

2009

Myth as Redemption in Three Canadian Novels

Elizabeth A. Crachiolo
Northern Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.nmu.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

Crachiolo, Elizabeth A., "Myth as Redemption in Three Canadian Novels" (2009). *All NMU Master's Theses*. 371.
<https://commons.nmu.edu/theses/371>

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Works at NMU Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in All NMU Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of NMU Commons. For more information, please contact kmcdonou@nmu.edu, bsarjean@nmu.edu.

MYTH AS REDEMPTION IN THREE CANADIAN NOVELS

By

Elizabeth A. Crachiolo

THESIS

Submitted to
Northern Michigan University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Graduate Studies Office

2009

SIGNATURE APPROVAL FORM

This thesis by Elizabeth A. Crachiolo is recommended for approval by the student's thesis committee in the Department of English and by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Committee Chair: Dr. Dominic Ording Date

Reader: Dr. David Wood Date

Department Head: Dr. Ray Ventre Date

Dean of Graduate Studies: Dr. Cynthia Prosen Date

**OLSON LIBRARY
NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY**

THESIS DATA FORM

In order to catalogue your thesis properly and enter a record in the OCLC international bibliographic data base, Olson Library must have the following requested information to distinguish you from others with the same or similar names and to provide appropriate subject access for other researchers.

NAME: Crachiolo, Elizabeth A.

DATE OF BIRTH: June 11, 1982

ABSTRACT

MYTH AS REDEMPTION IN THREE CANADIAN NOVELS

By

Elizabeth A. Crachiolo

In Canada in the 1970s, three novels written by women were published with remarkably similar themes. These novels were *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), by Alice Munro; *Surfacing* (1972), by Margaret Atwood; and *Bear* (1976), by Marian Engel. *Lives* is a semi-autobiographical *Künstlerroman* depicting the physical, emotional, and artistic growth of a young woman in rural Ontario; *Surfacing* describes a woman's journey to her childhood home in northern Quebec, during which she comes to terms with her past and her lost father; and *Bear* is about a historian's sojourn on a remote island in northern Ontario, during which she has an affair with a bear. This thesis will explore the ways in which the force of myth or story provides the means for the protagonists in the novels to heal and become self-actualized. Although each individual novel has received much critical attention, they have never been linked together and illuminated under this thematic lens.

Copyright by
Elizabeth A. Crachiolo
2009

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the late Marian Engel, who wrote a magical book.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank, first and foremost, Dominic Ording, whose generosity, insight, and enthusiasm were indispensable for the completion of this project. Both he and David Wood, who read drafts and provided encouragement, are true mentors—I am deeply indebted to them for their selfless support and genuine interest in my academic progress. I'm also indebted to Jim Schiffer, who urged me to develop my ideas and who has been an unstinting supporter of my work. Stephen Burn, although not directly involved in the creation of my thesis, has been, without fail, awesome, in too many ways to mention. John Smolens, too, has provided friendship and advocacy not directly related to my thesis, but nevertheless essential for my development as a student at NMU.

Finally, my parents, Dan and Nancy, deserve more thanks than I can adequately express for their unconditional emotional support of all of my undertakings, no matter how self-indulgent and unlikely to lead to a neat conclusion.

This thesis follows the format prescribed by the *MLA Style Manual* and the Department of English.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Alice Munro's <i>Lives of Girls and Women</i>	4
Notes	16
Chapter Two: The Mythic North in Canadian Literature	18
Notes	22
Chapter Three: Margaret Atwood's <i>Surfacing</i>	23
Notes	35
Chapter Four: Marian Engel's <i>Bear</i>	37
Notes	50
Conclusion	52
Works Cited	54

INTRODUCTION

Three Canadian women published significant novels during the 1970s, a decade in which second-wave feminism was in full swing in the Western world. These novels, Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971); Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972); and Marian Engel's *Bear* (1976), share themes and reflect larger trends within North American fiction. All three depict a woman's journey away from male and cultural dominance (they are often presented as the same) and, with the help of myth and story, toward a life of her own creation.

I use the word "myth" in a way obliquely reminiscent of the mythopoeic tradition, which attempts conscious mythmaking under the assumption that there are archetypal experiences that culture circulates in various ways as recurring tales. In this view, a particular myth can be deemed "universal" because it speaks to an experience nearly all of us can identify with and appropriate when conceiving of our own lives. I also use the term in its most basic denotation, from the Greek *mythos*, meaning "word," "story," or "tale" (McConnell 7); in other words, it involves the impulse to tell, to make cohesive narratives out of the otherwise irreconcilable pieces of our lives. In the works I examine, the main characters, who are women, suffer because their stories have been silenced by the culture in which they live. The stories that provide redemption for the protagonists reflect their needs and desires and illuminate paths they may follow that diverge from the accepted roles women were expected to play. Myth thereby subverts the dominant ideology.

The subject's transformation through myth, in each case, is necessary both personally and politically. Munro's Del, Atwood's nameless narrator, and Engel's Lou are all outcasts and are trying to figure out what it means to be a woman, how to live in the male world of the 1970s, and how to cope with their perhaps beastly appetites in a culture that circumscribes female sexuality. Ania Loomba notes that for much of Western literary history, "female bodies symbolise the conquered land" (152). The link between women and land is explicit in *Surfacing* and *Bear*, and implied in *Lives of Girls and Women*. In the case of the protagonists of the former two books, even as they see the islands they temporarily inhabit becoming encroached upon by a tourist culture, they strive to avoid being invaded in much the same way. In *Bear*, Lou prefers an animal for a sexual partner over a man; in *Surfacing*, the narrator shuns sex with her boyfriend until she feels able to take control over their intercourse and procreation. Alice Munro's Del is sexually vibrant and has transcendent experiences in connection to the natural world, but finds the land loses its luminosity when sex loses its charm (as when Mr. Chamberlain masturbates in front of her when she is a young girl, and she is not impressed—"for a year or two," she says, "I had been looking at trees, fields, landscape with a secret, strong exaltation" [185], but after Mr. Chamberlain's exhibition, "The landscape was postcoital, distant and meaningless" [187]).

All of the protagonists' sexual partners are represented as silent and animal-like. In *Bear*, of course, he really is an animal; Del's lover Garnet shuns words, preferring instead the tactile world of the body; and the narrator's boyfriend Joe in *Surfacing* reaches the height of his eloquence in grunts and is compared to a buffalo. Male silences resonate differently for the women who must contend with them. Garnet's taciturnity

frustrates Del's attempts to make lingual sense out of her experience. The silences of Joe and the bear, conversely, are welcome to their lovers, who inscribe these uncommunicative males with qualities of their own choosing. In all cases, the muteness of the women's partners becomes an attribute of note, within or against which the protagonists must stake out a claim for their own language and stories.

It is clear that the men (or bear) in these novels are merely testing grounds on which the main characters work out their beliefs. Atwood points out, "Something interesting starts happening to Canadian female protagonists around the middle of the twentieth century. Instead of going off into the woods to be with a man, they start going off into the woods to be by themselves. And sometimes they're even doing it to get *away* from a man" (*Strange Things* 101). In *Surfacing* and *Bear*, the "woods" are on islands situated north of the cities from which they come. In Chapter Two, I examine the significance of this northward movement. In all three novels, however, the women learn to cast off repressive male ideals in favor of more representative paradigms. Bakhtin finds the "corrosive laughter" (Holquist xxii), the carnival, of the common people to be a subversive force, and in a similar fashion I suggest that myth in these novels is used by the protagonists to assert their autonomy and overcome the symbolic colonization of their bodies and minds by men.

CHAPTER ONE: ALICE MUNRO'S *LIVES OF GIRLS AND WOMEN*

Critics have often commented on the difficulty of placing Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* into any specific genre. They have called it, among other things, a novel (Sue Thomas); a "novel" (Christine Prentice); a story-sequence (Brian Diemert); a volume of interlinked stories (Janet Beer); a collection (Peter Quartermaine); an artist-novel and a quasi-autobiographical novel (Elisabeth Cencig); a self-reflexive novel, self-begetting novel, and narcissistic novel (Barbara Godard); and an open-structured novel (J.R. Struthers, "Alice Munro"). In Prentice's analysis, it is precisely the text's resistance to categorization that indicates where its central meaning lies:

more important than finding the most appropriate genre in which to place the [text] is the acknowledgement of the questions [it] raise[s] about the notion of genre itself. By eluding labels such as 'novel,' 'chapter' and 'story,' [it] destabilise[s] rigid genre classification, existing in the gaps between categories that current critical discourse finds difficult to name. (29)

Thus its form reflects the destabilization of male discourse that is to some extent the novel's enterprise. Beer concurs—she refers to "Munro's estimation of the inappropriateness of the imperatives of the conventional novel form to communicate her chosen subject as much as to the potential physical and intellectual tyranny of the phallus, of male egocentricity" (126).¹ For the novel is a *Künstlerroman*, describing a young woman's development as a writer. Her challenge is partially to "break into the culturally valorized and powerful form of writing, undermining the dominance of the male voice, to tell her own stories" (Prentice 33). Del grapples with the task of negotiating various

discourses besides that of male/female, however—for example, oral/written, imaginative/scientific, body/mind, nature/society—in order to shape herself. Because she, aware of the fallacies of memory, creates as she tells, she literally creates herself in telling stories about her life. Once she has successfully integrated the various kinds of discourses that have influenced her, she is able to tell these stories, giving her author/ity and leading her to the “salvation in words” (Gault 453) that she seeks.

Various characters try to guide Del into following one path over another. Most notable of these are her mother, Addie, and her boyfriend, Garnet. The former symbolizes intellectual ambition, the latter sexual fulfillment, and Del’s choice of allegiance between them her coming-of-age struggle. Prentice notes that “[A]t the time of the publication of *Lives* in 1971, much of Munro’s exploration of the text of women’s relationship to cultural production, [sic] was new to public discourse” (29). The change in women’s status at the time is dramatized in the differences between Del and her mother, Addie, who is an artist of sorts in her own right, although defeated in that end by the societal strictures of her generation. She initiates Del into the kind of feminist ideology in which sexual love is scorned in favor of intellectual pursuits, since women are too often trapped into romance, and consequently marriage and children, thus thwarting their creative and intellectual endeavors. As Cinda Gault notes, “By not locating her reward for struggle in the love received by winning a husband, Addie seems to trade her sexuality for social freedom” (450). She urges her daughter to study hard in school so she can win scholarships to college. Even when Del is still a child, Addie recognizes her talents, making her perform feats of memory for her friends and the people to whom she sells encyclopedias. As Del gets older, however, she is increasingly

aware that she does not wholly subscribe to her mother's approach to life. She is not willing to relinquish sexual pleasure, and this choice leads to predictable power struggles between the two—both Addie and Del recognize that what is at stake is not simply a profession or a marriage, but the nature of Del's survival.

