A Monochromatic Mosaic: Class, Race, and Culture in Double-Focalized Canadian Novels for Young People

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Résumé *: Suite à un article précédent, paru dans un numéro antérieur de la* **CCL**, *la présente communication attire l'attention sur les romans qui rendent explicites, d'une façon thématique, les questions de classe sociale, de race et d'ethnie; it s'agit surtout de narrations alternantes que partagent deux protagonistes. Les romans qui nous occupent confirment une tendance manifestée auparavant, à affirmer et à célébrer l'acceptation de la distinction sociale, raciale et ethnique, mais à faire cela de façon à affaiblir la tolérance et à légaliser le conformisme. De plus, certains textes qui décrivent les immigrants en train de faire face à la vie au Canada partagent avec nous l'histoire de leur vie passée ailleurs en tant que le souvenir à garder mais, plus significativement, un souvenir de ce qui est resté le contraire de la vie qu'ils connaissent à l'heure actuelle au Canada. Ces romans établissent alors pour leurs personnages une reconaissance d'eux-mêmes comme des Canadiens formés spécifiquement en opposition avec leur vie ancienne passée ailleurs. Par conséquent, ces Néo-Canadiens auraient droit à nous rappeler qu'ils font partie de ces « Autres ». L'article semble indiquer que les caractéristiques partagées par ces romans répondent, d'une manière significative, aux idées que les Canadiens se font sûre le multiculturisme. Un seul roman en français va à l'encontre des modèles parus en anglais, confirmant que les valeurs affirmées dans ces livres représentent spécifiquement des opinions canadiennes-anglaises.*

Summary*: Continuing an investigation of Canadian novels for children and young people with alternating narrations focalized through two main characters, described in an article published in* **Canadian Children's Literature** *in 2003, this present article focuses on texts that make questions of class, race, and ethnicity explicit and centrally thematic. These novels confirm a tendency found in the texts explored earlier to affirm and celebrate acceptance of class, racial, and ethnic difference, but to do so in ways that actually undermine tolerance and legislate conformity. In addition, a group of texts that describe immigrants learning to cope*

with life in Canada offer a shared vision of the history of their life elsewhere as that which must be remembered, but remembered most significantly as over and opposite to life in Canada now. These novels then establish for their characters a sense of themselves as Canadians formed specifically in opposition to their former lives elsewhere and thus requiring continuing remembrance of that defining other. This article suggests that the shared characteristics of the novels under discussion resonate significantly in terms of widespread Canadian ideas about multiculturalism. One novel originally published in French in Quebec contradicts the patterns found in the English-language texts, suggesting that the values affirmed in the books under discussion represent specifically English-Canadian views.

My work on Canadian novels for young people that switch between two narrative lines began in my 2003 essay, "Of Solitudes and Borders: Double-Focalized Canadian Books for Children." In that essay, I acknowledged the Australian critic Robin McCallum's assertion that, "Since *The Pigman* . . . , interlaced binary narrative has become a common technique for structuring multivoiced narrative in adolescent fiction" (56) and proposed that the frequent use of this form in Canadian writing for young people might have significant resonances in a specifically Canadian context.[1] My consideration of a group of Canadian novels for children and young adults — novels I selected because they seemed on the surface to have nothing to do with questions of politics or nationality — revealed that they did indeed share characteristics that resonate interestingly in terms of mainstream Canadian rhetoric about Canada and Canadian identity:

- The novels use double focalizations to create an ambivalent state of detached involvement for their implied readers. They thus mirror a typical Canadian view of Canadians in relation to the culture of the United States, with Canadians acknowledging the ways in which they share a vast proportion of American culture but also thinking of themselves as significantly *not* American. As Eva Mackey suggests, "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).
- An insistence on differences between the focalized characters represents a form of what W.H. New calls "boundary rhetoric": "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). While the novels I considered don't focus on questions of race or culture, the obsession with 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 sense 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 Northrop Frye once identified as a key trope for Canadians' views of themselves, protects its members from the dangerous world outside its borders.
- As Frye, Margaret Atwood (in *Survival*), and others claim is true in traditional Canadian writing for adults, that danger is represented by the Canadian landscape itself.
- There is a focus on questions of property, and 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, I suggested, does the community of Canadian multiculturalism.
- The past is expelled also. It 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 concluded that "the novels seem to work to obliterate the possibility that such differences [gender, race, and class] matter, to see all differences as manifestations of individual personalities rather than culturally powerful categories." But I also acknowledged that "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" (82), and suggested that a next step in this inquiry would be to explore novels that do, in fact, acknowledge and focus on significant forms of cultural difference. Do more overtly political novels engage in the same exclusionary and difference-denying processes as the theoretically less political ones? Might they confirm or challenge McCallum's theory that "interlaced dual narration . . . can be a particularly problematic form" — problematic because "[t]he 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)?

Before I move to a consideration of more overtly political novels, I'll clarify the ways in which less political ones express the themes I listed above by looking at a text I didn't discuss earlier: Susan Currie's *Basket of Beethoven* (2001), which replicates the recurring features of my list with an eerie exactitude.

The alternating narratives of Sam and Helen reveal the many things they share under their apparent differences. He is a boy, she a girl; he poor, she rich. But both have recently moved to a new place, both live with just one parent (he with his mother, she with her father), both are isolated and friendless — and as their alternating narratives reveal, they share an interest in music. Helen, the daughter of a world-famous conductor, is a piano prodigy. As the novel begins, Sam is unaware of his musical bent, but he "always noticed the way sounds looked. Sometimes sounds almost drove him crazy" (5). In these circumstances, it's not surprising that Sam and Helen come together as he finds a way of forcing her to give him piano lessons, share a space (indeed, two spaces, as he comes to her studio for lessons and she, eventually, comes to the secret hideout he has created for himself in a wild ravine), discover the similarity underlying their difference, and share a relationship that ends their isolation and makes them better people. As Sam says, "first it was just me. Then you turned me into something else. I'm still me, but I'm all mixed up with you. We both — we *mean* more now" (119-20).

