

# *Of Solitudes and Borders: Double-Focalized Canadian Books for Children*

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• Perry Nodelman •

*Résumé* : Dans la liste des traits communs des romans de facture et d'esprit traditionnels pour la jeunesse canadienne que Mavis Reimer et Perry Nodelman ont établie à partir des travaux de leurs étudiants, la «double focalisation» est une caractéristique formelle qui se retrouve dans plusieurs œuvres. Cette stratégie narrative, si on la remplace dans le contexte canadien, offre des résonances complexes : elle montre à la fois l'émergence de constantes dans le discours littéraire canadien et met en lumière le réseau de significations propre aux romans favorisant un échange de voix narratives.

*Summary*: This essay explores the ways in which the use of a double focalization, one of the shared characteristics of "mainstream" Canadian children's novels listed by students in classes taught by me and Mavis Reimer, might be understood as having implications in a specifically Canadian context. The essay considers ways in which common threads in Canadian discourse about Canada might throw light on the frequent use of double focalization as well as ways in which that discourse might reveal the meanings and implications of the novels that use this technique.

**I**n the list of characteristics of Canadian children's literature compiled by the students in courses taught by me and Mavis Reimer and described in our 2000 article "Teaching Canadian Children's Literature: Learning to Know More," the item that most interested me personally involved the question of doubleness:

Most (but not all) of the novels switch repeatedly between two contexts, or have two stories going at the same time. For example, the novel might be structured around two different points in a series of events (flashbacks), two different focalizing characters, or two different historical settings. The two contexts come together dramatically at the central moment of the plot.

Does this suggest separation and then convergence as a structural principle as well as a thematic concern? The two contexts usually oppose the past and the present in some way, with resolutions often valuing letting the past go or moving beyond it. (34-35)

I was drawn to think further about these matters simply because they seemed to me to be so inherently Canadian — at least in terms of ways Canadians often talk about Canada. This is, after all, the nation of two official languages and of what Hugh MacLennan identified, in the title of an earnestly Canadian novel, as two solitudes. It is also the nation that defines itself, literally and perhaps symbolically, in terms of what Canadians proudly and repeatedly identify as “the world’s longest undefended border” between itself and somewhere else — a binary opposition of deep importance.<sup>1</sup> If Canadian novels for children and young adults do in any way express the specific national context from which they emerge, then there might be valid reasons for the presence of twofold features in Canadian books. What follows is a description of my explorations of that possibility thus far — tentative speculation rather than firm conclusions.

My first step was to see if the shared qualities our students found in the short list of novels they studied did in fact recur frequently in other Canadian fiction for young people — particularly the fiction in English I know something about. An unscientific survey of the literature I was aware of suggested that they did. Many novels present characters who represent contrasting lifestyles, often ones that represent choices for child characters (Jan Andrews’s *Keri*; Sarah Ellis’s *Pick-Up Sticks*; Janet Lunn’s *Shadow in Hawthorn Bay*; Tim Wynne-Jones’s *The Maestro*). Many others describe meetings between two characters who live in different times (Linda Holeman’s *Promise Song*; Welwyn Wilton Katz’s *Out of the Dark*; Janet Lunn’s *The Root Cellar*; a number of books about ghosts by Margaret Buffie) or even in different kinds of worlds (Kit Pearson’s *Awake and Dreaming*). But none of that is particularly surprising. The story of two characters meeting across time is a recognized and popular subgenre of children’s fiction,<sup>2</sup> and my own work on the recurring generic characteristics of children’s literature has often focused on the presence of binary opposites.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, I had a sense that Canadian books use these characteristics, widespread in English-language children’s literature internationally, in distinct and characteristic ways. And while I couldn’t quite put a finger on how, it seemed to me that progress toward discovering how might come specifically from a closer look at a binary feature that seemed to me to be far more prevalent in Canadian writing than in children’s literature generally: the telling of a story through the alternating focalizations of two characters — usually, but not always, two central characters. The descriptors of books used in library cataloguing systems do not include the types of focalization novels use. Nevertheless, an informal survey of my own col-

lection and of the shelves of various libraries and bookstores has allowed me to develop a sizeable list of English-Canadian novels for children and young adults of the last few decades constructed in this way. These include Martha Brooks's *Bone Dance*; Gillian Chan's *A Foreign Field*; Joan Clark's *The Dream Carvers* and *The Hand of Robin Squires*; Susan Currie's *Basket of Beethoven*; Cheryl Foggo's *I Have Been in Danger*; Jim Heneghan's *Flood and Promises to Come*; Anita Horrocks's *Topher*; Monica Hughes's *The Guardian of Isis, Keeper of the Isis Light, Log Jam, and The Maze*; Welywyn Wilton Katz's *Come Like Shadows, False Face, Out of the Dark, Third Magic, Time Ghost, and Whalesinger*; Paul Kropp's *Moonkid and Liberty* and *Moonkid and Prometheus*; Julie Lawson's *Destination Gold!* and *The Ghost of Avalanche Mountain*; Kevin Major's *Blood Red Ochre*; Carol Matas's *Sworn Enemies*; David Richards's *The Lady at Batoche* and *Soldier Boys*; Karen Rivers's *Dream Water*; Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch's *Hope's War* and *The Hunger*; Kathy Stinson's *Fish House Secrets*; Robert Sutherland's *A River Apart*; and Diana Wieler's *Bad Boy*.<sup>4</sup> In all of these novels, readers alternately experience how two (or sometimes three) different characters respond to the same or to connected events — events that most often occur in the same place.

While I was intrigued by the large number of novels that are similarly constructed in this somewhat unusual way, I wasn't particularly surprised by it. What could be a clearer expression of Canadian interests (and hopes) than voices speaking alternately out of two solitudes about similar things and, almost inevitably in the optimistic world of children's literature, finding a way to connect to each other before their stories come to an end? The pattern seemed especially relevant to questions of how Canadians tend to perceive themselves or engage in discourse about themselves in a national context — particularly in terms of Canada's charter-guaranteed and institutionalized multiculturalism. It's instructive, for instance, that in an article published a few years ago in the *Globe and Mail*, a medium that proudly identifies itself as "Canada's national newspaper," Stéphane Dion, Canada's Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, responded to the contention of Bernard Landry, then premier of Quebec, "that Quebec and Canada are separate nations" with this "truth" (as the headline of the piece identified it):

Fortunately, Mr. Landry is wrong. We can have more than one identity. To be at the same time a Quebecker and a Canadian is not at all a contradiction, but wonderfully complementary. In this global world, which increasingly brings us into contact with people of such varied cultures and backgrounds, it is a strength to have more than one identity, never a weakness. Identities are something one should accumulate, never subtract. (A13)

In the light of this sort of discourse, it's not surprising to note that the two central characters of many of the double-focalized novels I've listed belong

to and are clearly meant to represent different cultural groups: Vietnamese refugee and middle-class Canadian in Heneghan's *Promises to Come*; Canadians and Americans in Sutherland's *A River Apart*; French Canadian and English Canadian in Katz's *Come Like Shadows*; Canadian and Lebanese in Michèle Marineau's *The Road to Chlifa* (one of the few French-Canadian children's novels to appear in English translation); Métis and English in Richards's two novels; and, especially, Canadian of European descent and of Aboriginal descent in Brooks's *Bone Dance*, Clark's *The Hand of Robin Squires* and *Dream Carvers*, Hughes's *Log Jam*, Katz's *False Face* and *Out of the Dark*, and Major's *Blood Red Ochre*.

