction reaches Sadie, she convinces herself that Wish is dead (220). In a moment of grief, she has violent, wounded sex with Johnny Boustani, tasting “blood as she kissed him.”²⁹⁶ Sadie visits Lilly to ask if she knows anything about Wish. Lilly tells her, “you have the news you need,” which is a prophetic reference to Sadie's pregnancy (223, 251). When she leaves Sadie notices a statue of the

²⁹⁶ Johnny's describes himself to Mercedes as “Crucified by the love of a girl from the bay” (187).

Virgin Mary, who she has never prayed to before. She remembers a verse from the book of Ruth that she used to read to her Methodist grandmother, which she prays: "*Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee*" (224). She also prays for forgiveness without allowing "herself to think on what she was asking forgiveness for," implying that she has broken a sacred covenant between her, Wish, and God (224). The narrative tells of the tidal wave that hit Renew during Wish's childhood, sweeping his father to sea and leaving the town in "wreckage," just like Wish and Sadie's relationship and the world at the end of WWII. Sadie receives a letter from Harris, Wish's fellow POW, telling her that Wish is dead (229). She moves to Boston, converts to Catholicism and marries Johnny (319).

The few details we are told of about Mercedes' life with Johnny come from the narrative of her return to St. John's in 1994 with her daughter, Isabella, and Johnny's ashes. "Bella" (Beauty) is lost between adolescence and adulthood, having had an abortion at twenty-six. Crummey implies that her soul-sickness is representative of her generation: "Her nonchalance in matters of the heart was too practised to be sincere, Mercedes thought. The listless world-weariness in her bordered on self-hatred" (238). While holding Johnny's ashes at a war memorial service, Sadie falls and strikes her head, receiving a concussion (241). Because of the publicity of the event, Sadie's fall is reported in the news, and her old friend Amina hears of it, visiting Mercedes in the hospital and telling her that Lilly is still alive (246). When Mercedes visits Lilly she finds out that Wish visits her daily for a game of cribbage (253). After she finally spreads Johnny's ashes, Mercedes is overcome with the idea that his spirit has arranged her

rediscovery of Wish from beyond the veil (254).

Wish's life from WWII onward is now filled in, telling of Harris' death from radiation poisoning that he received in Nagasaki. Thinking that his body contains the same privation, Wish has Harris write to Sadie before his death, telling her of Wish's demise and sending along the knotted string (229). Wish aimlessly floats through life troubled by his wartime traumas, moving from a job in mining to film projection and finally settling back in Newfoundland in the 1980s. The day that Wish and Mercedes meet up again, he awakes with an unexplainable erection, which he interprets in supernatural and eschatology terms: "Signs and wonders ... before the end of time ... there was something vaguely and ludicrously apocalyptic about it. A resurrection so unexpected, so inexplicable, it was bound to carry some significance beyond the simple physical fact of itself" (287).

Sadie finds Wish playing crib with Lilly, and she joins in the game (289). Wish has turned into a belligerent old man and Sadie's reappearance in his life brings back as much pain as it does joy. This re-acquaintance period is also a purging process, where Wish comes to terms with his lifelong *psychomachia* (soul-struggle, 310). The elderly lovers visit two wreckage sites: the wreckage of the Cove by the "modernity bomb" (306) and the inner wreckage of Wish's spiritual life. The first involves a long drive up the eastern coast of Newfoundland and a walk through the place where the events of the 1940 love story took place. Wish feels an "uncanny echo" of the sacrament of cunnilingus as he visits the old Parson homestead (307). When they are returning in the car, Wish tells Sadie about the day he, Harris, and Spalding killed Nishino in the church basement, a few

days after the bombing of Nagasaki (327-8). Wish felt a deep ambivalence about the killing: on one hand he thought "*The Lord had delivered him into my hands*" (296, 1 Samuel 24 – David and Saul) and that the killing of Nishino was his righteous calling (328); on the other hand, his life has been warped by the "corruption" that he experienced because of his complicity with violence (322, 277, 291). There is a third aspect that unnerves Wish. After they had beaten Nishino to death, Spalding and Harris "pissed" on his corpse (329), but Wish wouldn't participate, not because of the disgrace of the act, but because he had an erection (332, 343). Wish's disordered desires are the novel's ultimate sign of the result of original sin, and his is broken by his confession, praying "take away my heart of stone" (335, 284). Mercedes is also overcoming the hardship, coming to grips with the death of her first born and the loss of the love of her life in her prime. She remembers the sacrament of cunnilingus and thinks, "I bet all that I had" (351).

During this purgation (350), facts come to light about Sadie's mother who hated Wish. She came from a Catholic community to live with Aubrey, a Methodist (325, 346). Her hate for Wish stemmed from her unresolved melancholia for her childhood Catholicism. The story ends on a hopeful note. Bella goes and visits Wish, who has been nursing his wounds with alcohol. After the visit she tells Mercedes that if she desires Wish, she needs to "go after him" (351). Sadie chases after Wish with tenacity. The next time the two visit Lilly's, the prescient female priest (287-8) emerges from her stupor and conducts a marriage ceremony in Latin, joining Wish and Sadie in holy matrimony (355-6). In marriage, Mercedes lives up to her name as "our lady of mercy," by taking on the tortured curmudgeon that Wish has become. She sees in Wish something more than he

can see himself.

As my summary outlined, sacramentalism and eros are thematically linked throughout the *The Wreckage*. Moreover, it is the explicit sexuality of Wish and Sadie's encounters that is seen to have metaphysical effect. Crummey's representation of sexual metaphysics is, thus, strongly influenced by the "deregulated" sexuality of late-twentieth century liberalism. He exploits the tension between sexualized eros and theological eros in such a way that naturalized grace (an inversion of graced nature) contradicts his presentation of universal depravity (which does introduce a genuine theme of grace).²⁹⁷ To consider these questions more fully, we need to attend to the relationship between human nature, desire, and theo-political form.

Human Nature

In his essay, *The Concept of the Political*, Carl Schmitt suggests that, "one could test all theories of state and political ideas according to their anthropology and thereby classify these as to whether they consciously or unconsciously presuppose man to be by nature evil or by nature good."²⁹⁸ Of these two presuppositions, Schmitt argues that political realism requires the "concrete possibility of an enemy," and, consequently, the pessimistic view of human nature: "all genuine political theories presuppose man to be

²⁹⁷ Perhaps the most blatant of these quasi-pornographic sexual scenes occurs between Wish and Jane on p. 262.

²⁹⁸ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, Trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 58. definitively sides with the camp that has a negative view of human nature, arguing that "All genuine political theories presuppose man to be evil" (*The Concept of the Political* 61), and "[P]olitical thinkers are always aware of the concrete possibility of an enemy. Their realism can frighten men in need of security. (65).

evil”²⁹⁹ Isaiah Berlin follows Schmitt's lead, but comes to contrary conclusions in his essay, “Two Concepts of Liberty”:

Philosophers with an optimistic view of human nature and a belief in the possibility of harmonizing human interests, such as Locke or Adam Smith and, in some moods, Mill, believed that social harmony and progress were compatible with reserving a large area for private life over which neither the state nor any other authority must be allowed to trespass. Hobbes, and those who agreed with him, especially conservative or reactionary thinkers, argued that if men were to be prevented from destroying one another and making social life a jungle or a wilderness, greater safeguards must be instituted to keep them in their places; he wished correspondingly to increase the area of centralized control and decrease that of the individual.³⁰⁰

The binary that is erected between Locke, Smith, and Mill on the one hand, and Hobbes and Schmitt on the other, results, according to a Catholic interpretation argued by *la Nouvelle Théologie*, from a radical differentiation between the natural and the supernatural. Crummey resists this differentiation. From the perspective of Henri de Lubac, human nature can only be univocally interpreted as evil if God is absolutely distanced from his creation and his image is fractured beyond recognition. However, to read human nature as essentially good, would be to overstep the problem of humanity's sin and the consequent need of grace.³⁰¹ The “truth” of Catholicism is somewhere between Schmitt and Berlin, as nature, which was created good, has been deprived of the full extent of that goodness by mismanaged desire.

²⁹⁹ Schmitt, 65,61. Schmitt does not expect widespread acceptance of his thesis: “Without wanting to decide the question of the nature of man one may say in general that as long as man is well off or willing to put up with things, he prefers the illusion of an undisturbed calm and does not endure pessimists” (65).

³⁰⁰ Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” *Four Essays on Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 118-172, 126.

³⁰¹ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988, first edition 1947), 371. In his appendix, “The Double Nature of Man,” de Lubac writes: “man's nature lies midway between two extremes – between the divine, incorporeal nature, and the irrational nature of the brute creation. Examine the compound which is man, and you will find that he has a share in each of these opposite elements” (371).

As Crummey recognizes, the taste of that goodness is not completely lost to humanity because God anticipates human depravity and decides to sacrifice himself (Rev. 13:8), creating what William Desmond calls a “primal ethos” of redemption that calls the “second ethos” of human agency to become a “reconfigured ethos”: “reconfigured in light of our fundamental orientations to what is...both actual and possible.”³⁰² This cosmological atonement, which redoubles the original goodness of creation through Christ's exceeding humanity, overcomes original sin and offers goodness back to humanity. Because Christ is the exception from the rule of depravity without abandoning his humanity, the norm of human potential is reconfigured.³⁰³ Christianity, thus, offers a paradoxical “politics” according to which humanity is both depraved and yet graced.

Love is the most prominent sign of God's sustained image in fallen humanity. Crummey recognizes this and attempts to anchor his representation of the supernatural in the immanence of contemporary sexual mores. In Christianity, there is a longstanding discourse of spiritual eros that uses the analogy of sexual desire for the human other to express the desire for the transcendent.³⁰⁴ The problem arises when the analogy collapses and desire for the transcendent does not transcend the immanent referent. For this reason, Christianity has given rise a widespread discourse on love, which ranges from Anders Nygren's distanced binary of agape and eros, to Vattimo's claim that love demands that Christianity needs to abandon itself to secularism.

³⁰² William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), 2-3.

³⁰³ The beatific vision is a higher grace than the paradise of Eden.

³⁰⁴ For example, consider the erotic imagery of “Song of Songs,” the many images of Christ and his bride awaiting consummation, and the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux, Catherine of Siena, and Mechtilde of Magdeburg (to mention only the most prominent).

All you need is Love/Love alone is Credible

C.S. Lewis has popularized a typology of love according to the four koine Greek words used in the New Testament. They include, *Storge*, or love of inanimate things, from pets to nation states; *Philia*, friendship; *Eros*, desire; and *Agape*, self-emptying love.³⁰⁵ Discursive tension has enveloped eros and agape throughout the Christian tradition, because human desire and desire for the divine share a similarity. Thus, Crummey's innovation of the sacrament of cunnilingus centres on a particularly Catholic problem, one that we see Gianni Vattimo and Graham Ward stumbling over. The problem relates to the nature and grace (supernature) continuum. If Catholics affirm a basic analogy between human beings and the divine, the analogy of being, then it follows that human capacities are tied to those of God and that humans should express their capacities in light of Christ. If the greatest human capacity is love, and love naturally affects humans from the moment a mother gazes into the eyes of her child to the moment the young Dante sees Beatrice, how is it that natural love, whether eros or agape, is connected to supernatural love ("God is love," 1 John 4:8)?

In *The Future of Religion*, Vattimo claims that the Christian metanarrative of the supernatural has been compromised. He argues that love in a secular age should completely empty itself of metaphysics (the analogical predicate in God) and affirm the "natural" movements of love,³⁰⁶ just as Christ emptied himself of his due honour before

³⁰⁵ See C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Toronto: Harper, 1960), 1960. On *Storge* see p. 39-68; *Philia*, p. 69-110; *Eros*, p. 111-40; and *Agape*, p. 141-70.

³⁰⁶ Gianni Vattimo and Richard Rorty, *The Future of Religion*, ed. Santiago Zabala (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 79-80. I am drawing from Vattimo's statements, and Zabala's paraphrasing of Vattimo. Rorty's argument relies on Vattimo's work, and contributes little to the conversation.

death (Phil. 2: 5-11).³⁰⁷ Vattimo claims that Christianity has introduced a sort of nihilism to the Western tradition, which has been demonstrated through Christianity's negating influence on paganism and any other pluralist metaphysic. The ultimate end of this metaphysics is to eventually negate itself (kenotic agape) by making secularization its task,³⁰⁸ and offering society one single regulation: "love is the only law."³⁰⁹

Zabala, Vattimo's student, suggests that Christianity must abandon all of its teachings about sexuality and remain completely silent about the issue.³¹⁰ By doing this Christianity will "no longer be a patriarchal Eurocentric church, but a universal and tolerant one."³¹¹ "The challenge of the future," writes Zabala, "will be to convince the Church that charity must take the place of discipline."³¹² Charity is left vaguely defined as a preference for the neighbour (Christ's second commandment) above truth, which leads to "weak ontology."³¹³ The sexual element of "charity" is never overlooked by either Zabala or Vattimo, as abandoning truth entails abandoning purity (sexual or otherwise): "once Christianity is reduced to the claim that love is the only law, the ideal of purity loses its importance."³¹⁴ Vattimo makes his disjuncture between unfettered eros and the Augustinian doctrine of human nature explicit, by separating purity from desire. If one endorses his overtly positive view of human nature then Christianity must be interpreted as an ontology that was incarnated to give way to the free play of love,

³⁰⁷ Vattimo, 47.

³⁰⁸ Vattimo, 14.

³⁰⁹ Vattimo, 79.

³¹⁰ Zabala on Vattimo, 16.

³¹¹ Zabala on Vattimo, 16.

³¹² Zabala on Vattimo, 16.

³¹³ Vattimo, 65.

³¹⁴ Vattimo, 79.

whatever form it takes.

The conflation of eros and agape can be seen in works by theologians who strongly resist Vattimo's conversion of Christianity into liberalism. In his chapter "Suffering and Incarnation: A Christian Politics," Graham Ward argues that the debate about eros has been focused on "*jouissance*" in continental philosophy.³¹⁵ "[W]hether in Deleuze, Lacan, Lyotard, Barthes, Foucault or Žižek," Ward claims "suffering constitutes itself as the lack or absence of *jouissance*."³¹⁶ Žižek and Lacan find pleasure in the play between the "imaginary and the symbolic" object, which are never identical. Žižek tells his public to "enjoy their symptom" rather than to wish for the identity of desire in imaginary, symbolic, and real forms. Similarly, under the logic of Derrida's *différance* the object of desire is always in need of a supplement. The need for a supplement, which has "always-already" status, enacts an infinite deferral of completed desire.³¹⁷ Ward describes both of these formulations as symptoms of a sado-masochistic culture, something that Žižek acknowledges by repeatedly asserting that de Sade articulates the perverse result and acceptance of Kantian moral law.³¹⁸ "[T]he dreams of the bliss of union intensify the suffering in the [same] way that Sisyphus is tormented by seeing the goal for which he

³¹⁵ Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 250.