Basket of Beethoven allows this mixing up to occur specifically in terms of music, especially the music of Beethoven. Alone and feeling constricted in her new life, Helen escapes into a vision of herself and Beethoven walking where she can "smell the forest scents — pine needles, earth beneath her feet, flowers and weeds growing by the river" (27). There the composer counsels her to "cultivate the inner life — nobody has any control over that" (26). In his narrative, meanwhile, Sam finds a similar escape in a similar place — "a ravine, green and wild and calling to him like a sweet, high flute. Suddenly, the sound-patterns surged inside him. They mingled with bird calls and rustling wind, almost speaking with a human voice" (9). Sam and Helen have their first encounter in the schoolyard as he wakens from a daydream of himself in the ravine to see Helen reading, and asks her about the book — a life of Beethoven. Reading the book himself later, Sam finds that Beethoven, who also heard natural sounds as music, "reminded Sam of himself" (39). Later, Sam eavesdrops on Helen playing Beethoven, and thinks of what he hears in a way that blends his own innate sense of music and secluded wild places: "He saw a rainforest where the animals, birds, insects, and plants sang in their own mysterious voices — separately, yet in a chorus that included everyone" (36).

Indeed, this image of diverse sounds making one harmonious whole is central to the book's intentions. Later, Sam hears his first symphony, Beethoven's Pastoral, and Helen insists, clearly incorrectly, that "Beethoven was complete. He didn't need anyone, and he didn't want anyone" (85). Sam knows better: "Helen was wrong! Every note said Beethoven wanted to reach out to everyone, to share exactly what he felt" — to include all isolated diversities just as his music unites them. Sam represents his truer version of Beethoven in his gift to Helen, a basket containing items he in-

terprets symbolically: "a composer takes an ordinary thing and makes it something different. You see it in a new way, sort of all mixed up with the composer, too. . . . Like the *Pastorale* symphony. It's flowers and pastures and forests and rivers, birds and animals. But they got mixed up with Beethoven and turned into something completely new" (119). This vision of individual things brought together in a communal music mirrors the community the novel develops. As Sam plays at a school concert at the end of the book, "mingled in the notes of *Ode to Joy* were hidden all three of them. Beethoven had written it, Helen had arranged it, and now Sam played it as if his heart had been born to do nothing else" (122).

In replicating all the patterns I described earlier, *Basket of Beethoven* seems an obvious example of the boundary rhetoric that underpins Canadian multicultural discourse. It offers readers the knowing satisfactions of detachment: we can see through Helen's claim to superiority when she tells Sam that playing the piano is "not just *charge of the light brigade*" (45), as we recall her teacher saying the same thing to her earlier. Readers are also in a position to see the common threads relating to isolation, music, and wild places in Sam's and Helen's narratives, and thus know they are alike even when they see each other as enemies. Even at the start, when Sam wants to "build his own world and have his adventures. . . . Far from Helen Alemeda" (21), he feels that "Helen had a strange power that seemed to echo the tumbling patterns in Sam" (32). Sam and Helen then have differing views of sometimes different but always connected events until they come to share the same story in the same spaces. Typically, the novel focuses on spaces that first represent a safe isolation and then the harmony of things brought together — not only the space of Sam's hideout in the ravine and of Helen's Beethoven fantasy, but also the space created by Beethoven's music. Also typically, the characters think of their safe spaces in terms reminiscent of the protective garrisons Frye identified as typically Canadian, and must have the garrisons breached by the forces of wildness in order to enter into harmonious contact with each other — Sam breaching Helen's fortress, the bully Pete breaching Sam's.

Above all, it is the novel's insistence on differences subsumed in a whole that connects and unifies them in an overriding harmony that most clearly works as boundary rhetoric. The novel insists on it so much that it even tries, unconvincingly, to include the bully Pete in the harmony of its ending, as he joins Sam in gathering his "basket of Beethoven" and drives with Sam and his mother to the final concert. Pete, however, remains silent, speaking not a word after Sam invites his assistance. Pete's entrance into this community seems to require the silencing of what he represents, which remains a threat to its harmony. That threat is a violent lack of care for others that erodes harmony.

Pete's silence is revealing. In the process of creating the community in which Sam and Helen and the silenced Pete equally belong, *Basket of*

Beethoven works to obliterate the possibility that differences between people such as class or gender matter. It simply ignores any possibility that this eleven-year-old boy and girl are even aware of their difference in gender; for all the attention the novel gives to the matter, they might as well both be of one sex. The novel does pay some attention to matters of class — as it inevitably must once it has established that Sam and his hardworking mother live in a small co-op apartment and Helen and her famous conductor father in a large house. As Sam tells himself, "people like Helen didn't live at the Lovett co-op" (56). Sam often makes comments that seem to express his own awareness of class matters. On his first view of the "large, terrifying space" of Helen's music room, he thinks, "People who belonged in a room like this . . . knew more than he could ever possibly learn" (57), and he feels "Fury at being in his apartment while Helen rattled around in her huge house . . . he suddenly felt like the co-op was trying to swallow him" (72). Yet he also insists that "[h]e was the same kind of person she was. He was worthwhile" (35). Sam and others are convinced that he belongs in Helen's space — that, as Helen's housekeeper says, he is "The Alemedas' kind of person" (65). The novel might then be read in class terms as the story of a boy from an undesirable lower class background — a milieu defined in terms of Sam's relationship with his neighbour Pete as anti-cultural and prone to violence — but having some inherent worth that defines him as incorrectly classed, achieving the happy ending of a rise to a better place. As Sam says near the end when Helen tells him to "Go home," "I'm here to stay" (118).