The novels in this last group intrigued me especially. They seemed to be surprisingly similar to each other, not just in their focalization and structure but in their plots, characters, and thematic concerns. Indeed, they read like different writers' versions of the same basic story: an Aboriginal Canadian and a non-Aboriginal Canadian struggle over their shared claims of ownership of the same originally Aboriginal object or place (an artifact or a piece of land). Furthermore, all these novels have received critical acclaim and almost all won or were shortlisted for significant prizes,<sup>5</sup> and as Mavis Reimer and Anne Rusnak suggest of prizewinners, "since such books have been judged by knowledgeable readers to be the finest examples of their type, they are most likely to reveal a community's sense of itself and its version of the real, the good, and the possible" (11). For a lot of Canadians interested in children's literature, then, this group of novels clearly represents what Canadian children's literature might most likely or perhaps even ideally be: the best way to communicate what Canadian writers especially want to communicate to Canadian children. A closer consideration of them might well reveal how Canadians consciously or unconsciously work to explain Canada — and especially the relations between those Canadians who are Aboriginal and those who are not — to child readers.

But just as I was about to leap toward some benignly patriotic conclusions about the wonderful Canadian capacity for tolerance and brotherhood, I read something that gave me pause: the Australian critic Robin McCallum's thoughtful and stimulating *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity* (1999). As its subtitle suggests, McCallum's book deals exactly with questions of dialogue, questions that inevitably involve binaries, dualities, and doubleness. As she writes,

The main focus is on novels which represent subjectivity as being dialogically constructed through interrelationships with others, through language, and / or in a relation to social and cultural forces and ideologies. My second interest is in novels which use overtly "dialogical" narrative strategies to structure the narrative and to represent subjectivity and intersubjectivity. (7-8)

The books McCallum discusses — British, American, and Australian, but none of them Canadian — describe characters of differing interests and backgrounds meeting. Furthermore, McCallum devotes an entire chapter to books with alternating double-focalizations:

Since [Paul Zindel's] *The Pigman . . .*, interlaced binary narrative has become a common technique for structuring multivoiced narrative in adolescent fiction. Parallel narrative strands are narrated either by two narrators . . . or in the third person from the viewpoint of two character focalizers. . . . These strategies can overtly structure a novel as a dialogue between two social, cultural, gendered or historical positions. (56)

If McCallum is correct, then there is nothing particularly or distinctly Canadian about the matters that interest me. They simply reveal the extent to which Canadian writing for young adults accords with what happens in young adult literature produced elsewhere. But I'm convinced that's not quite true, for a number of reasons. For one thing, while McCallum rightly suggests that such books are not all that unusual, I suspect from my own reading of international children's fiction in English that there have been proportionately more of them produced in Canada than elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the novels of this sort that McCallum names are distinctive works of fiction by award-winning writers. While some highly-regarded Canadian writers have used this structure, it nevertheless appears to be conventional enough in Canadian writing to occur also in less literary books — in entertainments like Kropp's *Moonkid and Liberty* or Lawson's *Destination Gold!*, for instance — to be a way of shaping a novel that is not viewed by Canadians as being particularly special or difficult. It's instructive, for instance, that the back cover of one of the novels, Stinson's *Fish House Secrets*, identifies it as "A *straightforward*, touching novel about two troubled teenagers" (emphasis added). In the United States and, I suspect, in Britain and in Australia, "straightforward" novels rarely use this technique.

In any case, McCallum's work focuses on "subjectivity" — i.e., what people understand themselves to be in their relationships with the world in general. I'm interested in how questions about subjectivity resonate somewhat differently when considered in the context of a specific national literature. What happens if I assume, as I find my responses to these novels seems to invite me to do, that they offer insight not just into adolescent identity at the personal level (and perhaps internationally) but also into Canadian young adult subjectivity specifically? In other words, and as I suggested earlier, I have a strong intuition that there is a specifically Canadian dimension to the frequency with which Canadian writers for children choose alternating double focalizations.

One reason I might do so is a possible confluence of common ideas about adolescence and some particular views of Canadian identity. In

"Canada: Case History: 1945," a poem frequently reprinted in Canadian school anthologies, the Canadian poet Earle Birney says:

This is the case of a high-school land,  
dead-set in adolescence

.....  
Parents unmarried and living abroad,  
relatives keen to bag the estate,  
schizophrenia not excluded,  
will he learn to grow up before it's too late? (1-2, 20-23)

If Birney's characterization is now or ever was apt, then we might expect Canadian books of all sorts to share the characteristics of literature for adolescents internationally and might also expect Canadian books for adolescents to exhibit those characteristics in an especially intense manner that defines them as distinct.

Furthermore, Birney's reference to "schizophrenia" — intended as a satiric joke about English and French Canada — resonates interestingly in terms of double focalizations, particularly since so many of the Canadian double-focalized books I've listed alternate between speakers of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. As I said earlier, the significance of multiculturalism in Canadian public discourse suggests why writers might be drawn to write in this way — why they would want both to describe difference and to bring their characters to understand and accept their differences. Seen in these terms, in fact, double-focalized books, even those that don't make a point of their characters' differing cultures, might be read as metaphors for the Canadian multicultural situation.

Indeed, scholars often focus on the ways in which Canadian literature focuses generally on matters of difference. E.D. Blodgett asserts that Canada "is a place of plurality that at once constrains and liberates. . . . Canada is to be defined as a crisis. Crisis, no matter how intense, is the intersection of competing arguments" (3). W.H. New suggests that borders — boundaries between countries and between people individually and in groups — are a key trope in Canadian writing:

I want to propose that the various Canadas that Canadian studies discuss in large part *derive from* — not just "use" — various forms of boundary rhetoric. What does this mean? It acknowledges, simply, that boundaries function both as descriptions of concrete agreements *and* as metaphors of relationship and organization. (5)

If there is validity in what New suggests, then it seems logical to suspect that texts of Canadian literature, including ones intended for children, would represent these constructions — in other words, that they would deal with divisions and doubles and negotiations between them and do so

in particularly intense and obvious ways. The texts might well be read as significantly Canadian exactly in terms of the boundaries they describe and attempt to negotiate.

As McCallum's work suggests, however, any and all descriptions of characters attempting to negotiate the boundaries between them are not necessarily and inevitably representative of specifically Canadian culture or politics. If novels with alternating focalizations can be written and published outside Canada, then why can't such novels be written and published inside Canada without any distinctly Canadian relevance? Alternately, however, I might propose that the fact of publication in Canada might produce specifically Canadian resonances even in books that would lack such resonances if produced elsewhere. Before I can focus on what might be distinctly or just revealingly Canadian about such novels, then, I need to consider ways in which they might in fact share the non-national implications of similar books published elsewhere as well as ways in which the apparently non-national might be resonant of national concerns, specifically multicultural ones.

In what follows, I focus my attention on a group of novels that seemed to me on first reading least likely of all the double-focalized books I'd read to represent multicultural or other national concerns. These are novels that seemed to have quite other agendas and that therefore seemed most likely to test my thesis that their double focalizations might have specifically Canadian resonances.

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At first glance, Cheryl Foggo's *I Have Been in Danger* might seem to be exactly the kind of book that puts an alternating double focalization in play in order to focus on questions of difference in a multicultural context. It appears as part of *In the Same Boat*, described on the novel's back cover as "a wonderful new series of novels that celebrate the diverse cultures of our country," and it tells the story of two sisters with a white father and an African-Canadian mother. Surprisingly, however, the novel, which centres on an older sister deserting her best friend and her younger sister as she tries to fit in with the popular crowd and be "normal," seems to have little to do with multiculturalism. Being normal here is a matter of thinking about boys and clothes rather than continuing to play the imaginative games of childhood. It seems to have nothing to do with deserting one's cultural heritage. Nevertheless, the novel does call attention to the girls' skin colour — the would-be conformist is lighter-skinned and upset that people are always surprised that her mother is black, something that never happens to her darker-skinned sister. As a result, although the text itself never openly asserts the connection, the girls' mixed heritage becomes a kind of metonym, a marker for their inherent lack of "normalcy," while their dif-

fering skin colours come to stand as markers of their differing attitudes toward conformity. As the plot develops, the older sister's attempts to fit in result in her being lost and injured in the wild, the younger sister sets out alone to find her, and both girls save each other from extreme danger and reaffirm their love for each other. In the light of the connections the novel implies between their values and their skin colours, their reunion suggests not just defiance of normative teenage social conformity but a triumph for cultural diversity.