³¹⁶ Ward, 250.

³¹⁷ Ward, 251.

³¹⁸ Ward, 250. For Žižek's argument see *The Ticklish Subject* (New York: Verso, 2000), 132, 152, 168, 247, 359, 379. De Sade is the flip side of the Kantian moral law for Žižek and Lacan because perversion does not subvert the force of law, but reinforces it: "The pervert...brings to light, stages, practises the secret fantasies that sustain the predominant public discourse, while the hysterical position precisely displays doubt about whether those secret perverse fantasies are 'really it'" (248). For Žižek, the hysteric is more potent because he is aware of the gap between reality and subjectivity, where as the pervert is all too certain of the route to *jouissance*. There is reason to see a partial truth in the hysteric as Žižek constructs him, because there is a strong relationship between acknowledging one's epistemological humility and negative theology, which is a significant step in analogical thought.

strives while also arguing that it can never be attained.”³¹⁹ In contrast, Wish Furrey's trajectory describes a dialectic of initial pleasure, amongst social antagonism, which transitions into increasing antagonism accompanied by pain, that is resolved by a final hope of pleasure returned, which promises to overcome the legacy of pain. Ward's answer to the problem of unceasing suffering involves a reduction of the messianic return of Christ to the “natural” logic of sexuality. He wants to affirm the fullness of the beatific vision in heaven, which is intimated in trace form through epiphany. Thus, suffering cannot “be” something of worth in this economy, but is taken up by Christ only because of the necessity required by original sin. Here Christ negates the negation of pleasure by mediating divine life across the analogical interval and remaking suffering into complete jouissance.

This unity of imaginary and symbolic, or the supplement to end all supplements, is expressed through the figure of an orgasm:

The agonistic pleasure of enduring the undecidable (Derrida) is akin to being suspended on the brink of orgasm without being allowed the final release of coming. This is the quintessential sado-masochistic ecstasy which, in truth, announces a certain stasis, even paralysis. In contrast, the closing lines of the New Testament resound with the call for Messianic arrival: “The spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let him who hears say, “Come.” ... He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus' (Rev. 22.17, 20). The Christian always seeks that coming, not to prolong its arrival, but in the belief that proclaiming that coming is itself ushering in its fulfilment.³²⁰

While this undoubtedly fits the post-structural atmosphere of double-entendres, it

³¹⁹ Ward, 253. I encourage the reader to see the similarity between the problems associated with jouissance in contemporary continental philosophy and the problem of emancipation as discussed in my chapter on MacDonald. Christianity does not refuse the problems of emancipation or uncompleted desire, but rather thinks through these issues according to the logic of original sin and the salvific economy of the Trinity.

³²⁰ Ward, 263.

concedes too much to the sexualized reading of eros in an attempt to read the supernatural by the logic of the natural.

Like Crummey, Ward makes sexual eros the primary referent in the analogy between the natural and supernatural. The Father becomes the fulfilment of the phallus, rather than the one who calls for the marking of the phallus, the subjection of the phallus to his benevolent command. The paradox of the analogy of being is that what is named from what is naturally known, comes before what is natural and shapes the natural toward the supernatural. Thus, the analogy might begin with sexuality, but sexuality is an intimation of the spiritual anologate, which is wholly different than the fallenness of sexuality. It is this fallenness that needs to be negated – and this is enacted through a negation of the negation. Eugene Rogers describes the workings of the analogy of eros:

Christians must norm their use of the word “love” by the love by which Jesus pleases the Father... a love that pleases him already in the trinitarian life...It is not a genital or a sexual love... It is an eros that (like monasticism and marriage) ends in goodness, righteousness, holiness, and the fulfilment of the trinitarian purpose. That does not make the love not erotic; it makes the erotic a subset of the love of the Son for human beings and the love for which the Father loves the Son, the love in which the Holy Spirit delights and – with the gracious inclusion of human beings – celebrates at a wedding.³²¹

Desire, then, is primarily desire for the infinite and secondly, the finite. Yet, the nature-grace continuum is not willing to let natural desire be exhausted by the natural. It is a desire for what exceeds the natural by virtue of the plenitude of the source of creation.

Original Sin and Multiculturalism

The title of *The Wreckage*, and the theme it introduces, demonstrates that

³²¹ Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., *Sexuality and the Christian Body* (Malden: Blackwell, 1999), 222.

Crummey is not convinced by his own sympathy towards ideologies of human innocence. The story begins with a fragmented self, Nishino, slogging through the jungles of Asia during WWII (on the side of Japanese Fascism no less), precisely because he is the site of trauma. This trauma is not a result of war, but is cultivated in the provisional peace of Kitsilano, BC, (English Bay), where he was implicated in the texts and practices of racial antagonism. He and his friends desired to swim in the local pool, but the manager at the door banned them: “No Japs” (189). Nishino then decides to bribe the elderly manager with strawberries, discussing common ground the two share - the sawmill where he and Nishino's grandfather both worked. The manager apologizes to Nishino: “‘You're a cleaver little nip, ain't you,' he said. And he apologized again, as he did regularly, for the pool's policy. 'People just won't stand to share the place with your kind’” (190). Yet they come to a settlement; the boys can swim at 7:30 before the pool opens. The boys enjoy the swim, but afterwards they desire retribution: “All four boys pissed into the clear water of the pool” (191). Here urine functions as the analogy of political and ethical corruption. Clearly the racist policies of the pool contributed to Nishino's depravity. Nishino, however, is not without agency; nor are Wish's friends when they urinate on Nishino's dead body. Presuming innocence and pointing fingers on any front simply contributes to the depravity – they are all guilty. Even Nishino's bumbling Japanese language teacher, Mr. Yawata, contributes to this negative effluence by teaching fascist texts to his Japanese-Canadian students (128-9).

Nishino was “inspired” by his school teacher as he read from the *League of the Divine Wind*, a fictional novel borrowed from the pages of Yukio Mishima's ode to

seppuku, *Runaway Horses*, the second novel in his *Sea of Fertility* tetralogy.³²² In *Runaway Horses*, the *League of the Divine Wind* is Isao's (the protagonist) favourite novel, and it embodies his personal ambition to bring divine justice to the corrupt, Westernized officials of pre-WWII Japan – one of Nishino's ambitions. The league is composed of two hundred warriors who long to commit seppuku, or ritual suicide with their samurai swords, after they have purged the nation from its vices in the name of the emperor. Mishima was a fervent supporter of Japanese fascism, writing a play titled *My Friend Hitler* in 1968 and raising his own army of militant youth, the Tatenokai (the Shield Society).³²³ With four members of the Tatenokai, Mishima entered the compound of the east division of Japan's self-defence unit, overtaking the general and so that he could speak to the masses of his planned coup d'etat. At the end of the speech, which the crowd mocked, Mishima returned to the general's office and committed seppuku in a similar fashion to his character's in the *League of the Divine Wind*.

Why does Crummey layer Mishima into *The Wreckage*? The reader who doesn't know Mishima's works would skip over Crummey's reference quickly and continue on in sympathy with Nishino in his liminal state as a Japanese born Canadian during WWII times. On top of the racism that Nishino experiences in Canada, he is also othered by the Japanese of his home country: "He tried to bury every conscious verbal and social tic that would mark him as an outsider, but he was often taunted for his city-fied accent, his barely definable but undeniable separateness" (127). This seemingly cosmopolitan novel grates against the common felt sympathy with the plight of Japanese-Canadians during

³²² Yukio Mishima, *Runaway Horses*, Trans. Michael Gallagher (New York: Knopf, 1973).

³²³ Yukio Mishima, *My Friend Hitler*, Trans. Hiroaki Sato. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

WWII by demonstrating how Nishino is recruited on Canadian soil to fill his “obligation to the emperor” (128) by betraying his host country's allegiance with Allied forces.

Nishino is not the sort of Japanese-Canadian you would find represented in Joy Kogawa's layered protest to Japanese internment, *Obasan*.³²⁴ Alluding to the novel's title, Crummey writes of Nishino's boyhood impression of life in Canada:

A handful of boys in Nishino's class could pass gas at will and they formed their own League of the Divine Wind, belching and farting through the halls of the school, shouting “Kamikaze!” as they went. They sat outside the classroom and performed mock seppuku with their pencils. It was all a bizarre joke to them. Two of the boys slipped into the classroom early one afternoon and removed the screws from Mr. Yawata's chair and it collapsed underneath his weight the moment he sat down. He lay there, sputtering among the wreckage, his glasses fallen across his face. And Nishino felt as if the fate of all things Japanese in the new world lay there with him. (129)

In spite of the comic element in Crummey's representation, Nishino finds himself fighting for the Japanese Emperor as a spy, eventually being shot in the back and interrogated by his commanding officer because of his cultural hybridity.

Likewise, Wish's pre-war experiences as a “mick” (a derogatory term for an Irish Catholic) in Methodist communities like “the Cove” also pre-figure the “global” prejudices that contributed to WWII. The provincial is the realm of love and meagre economics, where the global is the realm of clashing military forces (the allied and the axis), yet the two participate in analogical modes of sinning.³²⁵ The only realm where

³²⁴ Joy Kogawa, *Obasan* (Toronto: Penguin, 1981).

³²⁵ Carl Schmitt categorizes “provincial” tensions such as those between Catholics and Methodists in Newfoundland as in-group fighting that is contained under the category of “friend.” The battles of WWII, however, would be considered fighting between “enemies”; Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 29. Schmitt wrongly argues that Christ didn't imply that the love of the neighbour was meant to extend to enemies (28-29). Given his astute theological education, Schmitt's misreading of this passage seems ideologically motivated. Derrida problematizes Schmitt's friend-enemy dichotomy in *The Politics of Friendship*, out-Christianizing Schmitt by arguing that he overlooks problems that Plato raised in the *Republic* about the definitions of “Greek” and “Barbarian,” on which Schmitt bases his argument. “Polemios” (internal enemy) and “Ekthros” (external enemy) do not perpetuate a static

multiculturalism thrives in the novel is the Catholic community in St. John's where the Basha family flourishes as minorities amongst European Catholics. Indeed, in the Catholic church, the only criminals are those who leave the Church, like Helen Parsons and abusive Priests. Wish tells of the anti-Protestant rhetoric that the Monsignor in *Renews* would encourage:

[Wish:]“The things the Monsignor used to tell us about you.”

[Sadie:]“Who?”

“Your people. Protestants. Threw you all in together, Bill Sunday and Christian Science and the Quakers and Alexander Dowie, the Sally Ann. Trial marriages and prison reform and prohibition. A diseased imagination, he used to say, at odds with the genius of Catholicism.”

“The what?”

“The genius of Catholicism. Funny how I spent all my time at mass daydreaming about some girl's tits and I can still quote him, chapter and verse.” Wish took a breath. “Father Power didn't think much of you crowd.” (326)

It is Father *Power* who cloisters Lilly, a sympathetic character, and the unfettered yet embodied sign of Catholic spirituality: “Father Power got her tied to a stake up at the convent” (118). Only the lay powers of Billy-Peter, Tom and Patty can rupture his prejudiced hold on the spirit (118).

While his ecclesiastical politics seem to implicate others in depravity, Crummey is not content to totally displace depravity onto external sources. After being exposed to radiation poisoning at the bomb site of Nagasaki, Wish tells Mercedes about Harris' quick death to cancer and his fear of his immanent death, a *telos* that should be read with all the theological weight that St. Paul puts on it: “What made him sick was in me too” (291). Wish implies that the sin of dropping the bomb begets sin. Yet it didn't enter him from

binary but serve to align state, nation, and blood/nature in a way that turns the polis into the family; see Derrida's *The Politics of Friendship*, (New York: Verso, 2005), 87-93.

the hand of some anonymous American pilot. Speaking about the mysterious and painful legacy of Nishino to Spalding, one of Nishino's killers, Spalding tells Wish,

“You can't let that fucker get under your skin.”

Wish offered a strained smile. “What if he was always in there?”

“Well in that case.” Spalding paused. “I guess you'd have to see a priest about that,” he said. (277)

During the conversation Wish holds his post-war talisman in his pocket (more of an albatross around the neck), a British war medal that he picked up from Nishino's corpse (276-7). Nishino carried it as a trace from his past. It was his father's medal, and it was laden with the memory of how his father (Japanese) was treated when he made public his affair with the French wife of a fellow fallen soldier (313). Wish's sin, which is mapped into a collective web, weighs on him and perpetuates his internal fragmentation, which he relies on alcohol to forget. One vision that is particularly instructive involves a Japanese “Mother and Child” that Wish feels nothing for:

Wish saw a woman sitting on a concrete step that first morning, her neck and face and one side of her head scorched raw, the dull-white of her skull visible in spots through the tattered scalp. She was nursing an infant, the skin of the baby's back bubbled by the heat of radiation. It looked to Wish like pork rind just out of the oven. The woman seemed barely aware of her surroundings, of the child in her arms. Dead to the world, was his thought. But he felt nothing for her or the infant. (292)

Later in life Wish realizes that “wishing such a fate on them had made it so. His wish alongside the wish of others like him” (345). Here we must not pass up the chance to recognize the coincidence of his name, “Wish,” with his deepest sin, yet also his redemption (Sadie and Lilly). Feeling nothing for the Mother and Child is a reflection on his abandonment of the image of God in humanity (Mary being the most immaculate image for Catholics), worse, the incarnate God-man, Christ (having two natures).

Recalling this impression on his soul while driving during the 1994 narrative, Wish has to pull over and vomit (345). When Lilly finds Wish in his perpetual drunken state, she tells him “You have to ask God for help with this;” he responds, “There is no God, Lilly” (331). She turns to him with Latin, “*Adjutorium nostrum in nomine Domini qui fecit coelum et terram [Our help in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth]*.” Without him,” she said, “we can do nothing. You have to say the prayer of a special intention to Our Blessed Lady, every day for thirty days, to ask for her intercession” (331). Wish battles against Lilly, becoming sober “on his own volition” (331), yet his volition is not beyond grace. The novel makes this irony explicit by injecting a hand of providence at every significant narrative juncture, from the burning prize horse named after the Virgin Mary – the Ocean Star – sent flying on fire to the water over religio-political tension and “tattooed” on Wish’s neck as a birth mark (341-2), to the novel’s explicit statements about providence: “God’s hand was there in the details, Lilly always said, turning you left or right. And there was some vague comfort in thinking God was to blame” (165). Herb Wyile reminds us of the theme of infinite jest that Crummey puts forward near the conclusion, “Everything that had ever happened to Wish seemed part of some mad joke designed to be the end of him.” However, Wyile wants to leave us in the grip of the nausea of postmodern ethical decisions, and he decides not to situate the line in context.³²⁶ The passage continues, “he clung so fiercely to his coffee and pirated satellite television and Billy-Peter’s pots of stew, to the second hand car he kept alive with spit and tape and prayer. As if some impossible moment of redemption was bound to

³²⁶ Herb Wyile, “Making a Mess of Things: Postcolonialism, Canadian Literature, and the Ethical Turn,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 76.3 (2007): 835.

materialize out of that fog” (346). The impossible happens eight pages later when Lilly emerges from the fog of dementia to conduct the miraculous wedding between Sadie and Wish, against his will (which should thwart his faith in autonomous voluntarism, one would think).