Nevertheless, the novel insists that the "here" Sam plans to stay in is not the mansion he stands in but the aesthetic space music opens up to him — that, despite appearances, Sam's story has nothing to do with class issues and everything to do with individual interest and talent. His comment about being here to stay in Helen's "home" echoes an earlier thought he had about "the *coming home* feeling of learning to release the sounds" (42) — so that the space he now refuses to leave is not a political one but a musical one. The novel insists it is not significantly a place of wealth but "a world where people turned their feelings and ideas into music" (115). In an apparent acknowledgment of and then slide away from class issues, Sam admits to himself that "he was embarrassed at the difference in their parents" (87), but then goes on to offer a reason for it that has nothing to do with class or wealth: "Helen would never be able to understand a mother who forbade piano lessons, and sneered at the whole idea of people coming together to make music" (87). Considered in terms of its ideology, *Basket of Beethoven* seems to work most significantly as an effort to misrepresent class differences as mere differences in character — a perfect example of the pattern I noted earlier of seeing all differences as manifestations of individual personalities rather than culturally powerful categories like gender or class.

In doing so, furthermore, the novel reveals the homogenizing tendency in its apparent celebration of differences acting in harmony. The novel claims that Sam changes Helen as much as she changes him, but that's not really the case. He gets a whole new life. She only learns to be happy with what she already has. The world they both inhabit at the end is the one she always lived in. Sam can share Helen's wealthy space only by sharing her sensibility and rejecting what the novel seems to represent as the violent, anti-intellectual sensibilities characteristic of his own class. She must accept little and reject nothing. While the novel carefully conceals it, the harmonious music it celebrates excludes the discordant notes of those without money.

Unlike *Basket of Beethoven*, some novels use double focalization to do what McCallum suggests: to "overtly structure a novel as a dialogue between two social, cultural, gendered or historical positions" (56). In Paul Kropp's *Moonkid and Liberty* (1988), Ian and his sister Liberty share Sam and Helen's sense of isolation from "normal" children, and for similar reasons. They have been brought up with the values of their father, an aging hippy bookseller. Ian responds by adopting and celebrating his difference — he sees himself as "an alien abandoned on a hostile planet" (15). But as the book begins, Liberty has decided to try to be more "normal," to disguise or even forget her intellectual interests and focus her attention on makeup, clothes, and boys. The novel then offers her a role model who transforms the question of being normal into a matter of money and class. Liberty's mother, once herself a free-spirited eccentric, has become a successful professional, attached to a wealthy lawyer and living in an extravagantly expensive house in San Francisco (she thus becomes one of the symbolic "Americans" fairly common in Canadian literature, greedy consumers whom Canadians try hard not to be like).[2] She now offers her children the opportunity to come live with her and enjoy her lifestyle.

In a sense, this novel moves in the opposite direction from *Basket of Beethoven*. Rather than turning political issues into personal ones, it turns the personal question of fitting in to ordinary teenage life into a class issue. To be "normal" is to accept and live by the consumerist values of the middle-class majority. There is an insistence throughout on a critique of "normal" values, seen here as interconnected with specific social and political assumptions. Rick, Ian and Libby's father, is not just an eccentric freak, but an eccentric freak with a display about the communist utopia Albania in his store window. Libby's metaphor for her state of being an outsider specifically raises class issues: "I've spent my whole life looking at all the kids who fit, all the ones who belong, from the other side of a pane of glass, like a poor kid with his nose pressed to a department store window" (44-45). It's not surprising, then, that she is invited to join the popular girls on the occasion of a visit to the mall, for which she's told to bring her father's credit card. Being "normal," defined as having both the desire and the

money to spend excessively on clothes, is then restricted to the class of those well enough off to have credit cards. Libby's mother confirms the identification of normalcy with consumerist middle-class values when she says of her former partner, "Rick and I lived in never-never land, not wanting to grow up. But you know, Libby, there isn't any pixie dust. Sooner or later you've got to come back and make it right here, in the real world" (96). Her partner Michael confirms this acceptance of things as they "really" are: "I've decided that the system is a lot bigger and stronger than I am. Maybe instead of rebuilding it all you can do is give it a nudge in the right direction" (107). Shortly after Michael expresses this complacent attitude, Ian and Libby have an explicitly political debate, Ian seeing Michael as a man who "has all the nice liberal phrases down, he gives to all the right causes, but his nine to five is being a legal hit man" (113), whereas Libby once more identifies nonconformity with poverty: "You think we're so wonderful because we haven't got two cents to rub together" (113). Ian continues to think of events in terms of a class analysis. He says, "The people of California — and I had better limit this to the upper-middle-class white people in California — have nothing to do with real life" (117). And later, he asserts that people who are different are tolerated if "they have money" (141).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the novel comes down most obviously on the side of individuality as opposed to conformity, and thus on the side of class-conscious critique as opposed to middle-class complacency. Having been isolated when her new friends dump her after her father is accused (unfairly) of selling pornography, Libby learns to accept her freakishness and to adopt it as a flag, making a grandstanding sort of noble speech about tolerating difference to her former "normal" friends: "'And if people like you pass for what's normal around here — ' I stopped for breath ' — then I'm a freak, too'" (183). Meanwhile, however, and perhaps just as inevitably, Ian, who has seen himself as an alien outsider, must declare his connection to humanity: "It's what's inside me. The human part. I've been hiding from for too long" (169). Given an opportunity to leave his school and join a gifted class, he interprets it as running away from the real world and decides to solve his problems in the midst of people unlike himself. In other words, the novel moves its characters toward each other. They meet in the centre, in a compromise that purports to include both the need to connect and the desire to be oneself.