In her book *Survival*, published in 1972, Margaret Atwood discusses the figure of the artist in Canadian literature. She suggests a mid-twentieth century theme of the artist as “a cripple, mute or castrated man. [He is not] able to produce any credible art: as an artist, and necessarily then as a man, he is paralyzed, frozen, the equivalent of the stiff corpses that litter the winter landscape in stories about Nature the Monster” (184-85). Although she briefly mentions *Lives of Girls and Women* in this context, she refers only to Del's struggle as an artist (193). What her image of the corpses conjures, however, is Addie's increasingly frequent position lying prone in her bed as she despairs more and more for her daughter's future as a University student—she herself is a frustrated artist, and has banked all her hopes in Del. Atwood's corpses also reflect Gault's analysis of *Lives of Girls and Women*, wherein she delineates the many similarities between it and William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*.² Gault points out that the novels feature mother and daughter characters with the same names (both mothers are called Addie, and the daughters are Del and Dell). She observes that, in Faulkner's novel, “Marrying and having children lead to a loss of words and, eventually, to [Addie's] containment” (443); and that, likewise, “Faulkner portrays Dewey Dell as a woman excluded from language” (446). Munro's Addie as a corpse figure fits with this comparison. Whether or not Munro consciously appropriates Faulkner's novel, the juxtaposition adds resonance to Del's plight and underscores the disparity between her fate and Dewey Dell's. Munro's

Del successfully avoids the traps of marriage and children, retaining the words and stories that allow her to become an artist—a writer.

Before this development happens, though, Del “falls for quintessentially Faulknerian Garnet French” (Gault 451). True to her writerly nature, to some extent she imagines him into being. She is enamored of romantic plots, shown in her reading and re-reading of *Wuthering Heights* as well as her love of operas like *La Traviata* and *Carmen*. While listening to these operas, “My eyes filled with tears. Swiftly formed fantasies boiled up in me. I pictured a lover, stormy circumstances, doomed throbbing glory of our passion” (Munro 201). She conceives of her relationship with Garnet in similar terms. When they first meet, she sees him looking at her from across a church and predicts that he will move to be next to her. She thinks, “what nonsense; like a recognition in an opera, or some bad, sentimental, deeply stirring song” (231). The irony is that she is right, and their acquaintance with each other follows predictable romantic lines—the touching of hands (“it is like fire, just as they say” [231]), the accidental separation, the chance meeting that leads to a passionate affair and—almost—marriage. Although Del knows there are qualities about him that she doesn’t truly like, that in fact embody all that she has been taught to disdain—the Baptist church, the outskirts of town, Porterfield drunks, ignorance of a Western-style education—she is able to “rearrange” him, as she knows he does her, and focuses on the unknown:

I loved the dark side, the strange side, of him, which I did not know, not the regenerate Baptist; or rather, I saw the Baptist, of which he was proud, as a mask he was playing with that he could easily discard. I tried to get him to tell me about the fight outside the Porterfield beer parlor, about

being in jail. I would pay attention to the life of his instincts, never to his ideas. (241)

Essentially, she is “writing” him to her liking, using the language of romance narratives, as she does with their affair: “I talked to myself about myself, saying *she*. *She is in love. She has just come in from being with her lover. She has given herself to her lover. Seed runs down her legs*” (253; italics in original). She is a character in her own novel (quite literally), and “he himself was—in play. . . I meant to keep him sewed up in his golden lover’s skin forever, even if five minutes before I had talked about marrying him” (260).

She plays a dangerous game, for her liaison with Garnet represents her embrace of the sexual over the intellectual—a near death in the world of this novel, in which Del must learn to balance the two. He exemplifies an absence of words; he is silent, inscrutable, living in the realm of the body³: “He never would explain, unless he had to” (235). Del is affected by his taciturnity. She “could not have made sense of any book, put one word after another, with Garnet in the room. It was all I could do to read the words on a billboard, when we were driving” (242). Struthers points out that “For Del, marriage with Garnet French would not involve baptism into a new life, but rather the death by drowning of her own real, imaginative life” (“Reality” 44), her imaginative life being wholly tied up with words and story. On some level, Del herself is aware of this: she lies to her mother that her hymen’s blood on the side of the house is from a dead bird. Thomas notes that, traditionally in *Künstlerromane*, “birds are broken, crippled, strangled or hung, as a sign of the difficulty the woman artist has in reconciling her ambition with her sense of femininity.”⁴ She ultimately succeeds, however; she “will not represent inevitable female containment because, in this case, the woman’s reproductive system

will not determine her destiny. As a result, Del can look forward to claiming the kind of authority men have in combining sexual experience with self-respect” (Gault 452). For when Garnet tries to baptize Del in the Wawanash River, “her shocked rejection of him is a rejection of the master-narrative which he embodies” (Prentice 33). It is also a rejection of the fate of the tragic woman artist figure, as embodied by Miss Farris, who drowned in the same river, a suspected suicide.⁵ Del will not drown, will not commit suicide, will not be baptized into a wordless physical existence, will not become another Addie figure like her mother or Garnet’s mother.⁶ She says, “I thought of him kicking and kicking that man in front of the Porterfield beer parlor. I had thought I wanted to know about him but I hadn’t really. I had never really wanted his secrets or his violence or himself taken out of the context of that peculiar and magical and, it seemed now, possibly fatal game” (Munro 261). Reality has cut through her fantasies, but ultimately it will be the fusion of the two, manifested in the form of the semi-autobiographical novel she writes about her life, that redeems her. Cencig goes so far as to use the language of rebirth to describe what the “ironically subverted” baptism does to Del (81).

Del must leave Garnet because she clings to the stories that are part of her. She wants the life of the body that he represents, but she is also firmly rooted in the life of the mind—words, stories, history. Her purpose in writing her life story is an attempt to depict not just her life, but the process by which her life has come to be told; she has “transformed” her hometown into a “mythical” place, “recreating [it] for [her] own artistic purposes. Most important of all, [she has] . . . made this process of transformation transparent by means of metafiction” (Cencig 66). The metafictional element is subtle, showing itself mainly in “Epilogue: The Photographer,” but certainly it comprises much

of the meaning of the text. “Epilogue” describes Del’s early attempts at writing a novel, the idea of which she carries “everywhere with me, as if it were one of those magic boxes a favored character gets hold of in a fairy story: touch it and his troubles disappear” (Munro 267). The novel describes Jubilee and its citizens, but oddly twists them, employing gothic conventions (doubles, the paranormal, transformations) to transform it into something young Del deems worthy of fiction: “For this novel I had changed Jubilee, too, or picked out some features of it and ignored others. It became an older, darker, more decaying town, full of unpainted board fences covered with tattered posters advertising circuses, fall fairs, elections that had long since come and gone” (270). She feels that “that town was lying close behind the one I walked through every day” (270), although she ignores the real people she knows who form the inspiration for her fictional characters. Her encounter with Bobby Sherriff leads her to realize that fiction does not, in fact, make “troubles disappear”; “It is a shock, when you have dealt so cunningly, powerfully, with reality, to come back and find it still there” (274). His gesture of standing on his toes contributes to Del’s realization that “People’s lives, in Jubilee as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing and unfathomable—deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum” (276). She is learning to find the miraculous, strange, and interesting in the utterly mundane—a common theme with Munro, who “is obsessed with the paradox of the strange and the familiar, translated into language by contradictory terms fused into an oxymoron” (Cencig 76). It is this insight that turns Del into a writer of realistic fiction based on her life.

In order to arrive at the point where she is able to write this way, she must first reconcile her conflict between the different types of storytelling in her life. The first

introduction to story Del encounters is through Uncle Benny, who “could read very well but could not write” (Munro 15), and is “a story-teller in the oral tradition” (Struthers, “Reality” 32). He approaches storytelling the way he accumulates found objects: “He valued debris for its own sake and only pretended, to himself as well as to others, that he meant to get some practical use out of it” (Munro 7). His tabloid newspapers make Del “bloated and giddy with revelations of evil, of its versatility and grand invention and horrific playfulness” (8). His stories, too, involve the fantastic, the grotesque. When he comes back from his rendezvous to marry, he “looked at us with the air of one arriving home from a long journey whose adventures can never properly be told, though he knows he will have to try” (18). The world evoked by Uncle Benny’s stories resembles the world Del creates with her melodrama, the one that “lies close behind” the real Jubilee. She uses the same sort of language when describing the feeling of listening to Uncle Benny:

[L]ying alongside our world was Uncle Benny’s world like a troubling distorted reflection, the same but never at all the same. In that world people could go down in quicksand, be vanquished by ghosts or terrible ordinary cities; luck and wickedness were gigantic and unpredictable; nothing was deserved, anything might happen; defeats were met with crazy satisfaction. It was his triumph, that he couldn’t know about, to make us see. (30-31)

Uncle Benny’s crazy narratives sharpen Del’s hunger for stories and contribute to her later expectations of life. Aunts Elspeth and Grace also “told stories. It did not seem as if they were telling them to me, to entertain me, but as if they would have told them

anyway, for their own pleasure, even if they had been alone” (38). They teach Del about subtlety: “There was a whole new language to learn in their house. Conversations there had many levels, nothing could be stated directly, every joke might be a thrust turned inside out” (43). Prentice notes that the “textual representation of oral storymaking serves a number of functions. It draws on traditional practices and patterns, not simply to reverse the hierarchy of privilege, but to reintroduce the suppressed element of a potential dialectic into dominant discursive production” (34). The title of the novel indeed indicates that there will be representation, not just of one girl/woman, but of girls and women in general, and in order to do that one must, especially in 1971, portray the various discourses women negotiate, including their struggle with the hegemonic male discourse that informs their everyday lives. There is no doubt that this portrayal is at least part of Munro’s intention. Yet the issue is complicated by, for instance, Uncle Benny, who is a man but who nonetheless displays what is otherwise considered in the novel a feminine method of communication—oral storytelling. Coupled with that, he is emasculated to some extent, as shown by the passive role he takes with his wife, the nurturing role he takes with Diane, and his comic ineffectuality at playing the hero and rescuing Diane.⁷