But how, then, does the alternating focalization of the two sisters support these concerns? In fact, as far as I can tell, it doesn't. Although the two sisters have opposing understandings of events during the time when one deserts the other, Foggo chooses to present their thoughts of these events not in terms of how they understand them as they happen but instead as they remember them later, as they relive their night of turmoil in the wild. At this point, both girls share one view of the past events — that the older sister has acted foolishly. Even though the narratives of their memories alternate, then, they both express the same attitude and thus chronicle a difference they don't in fact actually express. For a book with an interest in diversity, *I Have Been in Danger* is both surprisingly univocal — firmly committed to one right way of understanding things — and surprisingly conservative. Its happy ending involves a flight from independence and a return to the nest, thus implying a condemnation of any divergence by young people from their parents' values.

What, then, is the effect of the alternating double focalization of *I Have Been in Danger*? It works most effectively in the passages that describe the sisters' experiences during the wild night of terror. As dark falls and danger threatens, Foggo cuts from the thoughts of one sister to the other, much as the camera cuts from one character to another in a thrilling disaster movie. Neither knows what the other is thinking or, for a long time until they meet, doing, and so only readers are privy to how their thoughts and actions do and don't interact. Readers know, for instance, that one sister lies semi-conscious as the other searches desperately for her, thus making the situation seem more urgent and the suspense more intense.

Something similar happens in two novels by Julie Lawson, *The Ghost of Avalanche Mountain*<sup>7</sup> and *Destination Gold!* In both novels, the plot alternates between events as experienced by different characters. In *Ghost*, the focalizing characters are the ghost of a boy who died in an avalanche decades ago and a girl of today who wears the goldstone he wants to reclaim (with one passage focalized through the girl's Australian aunt and one through a boy, Raven, who is her friend). In *Destination*, the focalizing characters are a boy, his sister, and another girl caught up in the Klondike gold rush. For a long time in both books, the key characters remain physically separate from each other and experience quite different events without knowledge of what is happening to the others. Thus, it's a major plot point

in *Destination* that a letter Ned writes does not reach his family, so that he and his sister Sarah don't know where each other are, and for much of the novel, Ned and Sarah and the other girl, Catharine, are not even aware of each other's existence. In *Ghost*, meanwhile, the living Ashley and the ghost Jonathan are aware of but unable to understand each other's life and needs until their first (and last) conversation at the novel's climax.

But while the characters remain isolated in their separate stories, their intertwining narratives offer readers insight into their connections with each other. Indeed, readers are able to understand what remains mysterious or confusing to the characters — and, also, what their connections to each other are — because answers to questions raised by one narrative appear in the others' narratives. In *Destination*, for instance, readers know as Ned doesn't that his letter has never arrived — and when Ned overhears a conversation about the girl his supposed friend Montana won in a game of cards, readers will understand from earlier narratives of Catharine's that she is in fact that girl — that there is a connection between Ned and Catharine through Montana neither will be aware of for many pages to come. Furthermore, since readers already know from Catharine's earlier narrative about Montana's vicious treatment of her and her horror of him, they can understand how foolish Ned is to trust him. In *Ghost*, similarly, readers can understand from Jonathan's narrative who he is and why he is doing what he does to Ashley long before Ashley herself does. Similarly, readers know what Jonathan can't figure out: that the raven who he knows will lead him to his prize is not a bird but a boy of that name.

In both novels, then, as in *I Have Been in Danger*, readers know more than the characters do and can read their situations in ways the characters themselves cannot understand. This creates suspense: readers can wonder when characters will realize what the readers already know and, meanwhile, will enjoy worrying about what the characters' ignorance will lead them to.

It's commonly assumed that the single focalization through one main character, more typical in children's fiction, allows readers a main pleasure of that fiction: the opportunity to identify with that character, to see themselves in terms of that character's thoughts and experiences. Logically speaking, the multiple focalizations of Lawson's novels undermine the possibility of such an identification by keeping readers at some distance from the characters and making them understand more than the characters know and in ways they cannot possibly understand themselves. The article Mavis Reimer and I first wrote about these matters reports the following:

It seems to have less to do with the old theory about our national preoccupation with two solitudes than it does with the ways in which the presence of two focalized characters works to detach readers, prevent identification

with any one character, and encourage critical objectivity. ("Teaching Canadian Children's Literature" 31)

I've since come to think that that's only partially true — that the distance does not necessarily make for detached objectivity. I've concluded so because of the ways in which the alternating focalizations of these novels by Foggo and Lawson do in fact seem to be inviting empathy with the characters, and, in doing so, remind me of the construction of a quite different form of narrative: the TV soap opera.

These shows typically alternate among a number of different storylines involving different characters in each episode and, like readers of Foggo's and Lawson's novels, viewers of the soap opera are privy to significant information garnered from scenes involving one character that is unknown to other characters who might behave differently if they possessed it. Many of the storylines of the soap opera are about keeping secrets, but viewers are often privy to what the characters are unaware of and often try so desperately to keep from each other. Nevertheless, the viewers' larger knowledge of what is happening to all the characters beyond any of their individual knowledge hardly operates as an invitation for them to be detached from the characters. Instead, they must remain uninvolved, separate but deeply caring, worrying about the ignorance with which individual characters go about their business (just as I suggested earlier that readers are invited to worry about what Foggo's and Lawson's characters don't yet know). The theorist Tania Modleski suggests that the implied viewer of a soap opera is a traditional "ideal mother" of adult children, possessed of more knowledge than they have, unwilling or unable to take sides or interfere in their lives, and desperately hoping they will come to know what she does in time to save themselves. Similarly, Lawson's multiple focalizations work to keep readers distant from the characters but nevertheless involved with them and concerned about them.

Despite the resemblance to soap operas as produced in many countries, I might argue that this is an identifiably Canadian attitude. According to Eva Mackey, "The constant attempt to construct an authentic, differentiated, and bounded identity has been central to the project of Canadian nation-building, and is often shaped through comparison with, and demonisation of, the United States" (145). Indeed, public discourse about Canada often focuses on identifying ways in which Canadians are *not* American.<sup>8</sup> Sharing most aspects of a common culture and economy yet on the other side of a border which, while undefended, is nevertheless a border, Canadians are in the position of being separate in a significant way from that which they are in fact connected to and a part of — and thus they tend often to focus on that paradoxical state as a key to their distinctness. Being connected to, more or less the same as, and yet significantly outside of and separate from: that represents both the position of Canadians in

relation to the United States and of soap opera viewers and Lawson's readers in relation to alternatively-focalized characters.<sup>9</sup> The prevalence of double-focalized narrations in Canadian fiction for children might then represent a reading position significantly Canadian in its positioning of readers as observers of a life more complex and exciting than their own and that involves people they feel empathy with but are nevertheless separate from. I'm not, I hasten to add, suggesting that writers deliberately choose this form as an undeniably Canadian one — only that the peculiar relationship of separation and involvement it so readily allows might make it attractive to writers immersed in the rhetoric of the Canadian milieu.