This seems to make sense in individual human terms — to be clichéd, even. But in the light of the connection the novel makes between questions of individuality and normalcy and class issues, there are bound to be implications in this move that relate to class. Indeed, the acceptance of one's shared humanity that leads to a rejection of extreme and isolating forms of freakishness seems at the same time to negate the political validity of the novel's implied critique of conformity. Everyone, even Ian, praises his fa-

ther for becoming less completely idealistic and making his business more commercial. Ian himself, finding a darkness in himself that he believes represents his shared humanity, quickly translates it, not necessarily logically, into doubting his conception of himself as an alien and separate individual free to pursue his own values; he learns, again not necessarily logically, to try to belong to the "normal" middle-class world. Furthermore, his doing so echoes and thus confirms what his mother and Michael said earlier about accommodating to "the real world" — "real" clearly meaning money-oriented, consumerist, and middle-class. In setting up Libby and Ian as opposites in need of a balance, the novel logically requires us to accept middle-class values, a little diluted but more or less intact, as what constitutes an acceptably happy ending. In a way, then, the novel comes to represent one of the typical Canadian attitudes of the sort Mackey talked about — the attitude that Canadians are, most significantly, "not American," even though we share American culture and American values, and that we are more communal, less self-indulgent, more generous, more liberal.

Furthermore, the novel achieves its supposedly happy balance by undermining the validity both of what Libby and Ian aspired to before as well as the extreme characters who represented it — their father and especially their mother. The middle-class implied reader of this novel then gets both to support a shared communal set of relatively commercial, relatively self-indulgent values and also to laud him- or herself for not being merely commercial or self-indulgent.

Moonkid and Prometheus (1997), a sequel published nine years after *Moonkid and Liberty*, moves even further away from a critique of conformity. It continues to counterpoint the differing views of two more or less opposite characters of the same events. But now Liberty recedes into the background, to be replaced as the second focalized character by Prometheus, a younger boy Ian must tutor to avoid being moved to a different high school. Despite the change of character, the rhetoric of difference remains. Pro is huge, Ian small; Pro athletic, Ian physically incompetent; Pro almost illiterate, Ian immersed in books. Most significantly, Pro is black, Ian white. Furthermore, Pro lives in "the Royal Home projects, a set of 1950's low-rise units that had been built on the site of a former slum, and quickly became a slum themselves" (56). Compared to him, then, Ian is rich and privileged — even though, as Ian himself insists, "rich is relative" (184).

Not surprisingly, then, the novel frequently and explicitly raises issues of both class and race. Ian describes his sister as having "one foot planted in the lefty-Liberal values she was born with, and one foot about to land somewhere to the right of Rush Limbaugh" (24). His own feet, he says, are "firmly planted to the left, that Pinko-bleeding-heart-position" (24), a position he confirms by speaking cynically of Pro's apartment as "a building designed to warehouse the poor" (126). Ian's still left-wing father sees Pro's inability to read as due to "social factors" (37), and a major theme of the

novel is Ian's negotiation of the difficult task of helping Pro without insulting him — without, as Pro suggests, turning him into "a charity case" (74). Meanwhile, Ian father's says, "I think Prometheus is a victim of a racist society" (39), and racism emerges as an explicit subject of the novel when Z-Boy, another boy who also lives in the projects, calls Ian "whitey" (18), and when Liberty angers Ian by stereotypically suggesting that Pro's journal must be about "abuse in the home" and "drugs in the urban jungle" (23).

Nevertheless, the novel itself confirms her stereotypes when it turns out that Pro's mother and sister were, in fact, physically abused by his now-absent father and that his sister did have a drug habit. The novel tends to confirm stereotypes in other ways also — especially in the differing presentations of its two focalizations. While readers are privy to Ian's often highly literate thoughts, all we know of Pro is what he writes in his journals, passages filled with mistakes crossed out, corrected by Ian, that make it clear how illiterate he is. We know of him only the little he is willing or able to put on paper, and even that is filtered through his white tutor's editing. That makes him seem less complete, less human — and in a long tradition of stereotypical Black Sambos and Uncle Toms, endearing exactly because of his lack of skill.

Furthermore, Ian has what seem to be unconsciously racist thoughts of his own. When he first meets Pro, he describes him simply as "an enormous kid" (10). He makes no mention of Pro's skin colour, which might imply either a profound degree of tolerant disinterest or a profound level of acceptance of the idea that a student in need of tutoring will, of course, be black. Later, and strangely in the light of this description of his first encounter, Ian does include the word "black" as he describes Pro in an angry mood: "I suppose I would have cowered too if two hundred pounds of angry black teenager began coming at me" (116); and he captures his fear at being confronted by a gang of boys in the projects by describing one of them as "a very black, black boy, maybe eleven or twelve, but already bigger than I'll ever be" (133). Furthermore, Ian thinks Pro's black teacher Ms. Noble is "an enormous woman . . . blocking the brightness of the sun behind her like a human eclipse of the sun" (9). For Ian, and for the author who created him and gave him these characters to encounter, being black seems most often to equate with an intimidating and immense physicality — with something stereotypically tending to the less rational and more bodily and animal part of human nature.