Additionally, Addie mostly relates to others via a stereotypically masculine communication style, with her encyclopedias and Tennyson quotes. Del is forced to reconcile this side of her mother with her more unreliable side—for example, the story about her mother that does not match up with her brother’s story (or her intimations that her brother sexually abused her, which contradict Del’s impression of him as an adult): Cencig observes, “Brother and sister have radically different recollections of their

mother, a discrepancy that leaves the child Del bewildered and deeply doubtful about the reliability of adult people's stories. Del begins to distrust her mother's eloquence, her references to poetry, her world of encyclopedias" (79). Nevertheless, Addie purveys story apparently through history, fact. Her encyclopedias evoke, in Del's imagination, "All bloodshed, drowning, hacking off of heads, agony of horses . . . depicted with a kind of operatic flourish, a superb unreality. And I had the impression that in historical times the weather was always theatrical, ominous; landscape frowned, sea glimmered in various dull or metallic shades of gray" (Munro 74). Uncle Craig, a historian who delights in the commonplace, the everyday, posthumously inspires Del to replicate his attempt to piece together the details that make up Jubilee life. Although as her younger self she abuses his manuscript, which seems "dead to me, so heavy and dull and useless" (70), when later she comes to appreciate his vision, his attempt to reconstruct the quotidian, she feels that "no list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together—radiant, everlasting" (276). Mr. Chamberlain's war stories, too, spark Del's interest. Envisioning the Italian prostitutes he speaks of, Del wonders:

A man paid you to let him do it. What did he say? Did he take your clothes off or did he expect you to do that yourself? Did he take down his pants or did he simply unzip himself and point his thing at you? It was the stage of transition, bridge between what was possible, known and normal behavior, and the magical, bestial act, that I could not imagine. (168)

Filling in the blanks between the mundane and the fantastic is precisely the concern of the novel, and is crucial to Del's growth as a writer, as before she can write *Lives of Girls and Women* she must come to terms with the gaps between known facts and the unknown—and must be able to find the fantastic in the mundane.

Although I assume that Del is the writer of *Lives of Girls and Women*, not all critics, even those who call the book a *Künstlerroman*, agree. It seems that many believe she continues to write the kind of Gothic fantasy that she explains comprises her first attempts at writing fiction, or in any case that she is not the author of Munro's novel. For example, Brian Diemert mistakenly claims that the epilogue discusses "the novel Del plans to write called *The Photographer*" (126). The epilogue, which is a flashback like the rest of the book, clearly states, however, that *The Photographer* was an early creation of Del's, and is in no way representative of her later work. Del's declaration that "It is a shock, when you have dealt so cunningly, powerfully, with reality, to come back and find it still there" (Munro 274) as a prelude to her visit with Bobby Sherriff is one clear indication that the novel about his family was already finished by the time of the visit which comprises the subject of the epilogue. The final scene, indeed, explains Del's dramatic shift from writing the fantastic to writing the ordinary. Her "yes"⁸ to Bobby's odd gesture foreshadows her later realization that the fantastic is *in* the ordinary, although "[a]t present I did not look much at this town" (276). Del has found a solution to the problems of artistic expression, in presenting the smallest details of fact in the style of Uncle Craig as well as the elements of fantastic stories, which can be found in the quotidian. The entire narrative of Munro's novel explains the ways in which Del reconciles the fantastic with the factual. The result is Munro's novel, which Munro

wrote, of course, but which Del has also written, both as Munro's alter-ego and the narrator of the book. As Perrakis puts it, "If *Lives of Girls and Women* is in some ways Alice Munro's artistic autobiography, Del Jordan's life symbolizes the kind of experiences that create an artistic consciousness like that of Munro" (61).

By the end of Munro's novel, Del has succeeded in her endeavor to "transform the raw material of [her life] into art" (Cencig 70). She has assimilated male and female discourses, yet ultimately transcends them and finds her own voice, which culminates in Munro's novel. Various critics use language that indicates Del's ultimate redemption through this process of finding her voice in order to become a writer: "Del learns that the stories of lives of girls and women may, after all, have alternative, affirmative endings, for she creates one of those endings for herself" (York 214); "'Epilogue' optimistically suggests that by having the courage and perseverance to accept the limitations and denials of 'real life' without succumbing to them, Del will transcend them" (Perrakis 66); "Del gives birth to the text (corpus) and to her body (corps)" (Godard 67). By writing her own story in her own way, Del becomes a self-fashioner, literally scratching a self with her pen along with a text.

Notes

¹Beer links Munro's purported criticism of hegemonic, i.e. male, methods of discourse to an inferiority of status of the men in the novel. Although it may be true that "[s]tory after story delineates the end of male exclusivity" (125), it is questionable whether "men are the bit-players, featuring in single episodes rather than informing the whole, and reduced in status by being made subject to judgement" (126). The women are judged, too, sometimes more harshly than the men (Mr. Chamberlain, exhibitionist to Del when she is a young girl, is not held to any great condemnation—in fact, Del almost feels he has given her a gift of insight; and hapless Uncle Benny's cruel and abusive wife is certainly the most vicious character in the novel, later being reduced, uneasily, for lack of any other way of coming to terms with her, to an outrageous story). Indeed, men, along with women, instill in Del a reverence for story. Uncle Benny is one of the first. Uncle Craig is another, albeit belatedly. Two of them are even given names indicative of what Del attempts to do in re-constructing her life as a narrative: Art Chamberlain and Jerry Storey.

²Other critics have found strong links between Alice Munro's work and that of writers from the American south. Struthers, for example, makes connections between Munro and Eudora Welty ("Alice Munro"), and Nora Robson focuses mainly on her resemblance to Flannery O'Connor.

³In his inscrutable silences and lack of verbal acuity, the narrator's comparison of him with an animal, and her experience of him primarily as sexual, Garnet French uncannily resembles the bear in Marian Engel's *Bear* as well as Joe in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*. Interestingly, he also vaguely resembles, in appearance and

proclivity toward religion, albeit with significant differences, the husband in Donna Morrissey's *Sylvanus Now*. In this novel, published in 2005, an intellectual young girl is unable to escape her tiny Newfoundland fishing village, succumbs in marriage to a darkly handsome, unlearned fisherman, and learns to be happy in a life she never wanted.

⁴Thomas bases her assessment partly on the intertextuality Munro employs through her "persistent allusions" to James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Struthers also compares the two in "Reality and Ordering"; Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis does the same in "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Girl"; and Godard claims that *Lives* is a "*bildungsroman* [*sic*] written *against* Joyce" (65; italics in original).

⁵Diemert traces the echoes of Virginia Woolf in *Lives of Girls and Women* and links the fate of Miss Farris to Woolf's suicide by drowning. Miss Farris's counterpart in the novel is the woman Addie idolized when she was young, Miss Rush, who died in childbirth.

⁶Gault notes that "Del seems to come face-to-face with a representation of Addie Bundren's life in Garnet's mother" (451).

⁷Godard nods to Benny's womanly nature when she talks about "mothers and Uncle Bennys" in one breath (54).

⁸Godard finds an additional allusion to Joyce in Del's "yes," which echoes Molly's famous "yes" in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In Godard's analysis, a major difference between Molly and Del is that Molly is a muse while Del is a creator, and their yeses signify this respectively.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MYTHIC NORTH IN CANADIAN LITERATURE

In the remaining two novels examine, Marian Engel's *Bear* and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, the North as a metaphor assumes particular significance. The North¹ has been an enduring image and concern in Canada, a country which has traditionally defined itself by its vast arctic region. Renée Hulan notes the importance of the North in creating a nationalist ethos (*Northern* 11). This region has been represented in many ways, and the representations have changed over time. Margaret Atwood says, "The North' is thought of as a place, but it's a place with shifting boundaries. It's also a state of mind" (*Strange Things* 8). Peter Davidson, in his study *The Idea of North*, echoes, "Everyone carries their own idea of north within them" (8) and "Everyone has a different north, their own private map of the emotional—indeed the moral—geography of north and south" (20). Sherrill Grace asserts the same when she says it is a "state of mind, an imagined space" (43). The state of mind the North evokes, however, has changed over time. Atwood points out a few stereotypes that have commonly been associated with the North:

In the Canadian North of popular image, the Mounties with their barking dog teams relentlessly pursue madmen through the snow, prospectors stumble raving out of the bush clutching their little bags of gold-dust, jolly voyageurs rollick in their canoes, Indians rescue hapless whites who get endlessly lost in the woods, wolves devour lone hunters, or not, as the case may be, Eskimoes . . . well, you get the picture. (*Strange Things* 8-9)

She explains that those images have persisted throughout time in Canadians' conception of the North, and that it is only the "values ascribed to them" that have fluctuated (9). One of the earliest ways in which English settlers viewed the North was as "uncanny, awe-inspiring in an almost religious way, hostile to white men, but alluring" (19). Later, it became a pure, almost Edenic haven in which to escape the hazards of civilization (44), and "mysterious and mystical" (Hulan, *Northern* 140). It has been associated with freedom (6-7). Davidson points out (21-50) the contradictions inherent in global representations of the North beginning with the ancient Greeks, in which the cold regions are variously figured as analogous to heaven, "endless day" (50) and also to hell, "endless dark" (50).²

Most pertinent for *Bear* and *Surfacing* is the idea that going north is also going North—that is, that traveling closer to or all the way to the Arctic regions somehow facilitates a parallel inward journey that leads to transformation. In his discussion of Glenn Gould's popular late-1960s radio program called "The Idea of North," Paul Hjartarson explains, "In 'The Idea of North,' the Arctic becomes an interior landscape, the trip north an inward journey" (75). Hulan says that "In literature, people go north to escape, to prove themselves, to learn something, and usually to leave again" (*Northern* 6). This pattern is certainly true of both Lou in *Bear* and the unnamed narrator of *Surfacing*, both of whom journey North, where they experience spiritual transformations. Significantly, both protagonists return at the end of their trips to the southern Canadian cities from where they have come. In *Bear*, the protagonist's return is foreshadowed by her failed attempt to romanticize the black flies: "She was trying to decide to regard the black flies as a good symptom of the liveliness of the North, a sign that nature will never

capitulate, that man is red in tooth and claw but there is something that cannot be controlled by him, when a critter no larger than a fruitfly tore a hunk out of her shin through her trousers” (Engel 71-72).