When Sadie thinks of the “whole truth” that Wish tells her of the past, she is overcome by his sin and fears what he might do to her “memory of him” (322): “A wager with Hiram, Wish told her, standing in the old bedroom, his hands filthy with rust. I’d have screwed a knothole, he said. ... A whiff of ammonia in her nostrils ... The cheap aftershave Wish was wearing, alcohol and leathery mint, and something awful beneath that. Sweat and old age and fear. *Corruption*” (322, emphasis added). Once he enlists as a soldier in the British Army most of the contact Wish has with racialized and national others reflects a similar structure of feeling. When he arrives in London a prostitute takes him aside to help with the “war effort,” “clamping his half-erect cock in her unshaven armpit. ... His head ached and he knew he would be bawling drunkenly in some alleyway before the night was through and the evening fell steadily around him in they tiny room. It felt as if he was bringing it down on himself, fucking his way into the dark” (153). After the war, when he works as a projectionist in a movie theatre, Wish is alone with an African-American woman, Magnolia Cooksey, who cleans the theatre. He engages in conversation with her, but realizes quickly that “She didn’t trust him ... Had never trusted him, a drunken white man, the theatre all but empty” (265). The next Monday he finds out that there has been a racist killing of a fourteen year old black boy who was murdered for whistling at a white woman. The husband and brother-in-law who perpetrated the

crime were acquitted (265). The truth that Crummey is telling through all of these violent and depraved exchanges, Nishino and Wish being the central focii, is that multiculturalism must be based on a view of human nature that accounts for the wreckage of the image of God enacted by original sin and performed by all descendants of that mythological beginning. Crummey is not content with monologic ethnic formations, citing their ability to corrupt a universal sense of humanity and the desire to love. However, his scepticism of the potential of multicultural communities that are non united united under a common confession of their depravity illustrates his promotion of the doctrine of original sin. Through a multiculturalism based on original sin, difference becomes a sign of God's grandeur as creator of all, and depravity is a universal condition that cannot be externalized without alienation from self.

Crummey pieces together the theological realism of the Catholic tradition in his rich thematic of sacramentalism, with the sexual liberty of our secular age. In contrast to Vattimo, Crummey's narrative implies that while traditional sexual conventions may be lost to the past, there is still a need for public religion. This need manifests itself through Crummey's lengthy investigation of trauma, original sin, racism, and violence. While the global state is wrought with war in the WWII narrative, Wish and Nishino look inward and discover a wretched impulse toward evil. Wish is unable to reconcile his fractured self-narrative on his own and needs an act of grace that is mediated by community that can gather his life's wandering together around a supernatural event, the sacrament of cunnilingus. Crummey's conception of the post-secular as worked out in *The Wreckage* points to an increased autonomy on sexual matters, while also claiming that sexuality is

part of the continuum between nature and grace. Moreover, Crummey's account of sin implies that while individual autonomy needs to be observed, negative freedom must be preserved by taking seriously the damage done to humanity by radical evil - evil that humanity participates in.

McClure, quoting William Connolly, argues that the post-secular is marked by the erasure of the "Augustinian moment," which claimed that "we are fragile; god is perfect; the earth is solid and bountiful: we have been given dominion over it," but also a rejection of its secular negation. They argue that a "posttheist, postsecular rejoinder" is developing which claims that "the earth is fragile; ...the sovereign god was on balance a destructive construction; ...nontheistic reverence for life and the earth remains to be cultivated."³²⁷ This is not what we find in Crummey's work. Crummey's post-secularism modifies Augustinianism, while preserving original sin. Instead of asserting the weakness of ontology, Crummey's novel ends with the phrase "What God has joined" (356) which beckons for the reader to respond, "let no man put asunder." Far from fragility, Crummey calls for permanence, permanence that rises up from and perfects liberal autonomy. "Amen to that,' Mercedes said" (356).

³²⁷ John McClure, *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 15.

Rewriting the Narrative of Vacuity: Placing the Protestants in Atlantic Canadian Literature

The rise of the English-Catholic writer in Atlantic Canada has not occurred in a religio-politico vacuum. Rather, the literary framework we have examined thus far has come to the fore because of shifting relations of the secular-religious binary in the Atlantic Canadian imaginary, largely populated until the early 20th century by mainline Protestant writers. While the form of secularity they expressed erected a strong divide between the two poles (Secular I), a normative Protestant ethos nonetheless regulated the content of the secular. As the later Secular I inverted the hierarchy of the religious and the secular, these writers virtually disappeared.³²⁸ Co-related with this disappearance, a dominant liberal metanarrative de-emphasized the Christian element in our modern imaginary.³²⁹ As the Protestant imaginary was destabilized, a cultural vacuum formed which radicalized Protestant individualism by disintegrating the collective ethos that served as a balance to the individual will. As a result, private conscience was transformed into the autonomous self of the consumer market economy, whose will is blown to and fro

³²⁸ In Atlantic Canada the Protestant mainline historically consisted of Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregationalist and Lutheran churches. In 1925, the liberal wing of the Presbyterian church joined the Methodist and Congregationalist churches to become the United Church of Canada. The mainline is currently represented by the Anglican and United churches; however, it could be argued that the more liturgically focused “high” Baptist churches of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches could also be considered under this category. Generally speaking, the evangelically focused churches, be they Baptist, Presbyterian, Wesleyan, as well as the Pentecostal and the Vineyard Christian fellowship, are not considered mainline.

³²⁹ Nathan Kerr writes, “Liberalism can operate politically only by abstracting from particular communities, traditions, and narratives and appealing to extrinsic, universalized, and rationalized conceptions of what it means to be human. Yet precisely thereby liberalism is forced to attribute to the state and civil society a hegemony they are not meant to have. Liberalism concedes to the state an imperialistic and totalitarian power: as the state is the objective arbiter of universality, so the state alone is the given condition of power according to which ‘politics’ might be conceived”; Nathan Kerr, *Christ, History and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (London, SCM Press, 2009), 94.

by multiple, competing marketing campaigns.

Joel Baetz identifies this narrative of vacuity in his article on *Fall on Your Knees*, calling it “cultural absence.” Baetz links the Gothic supernatural tropes that MacDonald employs to her resistance of this absence. He claims that MacDonald defies the “empty house” of liberalism by haunting it with ghosts:

[*Fall on Your Knees*] is a direct and open challenge to the assumptions about Canada's cultural absence. In a way, the novel itself is a ghost, haunting those who believe that Canada is a blank space and scaring them into recognition of the diverse richness of our past, the false exclusivity of our written history, and the potentiality of an inclusive present. What MacDonald's novel offers is nothing less than a difficult and complex model for cultural recuperation.³³⁰

This narrative of vacuity that Baetz identifies may also be linked to a perceived inferiority that resulted from Canada's status as a settler colony with a “second world” literature.³³¹

Because Canada's traditions perpetually link its citizens to other regions - Europe, Africa, and Asia - it is impossible to create a political narrative of “pure” Canadian identity. The liberal metanarrative allowed us to cope with this cultural displacement and transnationalism. It rationalized the post-WWII anxiety toward “pure” identities, which are impossible in Canada, and fostered an antithesis – the dissolution of any sense of similarity through the reign of “pure” difference.

The previous chapters have given detailed analysis of six novels that promote a thicker engagement with religious difference, but in doing so, they resist the Canadian

³³⁰ Joel Baetz, “Tales from the Canadian Crypt: Canadian Ghosts, the Cultural Uncanny, and the Necessity of Haunting in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*,” *Studies in Canadian Literature* 29.2 (2004), 63. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak address the narrative of religious vacuity in Canada, calling it the “social disestablishment” of Christianity in the 1960s and 1970s; See Bramadat and Seljak, eds., *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 418.

³³¹ Corey Frost, “Intersections of Gender and Ethnic Performativity in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 35.2 (2005), 198.

hegemony, which is still thinking in terms of Secular I. To pass beyond this structure, religion must be shown to be integral to a notion of ethical citizenship, the source of many strong evaluators that ground our ethical (and imaginative) traditions. In our current imaginary, religion functions as a sign of a problematic past identity – as in Ignatieff's recent misreading of George Grant's lament for 'Christendom,'³³² and also a sign of present difference – saris, turbans, head scarves, kirpans, WWJD bracelets, and Ichthys bumper stickers. In reality, a strategy that perpetuates a narrative of past religious vacuity (or focuses only on distanced colonial aggression) in order to accentuate present difference actually subverts present difference by undercutting thick conceptions of public religiosity.³³³

There is a need then, to move beyond pure difference and to adopt an analogical mode of constructing national (and international) identity. Using analogy we can recognize similarities while always acknowledging difference – linguistic, ethnic, religious, sexual, economic. Identity is forged from multiple overlapping analogies which form nexuses of common interest and debate in our national imaginary. Moreover, this identity cannot adopt a mode of “purity” because it is constituted with the perpetual differences of individuals and the constructed differences of groups always in mind.

From a literary perspective, a necessary step in deconstructing the narrative of vacuity

³³² Michael Ignatieff, *True Patriot Love* (Toronto: Penguin, 2009). Ignatieff implies that Grant was not lamenting the loss of the Canadian nation, but the loss of Christendom. This allows Ignatieff to launch his thesis that Canada is much different than the US, and that we did not lose our identity because of liberal (Pearson) initiatives.

³³³ Paul Gilroy argues that there is a danger of seeing politics as a dialectical battle between identity and difference because it avoids substantive political achievements that can be worked out between the two; *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 63. I would argue that the way forward is through the paradoxical mode of analogical identity formation, which is caught up in the recognition of difference, without compromising the meeting points where substantive politics can be developed.

which upholds the present impasse, involves the restoration of religious content, along with its debates and differences, to our critical engagement with our canonical literature. Accordingly, my description of the rise of the Catholic discourse in Atlantic literature requires a consideration of the Protestant literary imaginary that preceded it.

We will begin this narrative by briefly considering Protestantism in writings by Thomas Chandler Haliburton, Bliss Carman, and Lucy Maud Montgomery. We will then analyse the various strands of Protestant modernism that are evident writings by E.J. Pratt, Frank Parker Day, and Percy Janes. The narrative of religious vacuity is at its height in Ernest Buckler's Platonic materialism in *The Mountain and the Valley*. The beginning of the end of this narrative can be found in Alistair MacLeod's short stories. In the conclusion, we will see that George Elliott Clarke's writing demonstrates post-secular tensions that respond to the trivialization of religious identities. In his attempt to save the African United Baptist tradition from erasure, Clarke effectively subsumes religion under the category of culture. The six Catholic writers that are the focus of my study, work through the problems of post-secularity differently because they have recourse to established traditions of theological aesthetics, which allow the Catholic writer to see writing itself as constituting grace by participating in God's redemption of the world.³³⁴ Even taken in its most secularized form, this sensibility offers the writer a ready-made

³³⁴ I am relying here on Taylor's description of Hopkin's poetics: "A new poetic language can serve to find a way back to the God of Abraham....[P]oetry has a double source, as Seamus Heaney has suggested. On one hand, the poetic images strive to articulate experience, almost one might say, to gain relief from the 'acute discomfort' of powerful but confused feeling, as Eliot put it; on the other, they strive to make sense of, to make once more experientially real, the action of God which has already been captured in a theological language honed by tradition. The ultimate insight captured in the poem is a fusion of the two, which transforms both; that is, the experience is given deeper meaning, and the work of God acquires a new kind of experiential reality" (SA 757).

apologia for continuing an otherwise doubtful endeavour – artistic creation.

The situation that gives rise to North American English literature is, however, not given to this theological aesthetic. What we find, in the first place, is literature that maintains a pluralist Protestant ethos, even while preaching the distancing of the secular and the religious. Thomas Chandler Haliburton's discussion of religion in *The Clockmaker* (1836) demonstrates these seemingly contradictory dynamics.

Haliburton was a Nova Scotia-born British colonial from the upper class, who celebrated the high Anglican liturgy, acted as a judge in Windsor, NS, and at the end of his career in British North America, returned to Britain and won a seat as a member of the Tory party (1859-65). Haliburton created the popular character Sam Slick, the Yankee protagonist of his satirical episodes, which were originally published in Joseph Howe's newspaper, the *Novascotian*. He had a readership in the newly founded American states, the British colonies in Canada, and Britain. Fred Cogswell describes Haliburton's awareness of his “inferiority” to the British centre:

In so far as there was a crippling factor in Haliburton's life and writing, it was the fact that, say, do, or write what he would, Haliburton knew himself to be a colonial and that on this account all his achievement would be patronized in the very places that he considered to be his own true spiritual home.³³⁵

It might be said that Haliburton saw Nova Scotia through the eyes of an outsider. Yet, as Cogswell represents him, Haliburton loved the land which was slipping away from the Burkean conservatism that he championed.

The low church traditions that were popular in Nova Scotia as a result of Henry

³³⁵ Cogswell, Fred. “Thomas Chandler Haliburton.” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=4475 (accessed December 2, 2008).

Aline's "New Light Movement" seemed to drive the high church Anglican in Haliburton to sympathize with the "Popish." One episode from the *Clockmaker* describes a Sabbath morning when Slick engages a country priest. It begins with Slick's musings on the virtues of the rural Christian mores that were typical of the Protestantism of the Maritimes:

His first thought is prayerfully to render thanks; and then when he goes to worship he meets all his neighbors, and he knows them all, and they are glad to see each other, and if any two on 'em hant exactly gee'd together durin the week, why they meet on kind of neutral ground, and the minister or neighbours make peace atween them.³³⁶

Haliburton contrasts the rural rituals with the urban, where Slick "always feel kinder gloomy and whamblecropt."³³⁷ He complains about the loneliness on the streets, which is due to the absence of business and shut store fronts, as well as the the anonymity of urban congregations: "You don't know no one you meet there. Its the worship of neighbors, but its the worship of strangers, too, for neighbors don't know nor care about each other."³³⁸ Slick has this idealistic perception of rural religion in mind when he encounters Father O'Shaughnessy, who is angry about a pamphlet on the subject of infant baptism that is causing disquiet in between Protestants and Catholcis. Slick has already confided in the reader that he is troubled by "these religious controversies" which "are a serious injury to the cause of true religion" and he regrets that this controversy has spread as far as New Brunswick "where it will doubtless be renewed with equal zeal."³³⁹

³³⁶ Thomas Chandler Haliburton, *The Clockmaker: Series One, Two and Three*, ed. George L. Parker (Stittsville: Carleton University Press, 1995), 140. This engagement is found in Chapter 24, "Father John O'Shaughnessy."