Despite its own apparently unconscious indulgence in this sort of conventionally racist thinking, the novel does quite obviously try to critique racism. Like just about all the other double-focalized novels I've discussed, its main thrust is to reveal the similarity underlying the carefully outlined differences of its two main characters. But here, the by now very familiar trajectory by which two opposites come to share the same community in

the same space has clear racial implications and clearly tries to affirm that race is not a significant difference — that it doesn't and shouldn't matter.

Indeed, the novel tries very hard to affirm that what happens to Ian and Pro has nothing to do with race, or even, for that matter, with class — except for the huge significance of dismissing its significance. Despite its awareness and insistence on matters of race and class, this novel is yet one more example of what I earlier described as the effort to see all differences as manifestations of individual personalities rather than of culturally powerful categories such as race. As Ian arrives to see Pro waiting for him before they attend the planetarium show he's invited him to, he observes that "among the crowd of little white kids waiting for the show, yuppie shoppers on their way to Yorkville, and university students taking Saturday off, Prometheus looked as out of place as Ice-T at a symphony concert" (78). But Ian quickly negates the apparent race-consciousness of that comment by adding, "dressed in my grunge clothes . . . I didn't fit in all that well, either" (78). We are being invited to understand that the equality of their being outsiders is more significant and more meaningful than the difference between blackness and whiteness. Pro confirms the personal nature of their relationship — and therefore, an insistence that it transcends and has nothing to do with race — as he writes: "Ms. Noble is black like me so I thot I could trust her but I was wrong" (139). Whom he can trust, he and readers learn, is the boy of a different colour in a relationship that transcends race: "I guess Moonkid cares about me, but how come? There's no reason. He isn't family or a kid or even black. He's just this weird dude with a weird family who's some kind of spaz, but he's still my friend" (264). This relationship solves the problem of racial difference by erasing it — by allowing the two boys to ignore it. In doing so, it implies a solution to racism generally: ignore it and it will disappear. Skin colour becomes a false marker of difference, a difference that conceals sameness.

But as I've already suggested, the insistence on sameness does not entirely erase difference — or racial stereotypes. The central conceit of the novel is that Ian finds himself learning as much as he is able to teach; as one boy becomes more proficient in reading and writing, the other learns not only about basketball, but also, how to, as Pro says, "feel with your heart" (224). The invitation to interpret the white boy teaching the black boy how to read and to think and the black boy teaching the white boy how to do sports and to feel as just a matter of two individuals finding each other barely conceals some astonishingly conventional stereotypes about both whites and blacks. Nevertheless, the novel does seem intent on erasing differences, and not just racial ones. In it, Ian, the self-declared alien, learns to be human: "now Pro was my friend, or was willing to call himself that, and he was very definitely an earthling. So much for theories" (216). But Ian had already admitted his humanity at the end of the first novel; what Pro actually teaches him, surprisingly, is how to fit in —

how to be normal exactly according to the supposedly shallow ideas about normalcy Libby expressed in *Moonkid and Liberty*. After Ian uses his new basketball skills, one of the popular boys says, "nice to see that you're really one of us" (256), and Ian acknowledges that "I'm not as weird as I used to be" (260). This is, furthermore, presented as a happy ending.

Indeed, *Moonkid and Prometheus* continues the process begun in *Moonkid and Liberty* of making its characters more normal — that is, more attuned with what both books seem at first and most obviously to be critiquing. Ian's dismissive assertion that Liberty 's "politics have moved to the right" (23) actually describes all the central characters, including himself. Liberty moves even further right, actually going off to California to live with her mother, "the Queen of Conspicuous Consumption" (24), and her doing so is plainly a quest for a typical normalcy — she makes it clear she no longer wants to act as a substitute mother for Ian (195). Pro begins the book excluded from the middle-class norm by his class and even to some extent by his race (it's instructive that when he comes to Ian's father's store on Halloween, he disguises himself in whiteface as "a poor white kid from the slums" [185] — a disguise likely to make him more acceptable in a middle-class neighbourhood?). But inspired by the middle-class Ian, he develops middle-class tastes and interests, and aspires to join the middle class by becoming a teacher. Magically, also, he gets a more normally (or stereotypically) middle-class family, as his father re-enters his life and his sister frees herself from drugs. Like Sam in *Basket of Beethoven*, it seems, Pro already had the potential, was already incipiently normal, and was merely incorrectly classed.

As for Ian himself, his own move towards normalcy — that is, middle-class conformity — is paradoxically due to the lower-class Pro. There is, indeed, some ideological sleight of hand going on here. Pro, it seems, is emotionally normal — what Ian would call human as he sees himself learning to be human. It might even be his class and his blackness that make him so human, closer to his bodily, feeling animal self as members of the lower class and people of colour have often been stereotypically imagined to be. So both Ian and Pro become more "normal," and both do it by becoming more like each other — another way of erasing or more accurately ignoring the significant questions of racial and cultural difference still present in the novel and available to attentive readers.

But in becoming more normal, Ian also becomes more like Libby — and also, therefore, more like his mother. Meanwhile, Libby also becomes even more like her mother, and Pro becomes more like Ian was to begin with, the "alien" intruder (alien because of his race and class) now committed to acting like normal middle-class white folk. The novel's solution to both class and race problems is to move everyone at least one position further to the right, and thus to make everyone more normal, more mainstream, and perhaps above all, more middle-class. Those who can't or won't

— like Z-Boy, who acts like a more stereotypical boy from the projects — are condemned to exclusion from the happy community of "normal" people the novel eventually forms. Pro quite accurately calls Z-Boy a "reject" (282) — a comment interesting in terms of Ian's assertion earlier: "As far as I can figure out, rejection is natural among earthlings. Acceptance and community are the rare items" (103). The community Ian seeks and finds and that the novel aggressively affirms nevertheless still has rejects.