Recent literary criticism of the North has been concerned with the portrayal, or lack thereof, of northern Natives in writing by southern English Canadians. Coates and Morrison mirror Hulan when they write, “northern society and landscape have been presented in stereotypical terms, by people who have gone north to ‘discover’ things, quite often themselves,” but add that “Literature has served as a major element in a kind of intellectual colonialism, substituting southern voices for indigenous northern expression.” Various critics³ have alerted English Canadian writers to their portrayal of the North primarily through stereotypes and their misrepresentation or underrepresentation of the Natives who are its primary inhabitants (in the Arctic, at least). Hulan calls especial attention to the solipsism involved in English Canadians’ travel narratives about the North, in which they place themselves at the center of their story and project onto the northern landscape and its people whatever serves their purposes (“Literary Field Notes”). *Bear* and *Surfacing* are, at times, guilty of doing just this; both perpetuate what Jensen calls “a quaint Canadian native fetishism, a modern equivalent of the Enlightenment idea of the noble savage” (163).

Nevertheless, it may be a bit reductive to read the books only through this lens. Both novels are concerned with imagining ways of life that oppose the white, male hegemonic experience. As such, they turn not only to the perspective of women (although that is their primary concern), but also to other underrepresented and colonized groups of people: Natives. That they encounter, in the case of *Bear*, Native inhabitants

who have close ties with a pre-colonial way of life, and in the case of *Surfacing*, a broadly Native rite of passage, only serves to reinforce their solidarity with the North and the paradigms it presents.

Notes

¹ With K.S. Coates and W.R. Morrison and others, I use capitalization when referring to the *idea* of North, its metaphorical denotation rather than a compass direction.

² Interestingly, the North is also gendered. “It would be easy to assign gender to direction: south is female, north is male. Or too often the destroying north is gendered as the Snow Queen, the Ice Witch” (Davidson 9). In both *Bear* and *Surfacing*, the northern land could best be described as a helpless yet resilient female.

³ See Hulan, *Northern Experience* and “Literary Field Notes”; Coates and Morrison; and Lars Jensen.

CHAPTER THREE: MARGARET ATWOOD'S *SURFACING*

In her article "Setting Words Free," Karen Gould outlines the concerns of feminism in Quebec until 1981. She identifies language as one of its primary preoccupations, partially as a result of Anglophone cultural and economic dominance over the Francophone in Canada. Although she sees this "acute . . . malaise about speaking and writing" as "distinctly *quebécois*" due to Quebec's unique history, she acknowledges that this "theme . . . permeates many 'colonized' literatures" (618-19). She also points out that much of *quebécois* feminist ideology has been influenced by French feminists' linkage of language and the body. Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, set in Quebec and published in 1972, reflects this preoccupation with language. Interestingly, however, it departs from the "valorization of language" so prevalent in *quebécois* women's writing at the time (619); it actually *de*-valorizes language, rendering it meaningless, or even harmful, at the same time as it uses language to do so. Of course, Atwood is an Anglophone writer, by her own admission "far from being well-read in Quebec literature" (*Survival* 217). It can be assumed, however, that she was aware of Canadian Francophones' struggle to preserve their language and culture. She notes that "French Canada must cling to its language-and-religion life-raft in the sea of hostile English Protestants which threatens to engulf it" (218). Although *Surfacing* devalues language, it is significant that it is specifically human language, English especially, which is associated with falsity, fatuousness, and even cruelty. This type of discourse is pitted against a more innate, "true" communication, linked with non-human languages and the mythic journey. What the Quebec feminist tradition and Atwood's feminist novel share

is an association of language with the colonization of both country by country and women by men.¹ It is the colonizing influence which must either be shrugged off or adapted. In Atwood's novel, it isn't until the protagonist rejects inauthentic discourse and embraces Native mythology and the languages of nature that she takes steps toward her redemption.

Atwood's nameless narrator drives with her boyfriend, Joe, and another couple, David and Anna, to a northern Quebec island in order to look for her father, who is missing. Language is presented as meaningless from the beginning and becomes more insidious as the visit to the island wears on. As the narrator and her companions reach their destination, she contemplates that "people could say words that would go into my ears meaning nothing. To be deaf and dumb would be easier" (5). "Language divides us into fragments," she thinks, and "I wanted to be whole" (140). David and Anna specifically embody the falsity and fragmentation of language. Anna talks constantly but doesn't say much—furthermore, what she does say does not represent her true self. She uses "a cheerful voice I once thought was hers" (117). Her singing is an assault to the senses, and in one passage is compared unfavorably to the call of an owl, whose voice is "quick and soft like a wing beating against the eardrum, cutting across the pattern of [Anna's] voice, negating her" (117-18). Anna's makeup, too, demonstrates her willingness to engage in artificiality. The cosmetic simulacrum of her face has become her true face, "her artificial face is the natural one" (37), so much so that her husband doesn't like to see her without it, even first thing in the morning; nor does she like him to see her without it.² (In fact, she contradicts herself when she amends that he is unaware of her wearing it.) Makeup, the art of concealing nature, of misrepresenting oneself, is

“the only magic left to her” (159), whereas the narrator sees herself as able to perform magic through her pseudo-shamanistic journey. David, aptly or ironically, teaches communications. He continually exhibits his inability to engage in genuine dialogue. He employs a fake “yokel dialect . . . for fun, it’s a parody of himself” (22), asking Evans about fish in a “folksy, chummy, crafty” way (24). Together, he and Anna put on “skirts,” for which “Joe and I are the audience” (38).

The narrator’s “ex-husband,” who, we find, was not really her husband but her lover and married to someone else, also embodies the craftiness of lingual manipulation. He is an art and lettering teacher; his association with the written word is in keeping with the themes of the novel, since his proclamations of love for the narrator proved false, and she “will never trust that word again” (41). She can’t tell Joe she loves him, not only because she doesn’t, but also because she doesn’t know what the word means anymore—it has lost its meaning, much like nearly everything in her life. Joe, however, contrary to Anna, David, and the “ex-husband,” is nearly wordless. His attempted communications make up a humorous catalogue of inscrutability: “I can’t tell whether he’s pleased or discouraged” (29); “Joe is swaying back and forth, rocking, which may mean he’s happy” (34); “He gives a noncommittal growl” (37); “Joe grunts, I wonder if he’s jealous” (70); “I thought he was being sarcastic but I wasn’t sure” (130); “speech to him was a task, a battle, words mustered behind his beard and issued one at a time, heavy and square like tanks” (71). He is described as an animal, partly because of his difficulty with speech but also because of his beastly appearance: “From the side he’s like the buffalo on the U.S. nickel, shaggy and blunt-snouted, with small clenched eyes and the defiant but insane look of a species once dominant, now threatened with extinction” (2); “his beard is dark

brown, almost black, it continues around his neck and merges under the sheet with the hair on his back. His back is hairier than most men's, a warm texture, it's like teddy-bear fur" (35). Joe's hair is unlike the hair that David grows to pretend he's rugged—and that Anna says reminds her "of a cunt" (38). It is genuine, and along with his silence it imbues him with a wildness, a beastliness that the narrator finds reassuring, despite her temporary rejection of him. Ultimately he is deemed acceptable, although "he needs to grow more fur" (155), because "For him truth might still be possible, what will preserve him is the absence of words" (153). The narrator is also associated with wordlessness, and is nameless because she is "through pretending . . . to be civilized" (162). She imagines the child she believes she conceives with Joe "will be covered with shining fur, a god, I will never teach it any words" (156). She even imagines herself to be turning into an animal. "[T]he animals don't lie" (147), she believes, and neither is Joe capable of lying.

Deceptive language is associated with the "Americans" (who turn out to be Canadians). The narrator justifies her mistake in confusing their nationalities by pointing out the importance of language, which for her indicates a way of life: "If you look like them and talk like them and think like them then you are them, I was saying, you speak their language, a language is everything you do" (123). The narrator identifies David particularly with an American mentality: "he didn't know what language to use, he'd forgotten his own, he had to copy. Second-hand American was spreading over him in patches, like mange or lichen. He was infested, garbled, and I couldn't help him: it would take such time to heal, unearth him, scrape down to where he was true" (146). It is

significant that the intolerability of language is associated specifically with humans, whether American or Canadian or Quebecois.

While human language might not be desirable, the languages of nature are presented more positively as the narrator feels continuously more alienated from the human world. She mentions that “Once people believed the flight of birds was a portent: augury” (87). Later, she listens to “Bird voices twirl[ing] over my ears, intricate as skaters or running water, the air filling with liquid syllables” (119). The water is “multilingual” (172). The narrator talks about the languages of the forest having “no nouns, only verbs held for a long moment” (175). Her mother and father speak to her, as visions, “in the other language” (182). The narrator, too, associates herself with the “other language,” relinquishing her name because “I tried for all those years to be civilized but I’m not and I’m through pretending” (162).

The “other language” can be likened to myth. Much like in Marion Engel’s *Bear*, the protagonist’s movement North is also a psychological journey to her past and her subconscious. Myths from at least two traditions are invoked, most notably from the Bible and from Native culture.³ Ultimately it will be the Native that allows the narrator to begin down the path to healing. The narrative reflects the dynamics between Western and Native in its structure. Biblical allusions permeate the first two-thirds of the book. The narrator and her friends travel to the stern French Canadian Catholic world of rural northern Quebec, an island reminiscent of Eden, so pure that even “the disease [affecting white birch] hasn’t yet hit this part of the country” (30). Here the narrator feels she wants, suggesting the un-doing of the temptation and fall of Eve, to “save all of them from knowledge” (77). Earlier, she recalls answering a riddle, given her by other

children as a taunt, with the wrong answer—“‘Adam and Eve,’ I said craftily. ‘*They were saved*’” (66). Although her response is “crafty” because it avoids the correct reply, “pinch me,” it foreshadows the ending of the novel, where the narrator is obliquely compared to Eve—“I multiply,” she says (162), echoing the command of God in Genesis, “Be fruitful and multiply” (*King James Bible*, Genesis 1.28). She and Joe also bear a resemblance to Mary and Joseph (hence Joe’s name). Although the narrator is decidedly not a virgin, or anything resembling chaste, she surprises David and Anna by refusing to sleep with David. Innocently, insanelly, she asks him if he loves her, if that’s why he wants to sleep with her (146). In believing that the child she may be carrying could be a god, she also invokes the image of the mother of Christ, although the god the narrator thinks she carries would be of a different sort.