³³⁷ Haliburton, 140.

³³⁸ Haliburton, 140.

³³⁹ Haliburton, 141.

Not knowing where his conversation partner stands on the issue, Father O'Shaughnessy tries to discover Slick's religious affiliation: "Says he, what are you, Mr. Slick? Well, I looks up to him and winks, a Clockmaker, says I; well he smiled, and says he, I see; as much as to say I hadn't ought to have axed that are question at all, I guess, for every man's religion is his own, and nobody else's business."³⁴⁰ In this world where religion is ubiquitous and yet privatized, there nonetheless remains a desire to identify others by their confession. The priest attributes Slick's convention of privacy to sectarianism and can hardly hold back his judgement:

Now, says he, for gracious sake do jist look here, and see how you heretics (protestants I mean, says he, for I guess that are word slipt out without leave,) are by the ears, a driven away at each other, the whole blessed time tooth and nail, hip and thigh, hammer and tongs, disputin, revilin, wranglin, and beloutin each other, with all sorts of ugly names that they can lay their tongues to. Is that the way you love your neighbor as yourself? *We say this is a practical comment on schism*, and by the powers of Moll Kelly, said he, but they all ought to be well lambasted together, the whole batch on 'em entirely. Says I, Father John, give me your hand; there are some things, I guess, you and I don't agree on, and most likely never will, seein that you are a Popish priest; but in that idee I do opinionate with you, and I wish with all my heart all the world thought with us.³⁴¹

Haliburton's sympathy is divided between Slick's ethic of privacy, an important element of Secular I which allows for the distancing of the secular and the religious, and the priest's abhorrence of schism. The antagonism that results from the fractured religious unity is a realistic theo-political problem for Haliburton, one that prohibits a peaceful separation of public and private spheres. Yet, Haliburton ends the episode in irony,

³⁴⁰ Haliburton, 142.

³⁴¹ Haliburton, 141-2. He repeats this point on p. 180

highlighting the role that “writing” plays in disturbing this peaceful binary conception of spheres:

*for writin only aggravates your opponents, and never convinces them. I never seed a convert made by that way yet, but I'll tell you what I have seed, a man set his own flock a doubtin by his own writin. you may happify your enemies, cantankerate your opponents, and, injure your own cause by it, but I defy you to sarve it.*³⁴²

Because Haliburton continues to write, even while writing leads to aggravation, the reader is presented with an unsettled religio-political compromise, which is not solved by Parson Possit's advice to “lay right hold of” the instigator “and chuck 'em over the fence.”³⁴³ Haliburton's ironic ending implies that there is no end to theo-political debate, while the straight-forward logic of the episode preaches privacy.³⁴⁴

There are several observations that we should make about Haliburton's Protestantism and the role of religion in his fictional Nova Scotia. Firstly, Nova Scotia is alive with religion and various forms of Christianity are prevalent – Catholicism, Anglicanism, Evangelicalisms. This “internal” religious diversity should not be overlooked, as each tradition develops specific “structures of feeling” and social formations that create a spectrum of communities (often within communities). Secondly, Haliburton's aesthetic is significantly influenced by his Anglican-Tory worldview. *The Clockmaker* functions as a series of therapeutic episodes that are designed to foster the reader's desire for Haliburton's opinions.

³⁴² Haliburton, 144.

³⁴³ Haliburton, 144.

³⁴⁴ Haliburton writes, “What connection there ought to be atween Church and State, I am not availed, but some there ought to be as sure as the Lord made Moses,” yet he goes on to say that the “Colony Government is about as happy and as a good a one as I know on. A man's life and property are well protected here at little cost, and he can go where he likes and do what he likes provided he don't trespass on his neighbor,” (182).

At one point in the episode above, Mr. Hopewell complains at length about the Unitarians in New England, arguing that they need to be “pitched clean out of the state.” He continues, “let 'em go down to Nova-Scotia, or some such outlandish place, for they aint fit to live in no christian country at all.”³⁴⁵

Judging from Hopewell's opinion of Unitarians, Haliburton would not have approved of Bliss Carman's theology. Carman's aesthetic theology conforms to the idealism of his day and celebrates the transcendental insights of the individual (as loosened from the grip of a collective confession) vis-à-vis the universal spirit. Although Carman was raised in Fredericton, his family celebrated their connection to Concord, Massachusetts where their ancestor, Daniel Bliss, was a New Light Congregationalist minister and also the great-grandfather of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Carman's verse represents the thread-worn romanticism that was new to his cousin fifty years earlier. The lyric “Vestigia,” begins:

I took a day to search for God,
And found Him not, But as I trod
By rocky ledge, through woods untamed,
Just where one scarlet lily flamed,
I saw His footprint in the sod.³⁴⁶

Carman's wandering individual is conflicted by the *deus absconditus* of deism, where God is unavailable to scientific positivism and further obscured by multiple, competing versions of the sacred. Though he laments God's absence, Carman's mood lifts as he

³⁴⁵ Haliburton, 145.

³⁴⁶ Bliss Carman, *Later Poems* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1926); See also “Te Deum” of this collection, where Carman makes his Platonic construal of “shadow” and “substance” complicit with an “immortal rapture” in which the soul and the divine become one. This transcendental them was not wholly divorced from a more orthodoxy conception of Jesus, as demonstrated in his poem “Christmas Song” and “A Christmas Eve Choral.” This volume is no longer in print, but is available on line. *Canadian Poetry*, ed. D.M.R Bentley, <http://www.uwo.ca/english/canadianpoetry/>.

hears a thrush in the “holy twilight hush” and perceives God’s “voice upon the air,” and in “the glory of His robe”, the “last fires of sunset.” As the epiphany ends, the persona considers the natural world and longs to participate “in making saving Beauty be....” He concludes by linking this epiphany with the subjectivist longing of the idealist: “from that kindling ecstasy / I knew God dwelt within my heart.”

In Carman’s poetry there operates at once the seemingly contradictory disenchantment of the deity of Jesus Christ and the re-mystification of nature. He, thus, transforms the particular confession of Christianity into a generalized natural religion.³⁴⁷ “The Dead Faun,” is a lament for enchanted nature that “shall play no more...the mellow pipe of they father Pan.”³⁴⁸ The association of “father Pan” and Christ returns in Carman’s “Easter Eve,” where he compares the “fancies” of Greek and Christian myth: “If I should tell you I saw Pan lately down by the shallows of Silvermine... or...I met Christ walking in Ponus Street; / You might remark, ‘Our friend is flighty ! Visions for want of enough red meat!’”³⁴⁹ These myths that populate his imaginary are illusions, yet Carman goes on to interpret the wisdom of a mythological imaginary which connects the natural world to the cosmos: “I want to know, when the lock of winter was sprung of a

³⁴⁷ It is important that we understand how different the contemporary Catholic reliance on a nature-grace continuum (built on the analogy of being) is from Carman’s idealist inspired romanticism. The former maps all enchantment to the revelatory work of Christ, whereas the later maps Christ into a general enchantment. This is the difference between what Barth calls the “religion of revelation” and the “revelation of religion”; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.2, Trans. Geoffrey Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 284. There is a parallel between Barth and Balthasar here, in Balthasar’s formulation of theological aesthetics, rather than aesthetic theology; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol. I: Seeing the Form*. Trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. Ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 79-127.

³⁴⁸ Bliss Carman, *Poets of the Confederation*, ed. Malcolm Ross (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1960), 40.

³⁴⁹ Carman, *Poets of the Confederation*, 44-5. All quotations from “Easter Eve” are taken from these pages.

sudden, who kept the keys? / Who told old nibbler to go to sleep safe and sound with the lily roots, / And then in the first warm days of April – out to the sun with the greening shoots?” Who taught the bluebird “his chant of the happy heart, / As full of light as a theme of Mozart's – but where did he learn that more than art?” Both Pan and Christ are metaphors for a transcendental spirit which weaves instinct and seasonal time into an eternal fabric: “Already I share the life eternal with the April buds and the evening star / The slim new moon is my sister now; the rain, my brother; the wind, my friend. / Is it not well with these forever? Can the soul of man fare ill in the end?” By celebrating this spiritual immanence, Carman attempts to resist the disenchantment brought on by Enlightenment Reason, yet in choosing to defend a romanticized nature, he also prefigures the modern advent of hyper-individualism. Lucy Maud Montgomery is much more grounded in her description of life in early 20th century Cavendish, Prince Edward Island.

Montgomery, the wife of the Presbyterian rector Ewen Macdonald, recognized the Protestant ethos that ordered the maritime public and found that it had gone stale. Her education at Dalhousie University (1895-97) put her first among a new generation of women who had access to public life. She worked as a teacher, wrote for Halifax newspapers (*Chronicle* and *Echo*), and published over 100 short stories before she was married at the age of 37.

Anne Shirley is often overlooked as an important literary creation. Our interest is not in her popularity, but Montgomery's stylization of Anne as a figure of the Protestant sublime – the imagined possible of the elect Calvinist. Montgomery introduces this

theme when Matthew and Marilla received Anne as the unexpected. The order placed with the orphanage was for a boy, to help Matthew on the farm. But instead, the Cuthberts were surprised – the text tells us twice in chapter headings that follow on each other: “Matthew Cuthbert is Surprised”; “Marilla Cuthbert is Surprised.”³⁵⁰ Anne Shirley, the girl who rejects her name and demands to be called Cordelia, only to settle for adding an exotic “e” to the end of Ann, is the unassimilable representation of the human spirit.³⁵¹ In Cavendish, where “a dark church spire” marks the skyline, the Reformed life has grown old and stagnant and the Cuthbert’s have no progeny to succeed them. In contrast, the “great crystal-white star...shining like a lamp of guidance and promise” brought a spirited young red-haired girl to town to shake things up.³⁵² Anne, in this sense, is an analogy of the Holy Spirit. She is, of course, not the Holy Spirit, but the human spirit motivated by grace. She is exceptional, and as an exception, she reforms the norm, the law.³⁵³ Through her eyes, the mundane landscape shimmers with grace, and her imagination runs wild: “Anne’s beauty-loving eyes lingered on it all, taking everything greedily in.”³⁵⁴

Anne and Marilla assume the types of grace and law. Where Anne sees life and beauty, Marilla reduces her surroundings to their ability to supply her limited house-hold economy. Anne sees plenty, while Marilla sees depravity:

³⁵⁰ L. M. Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* (New York: Bantam, 1984), 9, 23.

³⁵¹ Montgomery, 24-5.

³⁵² Montgomery, 21.

³⁵³ Anne Shirley lends herself to this type of Agambenesque reading: “The exception [Anne] is what cannot be included in the whole of which [she] is a member and cannot be a member of the whole in which [she] is always already included”; Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 25.

³⁵⁴ Montgomery, 31.

“Oh, isn't it wonderful?” she said, waving her hand comprehensively at the good world outside.

“It's a big tree,” said Marilla, “and it blooms great, but the fruit don't amount to much never – small and wormy.”

“Oh, I don't mean just the tree; of course it's lovely – yes, it's radiantly lovely – it blooms as if it meant it – but I meant everything, the garden and the orchard and the brook and the woods, the whole big dear world. Don't you feel as if you just loved the world on a morning like this? And I can hear the brook laughing all the way up here. Have you ever noticed what cheerful things brooks are? They're always laughing. Even in wintertime I've heard them under the ice....

“You'd better get dressed and come down stairs and never mind your imaginings” said Marilla as soon as she could get a word in edgewise.

“Breakfast is waiting. Wash your face and comb your hair. Leave your window up and turn your bedclothes back over the foot of the bed. Be as smart as you can.”³⁵⁵

Marilla speaks in imperatives and tries to flatten the imagination to make it fit the symbolic context that she is accustomed to. Life needs to stay put. Anne, on the other hand, imitates the never ending uttering word, with imagination and flux and no end to her musings.

When Marilla decides Anne should have some religion, her conception of religion is overturned by Anne's romantic intuition. She asks Anne if she prays, and Anne says no. Marilla then inquires if Anne knows who God is: “'God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth' responded Anne promptly and glibly.”³⁵⁶ Having acquired this knowledge by rote at the orphanage Sunday school, Anne feels little compulsion to pray to this inert God. Taking Anne through the rudiments of Protestant orthopraxy, Marilla tells Anne that she must kneel to pray. Anne responds:

³⁵⁵ Montgomery, 31-2.

³⁵⁶ Montgomery, 49.

“Why must people kneel down to pray? If I really wanted to pray I'll tell you what I'd do. I'd go out into a great big field all alone or into the deep, deep woods, and I'd look up into the sky – up – up – up – into that lovely blue sky that looks as if there was no end to its blueness. And then I'd just feel a prayer. Well, I'm ready. What am I to say?”

Marilla felt more embarrassed than ever. She had intended to teach Anne the childish classic, “Now I lay me down to sleep.”³⁵⁷

Having had her heart softened by love, Marilla decides to interpret the law by the spirit rather than the letter, and she allows Anne to compose her own prayer. Surprisingly, Anne takes to the letter, writing her prayer as an epistle and concluding it with “Yours respectfully, Anne Shirley.”³⁵⁸

Janice Kulyk Keefer perceives this transgressive element in Anne, but fails to recognize her as a representation of the sublime: “Anne Shirley is permitted to break almost all the burdensome taboos of life in a fearsomely strict and dull Presbyterian community, openly accusing her elders of hypocrisy and convicting them of physical ugliness, dyeing her hair, intoxicating a teetotaler's daughter, and successfully refusing to attend school.”³⁵⁹ If the sublime is truly excessive and not only a figure, it must in the end remain unrepresentable. This may go some way to explaining why there are so many Anne novels. Anne can always be supplemented, but this need not imply that she is meaningless, nor unworthy of critical attention.

“God is in his heaven, all's right with the world,” concludes Montgomery's first installment of the Anne series.³⁶⁰ This optimistic version of the Protestant ethos, which could have been gathered from Pope's *Essay on Man* or the ridiculed Pangloss of Voltaire's

³⁵⁷ Montgomery, 51

³⁵⁸ Montgomery, 51.

³⁵⁹ Janice Kulyk Keefer, *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction* (Toronto:University of Toronto Press, 1987), 189.

³⁶⁰ Montgomery, 309.