The depictions of race and class in the *Moonkid* novels clearly have implications in the context of Canadian discourse about multiculturalism. They carefully define what differences — as well as what ideas about difference — can co-exist harmoniously and which ones must be excluded and expelled. Other novels that deal specifically with characters of differing cultural backgrounds are even more explicitly relevant to questions of who belongs in Canada and on what terms — and that's particularly true of three double-focalized novels that tell their stories from the alternating viewpoints of one child born into a comfortable middle-class lifestyle, someone meant to be "typical" enough for readers to relate to, and another involved in violent events in the past and/or in another country: the Vietnam war in James Heneghan's *Promises to Come* (1988), the Armenian genocide in Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch's *The Hunger* (1999), the Ukraine during World War II in Skrypuch's *Hope's War* (2001). As these novels progress, the "typical" child becomes aware of the events experienced by the other child and develops attitudes toward those events that are clearly meant to be shared by young readers of these novels. Indeed, the novels' clearly apparent assumptions about just who readers are most likely to be familiar with and relate to tend to undermine the celebration of the acceptance of difference they inevitably espouse and celebrate. Young Canadian readers seem almost always to be encouraged to think of themselves as *less* different people opening up a space for *more* different ones. Of particular interest is how these novels shape and claim history, especially how they connect it to questions of multiculturalism — in particular, questions about whose home Canada is and what attitudes to a past outside it allow one to claim a right to share that home.

Heneghan's *Promises to Come* tells how Becky Westover's comfortably well-off middle-class Vancouver family adopts Nguyen Thi Kim, a Vietnamese boat person. The novel does all the things that I've now learned to expect of interlaced binary narratives. First, it insists on its characters' difference, even their oppositeness. Becky tends to be overweight and loud, while Kim is exceedingly thin and silent. Becky is surrounded by family and comfort, while Kim's sections tell only of the suffering and deprivation of her past. Becky whines about every little problem, while Kim "accepted what was, accepted the pain and the hopelessness in the knowledge that suffering was as inevitable as the leaves falling from the jaca-

randa tree in the cold winds of autumn" (23). The novel also typically focuses on its two main characters' isolation from each other: "What could she be thinking? What could she be feeling? Becky wondered. She tried to imagine how she would feel if it were her. . . . Looking into the Vietnamese girl's eyes was like looking down into a dark well where everything was silent and secret" (16-17). Meanwhile, Kim thinks, "Her new family scared her. They were so loud. And so big, grinning down at her with their white, perfect teeth, and waving their arms and hands like noisy pelicans out of control. . . . Canada was an alien place" (18).

This counterpointing of opposites seems at first to have the purpose of making Becky seem shallow and self-indulgent — to act as a sort of wake-up call, a reminder of how guilty we should feel about what we take for granted. While Becky worries about having to eat less ice cream in order to keep her weight down or whines about not getting a bike she wants, readers learn of Kim's astonishingly awful past amidst the horrors of war: watching people go up in flames, observing the violent murder of her parents and the painful deaths of other adults who later look after her, living alone amidst the chaos and poverty of a refugee camp, being buried in garbage, being lost at sea in a sinking boat with other fugitives, being captured by pirates and then raped by them again and again, bayoneting one of her pirate rapists to death. This catalogue of horrors makes Becky's focus on her own small traumas seem superficial and self-indulgent, with the comfortable Canadian middle-class lifestyle that engenders and allows those small traumas appearing dangerously shallow — something readers should feel guilty about. Unlike *Basket of Beethoven* or the *Moonkid* novels, *Promises to Come* seems to be critiquing mainstream middle-class values more than confirming them.

Or is it? As in so many other double-focalized novels, it's obvious from the start that these characters will connect, as Becky early on wished "they connected" (1). There are, also as usual, many counterpoints — similarities hidden in their sense of isolation and difference that point the way to their eventual connection. They similarly fear each other and find each other alien. Becky's focus on how Kim has invaded her territory weirdly echoes Kim's narrative of her country invaded. Becky has a brother who is absent for most of the novel, returning home only toward the end; Kim has a brother whom she refuses to remember, so that he too is absent and enters the narrative only toward the end. One brother dies, the other is threatened with death, and Kim feels responsible for both. In the light of these connections, it's not surprising that the novel ends with the two girls sitting together harmoniously on the shore as Kim says, "I like here. . . . Being safe on harbor wall when sea is angry make me feel quiet here [she points to her heart]" (189). Having absorbed Kim, home is once more the safe comfortable place it had been for Becky before Kim's arrival.

It's true that, in the process of achieving a connection and a happy end-

ing, Becky must learn about Kim's past, and thus be more aware of the smallness of her own problems. But Kim must change much more than that. She can only achieve a happy ending when she becomes more like Becky — less thin, less frightened, less passively accepting of her fate, and less caught up in the turmoil of her horrible memories — safer and more comfortable. In other words, she happily adopts the values and the lifestyle of her new family, so that the apparent critique of those values ends up being only apparent. Liker the other novels I discussed previously, this one also ends up confirming what it appears to critique. And in doing so, it repeats the pattern McCallum speaks of, the tendency to subsume dialogue in monologue.