The narrator also wants to be like Noah, only the whole world is the ark: “I wanted there to be a machine that could make [humans] vanish, a button I could press that would evaporate them without disturbing anything else, that way there would be more room for the animals, they would be rescued” (148). The ark is an interesting image when considered in light of the title, *Surfacing*. Images of submersion and emersion permeate the novel, beginning with the story of the near-drowning of the narrator’s brother. She carries an image, which she couldn’t have seen in real life since she wasn’t yet born, of his submerged body in her mind. It isn’t until later that we find the image actually relates to the fetus she aborted: “it couldn’t be him, he had not drowned after all, he was elsewhere. Then I recognized it: it wasn’t ever my brother I’d been remembering, that had been a disguise. . . . it was in a bottle curled up, staring out at me like a cat pickled” (137). Here the fetus is a cat, and the narrator goes on to compare

it to both frogs and fish, animals that live at least part of their lives submerged: “it had huge jelly eyes and fins instead of hands, fish gills” (137). That she sees herself as Noah makes sense, since she wants to go back to the past and retrieve her child, “save” it from the doctors, or, as she sees them, the evildoers. The lake is described as “blue and cool as redemption” (9); on this lake “the weather shifts, the wind swells up quickly; people drown every year” (25). She feels “my lost child surfacing within me, forgiving me, rising from the lake where it has been prisoned for so long” (155-56), which echoes her earlier “surfacing” when she wakes up next to Joe (37). The surfacing in both references is a metaphorical movement from subconscious to conscious, from repression to acknowledgement. When she, Joe, Anna, and David arrive on the island, the lake is dammed and the “floodgates are open” (11), signaling the emotional immersion to come. The lake is “the entrance” (141) for the narrator into the emotional past, and her challenge will be to surface, to avoid drowning.

In her construction of herself as these various archetypes (Mary, Noah), the narrator is eminently innocent, as she is in wanting to undo Eve’s error. She constantly sees the suffering of innocents—the land, the animals, and sometimes women—in terms of sacrifice and metaphorical crucifixion, likening them to Christ.⁴ The most prominent of these images is that of the heron, which the narrator finds “hanging upside down by a thin blue nylon rope tied round its feet and looped over a tree branch, its wings fallen open” (109). She compares it to “a lynch victim” (110), emphasizing the predatory nature of the “Americans.” She describes another heron, this one in flight, as “a bluegrey cross,” saying that “Whether it died willingly, consented, whether Christ died willingly, anything that suffers and dies instead of us is Christ; if they didn’t kill birds and fish they

would have killed us” (134). The referent of “they” is left ambiguous. We suspect it means not only the “Americans,” but also men, hunters (Anna noticeably abstains from fishing, and the narrator is disgusted by it although she teaches David and Joe how to do it). “Us,” then, refers to women and animals. The heron, and birds in general, are associated with the narrator’s mother, who she remembers feeding birds (101) and sees in a vision feeding wild jays (176). When her mother is on her deathbed, she is “very thin . . . skin tight over her curved beak nose, hands on the sheet curled like bird claws clinging to a perch” (16). Trying to fly as a child, the narrator’s mother “made wings . . . out of an old umbrella . . . jumped off the barn roof, attempting to fly, and she broke both her ankles” (117). Interestingly, the story the narrator is supposed to be illustrating is called “The Tale of the Golden Phoenix” (48). The phoenix is a traditional Christ metaphor in its representation of persecution, death, and subsequent resurrection. This image is invoked when the narrator comes across the heron: “They must have got it before it had time to rise” (110). The heron serves here as a failed phoenix, a failed Christ, much like the narrator’s mother, who is closely associated with these figures through her link to the birds. The narrator’s brother, on the other hand, was “raised from the dead,” saved from drowning, and doesn’t remember the event (68). The narrator says, “If it had happened to me I would have felt there was something special about me . . . I would have returned with secrets, I would have known things most people didn’t” (68).

A more subtle, and more gruesome, sacrificial Christ metaphor is in the recurring image of frogs. Frogs are mentioned repeatedly throughout the novel, usually as victims in images of entrapment, cruelty, and death.⁵ They are meant to represent the narrator’s aborted child, who “surfaces,” amphibian-like, in her consciousness repeatedly. There’s

the fairy tale connection of “kissing the frog” leading to happy after ever which has been shattered here—the “husband” went from a prince to a frog, not the other way around. But a more striking connection with frogs is in terms of Native belief about the Wendigo.⁶ Wendigos prefer to eat humans, but Atwood notes that “what Wendigos eat when there are no human beings around [are] frogs” (*Strange Things* 6). The narrator feels precisely like a Wendigo, and her child is her victim, much like frogs are the victims of voracious bush beings. Whereas the narrator has been casting herself as innocent, here she assumes culpability, which helps her heal: “I felt a sickening complicity, sticky as glue, blood on my hands” (124). Indeed, Carol Christ asserts that “Though she feels trapped, recognition of her guilt and responsibility is a step toward claiming her power to refuse to be a victim” (321). Atwood herself underscores the importance of renouncing the role of victim: “If you define yourself as innocent, then nothing is ever your fault—it is always somebody else doing it to you—and until you stop defining yourself as a victim, that will always be true” (“An Interview” 210-211). Assumption of guilt is the beginning of the narrator’s healing process.

The biblical themes are overshadowed, or complemented, by aspects of Native religion. One example of this is that the Genesis story of the seven days of creation helps structure the book—reiterated by the narrator’s solemnly noting the days in biblical fashion: “It was the sixth day” (127)—and yet the narrative moves past the seven days to allow for the narrator’s pseudo-shamanic journey. The book takes place over a total of thirteen days—the first two are what the travelers originally planned. The next seven are the extra days they decide to stay, after which Evans will pick them up. These are reminiscent of the biblical days of creation. The following four are those that the narrator

spends on the island alone and during which she undertakes a sort of vision quest. This is appropriate because four is a sacred number to many Native cultures, and it is significant that it is during this time that the narrator “confronts” her parents, forgives herself to some extent, and comes to terms with her life—in short, begins to heal. The narrator’s insistence on the meaninglessness of human language culminates in this section in her own wordlessness and immersion in the “languages” of nature: “In one of the languages there are no nouns, only verbs held for a longer moment” (175). The biblical pronouncement, “In the beginning was the word” (*King James Bible*, John 1.1), is both affirmed and negated when the narrator says, “The animals have no need for speech, why talk when you are a word” (175).

That these four days supersede to some extent the biblical seven that came before them coincides with the way in which the narrator represents human language as well as the stories of the Bible as “false.” It is their opposites—the Native, shamanic journey and the non-languages of nature—that will ultimately provide the means for her potential redemption. A discussion the narrator remembers having with her father when she was a child is worth quoting in its entirety:

He said Jesus was a historical figure and God was a superstition, and a superstition was a thing that didn’t exist. If you tell your children God doesn’t exist they will be forced to believe you are the god, but what happens when they find out you are human after all, you have to grow old and die? Resurrection is like plants, Jesus Christ is risen today they sang at Sunday School, celebrating the daffodils; but people are not onions, as he so reasonably pointed out, they stay under. (98)

The events of the novel result from the tensions suggested in this conversation. The narrator is compelled to travel to the island because her father is missing—dead, she later discovers. She has trouble accepting his death and her mother’s, partially because of the guilt she feels over severing contact with them. What she has to contend with is that they are “not onions”; they will stay dead, buried. The story of the resurrection is not applicable because it is not true. The narrator does not believe that the Bible’s claims are “true,” so they cannot save her or her parents from their fates. However, a sort of “vision quest,” perhaps facilitated by the narrator’s ingestion of mushrooms, provides closure. The mushrooms may or may not be the *Amanita muscaria*, Fly Agaric, she mentions before (144). By this time, she has renounced naming, and she’s “not sure” of the mushrooms she eats. If it is the *Amanita*, it would be in keeping with the practices of several Native cultures, who used the psychoactive mushroom for spiritual purposes. Whatever species the mushrooms are, they give her indigestion, indicating that they are poisonous, and therefore psychotropic: “The mothers of gods, how do they feel, voices and light glaring from the belly, do they feel sick, dizzy? Pain squeezes my stomach, I bend, head pressed against knees” (175). It is after she ingests the mushrooms that she begins having visions, confusing senses, and even feeling for a moment that she is a tree. Suddenly, “The forest leaps upward, enormous, the way it was before they cut it, columns of sunlight frozen” (175). It is under this spell that she sees both of her parents in visions. Interestingly, she will see her father as a wolf, a subconscious manifestation of her childhood indoctrination by the Catholics who say that anyone who does not attend church will turn into a wolf (50). This vision represents her coming to terms with her parents’ deaths as well as the death of her fetus. As she recognized earlier, “no power

remained in their bland oleotinted Jesus prints or in the statues of the other ones, rigid and stylized, holy triple name shrunken to swearwords. These gods, here on the shore or in the water, unacknowledged or forgotten, were the only ones who had ever given me anything I needed; and freely” (139). The Native is more “true” than the Western, and will help her save herself.

There will be, as the narrator herself notes, “no total salvation” (183), however; “redemption was elsewhere” (126). She realizes that even the child she has fixated on may not be the savior she is looking for: “No god and perhaps not real, even that is uncertain: I can’t know yet” (185). All of the moral judgements by the end of the story have been blurred. The narrative initially presents simplified dichotomies: the bush is good, the city is bad; Canadians are good, Americans are bad; women are good, men are bad; the languages of nature are good, the languages of humans are bad. But each one of those moral dichotomies is complicated, made nebulous, as when the “Americans” turn out to be Canadian. The narrator at first assumes she is innocent and victimized, but as her memories “surface,” she understands that she is culpable in her own problems as well as the problems of the world. She finally realizes that healing can only take place once she renounces victimhood: “This above all, to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that I can do nothing. I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone. A lie which was always more disastrous than the truth would have been” (185). The narrator, then, assumes the power of agency; due to her mythic journey she will leave the island empowered and ready to embark on the next part of her life.

Notes

¹ Elaine Showalter quotes Christiane Rochefort, who says, “I consider women’s literature as a specific category, not because of biology, but because it is, in a sense, the literature of the colonized” (197).

² Anna’s skillful manipulation of her face, the art that conceals art, calls to mind Spenser’s condemnation of *sprezzatura*: “[t]he art, which all that wrought, appeared in no place” and must be destroyed (*The Faerie Queene* Book II, Canto XII, line 522).