Candide, was almost exhausted when E.J. Pratt took it up. In the poetry of E.J. Pratt we see what Karl Löwith calls the secularized providence of progress.³⁶¹ Pratt who was ordained as a Methodist minister like his father before him in Newfoundland, wrote his graduate thesis on demonology and his doctoral dissertation on Pauline Eschatology. Angela McAuliffe argues that while Pratt only enrolled in the ministry to please his father, he nevertheless undertook a lifelong investigation of religious themes in his academic writing and poetry.³⁶² Pratt writes of Christianity:

The realist, the stoic, the prophet [may] at the end of their climb find a common ground. The desperate cruelty of existence may be seen in the lament over Jerusalem, and in that cry of abandonment on the Cross, but with that was [Christ's] belief in love, human and divine, stubbornly held, sublimely contrasted with the ignorance of his enemies. It is as hard a faith as everyone knows who has tried to maintain it when failure, suffering and death crawl like shadows over the hopes.³⁶³

McAuliffe contends that Pratt's chief religious conflict was with suffering and theodicy, instigated by a long list of lost family members and senseless suffering, yet readers of his poetry are also drawn to the ideological conflict between Lyell and Darwin on the one hand and the Christian cosmology on the other.³⁶⁴

In "The Highway" Pratt contemplates the "the dark abyss of time" (SA 322) and attempts to synthesize the "aeons [that] passed without a count or name" with "the unfoldment of the star and flower - / when in her sacrificial way / Judea blossomed with her Christ!"³⁶⁵ In the final stanza Pratt considers original sin, perhaps the chief stumbling

³⁶¹ Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 200-3.

³⁶² Angela T. McAuliffe, *Between the Temple and the Cave: The Religious Dimensions of the Poetry of E. J. Pratt*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 200.

³⁶³ Pratt as quoted in McAuliffe, 203, her additions are in parentheses.

³⁶⁴ McAuliffe, 200.

³⁶⁵ E.J. Pratt, *Selected Poems of E.J. Pratt*, ed. Peter Buitenhuis (Toronto: MacMillan, 1968), 20.

stone for orthodox Christians who hold to evolution. How is it that the specific event chronicled in the murky origin of Genesis is writ across the whole of the cosmology?:

But what made our feet miss the road that brought
The world to such a golden trove,
In our so brief a span?
How may we grasp again the hand that wrought
Such light, such fragrance, and such love,
O star! O rose! O Son of Man?³⁶⁶

The question mark in this last line is indicative of Pratt's ambivalent attitude toward Christianity, yet also his desire to see the suffering of humanity abdicated by the son of man – progress.

Two theological themes from Pratt's poems are worth remarking on: the first is his belief in a form of providence that brings about human progress; the second is his condemnation of contemporary idolatry. These two themes are in tension, as Pratt's progressivist hope in technology and his awe at its grandeur is a form of idolatry. When Pratt writes that “The man whose hands were on the wheel / Could trace his kinship through her steel,” he proposes a vision of humanity that is at one with technology, achieving as a consequence a near divine stature.³⁶⁷

In his poem “From Stone to Steel,” Pratt charts the technological evolution of history alongside humanity's spiritual formations, and he highlights similarities between “pagan idolatry,” “true religion” and human sacrifice:

Between the temple and the cave
The boundary lies tissue-thin:
The yearlings still the altars crave
As satisfaction for a sin

³⁶⁶ Pratt, 21.

³⁶⁷ Pratt, “The Man and the Machine,” 19.

The road goes up, the road goes down -
Let Java or Geneva be -
But whether to the cross or crown,
The path lies through Gethsemane.³⁶⁸

Pratt implies that neither Calvinism nor the primal religion of the cave, can save humanity from the “snarl Neanderthal” that is “worn close to the smiling Aryan lips;”³⁶⁹ the suffering of Gethsemane cannot be avoided.

When we turn to Pratt's narrative poetry we find the relationship between sacrifice and progress again. The sacrificial narrative of Jesuit missionaries in *Brébeuf and his Brethren* (1940) opens the door to the celebratory nationalism of *Towards the Last Spike* (1952). Brébeuf's passionate struggle in his mission to the Algonquin is capped by his violent death at the hands of the Iroquois. The poem ends by connecting martyrdom to nation building, the supersession of the Catholic faith: “Three hundred years have passed, and the winds of God / Which blew over France are blowing once more through the pines / That bulwark the shores of the great Fresh Water Sea.”³⁷⁰ The martyrs of the Jesuit Relations are close relatives to the heroic figures of Canada's technological battle for the dominion. As if straight from the pages of Homer or Virgil, the railroad workers of *Toward the Last Spike* fight against the great forms of Canada's vast natural expanse, that they might found the nation through their monumental endeavor:

Into this scrimmage came the fighting men,
And all but rivers were their enemies.
Whether alive or dead the bush resisted:
Alive it must be slain with axe and saw,
If dead, it was in tangle at their feet.³⁷¹

³⁶⁸ Pratt, 20.

³⁶⁹ Pratt, 20.

³⁷⁰ Pratt, 150.

³⁷¹ Pratt, 201.

The conjunction of sacrifice and progress, which in Pratt's work are both subservient concepts to the nation, are part of his political theology. Pratt's poetry, especially when considered in the light of his entire corpus, attempts to harness the powers of the Christian religion for the purpose of man's progress in the dominion of Canada. This becomes all the more significant when we understand that Pratt's Canadian nationalism is at the expense of Newfoundland's sovereignty, his mother country.

Pratt's poetry is most absurd in the baffling poem, "The Truant," where we find a pseudo-divine creator the great Panjandrum (a consciously "make believe" name from Samuel Foote's poem of the same name) facing down his insolent creation, "a biped, rational, six feet high" of "Calcium, carbon, phosphorus, vapour / And other fundamentals spun."³⁷² The great Panjandrum examines the creature and convicts the truant of "this capital crime,"

You are accused of singing out of key
(A foul unmitigated dissonance),
Of shuffling in the measures of the dance,
Then walking out with that defiant, free
Toss of your head, banging the doors,
Leaving a stench upon the jacinth floors.
You have fallen like a curse
On the mechanics of my Universe.³⁷³

Here Panjandrum combines the musical diction with which Augustine describes heaven, the physical-spiritual dance of Shiva's design, and the mechanistic universe of William Paley. Pratt has the representative of all humanity speak of our great technological feats before this vindictive god:

³⁷² Pratt, 38.

³⁷³ Pratt, 39.

Your astronomical conceit
Of bulk and power is aserine.
Your ignorance so thick,
You did not know your own arithmetic.
We flung the graphs about your flying feet;
We measured your diameter –
Of zeros prefaced by an integer.
Before we came
You had no name.³⁷⁴

Humanity carries on with this technological arrogance for another seventy lines. “And when, one day, grown conscious of your age” the truant complains, “We turned a human page / And blotted out a cosmic myth / With all its baby symbols to explain / The sunlight in Apollo's eyes.”³⁷⁵ After we demystified the cosmos we could measure this persecuting god and show it what it really is- “a rain / Of dull Lucretian atoms,” merely a “series of concentric waves which any fool / Might make by dropping stones within a pool.”³⁷⁶ Pratt vacillates between lampooning the great Panjandrum and placing the human in a ridiculous posture, with absurd claims. Pratt concludes this incoherent, angst ridden spectacle by claiming that humans, having dragged themselves from the cave only to experienced the destruction of WWII, have found the true faith in the humility of the cross: “in cathedral rubble found a way to quench / A dying thirst within a Galilean valley.”³⁷⁷ It seems, however, that the kenosis of Christ and the power of the Father are incompatible. Pratt ultimately refuses the great Panjandrum's cosmic dance, “No! by the Rood, we will not join your ballet.”³⁷⁸ The force of this last line suggests that this ridiculous god wears Hitler's moustache and is responsible for the destruction brought by

³⁷⁴ Pratt, 40.

³⁷⁵ Pratt, 41.

³⁷⁶ Pratt, 42.

³⁷⁷ Pratt, 42.

³⁷⁸ Pratt, 42.

the Axis powers. “The Truant” suggests that the quenching water of the Galilean valley is a human invention that outstrips the earlier, immature projection of a vindictive God.

We do not remember Pratt as a poet concerned with traditional religion, but as a Canadian Virgil, who described the great feats of the nation in long, epic poems. Thus, Pratt should be understood as a devotee to Canada's civil religion. Since Robert Bellah delineated the workings of civil religion in the US, critics have debated whether Canada has a similar “cult.”³⁷⁹ It is clear that Pratt labored to increase the strength of civil religion – successful or not. Pratt's poetic efforts towards the creation of a civil religion were guided by the obvious rule of national mythology – return to the events that have given that nation shape and immortalize them. This is what Pratt attempted to do in *Brébeuf and His Brethren* and *Towards the Last Spike*.

From Pratt we turn to his contemporary, Frank Parker Day, the author of *Rockbound* (1928), perhaps the only Canadian novel of its day to rival the best works by Hemingway and Steinbeck (although they came a generation after him). Like Pratt, Day's father was a Methodist minister, and throughout *Rockbound*, we perceive the fragmented cultural text of Protestantism, particularly the rural Baptist tradition in Nova Scotia. Day took his BA at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick and won a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford. He then studied at the University of Berlin before taking a teaching position at the University of New Brunswick. From there he left for New York, where he spent the bulk of his career at Union College. This was a career choice that gave his Canadian peers the sense that he was a turncoat, a judgement that has only been

³⁷⁹ Robert Bellah, *The Robert Bellah Reader*, Ed. Robert Bellah, Steven Tipton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 225-45.

redressed in the court of public opinion with the victory of *Rockbound* in the 2005 CBC Canada Reads competition.

Rockbound is set on three islands, Rockbound, Outer Island and Barren Island, in the bay between Lunenburg and Peggy's Cove, NS, in the early part of the twentieth century (the date is not exact, however, the books tells of the introduction of motors on fishing vessels).³⁸⁰ David Jung, the protagonist, was raised under harsh conditions by his mother on Outer Island. His great-uncle, Uriah Jung runs a fishing company on *Rockbound* with his sons Casper, Martin and Joseph. Rockbound is populated by two warring families, the Jungs and the Krauses. When David's mother dies, he applies to work with Uriah, who scrutinizes his methods and makes him work harder than his sons. David's cousins stigmatize him because of his "uncivilized" upbringing as an "Outposter," and the majority of the novel tells of David's fight to overcome these prejudices. The later part of *Rockbound* chronicles the friendship between David and Gershom Born, their rivalry over Mary Dauphiny, and Gershom's vengeful murder-suicide of Uriah and Casper.

As a representation of rural Nova Scotia the novel is highly self-conscious. Day prefaces most chapters with a line from *The Canterbury Tales*, with the exception of Ch. VII, *The Parlement of Foules*, Ch. IX, *Boke of the Dutchesse*, and ch. XIV, *Troilus and Criseyde*.³⁸¹ The language that Day's characters speak is reminiscent of Chaucer's old English, and the themes of the novel – usurping a King, tragedy, the outsider, murder, marriage – approach human universals through the particular traditional frame of English

³⁸⁰ These islands are said to have been based on East Ironbound, Tancook and Pearl Island, which are found of the coast of Lunenburg, NS and which Day visited in the summer of 1926.

³⁸¹ Frank Parker Day, *Rockbound* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 128, 171, 280.

literature. It is his relationship to Christian mythology that is most interesting.

In *Rockbound*, Day appropriates biblical myths, specifically the legend of David's rise to the throne of Israel, according to a cubist representational scheme. Cubism takes an image and refracts that image on a single canvas from multiple perspectives. The image, which in realism is single, becomes multiple, as seen in Picasso's "Portrait of Ambrose Vollard" and Braque's "Piano and Mandola." With *Rockbound*, the central tension between David and Uriah sends a reader familiar with the scriptural narrative of King David spinning. This is because Day's Uriah fills Saul's role as the King that David usurps. Uriah Jung is at some points Saul, other points Goliath, some times Jesse, and over all Uriah the Hittite. It is this last association that is most puzzling, because Uriah is a minor character in the biblical narrative and a major character in *Rockbound*. The Uriah of II Samuel 11 and 12 is a righteous husband of Bathsheba and a noble warrior of whom David quietly disposes. After David has Uriah placed at the battle front where he will surely be killed, the prophet Nathan convicts David of his sin. In *Rockbound*, Uriah is married to the sea. It is the sea and the prosperity of the fishing company that David desires; however, this David is a noble savage and instead, it is his cultured friend Gershom, who seeks to kill Uriah. Here again, the biblical narrative fractures. David desires the sea and the fishing company; Gershom desires Mary; David desires Mary, but is willing to sacrifice her to save his friendship with Gershom. Uriah, who hates Gershom, decides to intervene in Gershom's relationship with Mary by taking down flags that Mary puts up to communicate with her distant lover. When their relationship falls apart over a long winter, Gershom finds out about Uriah's intervention and vows revenge.

The result is similar to the biblical story: David gets the girl, Uriah dies.

The narrative of David Jung's rise to power also has similar attributes to the boy David's rise. He comes from the margins and is an unlikely successor. As David usurps Saul through a long sequence of victories and losses, so David Jung rises slowly. His relationship with Gershom (the name of Moses' son), mimics that of Jonathan and David. However, Gershom's murder of Uriah displaces both Jonathan and David and perpetuates the interpretive two-step that Day enacts with the biblical narrative. By selecting these elements from the myth and reassembling them to compose his own myth of Nova Scotia, Day implies that there is something eternal about the story he is telling. It resonates with the biblical texts, the Chaucerian epigraphs, and the early twentieth century fishing community experience. From this Protestant imaginary, Day attempts to express the typological narrative and inculturate it to his time and place.

The cubist approach to Christian myth that *Rockbound* embodies allows us to make some general observations about appropriations of biblical themes in twentieth century North American literature. Before the popularity of Steinbeck's *East of Eden* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, Day had begun to explore the possibilities available through modern aesthetics when attempting to rewrite myth. Where Margaret Lawrence's *The Stone Angel* takes up the characters of Hagar, Abraham (Bram) and Ishmael and attempts to transplant them into the early twentieth century, *Rockbound* takes the stable relationships of the familiar myth and spins them. We recognize David and yet don't really know him. David has become *unheimlich*, the familiar is odd, mixed, shifting. Day's education in Germany, where the study of myth was well established gives his work

a rich, timeless sensibility that is sometimes lacking in other biblical retellings. Lawrence attempts to explore the biblical type by updating it, where as Day draws attention to the ancient rhythms of Nova Scotia and sees in them a glimmer of myth, a glimmer that remains unstable, yet still conveys a common humanity that remains despite great expanses of time and space.