In my discussions of Lawson's novels thus far, I've focused on the way the different focalized charters occupy different story spaces. This discussion raises the question of the degree to which the novels might be *about* difference and therefore might represent some form of veiled discourse about the cultural difference so key to public discourse about Canada. In McCallum's terms, do they suggest "a dialogue between two social, cultural, gendered or historical positions"? Are they examples of what New calls "boundary rhetoric"?

The novels certainly do focus on contrasts between their characters. The characters in *Destination* are an optimistic male with a vision of a glorious future who trusts others too much, a pessimistic independent female fleeing an awful past who must learn to trust others more, and an uncertain dependent female who neither flees from the past nor seeks the future and who must learn to be more independent and trust herself. In *Ghost*, the two key characters are opposite in almost every way: they are male and female, ghost and human, orphan and possessor of a happy family, isolated from others and highly connected to them, illiterate and knowledgeable.

These differences are well worth exploring. But before I do so, I need to repeat what I suggested earlier — that these contrasts don't seem in any obvious way to highlight "social, cultural, gendered or historical positions." That these characters are rich or poor, male or female does not seem to me to engender any obvious, intentional consideration of the ways in which their gender or class influences their fate — as does in fact happen in other double-focalized novels (in, for instance, Wiener's *Bad Boy* and Katz's *False Face*, which clearly strive to make readers think about gender and race). There's no doubt that a careful reading of Lawson's novels would reveal much about ideological assumptions, but the novels themselves never obviously focus on them. They take it for granted that the contrasts between their characters have more to do with personality and individual destiny than ideology or history.

They are, nevertheless, about difference and moving beyond difference. The plots of both novels work most significantly to bring the characters together — not just to bring them physically together and into an aware-

ness of each other they first lacked, but also, in doing so, to offer each other what they emotionally lacked. The result is that isolated people achieve connection, dependent people achieve self-governance, and so on. The characters in both novels achieve happy endings by moving from isolation in their separate stories to participation in the one story they all share.

But, in fact, not quite all. In *Destination Gold!*, the happy ending the central characters share is happy specifically because the villain, Montana, has been defeated and has left town. Before then, the story has centred on questions of property and ownership, of supplies for the journey to the Klondike, and of the claims staked after the characters get there. Every potentially valuable possession passes through Montana's hand, is gained through deceit and trickery, but ends up happily in the possession of the characters who share the single story of the book's conclusion. Apparently, one can have or share ownership in the place one chooses to live in only by not being self-seeking — by displaying a willingness to share it.

*Ghost* focuses even more centrally on questions of property — in this case, the goldstone, to which both the ghost Jonathan and the girl Ashley have claims. Ashley has received it as a family heirloom from her aunt. Jonathan was present at its making, when lightning struck his grandfather as he made the stone, and has pledged to bring it back both to his grandfather and to the 'spirits' of the mountains, whom he believes are angered by its loss. The story ends as Ashley, buried under an avalanche caused by Jonathan and near a death that will pull her into Jonathan's ghostly world, willingly gives up the goldstone to Jonathan in return for reconnecting him to the rest of humanity by putting his name, previously unknown, on his gravestone. Once more, sharing leads to connection with others, although this time not to ownership; Ashley concludes that the goldstone "was where it belonged, where Jonathan wanted it to be. In the snow, in the mountains, in the shadow of the glacier" (230). The goldstone, then, acts as a symbol of what separates — what keeps Jonathan isolated in his half-world and connected neither to living humans nor his dead grandfather, what separates Ashley from her friends (after she accuses one of them of stealing the goldstone).

Furthermore, that separating of something has much to do with the "spirits" of the mountain — the forces of nature itself, the dangerous but compelling landscape that dwarfs humans and that they need to protect themselves from in their contacts with each other. It's instructive that this novel also contains the story of Ashley's friend Raven, a member of a family that falls apart, who then acts in an anti-social way and defiantly leaves the communal group on a field trip in the mountains to head off on his own, an act that leads to Ashley's near-death. In his story, as in Ashley's and Jonathan's, isolation leads to identification with and destruction by the vast forces of nature: like Ashley and in a different way, like Jonathan, Raven must be — and is — restored to the community in order to be pro-

tected from the dangerous spirits that inhabit and express the essence of the natural landscape.

All of this reminds me, once more, of Earle Birney — this time of his poem “Bushed,” in which a settler finds that the mountain he settles under is “clearly alive” (10):

then he knew though the mountain slept the winds  
were shaping its peak into an arrowhead  
poised

And now he could only  
bar himself in and wait  
for the great flint to come singing into his heart (25-30)

The “great flint” of lightning does come singing from the mountain spirits into Jonathan’s grandfather and thus creates the goldstone that dangerously isolates individuals from their communities. “Bushed” is often cited in discussions of what Northrop Frye called “the garrison mentality” (725) — the idea that Canadians so fear and feel dwarfed by the vast natural landscape surrounding them that they retreat behind the walls of their communities and huddle together there for safety. Now considered to be outdated as a way of accounting for adult Canadian literature, the garrison mentality seems alive and well in *The Ghost of Avalanche Mountain*, as it does also in Foggo’s *I Have Been in Danger*, which similarly dwells on the dangerous forces of the mountain wilds as a way of reconfirming the need for the garrison of a traditional family community. In these two novels, then, the isolation of characters from each other that double focalization almost inevitably emphasizes works to support and help express support for a traditionally Canadian garrison mentality — the need to constrain individual desire in order to gain the safety of a community and, at the same time, the happy ending of a shared story.

In the light of the home-and-away pattern so central to children’s fiction, that’s not so surprising: children’s stories often send young protagonists off into the dangerous wilds in order to learn the need for the safety of home. What’s interesting, I think, is the ways in which that pattern develops a distinctly Canadian resonance in the light of Frye’s garrison mentality, so that aspects of texts which might mean something less nuanced in another context do imply specifically Canadian meanings in the Canadian context.

The skepticism with which contemporary scholars view Frye’s garrison theories might cast doubt on that conclusion. The theory certainly works less well for recent Canadian writing for adults than it does as a way of approaching earlier Canadian texts, particularly ones written by immigrants new to the Canadian landscape — a landscape itself less urban and less controlled by humans than it has since become. Why, then, might Frye’s

theory operate as a context for contemporary writing for younger Canadians? It might be, simply, that adults who write for children conceive of childhood and adolescence as something like being an immigrant — a stranger in a unsettlingly strange land. But that does not account for the surprising frequency with which Canadian novels for young people move their characters from urban settings to rural ones, cottages or country houses or forests or wilds, where they face forces larger than themselves — something that happens many times in the double-focalized novels listed above.<sup>10</sup> It seems like an especially Canadian way to figure a theme conventional in children's literature internationally.