Furthermore, the monologue tends to silence history. At the end of *Promises to Come*, the angry sea of Kim's past — and her memories of it — have been expelled, put safely beyond walls like the actual ocean Becky and Kim sit by, much as characters who represent values antithetical to a harmonious consensus are expelled or rejected or moved beyond in novels like *Moonkid*. In other words, the novel invites some very specific attitudes toward history, specifically the history new Canadians experienced in other places prior to coming to Canada.

First off, that history must be known. Throughout *Promises to Come*, characters suggest, clearly incorrectly since readers are in the process of learning it and so clearly must know it and not forget it, that the best thing Kim can do is forget her past. After Kim's first rape, an older woman "reached out two fingers to stroke the girl's face. 'You are young,' she said. 'You will forget'" (56). Becky's mother echoes these sentiments near the beginning of the novel, when her father says Kim had a lot to learn and she adds, "And a lot to forget" (36). But in fact, learning Kim's history just as readers learn it is what finally leads Becky to accept and embrace her. She can understand and sympathize with Kim only when she knows the truth about her. Furthermore, Kim herself must acknowledge her past. The novel makes it clear through many repetitions that her resistance to telling her doctor about her brother — attempting not to remember — represents a serious problem for her.

But as well as being acknowledged, the past must be got beyond, understood as something clearly different and separate from, even opposite to, Canada now. It must be got rid of for the reason Becky suggests at one point: "Now she realized that Kim had been through experiences she couldn't even imagine. It made her feel like an ignorant baby — uncomfortable, inadequate" (36). Arousing such feelings of inadequacy is disruptive of comfort — not desirable. Past events must be transcended just as they are in fact transcended by Becky's and Kim's shared cosy acceptance of each other in a safe place at the end — and indeed, just as the apparent critique of Becky's comfortable self-indulgence is transcended by the happiness of Kim's coming to share it. Past trauma must be moved beyond if

Canadians are to feel comfortable with each other and if Canada is to be the harmoniously integrated place implied in the musical metaphors of *Basket of Beethoven*.

Nevertheless, Kim must not forget or ignore — she must, instead, remember and move beyond. First, the past must be returned to and relived, as it is relived for her doctor and for us as we read the narratives of what she tells him, in order to be dealt with appropriately. It's interesting in this context that the novel traces Kim's past — what she had tried to forget or repress or remain impassive to — as it might in fact be revealed according to theories of psychoanalysis. We move backwards through Kim's story, unpeeling layers of horror until we arrive at the foundational moment of her trauma, the moment in which she believes herself, inaccurately, to have killed her brother. Then, having surfaced that horror, she must find a way of dealing with it and ridding herself of her imprisonment in it. She does so when she expands her sense of responsibility for the death of one brother by blaming herself for the accident to Becky's brother (she believes she is cursed). Hurtling backward into the past, she runs away from her new home after hearing and being comforted by the Vietnamese language of her old home spoken by sailors who take her on their boat and out to sea, and finally, jumps into the ocean and imagines herself saving her brother and holding him safely in her arms. The trauma is dived down into, at which point I'm reminded of earlier comments by Becky about Kim's "large liquid eyes" (15): "Looking into the Vietnamese girl's eyes was like trying to see down into a dark well where everything was silent and secret" (17). But now the silence is over, the secret remembered and revealed, relived and reinterpreted — made into a story that has a happy ending and is over.

But even having been moved beyond, the past must not be forgotten. Kim and we as readers must remain aware of the significance of moving beyond by not forgetting what has been moved beyond. The past must be remembered as a bad thing transcended — brought here to Canada as emblematic of what Canada is happily opposite to, but safely enclosed in its being over as a narrative with a happy ending in ways that will not allow it to pollute its new environment. Kim not only reinterprets the past as over and opposite to her new life, but she also gets beyond her own conception of herself as a corrupting influence that will bring disaster on her new family. She is healed and therefore acceptably Canadian — happily safe and comfortable herself and not a danger to the safety and comfort of others.

Skrypuch's *The Hunger* is constructed a little differently than the other novels I've been discussing here. Rather than alternating descriptions of events as seen by two different characters, it focuses on the experiences of just one, Paula, a contemporary Canadian girl who is suffering from bulimia. But at one point, she dreams of being an orphan marching in the desert (83). Then, almost a hundred pages into the novel, as Paula in the depths of

her illness loses consciousness, she finds herself moving through a tunnel as she is immersed in a rank greenish substance. She has in effect vomited herself out of herself, and she wakens in the consciousness of Marta, a fifteen-year-old living in the midst of the deprivation and starvation of the Armenian expulsion from Turkey in 1915: "'Paula' no longer existed. She had just stepped inside of Marta" (99). She becomes and remains Marta for the next 60 pages, observing cruel murders, undergoing a forced march and near starvation, becoming a member of a poor Turk's harem — and then, after an immersion in water reminiscent of Kim's near the end of *Promises to Come*, she returns to herself with a new attitude toward her illness.

As the parallel with Kim's rebirth suggests, *The Hunger* has many similarities with *Promises to Come*. Despite its different structure, it uses its curiously doubled focalization for much the same purpose: putting the self-involvement and self-indulgence that leads Paula to be obsessed with the control of her body into perspective in contrast to the horrific trauma of a time and place where the comforts and values of contemporary middle-class life cannot be taken for granted. The novel plays this game of comparison in a clumsily forthright way. At one point, Paula's brother tells her, "You look like that mother [a starving Armenian] we found on the internet last night" (65). And after her ordeal as Marta, Paula concludes the obvious: "when she had lived as Marta the absence of her family had left her shrouded in an indefinable sadness. For all their faults, and in spite of all the angry words that had passed between them, Paula knew how fortunate she was to be part of a family" (160). As with Becky in *Promises to Come*, Paula's knowledge of history has given her a new perspective on her comfortable Canadian life. In the process, furthermore, she has learned to move beyond the mainstream middle-class values that have led to her problem — parents desperately striving for success, a need to control and to be perfect, and a conviction that "Thinness was power" (51). As does *Promises to Come*, this novel at first seems most significantly to use the contrast of its two narratives as a way of critiquing the shallow values of contemporary middle-class life.