The next two works that we need to address are *House of Hate* (1970) by Percy Janes and *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952) by Ernest Buckler. While Janes' work comes after Buckler's, it represents earlier aesthetic and social forms and moods, and so we will consider it first. *House* is a *Künstlerroman* set in "Milltown" (Cornerbrook, Newfoundland) from before WWI to the post WWII period (close to 1970). It tells the story of Saul and Gertrude Stone, a tragic working class couple who build their house piecemeal as money becomes available. Saul is an alienated worker who takes little joy from his life, and Gertrude is a homemaker who spends her life trying to find the love that she expects from her husband in her relationships with her children. The novel opens with a diagnosis of Saul's existential condition:

Hate is the child of fear, and Saul Stone had been afraid of one thing or another all his life

Mostly it was hunger, the certainty of not having enough food for today and the treat of having nothing at all for tomorrow. In his origins there was no great fault of character to blame for this chronic insufficiency; it was the misfortune of time and place rather than the result of human improvidence or bad judgment.³⁸²

One might suspect that Janes would link Saul's tyrannical character with substance abuse, but this is not the case. At least one legitimizing source of Saul's physical and mental

³⁸² Percy Janes, *House of Hate* (St. John's: Breakwater, 1992), 9.

abuse of his family is derived from the certitude that he draws from his Anglicanism. It is quite clear that Juju, Janes' thinly veiled autobiographical narrator, does not accept the claims of transcendence made by the Church of England. However, he does seem to accept the doctrine of original sin. After his military service, Juju roams the world looking for a source of freedom and living in a state of near poverty by his own design. His one indulgence is the realm of intellectual development. He tells us:

I became a mobile speck on the vast globe of this world, having no more intimate connection with my fellow inhabitants than a star; often I asked myself what it was that I sought in all these frantic wanderings, but no answer came clearly, not until world-weariness and an abrupt descent into middle age had at last driven me back home again and I came to realized that in these exotic places I had been seeking to prove to myself my passionate childhood conviction that all the world was not like Milltown.

Now, at forty, I wondered wither my early dreams had deceived me. Certainly I had found more culture than there was in my hometown, more breadth of mind, and less beery sottishness and general filth, but still there were times even now when the dark thought assailed me that this whole world was essentially a Milltown in which I should find no home nor any place of refuge this side of the grave. At such times I felt the hard, clear crystal of my sanity sinking and dissolving into chaos.³⁸³

At this point Juju has recounted the various coming of age stories of his siblings, all of which are marked by degrees of abuse that Saul had inflicted. Now that Juju is back in Milltown, he is showing his readers, through his eyes, what his family has become – a crew of alcoholics (Ank, Racer and Crawfie) who manipulate their families, in Crawfie's case giving his children to the Crown ward because he no longer wants them. The only child to escape the sins of the father is Hilda (Flinskie), the lone daughter. Hilda runs the town store and has become a upstanding member of Milltown. Juju looks to her for insight into his own troubles. She gives us a slight glimpse of the joy that might have

³⁸³ Janes, 262.

been ("How had she escaped the havoc?").³⁸⁴ After visiting Hilda, Juju looks out over Milltown:

And so her triumph over life was a pleasure to contemplate, not only because she offered to share a little of her home and her means with me, should my solitary wandering ever become too much for my health or human nature to endure, but also because inside her walls I lost for a time the feeling of coldness that I suffered from in all the other family houses up on Humber Heights

Each Wednesday night when I left Hilda I felt a pleasant calm in my mind and found myself in a mood to feel and appreciated the beauty of Milltown at night as I, standing on its rim, looked down into the gigantic bowl of mystery that was the harbour, and saw reflected in its blue serge depths the lighted windows of the paper sheds, like bars of gold strung on invisible wire. Often, as I crossed the hill, there would be a solitary rower making late way across the water, fire dripping from his oars, and a steady light shining from the other side of the bay to guide him safely home. For a little while peace entered my heart as I took in this magical scene whose hushed beauty was almost enough to reconcile me for the moment to the human darkness and chaos that Milltown really was.³⁸⁵

These two passages are amongst the most poignant in the novel. They describe the relationship between suffering and beauty in a way that beckons beyond Milltown and out into the broader human condition. We must remember that these thoughts arise from an individual who conceives of himself as a student of John Stuart Mill,³⁸⁶ where the pursuit of liberty and pleasure based on private judgement is seen as the only mode of undercutting tyranny. And who can blame Juju for finding such liberalism as the most appealing alternative to the tyranny of Saul: "I am independent, I say. I consider that I have full and complete liberty to act by myself. Is that clear? Is that finally and utterly clear, once and for all? Well, is it?"³⁸⁷ There is, implicit in this conflict, a certain social

³⁸⁴ Janes, 263.

³⁸⁵ Janes, 265.

³⁸⁶ Janes, 157, 161.

³⁸⁷ Janes, 161.

structure in which Saul is the worst version of a paterfamilias who uses excessive force, fear, and abuse to coerce his children toward his slim understanding of the good, against which Juju offers the only alternative – to paraphrase the New Hampshire licence plate – life free or die. The “religious,” specifically, the Anglican, looks like a crook, while the “secular” who throws off the yoke of common good, having seen the only avenue toward the good as through private judgement sees Milltown according to his own convictions. These convictions may resonate with a religious tradition (original sin, transcendent beauty), but they are based on a mode of subjectivity that stands against the collective. The individualism of *House* exposes a tension between Janes' liberalism and his consideration of “economic slavery,”³⁸⁸ which is interpreted through Marxist doctrine. His individualism, thus, grinds against his diagnosis of social ills. I might offer that in the face of the current formations of (hyper)liberalism we might see Janes' liberalism as a partial truth, with a pragmatic end – liberation from Saul.

As Janes struggles for the desperate secularism of Juju, a partial salvation, he often interpolates the religious in such a way that a distance can be created between dogmatic acceptance of the tradition's claims and the nominal association that is typical of Juju. We hear, for instance, of Gertrude's conversion from Methodism to Anglicanism, Saul's anti-catholicism, the Church Lads Brigade, Sunday School, Crawfie's “born again” experience with the Salvation Army and his subsequent backsliding to Anglicanism, family prayers, Saul's piety, a cycle of violence described through the moral language of the Church, and the Sabbath ban on card playing.³⁸⁹ By contrasting this religious

³⁸⁸ Janes, 264, 319-20.

³⁸⁹ See Janes on Anglicanism, 16; anti-catholicism, 75, 139-40; Church Lads Brigade, 80; Sunday School, 177; Crawfie's Salvation Army conversion, 105-10; family prayers, 90; Saul's piety, 100; violence and

framework with Saul's hypocrisy, religion as a coercive moral structure is completely ineffective in solving the family's problems. The failure of ritual, morality and religion coupled with the absence of Messianic intervention in the Stone family is the impetus for Juju's philosophical quest. To revisit Critchley's argument, religious disappointment leads to questions about politics (Juju's use of Mill), justice, the need for ethics and provokes (if we permit a strong autobiographical reading) the quest for understanding that leads to the writing of novels like *House of Hate*.³⁹⁰ Janes' hermeneutical enterprise turns to an ethical commitment to the other, the reader, in an attempt to circumvent the violence of Saul and especially, the sense of moral high ground that Saul derives from his Anglicanism. My concluding reflection on *House of Hate* is that Juju is caught between the renunciation of superstition of his supposed apostasy and the religious tone of the last sentences of the novel: "... I said goodbye to Milltown and all its works. I thanked God for Hilda, but I was bent on going for good. So for the last time I took the westbound express and struck out blindly across the world in my urgent and frantic and hopeless hunt for love."³⁹¹

Secularism in Janes' *House* follows the trajectory that I delineated in my introduction. Protestantism is superseded by a secularist attitude that must be understood as a "post-protestantism," because it shares with the Protestant a common reading of the nature-secular correlation. Because grace and nature are starkly distanced – infinitely qualitatively distanced (without recourse to analogy) – the secular, which is read according to this distance, can have little to do with the religious. The only option is to

church morality, 210, 225-6, 231; the Sabbath ban on cards, 195, 214.

³⁹⁰ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (New York: Verso, 2008), 4.

³⁹¹ See Janes on apostasy, 156, in Chapter 8; the above quotation is on 320.

make a clean break with tradition (Milltown and Anglicanism). However, as Juju finds, this clean break is hard to come by, which leads, I argue, to a returned conflation of the secular and the religious in *Secular II*. We will develop the emergence/resurgence of this *Secular II* by considering Alistair MacLeod's enchanted nature, after which we will see how the force of secularism affects George Elliott Clarke's works. But first we must describe the logic of the clean break that is most clearly illustrated in Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*.

Mountain is a novel that attempts to be loyal to the Annapolis valley experience by avoiding the narrative and religious traditions of that region and adopting the phenomenologically influenced style of literary modernism. Thus, we see a move from the dialogue centred aesthetic of Haliburton, to the internal depth of David Canaan. While Buckler uses limited third person narration, he is constantly describing his character's inner experience by attending to mental processes and experience. By attending to the inner thought world of the developing artist (*Mountain* too is a *kunstlerroman*) we feel the resonance of Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury*, Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist*, and perhaps a bit of Proust. David himself tells us how much he likes E.M. Forster.³⁹² In adopting the modernist aesthetic Buckler demonstrates the tensions of a “second world” literature, whereby local norms are subjected to the forms in fashion in the centre, so that the local might be taken seriously in literary circles unaccustomed to Nova Scotia's narrative traditions. Judging by the reception of early critics – *Saturday Night* praised the novel as “the most distinguished and promising first

³⁹² Ernest Buckler, *The Mountain and the Valley* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970), 244.

novel ever published by any Canadian anywhere” – Buckler's gamble was a success, yet, at what cost?³⁹³ For a novelist who laments the loss of a rural ontology to that of the technological, urban zeitgeist,³⁹⁴ he seems oddly unaware that his secularist approach is complicit with a progressivist ideology. For instance, in Buckler's CBC radio play “Excerpts from a Life” his heroine quips, “I haven't anything against religion – the church has it safely muzzled now, but personally I prefer intelligence.”³⁹⁵ The opposition of religion and intelligence is perhaps consistent with the odd coupling of enlightenment values and rural conservatism that is to be found in *Mountain*.

Creelman argues that the novel promotes “complex and competing ideological” structures that create “tensions at the heart of the text”³⁹⁶: firstly, the communitarian Buckler, whose apology defends the organic structures of meaning found in rural life worlds; and secondly, the existentialist proto-artist, whose angst, anxieties, and delusions do not permit the flowering of meaning even in a rural environment.³⁹⁷ I would argue that we find the most striking ideological conflict in the novel between, firstly, the erasure of transcendence and religious traces on the novel's secularist “surface” and secondly, the ironic strata of the novel which relies on the mythos of eden (the tree on the hill that brings death) and the loss of Arcadia to describe the “fall” of the rural “cosmos” and David's interior. It is David's intellectual pride and his lack of responsibility toward the

³⁹³ R.E. Waters, “Unknown Literature.” *Saturday Night* 70 (Sept. 1955), 31-33, 35-36.

³⁹⁴ David Creelman, *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 2003), 86-103.

³⁹⁵ Marta Dvorak, *Ernest Buckler: Rediscovery and Reassessment* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), 17.

³⁹⁶ Creelman, 86.

³⁹⁷ Creelman, 97.

other (particularly his sexual exploitation of Effie)³⁹⁸ that leads to the corruption of his artistic “spirit.” Where Janes describes a post-protestantism that interpolates Anglicanism literally, Buckler's evidence of interpolation is his erasure of religious habitus from the Annapolis Valley, synchronized with his appropriation of a Christian diagnosis of individual maladies.

This narrative of religious vacuity is at the same time matched with the appropriation of religious resources. I identify this as a Heideggerian mode of secularism because like Heidegger, Buckler erases any religious transcendent experiences from his phenomenological analysis of being, while drawing, almost covertly on categories of guilt, anxiety, time, and disclosure that are derived from the Christian tradition. We see this most clearly in two instances, which I will explore briefly below: Christmas in Entremont and materialist metaphysics.

Christmas for the young David is a time of advent, but the event that comes is entirely immanent. The fullness of time that Buckler accentuates is associated with the sacral order, yet the sacred moment is based on materialism and perception: “There were the three days: the day before Christmas, the day of Christmas, and the day after. Those three days lamplight spread with a different softness over the blue-cold snow. Faces were all unlocked; thought and feeling were open and warm to the touch. Even inanimate things came close, as if they had a blood of their own running through them.”³⁹⁹ Between the preparation for Christmas and the heightened expectancy of the event itself, Martha, David's sister, experiences “a parenthesis in time.”⁴⁰⁰ “Distances seemed to shrink,” the

³⁹⁸ Buckler, 146.

³⁹⁹ Buckler, 60.

⁴⁰⁰ Buckler, 60.

narrator tells us, and the proximity of things in themselves provides the young David with a rich material engagement with oranges, doughnuts, walnuts, and Christmas stuff.⁴⁰¹ Any sense of mystery that arises from this exceptional time – a holy day – is explained, primarily by reference to the wonderment of the mind.

The subject matter of Buckler's novel is primarily the empirical engagement with matter and customs within the limits of reason alone. His faith, in so far as it is evidenced in *Mountain*, is in the value of being. Being is still conceived as something that can give rise to meaning, and stylistically, this is evidenced in Buckler's attention to details, habits, and the cognitive response to being-in-the-world. Dvorak remarks that Buckler likely read Husserl in her illuminative chapter "Buckler's Ontological Commitment."⁴⁰² This would help to explain the ontological turn that Buckler uses in his narration; for example, as David and his siblings search for the "perfect" Christmas tree we get a sense for the way that the expected arrival of perfection itself shapes the very contours of their experience of being: "That's the best tree anyone could find, ain't it, Father?' The ridiculous momentary doubt of their father's judgement made them more joyous than ever."⁴⁰³ We should read the selection of the Christmas tree in light of the *axis mundi* that stands at the top of the mountain. It is the trip to the tree at the top of the mountain that has such meaning for the young David, yet this meaning is ruptured when his father is killed while harvesting a tree just like it. The narrator describes the death scene with the cool distance of material determinism:

The tree had no obedience in its heart, except to physics. It fell exactly when

⁴⁰¹ Buckler, 60-1.

⁴⁰² Dvorak, 79, 63-101.

⁴⁰³ Buckler, 63.

it must. His thoughts and his breath, strong as they were in their own way, were insubstantial, and powerless against it. One great branch pinned him to the ground, and its physics satisfied, itself lay still ... there wasn't an instant of pain. There was only a second of upward darting alarm.⁴⁰⁴

The interlinking awareness that might resolve the ideological conflict that Creelman points to may be found in David's experience of increasing disenchantment of the world as he ages. Before his father is killed by the unalterable hand of physics, the world “stood. And stood for something. Just by standing.”⁴⁰⁵ After the death of his father and the fall of the tree, he loses touch with his nascent sense of reality and sees the harshness of being as an inevitable consequence of existence. In the epilogue, David re-lives many memories from his past in a bricolage form. He thinks through the levels of determinacy which led to the felled tree that killed his father, until he comes to the conclusion this type of thinking can extend into infinity⁴⁰⁶:

All the thoughts behind every face, at every time ... They had a double *accusing*, because of themselves and of the things they mirrored. They were shapeless and infiltrate through each other. Their fluctuate form was not traceable in space or boundable by time. It was broader than space, and faster than time, and not containable by definite quantity in either. But each one was exactly as it was, just the same...

He halted suddenly.

'Stop!' he cried. Aloud.