In this way as in others, I'd argue, Canadian literature for children seems to represent a particularly intense version of the characteristic generic markers of children's literature as a whole. Just as Canadian thinking seems immersed in boundary rhetoric, so is children's literature. It is literature written across a border — by adults but for children perceived as different enough from the adults who write for them to need to be written for differently. Therefore, it almost always deals with contrasts, conflicts, and negotiations between the adult and the childlike (here in these books, the family and the wild). In its inherent doubleness, children's literature offers a paradigm for understanding the Canadian situation as imagined by Canadians in many different ways. If Canadian children's literature is a particularly intense version of these matters, then the presence of so many double-focalized texts within it may not then be so surprising.<sup>11</sup>

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At this point, I feel the need to pause and reconnoiter. In the process of exploring the possible implications of alternating double focalization in just three novels by two authors, I've managed to surface a surprising variety of ways in which the novels might represent a distinctly Canadian vision. If I'm right in believing that double focalization might be read in a specifically Canadian context, then I suspect that other double-focalized Canadian children's novels might well represent versions of the same concerns. At the very least, what I've discovered thus far might act as a useful cognitive model, a map against which to note and consider the divergences of other texts. Before I move on to explore further novels, then, this seems like a good point at which to summarize what I've discovered so far in terms of some or all of these novels:

- The novels use double focalizations to create an ambivalent state of detached involvement for their implied readers and thus mirror a typical Canadian view of Canadians in relation to the culture of America;
- An insistence on differences between the focalized characters represents a form of boundary rhetoric. While these novels don't emphasize questions of race or culture, their focus on differences seems to be a

metonymic representation of Canada's public mythology of multiculturalism;

- As is literally true for members of different cultures in the context of Canadian society as a whole, the focalized characters are connected despite their own perceptions of isolation;

- The focalized characters have differing views of sometimes different but always connected events until they come to share the same story in the same space — as do Canadians in the public mythology of multiculturalism;

- The shared space represents a desirable community, a safe space that, like the traditional Canadian garrison, protects its members from the dangerous world outside its borders;

- As in traditional Canadian writing for adults, that danger is represented by the Canadian landscape itself;

- There is a focus on questions of property: those entitled to share in owning it at the end can do so because they've given up their right to own it all individually by themselves. The community forms by expelling those self-seeking isolates who represent a danger to it — as perhaps does the community of Canadian multiculturalism.

If what happens in the novels by Foggo and by Lawson does in fact emerge from and therefore reveal some distinctive Canadian concerns, then I ought to be able to expect similar resonances in other novels. I'd like to test that possibility now.

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Anita Horrocks's *Topher* is surprisingly similar to *The Ghost of Avalanche Mountain*. Both involve a girl in the present in contact with a boy who lived in the same place on the edge of the Canadian wilds in an earlier time — in *Topher*, a cottage at a lake in northern Saskatchewan. Both alternate between events as perceived by the girl and by the boy; in *Topher*, there's an additional focalized character, the girl's older brother, who observes her from outside as she copes with the ghost's presence within. In both novels, the boy has died a violent death at the hands of nature: an avalanche and a drowning. In both cases, the girl has not before been aware of the existence of the boy; in *Topher*, the ghost is in fact an uncle Stacey didn't know she had — her father's brother, whose death as a child so traumatized Stacey's father that he has never mentioned him. In life, furthermore, the boys in both novels have been defined by their isolation from others, Jonathan by his orphaned state and his living alone with his grandfather in the mountains, Topher by his conviction that his father, locked in an inability to express emotion, hates him. In both books, contact with the boy first frightens the girl and those around her, leading to her isolation from her community. Meanwhile, another member of that community — Ashley's friend Raven, Stacey's father — is increasingly alienated from it, so caught up in a

sense of betrayal by others that he increasingly detaches himself from it, thus putting himself and others in danger. In *Topher*, furthermore, it's even clearer than it is in *Ghost* that this character's isolation not only parallels but emerges from the same anti-communal forces that lead to the death of the boy — not the spirits of the wild but instead guilt and a fear of expressing emotion. In *Topher*, as in *Ghost*, questions of ownership are central and depend on the outcome of events. Stacey's father wants to sell the family cottage that harbours his bad memories and can be persuaded to keep it only by learning the truth about his brother's death and his own lack of blame for it. In both books, eventually, the girl's knowledge of who the boy is and how he died leads to healing, reconnection (including the reconnection of the dead boys to their communities and the connections of people in the communities to each other), and the re-establishment of a safe and caring community at the end.

In the light of all these similarities, it seems likely that *Topher* resonates with Canadian concerns much as *Ghost* does. I believe it does. Because *Topher* does not appear to be aware of Stacey as she is of him, their alternative narratives contain fewer places where readers can know what the characters don't yet understand. As a result, the alternating focalizations of this novel seem less likely to result in a readerly position of empathetic detachment. The novel is much more of a conventional mystery, in which readers follow along with Stacey and her brother Chris as they gradually come to understand what's happening (although readers occasionally have clues provided by *Topher's* narrative that Stacey fails to understand). Nevertheless, the alternation between what Chris perceives as an empathetic outsider and what Stacey understands as a confused insider creates a different but equally balanced combination of detachment and empathy.

Meanwhile, the insistence on the differences between Stacey and Chris, coupled with the ways in which their empathy and detachment parallel the situation of Chris's father and his older brother *Topher* as viewed in *Topher's* story, creates an intricate boundary rhetoric. Alternating between two sets of characters described as opposite in two separate but interconnected stories, readers can follow as difference leads to isolation and then inevitably to connection in the shared space of the cottage and its surroundings.

As a garrison, the cottage fails — thieves enter, along with death and violence. But, in fact, that seems to be exactly the point. Building on Frye's garrison theories in her book *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), Margaret Atwood developed the idea that Canadian literature focuses on a sense of victimhood. The theory asserts that the vast forces of the natural world surrounding Canadians cause us to see ourselves as victimized and in need of safety, which is why we create garrisons in the first place. But Atwood envisaged a development of stages beyond that, in which characters accept and eventually even learn to celebrate their victimhood,

and so break down the walls and let the outside in. From this point of view, says Atwood, nature “exists as a living process which includes opposites: life and death, ‘gentleness’ and ‘hostility’” (63). Something very much like that happens in *Topher*.

Sensing danger, Chris’s father has built up walls against the past and against others and has refused to let the outside in — an outside intriguingly represented by the cottage and the lake he wants to rid himself of. The presence of Topher in Stacey’s mind breaches the walls. Indeed, eventually Topher comes to represent a connection with everything, a breaking down of all walls and barriers and boundaries — especially those between people and the natural world surrounding them. Stacey thinks:

She knew that Topher was part of her somehow. The same way the lake and the wind and the trees and the stars and the loons, even the cabin, were part of her. And Chris and her mom and dad and Thea. They were all part of her.

“It’s like music,” she said. “As if all the things I ever felt or thought or seen or done are part of a song. And the song is me. . . . Topher’s in the music.” (206)

*Topher*, then, parallels Atwood’s deliberately Canadian poem “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer,” in which the frightened pioneer builds walls. But

In the darkness the fields  
defended themselves with fences  
in vain:  
everything  
is getting in. (28-32)

Finally, as in *Topher*, the world outside, “the green vision . . . , invaded” (81, 83). For the pioneer, this invasion may or may not be a good thing — it can represent total connection or total absorption, integration or a loss of self. In *Topher*, the invasion is a more clearly positive event, an unambiguous celebration of connection.

As I suggested earlier, one of the connections made is between the present and the past. One of the results of that connection is a form of redemption — what was painful in the past ceases to be so after the characters in different times connect, and as a result what is painful for characters in the novels’ present also ceases to be so. Something similar happens in all the novels I’ve discussed so far. The ghosts of the past, whether the life of Jonathan in *The Ghost of Avalanche Mountain*, the distance between the sisters in the past of *I Have Been in Danger*, or the sad events of Catharine’s earlier life in *Destination Gold!*, cease to cause trouble for themselves and for others. As in the books the University of Winnipeg students read as they developed their list of shared characteristics, these novels “oppose

the past and the present in some way, with resolutions often valuing letting the past go or moving beyond it" (35). The past becomes meaningful less in terms of what it meant for those who originally experienced it than as a way for people in the novels' present to better understand themselves and what they need to renounce and move beyond in order to form connections to each other. I might argue here for another parallel to the rhetoric of Canadian discourse on multiculturalism, in which traditional dances and costumes, more or less divested of their original significance as aspects of religious faith or communal celebration, become meaningful primarily as a way in which people with essentially similar mainstream Canadian values signify the now primarily and most significantly symbolic difference they mutually share. Put baldly, the novels establish community by reinventing the past in ways that exclude its original meanings for those who experienced it.