³ I understand that the term “Native” is general, and does not denote a single culture or set of beliefs. The few elements that I discuss in my paper, though, especially the idea of the vision quest or the shamanic journey, are shared by many cultures. My oversimplifications derive from Atwood’s drastic oversimplifications of the process; she is perhaps even guilty of employing the Noble Savage archetype that she is so aware of in other writers’ novels. I do, however, think that she is consciously working within a tradition in which Native beliefs are given priority over European, and is evoking the conventions of that tradition in order to provide easy access in her readers’ minds to values conjured by that tradition.

⁴ Animals can be “food, slave or corpse, limited choices; horned and fanged heads sawed off and mounted on the billiard room wall, stuffed fish, trophies” (110-11); the white birches are “doomed eventually by the disease, tree cancer” (111); David says that “what they should have put on the flag instead of a maple leaf [was] a split beaver” (112-13)—an allusion to the victimization of both animals and women; and David kills a fish the narrator describes as “David’s murder, cadaver” (114).

⁵ A selection of frog references includes “a frog in a jar” (26); “Frogs hop everywhere” (31); “Nine beavers pissing on a frog” (33); “I take out the little frog . . . and hook it on securely while it squeaks” (58); “a frog’s [head]” (70); “frogs in the jam jar” (100); “jar of frogs” (108); “I took the bottle with the frogs in it out of the tackle box and unscrewed the top . . . a frog, exhaling ether, spread and pinned flat as a doily and slit open” (114); “frogs, their skin dry and their yellow stomachs puffed up” (125); “letting out air like a frog” (135); “boat and arms one movement, amphibian” (161); “A frog is there, leopard frog with green spots and gold-rimmed eyes, ancestor” (173); “Frogs and snakes get through but they are permitted” (174).

⁶ Atwood notes that the Wendigo is a cannibal monster whose “prevailing characteristic seems to be its ravenous hunger for human flesh” (*Strange Things* 66) and “has been seen as the personification of winter, or hunger, or spiritual selfishness” (67).

CHAPTER FOUR: MARIAN ENGEL'S *BEAR*

Marian Engel's novel *Bear*, winner of the 1976 Governor General's Award for fiction, limns a narrative similar to a widespread Alaskan and Canadian Native story. Engel's novel tells of an archivist from Toronto named Lou whom the Toronto Historical Institute sends to catalogue a library on an island farther north in Ontario, where an Englishman had settled and built a large colonial house. Colonel Cary had begun a tradition of keeping pet bears at the estate. When Lou arrives, she finds that there is still a bear, one her guide tells her is "kind of old, nobody remembers how old, but they live to be twenty-five or thirty so he can't be too young" (Engel 27). Lou gets used to the bear, and eventually even begins, bizarrely, what she believes is a romantic relationship with him. In the analogous Native tale, sometimes called "The Bear Mother," a girl goes against her culture's mores regarding behavior toward bears when gathering berries on a mountainside—she ridicules their excrement and taunts them. As punishment, the bears kidnap her and force her to become the wife of a grizzly. In both stories, the human protagonists engage in a relationship of some kind with male bears. It is my contention that Engel consciously appropriated the tale and manipulated it to reflect a different society and time than those in which the story was originally told. For, in the Native version of the story, during her captivity the girl brings forth twins who are half bear and half human. After her brothers rescue her and kill her bear husband, the children bring the tribe luck and teach them how to hunt effectively (Barbeau 3).¹ In Engel's version, however, the bear, unlike the Native figure of the animal, does not speak any human language; he does not seem to have any human emotion; he is ineffable. Most

importantly, when Lou tries to copulate with him, he slashes her, leaving what will prove to be a deep scar. Their relationship will remain unconsummated due to its physiological impossibility. Still, Lou's encounter with the mythic in the form of her liaison with the bear is the catalyst for her redemption.

Tension between the forces of myth and history drive the novel. Initially, Lou is squarely in history's camp: she works for the Toronto Historical Institute and is sent to the island to attempt to classify and catalogue the English colonial past. Life as a member of Western institutions, however, does not satisfy her. She engages in stale, sterile sex with the Director of the Institute, who epitomizes history, although "she knew in her heart that what he wanted was not her waning flesh but elegant eighteenth-century keyholes, of which there is a shortage in Ontario" (Engel 92-93). She is "a mole, buried deep in her office, digging among maps and manuscripts" (11). So deeply immersed is she in her work that she misses out on the other side of life: the summer sun, love, imagination. She gets to experience these things when she is sent to Cary Island.

The island is an amalgamation of the mythic and historical. Colonel Cary himself is a shadowy yet consistent presence there. It is his house in which Lou stays, his library she catalogues, his descendants' pet bear she tends. Cary is part of the colonial historical tradition, in that he bought an island that he names for himself and built a large house in the shape of a Fowler's Octagon, complete with a library of classic English texts. Cary, however, is something of a renegade who transcends this historical tradition; he straddles the fence between historical and mythological. He stores notes about bears in his books. While critic Elspeth Cameron attributes these notes to what I call the mythological, saying that "they remind Lou of pre-history, of a past in which man and nature were one,

where magical transformations gave hope and vitality to life” (85; see also Howells 73), some of the notes are in fact scientific in nature, thus belonging to a Western, historical tradition: “Carnivorous. Frugivorous. Tail generally short. Brain and nervous system fairly developed. Claws for digging, non-retractable. Senses acute. Cylindrical bones more similar to man’s than those of other quadrupeds, esp. the femur,” and so on (Engel 44). Many of his notes do, however, point out aspects of mythology: “The Laplanders venerate it and call it the Dog of God. The Norwegians say, ‘The Bear has the strength of ten men and the sense of twelve.’ They never call it by its true name lest it ravage their crops. Rather, they refer to it as ‘Moedda-aigja, senem cum mastruca,’ the old man with the fur cloak” (53). Further, “Many good Christians there also honour those fine animals at the summer solstice, when creatures mate in full view of the populace. It is rumoured that even the pious pay them reverence in view of the ancient belief that they, not Adam and Eve, were our first ancestors” (73). Indeed, Cary has named his estate “Pennarth,” which means “bear’s head” in Welsh (64). Lou, as well as Colonel Cary, is part of both traditions. She has been immersed in the masculinized historical way of life, and although she ultimately realizes she cannot exist entirely apart from this tradition, she also discovers that only the mythological can provide her ultimate redemption.

The first indication that Lou will be dealing with the mythic is the fact that she journeys north. Cameron notes that for Lou, “primitive truth in its dark energy both contains and is an extension of a powerful natural world,” which she specifies is a “northern landscape” (86). This “primitive truth,” which I call myth, is what allows Lou to turn from the historical and to live according to her own desires. Even before she arrives on the island, she feels changed: “The road went north. She followed it. There

was a Rubicon near the height of land. When she crossed it, she began to feel free” (17-18). The freedom the North provides is the beginning of Lou’s healing process. Stereotypically in Canadian literature, “people [go] north to ‘discover’ things, quite often themselves” (Coates). Certainly, this is true of *Bear*’s heroine, for she writes on a postcard that she has “a sense . . . of being reborn” (Engel 19).

The North is associated with other positive symbols in the novel, namely light and summer. The dichotomies between north and south, light and dark, summer and winter, are also associated with the dichotomy between mythology and history. The epigraph to the novel is a quote from Kenneth Clark’s *Landscape into Art*, and it points to both the tension between myth and history and that between light and dark: “Facts [i.e. history] become art [i.e. myth] through love, which unifies them and lifts them to a higher plane of reality; and in landscape, this all-embracing love is expressed by light” (7). Whereas her life in Toronto had “persisted in turning grey” (19), her life on the island is frequently described in terms of radiant light—there is a “blaze of sunshine” (37), the library is “a sea of gold and green light” (37), and Lou’s experiences of sunrise in Toronto and on the island are completely different: “Morning in the city is to be endured only. There is no dawn any more than there is real darkness. . . . Here, she woke shivering again and raised her nose to the air like an animal. The light in the bedroom was extraordinarily white” (45). And, of course, there are the Northern Lights, which Lou “watche[s]...flickering mysterious green in the magic sky” (116). The light, as indicated by the epigraph, transforms her from an unhappy archivist to a woman made whole by myth. Indeed, the final line of the novel portrays Lou basking in brilliant starlight as she drives south to

Toronto: “It was a brilliant night, all star-shine, and overhead the Great Bear and his thirty-seven thousand virgins kept her company” (141).

The forces of story and myth also show themselves in the figure of Homer, the man whose job it is to show Lou how to inhabit the island. He is the first to demonstrate a mythic way of life to Lou. Aptly named, he is a storyteller who makes Lou feel her profession is inadequate to capture the nuances of life. After he tells her a story about Colonel Jocelyn, Colonel Cary’s descendant, Lou reacts by questioning her profession:

What was the use of all these cards and details and orderings? In the beginning they had seemed beautiful, capable of making an order of their own, capable of being in the end filed and sorted so that she could find a structure, plumb a secret. Now, they filled her with guilt; she felt there would never, ever, be anything as revealing and vivid as Homer’s story, or as relevant. They were a heresy against the real truth. (83)

Lou knows that no historical record, no facts, about Col. Jocelyn could reveal her true character or her quirky magnificence. Lou’s file cards and numerical systems do not reveal the “truth,” which is more about the characterization and color of storytelling than the numbers and dates of history.

The biggest catalyst for Lou’s redemption happens, of course, via her partial enactment of the “Bear Mother” myth. Indeed, the novel seems to allude directly to this story: “She lay naked, panting, wanting to be near her lover [the bear], wanting to offer him her two breasts and her womb, almost believing that he could impregnate her with the twin heroes that would save her tribe” (121). From the beginning, though, the bear is shrouded in mystery and ineffability. Lou asks him, “Bear. . . who and what are you?”

(36) and wonders, “What does he think?” (59). His age is in question. He is “kind of old, nobody remembers how old,” Homer tells Lou (27). Lou comes to feel that he is “larger and older and wiser than time” (119). The difficulty in pinning down his identity extends even to his size and gender. Although he is “indubitably male” (35), and is described as such most of the time, at other times he has female characteristics. When Lou watches Joe King take him before she leaves the island, for example, he is “a fat dignified old woman with his nose to the wind in the bow of the boat” (138). Another time he is “a full-grown bear with a scruff like a widow’s hump” (35); He is “[n]ot a creature of the wild, but a middle-aged woman defeated to the point of being daft, who had sat night after night waiting for her husband for so long that time had ceased to exist and there was only waiting” (36); He “sat like a near-sighted baby” (54); “[H]e sat in the water like a large-hipped woman” (69). Donald Hair suggests that because the bear embodies the union of male and female, opposing forces which constitute a primary tension in the novel, he symbolizes a healing force for Lou, who struggles with her inability to fulfill a stereotypically feminine role (41-42); she feels that “There was something aggressive in her that always went too far” (Engel 122).