But the voices didn't stop.⁴⁰⁷

Thought is swirling in relation to being, and being has lost the worth it once had because it brings death. As being is devalued, thought becomes horrid and spectral.

...If only one thought had shaped itself exactly that little way other than the way it did...Then all the rest of it...He heard the crushing screaming challenge

⁴⁰⁴ Buckler, 220-21.

⁴⁰⁵ Seamus Heaney, *Electric Light* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 5

⁴⁰⁶ Aristotle calls this type of infinity “apeiron” which means “without form.” That lack of limit that this concept of the infinite entails led Aristotle to reject as

⁴⁰⁷ Buckler, 296-7.

of the infinite permutations of the possible...the billionth raised to the billionth power...

He screamed, 'Stop, stop...'

Then he thought: Myself screaming 'Stop.' Then he thought: Myself thinking of myself screaming 'Stop,' thinking of myself thinking of myself thinking of...

And then he put his arms about the great pine and thrust his forehead against its hard body. He screamed, 'Stop...Stop...Stop...Stop.'⁴⁰⁸

David's belief that thought is prior to event - that ideas change the very structure of being - is challenged by the unfathomable depth to the levels of causation that bring about mundane events. This insight into the complexity of the dialect between thought and existence ("myself thinking of myself") and the mystery of self consciousness drives him to the cumulative moment of protest. Then comes his epiphany. At the peak of his ascent up the mountain ("then he raised his head and saw that he was at the very top of the mountain" - we must read this with both Plato and Dante in mind) David conceives of a way that he might stop this vindictive order of being from destroying reason. "I will *tell* it ... that is the answer."⁴⁰⁹ David's solution to his problem - that thought tells of something that exceeds form, time, and space - is to give expression to his absolute perception of being: "I know how it is with everything. I will put it down and they will see that I know."⁴¹⁰ (Surely David's solution fails to explain how we transition from unknowing to knowing, from negation, to another form of positivity). Moving from ontology, to sociality, David remembers a time when he compiled a petition and read it to the villagers, giving them a sense of coherence: "When he read it back to them they heard the voice of their own reason speaking *exactly* in his."⁴¹¹ This is the idealist

⁴⁰⁸ Buckler, 297.

⁴⁰⁹ Buckler, 298.

⁴¹⁰ Buckler, 298.

⁴¹¹ Buckler, 298. Emphasis added.

moment of absolute communication. By speaking for the collective he gives expression to what would otherwise remain unfathomable, unvoiced: “Their warm wonder at his little miracle of finding the words for it that they themselves couldn’t find, or recognize for the words of their own thoughts until they heard him speak them, made him and them so fluid together that it worked in him like a kind of tears.”⁴¹² What David undergoes is the transition from the absolute equivocation (difference) of being, to the formation of a univocal identity through expression. He thinks his secular expressive work will bring about “pure” unity. What is left unsaid and unexplained in this passage is how the transformation of the myriad differences of the people assumes unity in the artist or philosopher’s expression without it falling to the will to power of the artist over his many rivals. Between the “univocal formal absence” and the “substantial equivocal differences” of this Hegelian formula there lies an equation of power.⁴¹³ The promise of art must account for this power dynamic (which Buckler doesn’t develop beyond David’s treatment of Effie), yet we need not resolve it the same way Nietzsche might. Buckler’s secular aporia can be resolved -via mystery - in the kenotic figure of Christ, who lowers the universal so that it can become a particular gift that promises to overcome violence. Indeed, this is the promise of art, it need not come with the baggage of Hegelian metaphysics.

Nonetheless, David makes his metaphysical claim explicit. Instead of taking the Valley inhabitants in their myriad particularities, David wants to “find their single core of meaning. It was manifest differently but only in different aspects, in them all. That

⁴¹² Buckler, 298.

⁴¹³ John Milbank, “The Double Glory, or Paradox versus Dialectic,” *The Monstrosity of Christ* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 198.

would be enough. A single beam of light is enough to light all the shadows, by turning it from one to another.”⁴¹⁴ This process of finding meaning is given a name - “translation.”⁴¹⁵ It seems that David's answer to the loss of meaning, to the vindictive tone that being can take, follows the Arnoldian secularization theory. The artist, rather than a religious cleric, will attend to being and give rise to art that will overcome anarchy and restore Arcadia. The form of the one that is perceived in the multiple on earth is the ultimate end of all contemplation. By contemplating the possibility of this form arising from the multiple sensory objects, meaning enters David's imaginary. This object is spirit in the very way that Hegel would conceive it. This is to say that spirit is thought and thought is “subjective materiality.”⁴¹⁶ Transcendence is not directed to a radically other realm, but is a function of materiality. This is to say that when David ascends to the heavens, his feet are on the mountain and the heavens are the product of so many chemical reactions in his brain.

Dare we see Buckler as a proto-physicalist? His examination of the determinate physical processes that bring about the fall of the tree and the death of his father supports this reading. It also makes sense of Buckler's dichotomy between religion and intellect. David's contemplation of being can hardly be a participation in a truly transcendental one, but, according to his physicalism, must be a one that arises from material only in humans, without independent ontological status.

We can see the turn away from this antiseptic secularism, which wipes the religious residue from the fictive sphere, in the short stories of Alistair MacLeod. In “The

⁴¹⁴ Buckler, 299.

⁴¹⁵ Buckler, 299.

⁴¹⁶ Alain Badiou, *St. Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 2.

Boat” and “As Birds Bring Forth the Sun” we see a return to myth, particularly myths of death and fatalism. While MacLeod re-enchants the cosmos, he also repositions religious subjectivities in a type of “second naiveté.” Ricoeur argues that “second naiveté” involves a movement from an originally held, yet unexamined position, to a critical engagement with that position through a hermeneutics of suspicion, and back to a reading which puts the critical perspective in tension with a re-appropriated naiveté.⁴¹⁷ MacLeod positions his stories squarely in the realm of his hermeneutical “prejudice,”⁴¹⁸ as they describe the lifeworlds of Gaelic speaking Scots in the homeland and the diaspora (here we speak of Cape Breton). It is also worth noting that, while Catholicism doesn't enter MacLeod's work as the direct referent as it does in the work of the six authors we considered above, it is difficult to divorce the enchantment of MacLeod's fictional Gaelic world from his Catholic practice.

“As Birds Bring Forth the Sun” begins with a family tale about the speaker's great-great-great-grandfather, who finds a puppy at the gate of his farm in Scotland and takes care of her until she grows into a 180 pound behemoth known as the *cù mòr glas* - the big grey dog. She is so large that when she jumps up to lick the man's face she nearly knocks him over, but as a puppy she was run over by a steel waggon and looked as though she might have to be put down. The grandfather nursed her back to health. Then, as she went into heat, he searched all over his region for a dog large enough to mate with her. Finding a dog who might be able to manage the great feat, the man took the *cù mòr*

⁴¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper, 1967), 352.

⁴¹⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Trans Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2006), 272-3.

glas down to the sea at low tide, where a rock formation allowed the male a height advantage:

He took some sacking to provide footing for the male dog and he placed the *cù mòr glas* in the hollow of the rock and knelt beside her and steadied her with his left arm under her throat and helped position the male dog above her and guided his blood-engorged penis. He was a man used to working with the breeding of animals, with the guiding of rams and bulls and stallions and often with the funky smell of animal semen heavy on his large and gentle hands.⁴¹⁹

Once pregnant, the dog vanishes. In the summer, when the man and his sons sail to a nearby island, the dog suddenly bounds over a hill and down toward her master. She jumps up to lick his face and knocks him over. With her are her six grey pups, who misinterpret their mother's friendliness for an attack on a fiend: "They fell upon him in a fury, slashing his face and tearing aside his lower jaw and ripping out his throat, crazed with blood-lust or duty or perhaps starvation."⁴²⁰ The beloved dog turned on her pups, but it was too late; the man was dead.

When the men of the community return to the island to confirm the dog's existence, they find no trace of her or her pups, yet she "was supposed to be sighted here and there for a number of years. Seen on a hill in one region or silhouetted on a ridge in another or loping across the valley or glens in the early morning or the shadowy evening. Always in the area of the half perceived."⁴²¹ The youngest boy who saw the killing continues to see the *cù mòr glas* in his dreams, and after an especially horrific rendering, he walked to a cliff facing the island and "cut his throat with a fish knife and fell into the

⁴¹⁹ Alistair MacLeod, "As Birds Bring Forth the Sun," *Island: The Collected Short Stories of Alistair MacLeod* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2000), 312. The short story, "As Birds Bring Forth the Sun," was first published in 1985.

⁴²⁰ MacLeod, 314.

⁴²¹ MacLeod, 316.

sea.”⁴²² The other brother mistook a man in a Glasgow pub for the *cù mòr glas*. The man took offence and a fight started outside the pub, where the brother was killed by the grey haired man and his six grey haired friends: “This is how the the *cù mòr glas a'bhàis* came into our lives, and it is obvious that all of this happened a long, long time ago. Yet with succeed generations it seemed the spectre had somehow come to stay and that it had become *ours* – not in the manner of an unwanted skeleton in the closet from a family's ancient past but more in the manner of something close to a genetic possibility.”⁴²³ The story ends with the speaker and his family standing around the death bed of their current patriarch. Everyone is aware of the family mythos, and no one will mention anything that hints at the legacy (that is except one of the brothers who mentions avoiding the grey hound bus). The speaker tell us of his second naiveté, “we are aware that some beliefs are what others would dismiss as 'garbage'. We are aware that there are men who believe the earth is flat and that the birds bring forth the sun.”⁴²⁴ Still, the speaker tells us, “you cannot *not* know what you do know.”⁴²⁵

MacLeod's story moves past the desire for de-mystification (of the post-Protestant Secular I), and towards a re-enchanted aesthetic. While MacLeod was working through the possibilities of enchantment through the Gaelic Catholic tradition, George Elliott Clarke was attempting to deprivatize the African-Canadian communities of Nova Scotia, which were steeped in two hundred years of Baptist practice, preaching, and song.

Both poet and scholar, Clarke has given much attention to the churches and

⁴²² MacLeod, 317.

⁴²³ MacLeod, 318.

⁴²⁴ MacLeod, 320.

⁴²⁵ MacLeod, 320.

spirituality of the African Baptist Association of Nova Scotia. In his critical collection, *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*, Clarke provides an academic argument for the uniqueness of what he calls “Africadian” literature, culture, and spirituality, arguing that the Africadian tradition has been a force of anti-modernism and cultural hybridity that has survived under apartheid-like conditions in Nova Scotia. “The challenge facing Africadian authors,” Clarke writes, “is to disorient the central Standard English orientation of English Canadian literature, by voicing their own distinctive English (while staving off the mass-merchandized African-American varieties) ... We must prize the old Africadian proverb 'All I gotta do is stay black and die.' Can I get an 'amen'?”⁴²⁶ Clarke links Africadian culture to the rhetorical forms of the Bible:

In accordance with the typology that Africadians have adopted, their literature has two broad themes: 1) the achievement of a liberatory identity and 2) the denial or destruction of identity. The first theme can be called *messianic*; the second *apocalyptic*. ... Africadian writers treat love, liberty, justice, faith, beauty, and community, all aspects of the good, in a messianic sense; that is, each or all of these qualities, if attained and maintained, will “save” the individual and, ultimately, humankind. In contrast, negative qualities such as hate, enslavement, injustice, apostasy, ugliness, and isolation, all aspects of evil, will damn all who pay them alms. The messianic work stresses revolution – the appearance of the world as it ought to be; the apocalyptic work stresses revelation – the appearance of the world as it is.⁴²⁷

As a poet, novelist, and playwright, Clarke's work can be interpreted under the categories above. Both messianism and apocalypticism in Clarke's reading are immanent categories which correspond to embedded realities. While Clarke's personal appeals to transcendence are not our concern, it is clear that his artistic rendering of religion is

⁴²⁶ George Elliott Clarke, *Odysseys Home: Mapping African Canadian Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 100-1.

⁴²⁷ George Elliott Clarke, ed, *Fire on the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing* (Lawrencetown Beach: Pottersfield Press, 1991), 22.

biased towards “closed world” readings of religion (thought not exclusively, SA 557-66). And it is true, yes, that even according to the most orthodox Christian reading, religion is, even if only partially, a human construct (inspiration never does away with the human mind). Religion in Clarke's writing, then, is predominantly considered as a form of culture and not a *sui generis* category. Rev. Langford of *Whylah Falls* is publicly upright and privately licentious; this disjuncture between public and private describes a difference Clarke inscribes between the surface and inner-mechanics at work in religion.

To the object of Langford's desire he writes, “Love is our single resistance against the dictatorship of death. / And for the moment of its incarnation, we will worship God, / we will make ourselves beautiful in the glinting of an eye.”⁴²⁸ Here again, we have come upon the naturalization of the supernatural that I discussed in relation to Crummey, Vattimo, and Ward above. Love is momentary, rather than eternal; orgiastic, rather than beatific; Pelagian, rather than Augustinian. Clarke has subsumed love under the eye of univocity and divinized humanity. This, however, is consistent with my thesis that the religious and the secular approach conflation in *Secular II*. The point where the natural ends and the supernatural begins has shifted from something known for certain, to a liminal zone, where the official line is uncertainty. This however gives rise to Clarke's ventriloquism of the blues:

The black highway uncoils
Like your body do sometimes.
The long highway unwinds, mama,
Like your lovin' do sometimes.
I'm gonna swerve your curves

⁴²⁸ George Elliott Clarke, *Whylah Falls* (Victoria: Polestar, 2000), 154.

And ride your centre line.⁴²⁹

Clarke has the wise Shelley tell us that we cannot trust Xavier's poems. His desire may be beautifully expressed (messianic), but it is likely a slight of hand that conceals an apocalyptic horror:

You bust in our door,
talkin' April and snow rain,
litterin' the table
with poems -
as if we could trust them!

I can't.⁴³⁰

She tells us that her father played the same rhetorical game with her mother, telling her "he / loved loved loved her" and then physically abused her: "Roses / got thorns. / And words / do lie // I've seen love / die."⁴³¹

While the religious cleric is unstable, Clarke lets us know that the secular poet is also. From the immanent, yet Utopian optimism of *Whylah Falls*, pastoral as it is, Clarke has turned to the tragic. Both *Execution Poems* and the novel, *George & Rue*, tell the story of George and Rufus Hamilton, Clarke's cousins, who violently killed a cab driver, Silver, and were the last citizens to be hanged in New Brunswick. In these works, Clarke attempts to trace the lines of racism and depravity that collided in this forgotten archive of Maritime history.

The figure of Rue in *Execution Poems* is sassy, strong, and maniacal. It is Rue who swings the hammer and kills Silver. In a poem labelled "Public Enemy," Clarke plays with the political idea of the *sacer homo*, to the metre of Chuck D (of the hip hop

⁴²⁹ Clarke, *Whylah Falls*, 59.