What most intrigues me about *Topher*, however, is the ways in which the idea of a free-flowing connection with nature becomes attached to possessions and property and thus to other forms of exclusion. Only by continuing to own the cottage can Stacey's family be connected both to the past Topher represents and to the lake itself. Furthermore, Stacey finally achieves the connection between Topher in the past and her father in the present by giving her father the comic book Topher had intended to be his birthday present — a parallel to Ashley's gift of the goldstone to Jonathan, its rightful owner, which equally signifies connection and healing. As in Lawson's novels, then, questions of property seem to be significantly attached to the themes I am identifying as having specifically Canadian resonances. Furthermore, ownership in these novels seems less an inherent right than something earned and possible to lose. Montana and the various thieves in *Topher's* two different time periods do not earn it and are therefore excluded from the community of shared difference in the same space that eventually develops. These are patterns that resonate for me in terms of participation in the shared multicultural space of Canada. They are connections I want to understand further.

That they might be significant is supported by another novel with an alternating double focalization and a profound concern with property, Kathy Stinson's *Fish House Secrets*. Like *Topher* and the other novels I've discussed so far, this one is set in a place on the border between urban civilization and the wild — this time a farmhouse on the Nova Scotia shore, a place that serves as a cottage for Chad's family and that brings characters from urban backgrounds into contact with nature. As in all the other novels, furthermore, the central characters are opposites who suffer isolation as a result of family trauma. Chad is a somewhat timid boy and a painter who holds back to view what he paints, Jill a reckless girl and a dancer who involves herself in experience. Like central characters in *Ghost*, *Destination*, and *Topher*, Chad has experienced the death of a close family member, in

his case his mother (and, like the children's father in *Topher*, he blames himself for the death). His father, once more distant, has begun to cling to him in a way Chad finds oppressive, and since his mother was a painter also, he feels he must hide his own interest in painting for fear it will distress his grieving father. Meanwhile, in the alternating narrative, Jill has run away from an unsettled home in which, once more opposite to Chad, her unemployed father ignores her and her parents argue with her brother (Chad is an only child) over his plans to marry a girl pregnant with his child; "It feels like home isn't there to go back to," she says (62). After Jill hides in Chad's barn and seeks his help, they find themselves developing feelings for each other. Their connection leads them to share both their art and their problems; as a result, they move toward reconciliation and reconnection with their families.

As in all the novels discussed so far, in other words, *Fish House Secrets* moves characters isolated in alternating narratives toward connection with each other in the same narrative in ways that support the value of family and communal connections. That seems simply logical when it happens in *I Have Been in Danger* or *Topher*, in which the alternating stories involve members of the same family who have become isolated from each other. It's equally logical in *Destination*, in which the characters brought together form a new family in a new community. It's a little less logical, albeit still reasonable, in *Ghost*, in which the happy community at the end excludes the ghost that ought never have needed contact with it: a figure of the past must logically return to the past. But *Fish House Secrets* is not so logical. The connection between Chad and Jill takes them back toward their families by driving them away from each other, so that the connection that represents the value of connecting is itself quickly disconnected.

This seems an especially unsettling conclusion to Jill's story. The novel never contradicts her view of the disruption of her family and the ways in which it stifles her, particularly because her father has blocked her wish to be a dancer by gambling away the money set aside for her classes. Furthermore, since Jill's family never actually appears in the story, there's no evidence it can have changed while she was away from it. All that has changed is her attitude toward it. Based on her encounter with Chad and his family and the advice she gives him about dealing with it, and thinking of Maurice Sendak's picture book *Where the Wild Things Are*, she decides to go back to where people love her "best of all" — all the while acknowledging that her parents aren't "doing such a hot job of showing it" (103). She concludes: "I don't know if I'm doing the right thing. . . . But going home, for now, and giving things there another chance — it's what I've got to do" (123). As I read this, I have a strong sense that she's "got" to do what she does less because it's the logical result of the arc of her story than because the novelist simply decided it would happen.

One reason for that might be implied by the novel's reference to *Wild*

*Things*. *Fish House Secrets* needs to fulfill its function as a text of fiction for young readers by returning its characters home, just as Sendak's Max and so many other characters in children's fiction go home. In a novel for adults, a teenager like Jill might well decide to do what she rejects doing here and run off to Vancouver (and, most likely, if readers are prepared to trust her descriptions of her family, be better off for doing so). A more likely ending for a young adult novel might be something like the one Jill herself imagines earlier: "I think about Chad's family, everyone getting along and spending time with each other. I imagine I'm actually a part of it" (70). As in Lawson's *Destination* and as in classical fairy tales like "Cinderella," many young adult novels end with isolated fugitives from bad homes finding better new homes with new families.

So why doesn't that happen here? It seems to have something to do with the misunderstanding on which Jill based her imagined entry into Chad's family — it is not in fact so ideal, and learning that seems to be what drives her into accepting her own family. But also, I suspect, it has a lot to do with questions of property. Put baldly, the fish house does not, and therefore apparently cannot, belong to Jill.

When Jill arrives at the farm, she sees a sign that reads "Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted" (15), and there's never any question but that she is a trespasser. At the end of the novel she decides to go home "where I belong" (123). The novel's discussion of property focuses on the fish house of its title, the novel's symbolic centre. Both Chad and Jill see the fish house as a place where they can isolate themselves from the oppressive demands of others and safely and secretly be themselves. Chad calls it "a place for secrets" (21), a place where he has "a safe protected feeling" (67) — which is why he goes there to paint in secret. Jill thinks, "Okay, I know it's not mine, it's probably his, one of these rich brats with more places to go than they know what to do with. But I need it more than he does, and without even having gone in yet, it feels like mine" (39). Later, she thinks, "The Fish House is so inviting, right on the sea and everything. I could be happy here forever" (72).

Being "right on the sea," the fish house also acts as a garrison not only from familial disruption but also from the ocean, so that, as in *Topher*, separations from or connections with nature and with other humans come to stand for each other. Chad can look through the fish house window from a safely hidden vantage point and try to paint the ocean. But, in fact, his paintings aren't successful. They become so only after he leaves the safety of the fish house and gives himself up to the experience of life and of the ocean outside on the beach with Jill — his own form of dancing with the wild things or allowing the green vision to invade. These metaphoric implications become clear as Chad thinks, "Changes . . . it's what I've always loved about the sea. But I've always felt insignificant in the face of its powers" (85) — and hidden from them. Later, he discovers that "the kid hiding

in the fish house with his box of paints — that's not me any more" (118).

It is not Chad anymore because he learns from his encounter with Jill to embrace the sea (at one point, to his astonishment, she happily strips in front of him and enters it) rather than hide from it — to be brave enough to express himself and his emotions to Jill and then to his family. As a result, Chad begins to paint well, and says, "I've got some of that power, too, from that mermaid holing up in my grandparents' old barn" (85). Furthermore, it is clear that Chad's painting and Jill's dancing represent both the vulnerable essence of their selfhood and their connection to the vast connectivity of all things the ocean represents. Chad says that letting Jill look at his painting with himself there would be "like I was standing in front of her naked" (100) (as she earlier stood naked in front of him), whereas she imagines him "loving to paint the way I love to dance" (91). There is also another creative act of revealing selfhood hidden in the protective garrison of the fish house — Chad's grandfather's journal, which he has written secretly after always having been afraid to earlier in life, and which Jill discovers and brings to light. Its title, "Rocks and Dune Grass," once more reinforces the connection between an essential hidden selfhood and the ocean landscape.