Certainly, because of the amorphous nature of the bear’s identity, Lou is able to create out of him whatever she needs: “she had discovered she could paint any face on him that she wanted, while his actual range of expression was a mystery” (72). The more time she spends with him, the more credit she gives him for having an inner life of his own. At first, being in possession of a bear “struck her as joyfully Elizabethan and exotic” (29), although to her he is simply an animal, a topic about which she knows nothing. When Lou contemplates what she learned about animals as a child who read

books about “animals clothed in anthropomorphic uniforms of tyrants, heroes, sufferers, good little children, gossipy housewives,” including those by “Sir Charles Goddamn Roberts” (59), she concludes that:

[N]either the writers [n]or the purchasers of these books knew what animals were about. She had no idea what animals were about. They were creatures. They were not human. She supposed that their functions were defined by the size, shape and complications of their brains. She supposed that they led dim, flickering, inarticulate psychic lives as well.
(60)

Accordingly, the bear looks “stupid and defeated” (35) and stares “like a fur coat” (48). As Lou acclimates to him, however, he begins to reflect her own shifting moods: “She looked at the bear and began to laugh. He looked as if he was laughing too” (49). When she is upset, “he, too, seem[s] subdued and full of grief” (84). Eventually, she elevates him to a superhuman, rather than subhuman, level, crediting him with an inner life beyond her own conception: “She felt him to be wise and accepting. She felt sometimes that he was God. . . . There was a depth in him she could not reach, could not probe and with her intellectual fingers destroy” (118-119). She feels he knows “generations of secrets; but he ha[s] no need to reveal them” (70). As a superhuman all-knowing creature, he is the ultimate representation of myth, what Cameron calls “primitive truth” (88) and Maria Laura Centra calls the “imaginary order” (89).

Lou’s relationship with the bear as an embodiment of myth symbolizes a radical breaking away from her past and its constrictions. Before she goes to the island, she ignores her periodic “crises of faith” (Engel 82) in her profession, in history, although she

recognizes the defects in her life. She feels that the “erudite seclusion of her job” has “aged her disproportionately, that she was as old as the yellowed papers she spent her days unfolding” (19). She is immersed in the past but has no true present life. The documents she surrounds herself with are “[t]rivia” (12). Spring comes and the sun eludes her:

[W]hen she saw that her arms were slug-pale and her fingerprints grained with old, old ink, that the detritus with which she bedizened her bulletin boards was curled and valueless, when she found that her eyes would no longer focus in the light, she was always ashamed, for the image of the Good Life long ago stamped on her soul was quite different from this, and she suffered in contrast. (12)

Despite her suffering, her pale arms, her dysfunctional eyesight, and her awareness of her life as claustrophobic and small, she has no reason to question her profession; history is a worthy enterprise. When she first arrives on the island, after finding a few of Colonel Cary’s notes about bears, she is frustrated: “God help him, he’d better have written little things down about other things too, the selfish bastard,” for “[t]here was no research material at all for this township between the period of Jesuit visitation and the resurvey of 1878” (52). It is not until after Lou has partially lived out the “Bear Mother” myth that she rejects her profession and decides to mold her life into a shape more conducive to true happiness.

The function of a wild animal as representative of a deeper, more fulfilling life occurs elsewhere in twentieth-century Canadian fiction, approximately mid-century, as

Virginia Harger-Grinling and Tony Chadwick note. They explain the animal's effect in *Bear* and similar stories:

[T]he fulfillment found in such a relationship with the wild, or even the formerly wild, contrasts with the lack of any such depth in the society in which the protagonist lives. These relationships also re-establish bonds with an older almost mythical past, and force the human being involved to more closely examine his or her present self. (57)

Lou goes beyond examining her present self, though; she confronts lingering issues from her past, namely problematic relationships with men and a reluctant abortion, and through her relationship with the bear, eradicates their harmful continuing influence. Part of this healing occurs through the animal's inadvertent attentions. Hair links his licking of Lou to the act of creation: "What is crucial to this novel is the way in which the bear shapes her cubs. She does so, according to tradition, by licking them. Hence, all that licking of Lou is not just a near-pornographic description of cunnilingus, but a symbol of the shaping of Lou, of the creation of her new self" (42). The bear's seemingly nurturing behavior, then, allows Lou to begin the process of forgiving herself for past transgressions. Final healing occurs, ironically, when she tries to copulate with him and he responds by "reach[ing] out one great paw and ripp[ing] the skin on her back" (Engel 131). After the initial shock, Lou experiences the slash as "the claw that had healed guilt" (140). The bear gives her love, or at least what she perceives as love, and then he gives her the punishment she feels she needs. She is "at last clean. Clean and simple and proud" (137). As Cameron notes, the eradication of guilt through "Lou's bizarre

relationship with the bear effects a personal transformation which reaches far beyond the physical” (88).

Lucy Leroy, the “old, old” (Engel 48) Métis woman—over one hundred years old—is linked through her age with the bear, and thus serves as another representation of the mythic, transformational force; her presence in the novel also indicates a postcolonial ideology.² When Lou meets her, Lucy is “babbling and crooning to the bear” (48), and the animal seems to be listening. Homer says Lucy “used to take one of them straight kitchen chairs out to the back yard and sit and just talk at [the bear] for hours. . . . The two of them together, they were a sight to see” (41). There’s even a bare hint that Lucy had the kind of relationship with him that Lou does. In Homer’s explanation about the bear, “His eyes got shifty again. There was something he had thought of, but didn’t want to say” (41). The animal shocks Lou by coming into the house as if he has been there before. “He knows his way,” she thinks (55). Lucy is the one who teaches Lou how to befriend him: “‘Shit with the bear,’ she said. ‘He like you, then’” (49). Lucy’s familiarity with him suggests that she is the real “Bear Mother,” albeit with no half-bear children—in the age of history, beast lovers presumably don’t engender progeny. S.A. Cowan notes that “[t]he name *Lucy* means *light*, and in part corresponds to the name *Lou*. Although Engel may have intended no pun, ‘Lou’ could be taken as a truncated name, consistent with the heroine’s lack of wholeness before her encounter with the bear” (81).³ Lucy’s last name (which means “the king” in French), as well as that of her nephew Joe King, also suggests, as Cameron points out, sovereignty (84). This sovereignty is also linked to the bear: “he’s a cross between a king and a woodchuck, [Lou] thought” (Engel

55). These characters are, as previously noted, linked with myth, and are pitted against the historic in the novel.

It would be easy to condemn Engel's use of Native characters and co-option of a Native myth, as she herself is non-Native.⁴ To do so would be missing the point, however, that the Native symbolism provides an easy link to the anti-colonial perspective, and is invoked because Lou is symbolically colonized by the historical as manifested by her job and her lover. She is not "free." Myth provides the psychological impetus for healing as a subtle metaphor for an anti-colonial force. By identifying with its redemptive power, she can overcome those outside forces and take control of her own life. Other critics have noted the postcolonial intimations of Lou's story. Cameron says, "Engel's bear [and, by association, the Native characters] represents the essence of a primitive truth which is uncovered by stripping away an imported and imposed tradition" (88). The "imposed tradition" is associated with male cultural dominance, as seen particularly in Cary's library, which houses scientific and canonical Western works and in which only a few women authors are represented: "Encyclopaedias, British and Greek history, Voltaire, Rousseau, geology and geography, geophysical speculation, the more practical philosophers, sets and sets of novelists" (38). The male hegemonic influence extends to the island itself: "In some respects the wilderness [sojourn] of...Lou represent[s] an undoing of the conquering relation to place characteristic of colonialism" (James 44). Although Lou is initially thrilled by Cary's house, she comes to feel that "[t]o build such a place in the north, among log houses and sturdy square farmhouses, was colonial pretentiousness," "an absurdity" (Engel 36). The tourists on the island embody the imposed tradition. Jennifer Henderson notes "the marked feminization of the

nation in 1970s nationalist discourse, which constructed Canada as a vulnerable, uncorrupted woman forced to defend herself against the external force of American cultural imperialism” (806). The land, the Natives, and the woman are equally taken over, and yet to some extent a sense of self-possession is retained; in Lou’s case, indeed, she ultimately renounces the fetters of male ideals.

There is a division between the characters in the novel, between those who inhabit the land in the “right” way and those who do so in the “wrong” way. Tourists don’t even inhabit the island—the “pallid but hearty summer people” (100) merely visit and shoot their guns. Certainly, Cary’s Island is not a quiet idyll in the wilderness when the tourists are present: “it had been transformed by automobiles, motorboats, long holidays, and snowmobiles and cash to real estate” (Engel 14). This is why Homer, as a person of European descent, can represent the anti-colonial, that is to say, the mythological. He seems to know everything about the island: its stories, where to find morels, how to grow food and catch fish. He is every bit as knowledgeable as the Native inhabitants. Lou, on the other hand, is clearly just a visitor, although not on the level of the tourists, who annoy her, make her feel “violated” (100). When she and Homer rummage through the trunks in the basement of Cary’s house, the inequality of their roles becomes clear. Lou tries on a gown, and “[s]uddenly, she wanted to pull rank, pull class on him, keep him in his place. She knew they were equal but she did not feel they were equal, in her head she was a grand lady going to balls, he was a servant who knew her secrets” (108). She has been living on the island, but part of her still identifies with the colonizing force.

Lou’s role-playing foreshadows her return to civilization. Although she is healed by her encounters with the mythic force on Cary’s Island, it is in Toronto where she

decides to begin a new life. She has found that she cannot fully enact the “Bear Mother” myth. As Karl Kroeber observes:

In this story (as in many Indian myths) sexual relations between humans and animals carry no overtones of perversion or bestiality. The absence of these qualities is made possible by the Indians’ imagining a fluid analogousness between two kinds of creatures that we imagine only oppositionally. The ‘otherness’ of bears is not to us what the ‘otherness’ of bears is to Indians. (144)

Indeed, their bodies will not fit together, and the bear does not give her “the seed of heroes, or magic, or any astounding virtue” (Engel 136), the way the bear husband does in the Native story. It is significant that it is Lucy who will care for the bear when Lou leaves. Still, a considerable transformation has occurred, and rather than returning to “yellowing paper and browning ink and maps that tended to shatter when they were unfolded” (12), Lou will take the “star-shine” (141) with her and create a new life.