⁴³⁰ Clarke, *Whylah Falls*, 24.

⁴³¹ Clarke, *Whylah Falls*, 25.

group *Public Enemy*):

Rue: Fredericton -fucking – New Brunswick.
A decade of Depression, then the Hitler War.
Carrying my bleak, nasty face out of Nova Scotia,
Alarmed, out of Nova Scotia, alarmed,
drift into Fredtown like so much blackstorm sky -
squinting at frigid, ivory, strait-laced streets
speckled by dung of Orange politicians' grins.
(spy ingots of shit orangng the snow.)
Fredtown was put up by Cadians, Coloureds,
and hammers. Laws and lumber get made here.
Bliss Carman got made here. Why should I put up with
this hard-drinking, hard-whoring, hardscrabble town?
I want to muck up their little white paradise here
I want to swat their faces til I'm comfortable in my gut.⁴³²

Rue, to “repent of, bitterly feel the consequences of, wish undone or non-existent” (*The Concise OED*), is a voice under censor, yet also an explosive, cantankerous voice – a voice of partial (in both senses) revelation. Clarke deconstructs Fanonian poetics of militant resistance by employing a dialogic form, which permits Rue's voice, but also channels the confessional voice of George (Georgie) and the vindictive voice of “Crown” (Judge Chaud of *George & Rue*, the repressed Acadian, who overdoes his allegiance to the British legal tradition).⁴³³ There is a sense in these two works that sin underwrites the complex world that populates Clarke's characters, and it cannot be eradicated through the pragmatic resistance to racist practices which can be located and contained. This is to over-simplify the human condition, as well as the cultural formations that gave rise to slavery and the black diaspora. Yet, there is no sense in Clarke's work that he longs for Africa; if he longs for Africa at all, it is for a richer sense of the beautiful in the place that

⁴³² George Elliott Clarke, *Execution Poems* (Kentville: Gaspereau Press, 2001), 32.

⁴³³ George Elliott Clarke, *George & Rue* (Toronto: Harper, 2005), 174.

he is in. The past is not forgotten, but it certainly isn't glorified. It is to be remembered in ugliness.

The George of *George & Rue* is a complicated character who is aesthetically and spiritually strong because he is weak. George does not swing the hammer, but he does assist in the sloppy disposal of Silver's body. After he has been sentenced to death, George undergoes a conversion, joining the Salvation Army (in as much as he can join from jail) using his conversion to work political influence with the Governor General, as she searches for a pardon.⁴³⁴ Even though George is weak, his faith seems to give him a newfound fortitude. He writes in his journal of a visitation by God:

YOU SEE I WOKE UP ONE NIGHT SWEATING ALTHOUGH THE CELL WAS COOL I KNEW SOMEBODY WAS IN MY CELL AND THAT WAS THE SPIRIT OF GOD HE SPOKE TO ME AND SAID TO ME WHY DON'T YOU BELIVED IN ME IS IT BECAUSE YOU CAN'T SEE ME You BELIEVE THERE IS A KING george vi AND YOU HAVE NOT SEEN HIM, SO NOW WHY DON'T YOU BELIEVE IN ME, WELL I COME TO YOU TO NIGHT IN YOUR DREAMS AND HE DID AND HE WAR A LONG WHIT ROBE A THORNY CROWN AND WAS BLEEDING IN HIS BROWN HANDS, SIDE, AND GOLDN FEET AND THEN i KNEW THAT GOD WS REAL AND MERCYFUL TO SINNERS, NO BODY HAD SEEN ME CLIMB FROM MY BED AND FAL ON MY KNEES AND CRY LIKE A BABY TO GOD, I DONT REMEMBER JUST WHAT I TOLD GOD THAT NIGHT ON MY KNEES BUT I ASKED HIM TO BE MERCIFUL TO ME AN EVIL SINNER, HE SAVED ME THAT NIGHT I KNOW I'VE BELIEVED ON HIS SON JESUS CHRIST EVER SINCE THERE WAS A SMELL LIKE CINNAMON AFTER WORDS....⁴³⁵

After this experience, as hackneyed as it may be, Clarke writes that it gives George the strength he needs to face death: "George was most content. He had his Xn resignation. He heard the lush, velvety voices of singers amid wheatfields and tasted the sweet, pure

⁴³⁴ Clarke, *George & Rue*, 193.

⁴³⁵ Clarke, *George & Rue*, 195-6.

wellspings of the Bible. He figured his soul was polished pristine.”⁴³⁶ At the hanging, however, the crowd takes on a religious sense that renews Clarke's hermeneutics of suspicion toward the Church. Amid the crowd of a hundred are six Klansmen, but those who wear no sheets are perhaps more brazen in their racism: “A man's drunken voice shouted lustily, 'Hang those black bastards! Or let us do it!’”⁴³⁷ The crowd takes on a demonic form that is marred with triumphalistic whiteness: “The atmosphere of the hanging barn was hot with hymns, muffled by the wood walls but still infiltrating the death chamber, turning it into some weird joint English-Latin, Protestant-Catholic service, with the Salvation Army band's marching music dove-tailing with the Gregorian-like chants of the Eternal Church. Ellis [the executioner] was poised funerally – a Gothic demon – atop the scaffold.”⁴³⁸

Like David Adams Richards, Clarke has a distrust for the public face of religiosity, while cultivating a respect for faith. Anyone who has watched Clarke tear up in the documentary *Seeking Salvation: A History of the Black Church in Canada*, has a sense that there is a deep connection between Clarke's representations of religion and his memories of the church of his youth, singing black spirituals with the spirit of Malcolm X.⁴³⁹ Clarke is still working through this hybrid mixture of protest and piety. It is his voice that has been the strongest of the literary Protestants of Atlantic Canada over the past twenty years and one suspects we have not yet heard his finale.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁶ Clarke, *George & Rue*, 200.

⁴³⁷ Clarke, *George & Rue*, 205.

⁴³⁸ Clarke, *George & Rue*, 205-6.

⁴³⁹ *Seeking Salvation: A History of the Black Church in Canada*, DVD, directed by Phillip Daniels (Toronto: Travesty, 2004).

⁴⁴⁰ Four years ago Clarke told me that he was writing what he considered to be his *magnum opus* on the African Baptist Association. I look forward to reading it.

What is striking about Clarke's Protestantism is how anti-modern it is. He makes this point several times in *Fire on the Water*: "Africadian literature was born in faith...it opposes godless modernity...*them that have ears let them hear*."⁴⁴¹ Even Clarke's settings (some amorphous time between 1900-1950) remind us that his Africadia has no truck with late-modernity, or the later inversion of Secular I. Yet, we must recognize this as a conceit. Alexander MacLeod reminds us that Clarke's imaginative project is caught up in that modern desire to remake home: "Clarke actively (and even aggressively) claims both the agency and the capacity first to reimagine his home and then to reconstruct it, physically, in the real world."⁴⁴² Of course, my point throughout this dissertation is that we all do this, it is just that Clarke holds a megaphone in our imaginary. To the degree that Clarke's factual African-Canadians have preserved their Protestantism in public, he is right to argue that the religious tradition has benefited from its marginal status in modernity (as odd as this may sound to a displaced resident of Africville). Clarke may be caught in the tail winds of a secularist ethos, but his "home" remains a source of public Protestantism that does not reflect the secularizing trend of Secular I.

⁴⁴¹ Clarke, *Fire On the Water*, 27.

⁴⁴² Alexander MacLeod, "'The Little State of Africadia is a Community of Believers': Replacing the Regional and Remaking the Real in the Work of George Elliott Clarke." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 33.2 (Dec 15, 2008): 96-115, 106..

Conclusion: Apocalyptic and the Given

Why is it that Catholicism now speaks while Protestantism remains silent (or reduced to culture) in Atlantic Canadian literature? Contemporary theologian Nathan Kerr argues strongly (in the Barthian tradition) that if Christianity is to speak meaningfully, it is only through the “apocalyptic inbreaking of Jesus into the contingency of the world in his “singularity.”⁴⁴³ For Kerr, this apocalyptic moment is fully independent from any pre-existing necessity and foretells of a complete eschatological inbreaking when “Christ is Lord” will fully be revealed. As such, Kerr maps his reading of the Christian apocalyptic to the messianic time of Walter Benjamin, “which marks the irruption of that evernew and unforeseeable event whereby each historical particular is 'blasted out' of the 'continuum' of 'universal history' and 'redeemed' as an event of singular action on behalf of the Kingdom of God...the eschatological liberation of the oppressed”⁴⁴⁴ If we are looking for a reason for Protestantism's silence in the Contemporary Atlantic Canadian imaginary, it may be because of this theme of apocalyptic inbreaking, which is waited on - “the virgins are trimming their wicks” - but not already given.

For Kerr, this emphasis on the “independence” of God from any moral or political structure, means that Christianity is placeless, always in diaspora, with aesthetic consequences following.⁴⁴⁵ For instance, Kerr claims that this “loss of a proper place”

⁴⁴³ Nathan Kerr, *Christ, History and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (London, SCM Press, 2009), 21.

⁴⁴⁴ Kerr, 58.

⁴⁴⁵ Kerr, 146. Kerr's emphasis on God's independence from political ideology, a correct position in my estimation, need not be attached to an argument about God's relationship to ontology.

leads the Church into a certain heresy, which denies its placelessness and binds “itself to an imaginary which attempts to 'locate' the particularity of Christianity's praxis with respect to a universalizable discourse of meaning.”⁴⁴⁶ Certainly this theme is not foreign to Johnston, who characterizes Arthur as one who seeks to keep his theo-political vision static, and sees Charlie as one who opens to a new time (with new revelations), as uncertain as that may be. What Kerr is working out here is the relationship that God has to the “given,” through the reformation (and nominalist) doctrine of God's majestic transcendence of all worldly givens.

Catholicism, on the other hand, teaches that God's self, his existence, is already given to the world in anticipation of the apocalyptic inbreaking of Christ. Kavanagh expresses the complicated relationship that this already givenness has to the contingencies of history through his symbol of the iceberg, which arrives for only a moment after thousands of years of preparation and soon after crumbles. The universal storehouse of God is poured out into the particular (Kerr abhors this language), contingent moment of Michael Baron's ascent. This language of universal and particular is appropriated from the Greek academy, but the referent that underwrites the Christian interpretation of the universal is tied to the trinitarian God (who becomes particular). What Kerr calls God's “moral independence” from human constructs, is conceived of differently for Catholics, who hold that God is inculturated in particular forms (for instance, the moral, political, and linguistic forms of a first century Palestine boondock). A particular imaginary, then, like that of Atlantic Canada is celebrated by Catholics according to the logic of the

⁴⁴⁶ Kerr, 179-80

eucharistic “inbreaking” of Christ, which is transformed into his mystical body.

Reverence for the particular historicity is tied to an attentiveness to the mystery of God.

The natural world of the iceberg is independent from God, while also already caught up in God's redemptive work. This is what I have been calling the nature-grace continuum.

This nature-grace continuum at work in the writing of *Secular II* comes with its own problems. For one, where Protestants have a read-made apology for God's absence – his majestic transcendence of the immanent, Catholics come to expect God to manifest himself out of “dry ground” (Isa. 53: 2). This is the problematic that Lynn Coady establishes in her examination of Bridget's postpartum depression and loss of faith. The regular expectancy of grace creates a habitual pattern, which if unfulfilled, leads a character like Bridget into a warped conception of her community, a *Strange Heaven*.

This study is not meant to resolve the theological differences between Catholics and Protestants, nor to decide which position is most accurate. Instead, my aim has been to describe the rise of literary Catholicism in Atlantic Canada and offer an internal rationale as to why the commitments of Catholicism have given shape to a certain aesthetic achievement. In addition, I have sought to link this particular Canadian occurrence to the similar theological aesthetics that are present in contemporary British and American literature. Further examination of these similarities must be left for another work.

The implicit critique of secularism at work in my description of the transition from *Secular I* to *Secular II* is necessary, however, since it demonstrates that the naturalized secularism (often taken for granted) is neither stable, nor irreplaceable. Certainly, a

secular element in society is a present reality, but which secular? The days of an exclusive, non-theistic secular are finished (the later, inverted Secular I). To highlight this, however, is not to claim that theocracy will replace it, nor to imply that an unchanged Catholicism will assume cultural dominance. Instead, we find that increasingly the public attempts to bring previously excluded constructions from various religious traditions – sacred rituals and practices, theological aesthetics, transcendental structures, theo-politics, religio-legal arbitration – into the discussion chambers of the national and transnational imaginaries.

To *re-publicize* religion in this way, however, necessitates an affirmation of human agency in the construction of religious and political structures. This need not exclude a transcendental actor (or another analogy of this role) from the creation of religion; however it does require a conception of human nature that is in continuum with the realm of religious action. This formulation is not meant to limit a divine actor to a univocal stratum of nature (or being), but to demonstrate how nature is transformed by an analogical being that elicits a response. The public and the political realm begin to be interpreted as structures that are “impure” because they reflect both secular and religious elements – as critics of civil religion have long recognized. Secular II, however, marks the acknowledgement of this theo-political hybridity, rather than the denial.

What then does this re-publicization of religion mean for the structure of society? Because I have rejected the harsh dichotomy between culture and society, I contend that changes in part of the imaginary reflect changes throughout the whole. This is a point of contention between Jose Casanova and Talal Asad. Casanova claims that contemporary

society is “deprivatizing” religion, and that religious involvement may rise; however, the structural differentiation of society will remain.⁴⁴⁷ Asad argues that this makes little sense.⁴⁴⁸ Differentiation that occurs alongside a certain social paradigm (Secular I), requires the commitments of that paradigm's effective actors to remain. If religion is deprivatized and involvement rises, this signals the de-differentiation of spheres and the shrinking distance between religion and politics.

As I have described in Atlantic Canada, this re-publicization may not have a direct effect on the particular region that we associate with it, but this is because regionalized culture has become, paradoxically, deterritorialized by market forces. Critics should not look to the social base in Atlantic Canada for some sort of confirmation of a rise in religiosity, but rather to the aggregate effect of the rise of religiosity on the readership that is elsewhere or anywhere. The Catholic trend in Atlantic Canada has not stopped since this study was conceived, instead we have seen the publication of Leo Furey's *The Long Run* (2004) and Ami McKay's *The Birth House* (2006), novels which take up the debates and theological structures of Catholicism throughout.⁴⁴⁹ This Catholic trend may fade, but one suspects the emphasis on the de-differentiation of the religious and the secular will not soon be exhausted.

⁴⁴⁷ Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁴⁴⁸ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 181-2; The debate extends to Asad's festschrift, *Powers of the Secular Modern*, ed. David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), Casanova - 12-30, Asad - 207-210.

⁴⁴⁹ Leo Furey's *The Long Run* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2004); Ami McKay's *The Birth House* (Toronto: Vintage, 2006).

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