As the novel develops, then, the fish house loses its status as a place of safe separation, isolated secrecy, and private property, and instead comes to stand for the very connections it at first seems to prevent. It is where hidden secrets come to light. In it, Chad connects with his art and thus with his dead mother, with the ocean,<sup>12</sup> with himself, with Jill as they kiss and "share a secret" (101), with his grandfather, and finally with his father, who reveals himself to Chad as Chad reveals his painting to him. In it, similarly, Chad's grandfather connects with *his* art and thus with himself and eventually with his family.

In the light of these connections, I find it surprising that Jill never dances in the fish house, that she never connects with *her* art there. Instead of hiding a secret of innate selfhood there and then revealing it, she is *herself* a secret revealed — something else that Chad and, it turns out, his grandfather hide in the fish house and then agree to reveal. And as I've already suggested, the revelation leads not to her connection with the others but to her expulsion and return home. As I mentioned earlier, I can think of only one way to account for this difference: the fish house does not in fact belong to her and she therefore does not belong in it. At one point, in fact, Chad tells her that "You're the one who doesn't belong here" (42), and although he later agrees to allow her there as a result of her connection to him, what he says here turns out finally to be the truth. The trespassing poor girl must return to her cramped, oppressive rented home in the city and leave the idyllic farm to the "rich brat" who owns it.<sup>13</sup>

There is, in other words, a disjunction between what the fish house represents symbolically and the relationship Jill has with it as real estate.

Symbolically, it is the ultimate border place, what both divides and connects land and sea, people and nature, people and other people, art and selfhood, individual selfhood and the vastness of everything. It represents the ways in which connection underlies and emerges from isolation. But since it is property that legally belongs to one family, a verity of contemporary capitalist reality never questioned here, someone not a member of that family must be expelled from it and deprived of the power of its border position.

It's possible that I'm making too much of this aspect of the novel and that, in fact, Jill does gain as much as Chad does from their meeting and from her stay in the fish house despite her eventual expulsion from it, that the expulsion does not represent an equivalent exclusion from the powerful meanings and values the fish house sustains. But in the light of this novel's similarities to *Topher* and the others, I'm finding that hard to accept. These books all allow exclusions in the process of affirming connection and do so in ways that raise questions of property and ownership. Obviously, furthermore, I'm finding it difficult not to read resonances of specifically Canadian import into these questions. It's not much of a reach to read *Fish House Secrets* as a sort of parable of the Canadian scene, in which the fish house is a clear manifestation of the boundary rhetoric inherent in much Canadian thinking and in which questions of different people sharing the same space interconnect intriguingly with ideas of ownership and belonging.

As I consider the ways in which the novels I've looked at here build their communities based on exclusions, I'm reminded of something Robin McCallum suggests about the non-Canadian double-focalized novels she discusses: "interlaced dual narration . . . can be a particularly problematic form. The tendency to structure narrative point of view oppositionally often entails that one dominant narratorial position is privileged and dialogue is thus subsumed by monologue" (56). All the books I've discussed subsume dialogue in two ways. First, as McCallum suggests, characters who begin by being separate and expressing differing points of view come to share one space and one monologic view that absorbs and abolishes their differences. Second, they achieve their monologic unanimity by excluding and eliminating or otherwise silencing those who represent a difference from it strong enough to represent a threat to it.

The tendency of double-focalized narratives to move from dialogic difference to monologic sameness becomes particularly obvious in another Canadian novel, Karen Rivers's *Dream Water*. The focalized characters in this novel are surprisingly similar to those of *Fish House Secrets*: a boy, an only child, who paints and who must deal with the death of his mother and with a distant father who begins to make demands on him, and a girl who dances and who must deal with a family in trouble involving a disruptive brother that ignores her and her ambitions. Cassie and Holden,

like Jill and Chad, feel oppressed and threatened by their family circumstances and practice their art in safely secluded solitude. After they meet, they give each other the confidence to end their secrecy by revealing their art to each other. As in *Fish House Secrets*, furthermore, the boy paints a picture of the girl in the context of the ocean as a turning point in the development of his art and their relationship. They also spend a night together (and apparently have sex) in the place where the boy paints, in an encounter that represents a willingness to connect and to be vulnerable but that might well turn out to be their last meeting together: in both cases, the boy remains where he is and the girl moves elsewhere. Not surprisingly, the thematic resonances of these events are also similar: what all these isolated characters find after they meet is not merely a connection with each other but also with both their own artistry and nature itself — a connection that allows the meaning of the past to change. The plot centres on the horrors of keeping whales in captivity instead of in their natural element, “unbarricaded in the endless expanse of the Pacific Ocean” (35), and it is clear that the human characters need and seek a similar freedom from barricades, a move beyond the borders of their isolating garrisons. That these two novels by different authors set in different parts of Canada should share so much reinforces the extent to which their themes and patterns might have a specifically Canadian relevance.

There are, however, some important differences between the two novels — most significantly that, unlike Jill, Cassie does in fact dance for the boy in the secluded place which belongs to him and in which they connect with each other. Indeed, she goes back there later on her own “even though it’s probably breaking and entering” (164), and dances “for Holden” again as he heads to the hospital where his mother has just died. Unlike Jill, it seems, Cassie is not excluded from metaphorical connections with herself, others, or the wider world of natural freedom beyond restrictive human categories by issues of property.

But that seems to be because, in fact, she is not in any significantly meaningful way different from him. As their separate stories before they meet unfold in the first part of the novel, it becomes clear that they share more or less the same story. They knew each other as children and are both haunted by memories of a school trip to the Victoria Seaquarium during which they saw a girl get killed by a whale. As a result, both are haunted by nightmares of the dark ocean water Holden obsessively paints: as Cassie observes, “So many canvases, covered with thick dark-green paint, covered with her dream water” (100). Both come from similarly well-off and unhappy homes; both have aloof fathers and self-involved mothers who focus on other problems and ignore them. Both seem completely isolated, not only from their families but from all other humans except one close and well-meaning friend who doesn’t really understand them. Held in captivity both by their bad dreams of the killer whale and by their oppressive

families, they parallel the whales held in captivity by engaging in activity dangerous to themselves and by others — Holden by drinking enough to become an alcoholic and Cassie by smoking and driving herself to exhaustion in her efforts to win a dance audition. This is not, then, a dialogue of different people and different stories becoming connected in one story. It is two parallel monologues of what is almost the same story repeated twice until the two similar characters come together in one understanding of what they always shared before they even knew it.

That *Dream Water* is a monologue even while it seems to be a dialogue becomes particularly clear in terms of a third focalized character, one whose thoughts appear only occasionally in the novel.<sup>14</sup> This is Mark Mitchell, a teacher at Cassie's school who is an activist against the captivity of whales. For much of the novel, Cassie is aware of him only as something like a stalker — a man with "dangerous black eyes" (44) whose frequent gaze distresses her: "It's like he's looking right into my soul, like he knows all my secrets" (45). Meanwhile, sections focalized through Mark reveal that he does often look at her. As Cassie walks on the schoolground with her friend, for instance, "Neither of them feels Mr. Mitchell's eyes watching from the parking lot" (34). Readers might well assume he is a potentially dangerous stalker and that we are on our way to a dangerous attack. As it turns out, however, he wants only to engage Cassie in his activism by getting her to tell others of her childhood experience at the Seaquarium; her agreeing to do so helps, as he believed it would, to relieve her of her bad dreams. How Mark views things through his powerful eyes — and his understandings of what keeps both whales and people in dangerous captivity — turns out to be the one right way of understanding things. He possesses something much like what the psychoanalytical theorist Jacques Lacan identifies as "the gaze that circumscribes us" (75) — the power of seeing in a way that defines for others the meanings of what it sees. Mark's rightness about everything confirms the absolute monologism of *Dream Water*, a monologism that subverts the obvious opportunities for dialogue offered by its alternating double-focalized narrative.