Notes

¹ There are many versions of this story. In Tom Peters's translation, which he identifies as Tlingit, the opposite is true: after returning to her human family, the woman, who has become part bear, kills all of her brothers but one, who kills her. Thus, she is not able to function completely as a human, and the children do not bring luck. In the basic version Catharine McClellan recorded, too, the ending is not as sanguine as the one Barbeau presents—the woman kills her brothers, she and her children transform fully into bears, and they leave the human settlement to live in the mountains. William Closson James notes that Engel read Barbeau's *The Bear Princess*, which he does not cite and which I have been unable to locate anywhere. Nor have I been able to obtain the interview he cites that reveals Engel's knowledge of the Native story. I assume that the version put forth in *The Bear Princess* is similar or identical to the version of Barbeau's that I found, which he calls "The Bear Mother."

² Lucy's character, and Lou's emulation of her, is part of what Margaret Atwood calls the "Grey Owl Syndrome" in Canadian literature—the Rousseauian tendency to portray Native characters as "noble savages" and the desire of Europeans to live like them, ostensibly in harmony with nature (*Strange Things* 35-61). Specifically, "living like the Natives in order to survive in the wilderness was translated into living like the Natives in the wilderness in order to survive. Survive what? The advancing decadence, greed, and rapacious cruelty of white civilization, that's what" (44). Engel doesn't allow Lou to achieve this cultural appropriation fully.

³ Margaret Atwood notes that “you don’t call anyone ‘Lou’ in Canada without a sly sideways glance at Robert Service’s ‘lady that’s known as Lou.’ Like Service’s Lou, Engel’s is no lady” (*Strange Things* 104).

⁴ See James and Margery Fee for thoughtful discussions of this topic.

CONCLUSION

That three novels with such similar themes and motifs were published within such a short time of each other is intriguing, and it is no coincidence that they were published alongside other feminist novels, such as Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*, that celebrated women's sexuality and attempted to represent women's experiences more accurately. The works considered here incorporate myth and story to reveal these experiences, and there are likely many reasons for the presence of this theme. The turn to myth in the seventies might reflect the deconstruction in the sixties of many dearly held beliefs, including those that formed the basis of familial, governmental, and religious structures. New beliefs, new stories, were needed to take the place of those that did not stand up to scrutiny. Perceptions of women's agency in life and sex were among the foremost that underwent drastic changes during this time, and are of primary concern in *Bear*, *Surfacing*, and *Lives of Girls and Women*. All of these novels endeavor to show the ways in which women's experiences have been circumscribed, trivialized, and misunderstood, and present alternative representations.

It would be worth looking at later books by women to see if the importance of myth and story is foregrounded the way it is in *Lives of Girls and Women*, *Surfacing*, and *Bear*. Without making sweeping generalizations, I'd like to point to a trend that has developed in the decades since these novels were published, one in which women use metafictional techniques to deconstruct the "old story" of love and romance, giving their female protagonists independence, choice, and power as a consequence. Several critics have worked in this field, including Gayle Greene (see *Changing the Story*), Marleen S.

Barr (*Feminist Fabulation*), and Patricia Waugh (*Feminine Fictions*). More study is needed, however, on the ways in which women have rebounded from the dominance of patriarchy, and found empowerment in the telling and revision of traditional stories, as well as in writing their own.

WORKS CITED

- Atwood, Margaret. "An Interview with Margaret Atwood." *Surfacing*. New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1973. 208-17.
- . *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1995.
- . *Surfacing*. 1972. Virago: London, 2002.
- . *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Anansi, 1972.
- Barbeau, Marius. "Bear Mother." *The Journal of American Folklore* 59.231 (1946): 1-12.
- Barr, Marleen S. *Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1992.
- Beer, Janet. "Short Fiction with Attitude: The Lives of Boys and Men in the *Lives of Girls and Women*." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 31 (2001): 125-32.
- Cameron, Elspeth. "Midsummer Madness: Marian Engel's *Bear*." *Canadian Fiction* 21 (1977): 83-94.
- Cencig, Elisabeth. "The Jordans: Remembered and Invented Past in Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* and Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*." *International Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue Internationale d'Études Canadiennes* 6 (1992): 63-85.
- Centra, Maria Laura. "'Paradoxical' Space and Techniques in Marian Engel's *Bear*." *Annali di Ca' Foscari* 35.1-2 (1996): 77-94.

- Christ, Carol P. "Margaret Atwood: The Surfacing of Women's Spiritual Quest and Vision." *Signs* 2.2 (1976): 316-30.
- Coates, K.S., and W.R. Morrison. "Writing the North: A Survey of Contemporary Canadian Writing on Northern Regions." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 59 (1996): 5-25. *General OneFile*. Gale Cengage. Northern Michigan University, Lydia M. Olson Library. 24 Sept. 2008 <<http://find.galegroup.com>>.
- Cowan, S.A. "Return to *Heart of Darkness*: Echoes of Conrad in Marian Engel's *Bear*." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 12.4 (1981): 73-91.
- Davidson, Peter. *The Idea of North*. London: Reaktion, 2007.
- Diemert, Brian. "Out of the Water: The Presence of Virginia Woolf in Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*." *Eureka Studies in Teaching Short Fiction* 6.2 (2006): 120-30.
- Engel, Marian. *Bear*. New York: Atheneum, 1976.
- Fee, Margery. "Romantic Nationalism and the Image of Native People in Contemporary English-Canadian Literature." *The Native in Literature*. Ed. Thomas King, Cheryl Calver, and Helen Hoy. Oakville, Ont.: ECW, 1987. 15-33.
- Gault, Cinda. "The Two Addies: Maternity and Language in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*." *American Review of Canadian Studies* 36.3 (2006): 440-52.
- Godard, Barbara. "'Heirs of the Living Body': Alice Munro and the Question of a Female Aesthetic." *The Art of Alice Munro: Saying the Unsayable*. Ed. Judith Miller. Waterloo: U of Waterloo P, 1984. 43-71.

- Gould, Karen. "Setting Words Free: Feminist Writing in Quebec." *Signs* 6.4 (1981): 617-42.
- Grace, Sherrill. "Canada and the Autobiography of North." *Anglistik* 15.2 (2004): 43-56.
- Greene, Gayle. *Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.
- Hair, Donald S. "Marian Engel's *Bear*." *Canadian Literature* 92 (1982): 34-45.
- Harger-Grinling, Virginia, and Tony Chadwick. "The Wild Animal as Metaphor in the Narrative of Three Examples of Canadian Fiction: Yves Theriault's *Agaguk*, Andre Langevin's *L'Elan D'Amérique* and Marian Engel's *Bear*." *Études Canadiennes/Canadian Studies* 44 (1998): 53-60.
- Henderson, Jennifer. "Review: Critical Canadiana." *American Literary History* 13.4 (2001): 789-813.
- Hjartarson, Paul. "Of Inward Journeys and Interior Landscapes: Glenn Gould, Lawren Harris, and 'The Idea of North.'" *Essays on Canadian Writing* 59 (1996): 65-86.
- Holquist, Michael. Prologue. *Rabelais and His World*. By Mikhail Bakhtin. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984. xiii-xxiii.
- Howells, Coral Ann. "On Gender and Writing: Marian Engel's *Bear* and *The Tattooed Woman*." *Narrative Strategies in Canadian Literature: Feminism and Postcolonialism*. Ed. Coral Ann Howells, Lynette Hunter, and Armando E. Jannetta. England: Milton Keynes, 1991. 71-81.
- Hulan, Renée. "Literary Field Notes: The Influence of Ethnography on Representations of the North." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 59 (1996): 147-63.

- . *Northern Experience and the Myths of Canadian Culture*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2002.
- James, William Closson. "'You Have to Discover it in Some Other Way': Native Symbols as Appropriated by Margaret Atwood and Marian Engel." *And the Birds Began to Sing": Religion and Literature in Post-Colonial Cultures*. Ed. Jamie S. Scott. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996. 33-46.
- Jensen, Lars. "Canadian Writing and the Articulation of North." *Tricks with a Glass: Writing Ethnicity in Canada*. Ed. Rocío G. Davis and Rosalía Baena. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000. 149-70.
- King James Bible*. Classic Literature Library. 1 Apr. 2009 <<http://king-james-bible.classic-literature.co.uk/genesis/>>.
- Kroeber, Karl. "Commentary." *Artistry in Native American Myths*. By Karl Kroeber. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1998. 138-63.
- Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- McClellan, Catharine. *The Girl Who Married the Bear*. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1970.
- McConnell, Frank. *Storytelling and Mythmaking*. New York: Oxford, 1979.
- Morrissey, Donna. *Sylvanus Now*. Toronto: Penguin, 2005.
- Munro, Alice. *Lives of Girls and Women*. New York: Vintage-Random, 1971.
- Perrakis, Phyllis Sternberg. "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Girl: Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*." *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal / Journal d'Études sur la Femme*. 7.2 (1982): 61-67.

- Peters, Tom, trans. "The Woman Who Married the Bear." *Artistry in Native American Myths*. By Karl Kroeber. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1998. 95-109.
- Prentice, Christine. "Storytelling in Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* and Patricia Grace's *Potiki*." *Australian-Canadian Studies: A Journal for the Humanities and Social Sciences* 8.2 (1991): 27-40.
- Quartermaine, Peter. *Recherches Anglaises et Nord-Américaines* 20 (1987): 117-126.
- Robson, Nora. "Alice Munro and the White American South: The Quest." *The Art of Alice Munro: Saying the Unsayable*. Ed. Judith Miller. Waterloo: U of Waterloo P, 1984. 73-84.
- Showalter, Elaine. "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness." *Critical Inquiry* 8.2 (1981): 179-205.
- Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene*. 1590. Penguin: London, 1987.
- Struthers, J.R. (Tim). "Alice Munro and the American South." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 6 (1975): 196-204.
- . "Reality and Ordering: The Growth of a Young Artist in *Lives of Girls and Women*." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 3 (1975): 32-46.
- Thomas, Sue. "Reading Female Sexual Desire in Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*." *CRITIQUE: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 36.2 (1995): 107-14. *General OneFile*. Gale Cengage. Northern Michigan University, Lydia M. Olson Library. 15 Jan. 2009 <<http://find.galegroup.com>>.
- Waugh, Patricia. *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern*. London: Routledge, 1989.

York, Lorraine M. "The Rival Bards: Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* and Victorian Poetry." *Canadian Literature* 112 (1987): 211-16.