McCallum objects to the subversion of dialogue by monologue primarily as a suppression of liberating possibilities — an imposition on potentially diverse individuals of one right way of being human. But in a specifically Canadian context and in the light of the questions of property — ownership of a shared space — it takes on unsettling political dimensions. McCallum spells out these implications elsewhere in her argument when she speaks of the problem of "how to conceive of the strangeness of another culture without marginalizing that culture" and describes

two possible misconceptions of otherness. The strangeness of an other culture or self may be understood by postulating a center of meaning common to both the perceiving and perceived culture or subject which, by ena-

bling the other to be conceived as a reflection of one's own culture or self, hence entails assimilation of that other to one's own culture or self. Alternately, the other's strangeness may be conceived from the position of the alienated subject as being so utterly different that it is rendered wholly incommensurable with one's own self or culture or any other culture. . . . In other words, both approaches operate through strategies of exclusion, whereby the other is marginalized, whether it be through a logic of identity or nonidentity. (100)

If I'm correct in reading a Canadian political dimension into the novels I've discussed, then their expression of both McCallum's categories has unsettling political implications. The border negotiations of their characters become a parable of the processes by which a theoretically inclusive but actually exclusionary shared national space — a property not equally owned by everyone who enters it — comes to exist.

I may, of course, be wrong to read that parable into these novels. As I suggested earlier, none of them has much to say literally or intentionally about issues of cultural background or other actual sources of friction between Canadians caused by the differing positions they occupy in politically sensitive registers of difference. While some of the focalized characters are male or female, rich or poor, the novels make little of these matters as reasons for their difference or conflict. As members of the same family or same social class, they can come together in a monologic unanimity at least in part because, like the characters in *Dream Water*, none of them are depicted as being all that different from each other in the first place, certainly not in terms of the registers of gender, race, and class that most often account for differing degrees of power in the world outside the novels. Where such differences between characters do exist, they are not dwelled on in any way that comes to seem intentionally thematic; indeed, the novels seem to work to obliterate the possibility that such differences matter, to see all differences as manifestations of individual personalities rather than culturally powerful categories. I may be able to read an insidious politics of diminishing difference into them exactly because they don't in fact claim to deal with politically significant differences.

But, as I suggested earlier, many double-focalized Canadian novels for children do in fact deal with such differences — appear, in fact, to be centrally about them. Not only are the alternating focalized protagonists of Diana Wiener's *Bad Boy* straight and gay, but as I suggested in an earlier article, the novel is built on and is centrally about that difference ("Bad Boys and Binaries"). Similarly, the fact that the central characters in Heneghan's *Promises to Come* are Vietnamese and Euro-Canadian and those in Richards's *Soldier Boys* and *The Lady at Batoche* Métis and English becomes the basis for an exploration of the meaning and significance of cultural difference, as do the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal backgrounds of characters in a number of other novels. Do Canadian novels that do in fact

acknowledge and focus on significant forms of cultural difference engage in the same exclusionary processes as the theoretically less political novels I've been discussing here? Are they, in McCallum's terms, equally monologic? That, clearly, is the next question I need to consider. I plan to continue my exploration of these matters by focusing on these more explicitly political novels.

## Notes

1. An Internet search using Google on 8 Feb. 2003 brought up 1,140 references to the phrase "longest undefended border," in contexts varying from tourism to trade to the National Library of Canada's explanation of how Canadian confederation happened.
2. I discuss it myself in "Interpretation and the Apparent Sameness of Children's Novels."
3. These matters are discussed in chapter nine of *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*.
4. I was also aware that the series of four "Minds" novels I had written in collaboration with Carol Matas tell their stories through the alternating focalizations of their two protagonists but, for obvious reasons, I chose not to include them in my exploration. I would like to thank Judith Saltman for her help in identifying double-focalized novels.
5. Katz's *False Face* was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award and won the International Children's Fiction Contest. Her *Out of the Dark* was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award and the Mr. Christie Award and won the Ruth Schwartz Award. Clark's *Hand of Robin Squires* was a Canadian Centre for Books for Children Our Choice book for three years and won the Alberta Publishing Award. Clark's *Dream Carvers* won the Mr. Christie Award and the Geoffrey Bilson Award. Major's *Blood Red Ochre* was shortlisted for Canadian Library Association Book of the Year Award and the Geoffrey Bilson Award. Brooks's *Bone Dance* won the Ruth Schwartz Children's Book Award and the Canadian Library Association's Young Adult Book Award. Hughes's *Log Jan* is the only one of these books not shortlisted or nominated for a significant award.
6. Of those produced elsewhere, McCallum names Caroline Macdonald's *Lake at the End of the World*, Paul Zindel's *The Pigman*, Penelope Farmer's *Thicker than Water*, Jan Mark's *The Hillingdon Fox*, Peter Hunt's *Going Up*, Jenny Pausaker's *What are Ya?*, William Mayne's *Winter Quarters*, Jean Ure's *Come Lucky April*, and Peter Dickinson's *A Bone from a Dry Sea*. Others include Joyce McDonald's *Swallowing Stones*, Erika Tamar's *Fair Game*, Jane Yolen and Bruce Colville's *Armageddon Summer*, and Robert Cormier's *Tenderness*.
7. *Ghost* is the last book of a trilogy, the first two of which are *Goldstone* and *Turns on a Dime*.
8. In a *Globe and Mail* article, Michael Valpy provides an interesting example: "Americans are the masculine in North America, Canadians the feminine. This may be our nicest mythology" (A9).
9. In the light of Modleski's identification of the implied viewer of soap opera as female, it's suggestive that, as in the Valpy article mentioned in note 8, so much popular discourse about Canadians vs. Americans identifies Canadians as possessing traditionally feminine traits as opposed to the traditionally masculine American ones: passivity as opposed to aggression, weakness as opposed to strength, concern for others as opposed to independence, polite restraint as opposed to free expression. I think, for instance, of Margaret Atwood's poem "Backdrop Addresses Cowboy," which imagines a woman's efforts to protect herself from a dangerous "starspangled cowboy" (1) she confronts "on that border / you are always trying to cross" (26-27).
10. It happens in one way or another in *Bone Dance*, *The Hand of Robin Squires*, *The Dream Carvers*, *I Have Been in Danger*, *Topher, Keeper of the Isis Light*, *The Guardian of Isis*, *Log Jan*, *False Face*, *Time Ghost*, *Out of the Dark*, *The Ghost of Avalanche Mountain*, *Destination Gold!*,

- Blood Red Ochre*, and *Fish House Secrets*. Many other Canadian novels for young people send characters to cottages, woods, and wilds to confront powerful natural forces.
11. The ideas outlined in this paragraph were first developed for "National Children's Literature in the Age of Globalization: The Case of Canada," a paper Mavis Reimer and I presented at a conference at the University of Reading.
  12. At one point, Chad has a vision of his mother in a mist rolling in from the sea (68-69) — as if she had in death become part of it, so that his connection with it through painting is also a connection to her.
  13. I can reach this conclusion only by doing an ideological reading against the text — I have no sense that Stinson wants me to notice the assumptions about class that operate here. It is for this reason that I include this novel in this study of texts that don't seem to intend to make points about culturally powerful differences.
  14. There is also one very brief passage in the middle of one of Holden's narratives focalized through his friend Matt.

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