There is, however, some irony here — perhaps unintended. Paula's earlier narrative makes it clear that her bulimia emerges from a need for control, to make her body what she wants it to be. As Marta, however, she survives because of the same strength of will: "She watched with dismay as her once strong and healthy body withered and contracted. But she would not let the Turks win. She was determined to live" (122). The same characteristic that seems to be criticized in one context becomes admirable in another — and thus, its actual value is confirmed. Does *The Hunger*, like *Promises to Come* and the *Moonkid* novels, actually confirm what it appears to be critiquing?

I can find an answer to that question in the context in which the narra-

tive of the Armenian massacre emerges in *The Hunger*: Paula's research for her project in a course she is taking, Enriched Multicultural History 201, which entails her identifying someone in her family past who immigrated to Canada and then "detailing the historical events that led this ancestor to immigrate" (16). That clearly suggests the likelihood that the novel will resonate in terms of national discourse about multiculturalism. As Paula learns and even actually experiences the events that brought her grandmother to Canada, the attitudes she develops about the past and her own multicultural heritage represent attitudes the novel consciously or unconsciously invites readers to share. Once more, they are similar to the attitudes taken toward the events in Vietnam described in *Promises to Come* — thus suggesting the possibility that they represent acceptably mainstream Canadian attitudes.

There is, to begin with, an urge to repress and forget past horrors. Paula's father tells her that her grandfather, who immigrated from the Ukraine, "went through some nightmarish events. I don't think you'd be doing him any favours by making him relive them. Just leave it alone, okay?" (25). (It's intriguing that Skrypuch herself doesn't leave them alone, making the memories of just such a Ukrainian grandfather the subject of *Hope's War*.) But Paula's grandmother, survivor of the Armenian massacre, reveals the error in leaving the past unexplored: "For years I've tried to put the past behind me. But the more I try to forget the more I seem [to] remember" (29). As Paula begins her research, however, her first discovery is that much has been forgotten: "Who today remembers what happened to the Armenians? Not her history teacher, and not the school librarian either. Even Grandma Pauline, who had been through it, said she had only sketchy memories" (61). As the events of the novel make clear, this forgetting is wrong. Paula not only learns more but actually experiences the horrors others have tried to forget — and as a result of possessing this knowledge, she develops a saner attitude toward herself in the present. She learns, above all, to appreciate what she has here and now in terms of its difference from a different time and place. She learns what it really means to be hungry. As her brother Erik explicitly asserts, "Sure puts our problems into perspective" (61).

But as in *Promises to Come*, learning what has been forgotten about the past is just the first stage of dealing with it. The next, as Erik's comment about perspective suggests, is to understand that the past is most significantly separate from and opposite to the present — which in the long run it less notably critiques than validates. Paula's experience of the otherness of the past in Armenia convinces her to appreciate how life here and now is, in fact, different from it and better than it. Forced to starve, she learns to want to accept and enjoy the richness her culture offers her — to eat and live as normal Canadians now do. The past is then claimed and celebrated as what we have moved beyond and no longer need to experience — as

what Canada as it is now stands in opposition to. In order to be appropriately part of Canada's multicultural mosaic, similarly, one must agree to this principle — take pride in and celebrate what one knows about, and what one therefore is as a result of, one's history in another place, but with a clear understanding that it is a history one has moved beyond and a set of values one no longer cleaves to, except in these emblematic terms: what my ancestors once had to be and I no longer have to put up with because I am a Canadian.

That such a view of history tends to monologue and thus silences other views becomes clear in *Hope's War*, another novel by Skrypuch that features two focalized characters. This time they are Kat, a young girl of Ukrainian background from whose point of view the novel presents most events, and her grandfather Danylo, threatened with deportation because of his presumed involvement with Nazis in the war prior to his immigration to Canada. Skrypuch provides Danylo's point of view at a few key points early in the novel and then increasingly toward the end as he has a deportation hearing and his once hidden past becomes revealed. Like *Promises to Come* and *The Hunger*, this novel counterpoints the horrific history of one of its characters with a young person's life in the present. Kat faces intolerant enemies just as her grandfather did in the past and does in the present. More significantly, Kat's friend Ian, a pianist who dresses in exuberant Goth style, faces discrimination from repressive teens just as the Ukrainians in Danylo's village during the war faced discrimination from the Soviets and then the Nazis, and also, just as Danylo now faces discrimination from the Canadian government in the present.

The connections between Danylo and Ian are made particularly obvious. At one point, Kat thinks, "there was so much that Kat didn't know about Ian" (64) — just as there are unknown mysteries in her grandfather's past. Furthermore, the intolerant person who draws swastikas on Kat's house turns out to be same boy who attacks Ian for being different. But above all, the novel confirms the significance of the connections between Ian and Danylo and between events in the past and the present in terms of a musical metaphor intriguingly similar to the one in *Basket of Beethoven*. When Kat first hears Ian playing Chopin's *Ballade*, she thinks, "she didn't know why, but it reminded her of her grandfather" (42). Later, as Ian plays, the novel follows Danylo's thoughts: "The ballade began with a pounding intensity that brought to Danylo's mind a vision of violence. He wondered if it had the same effect on Ian? Was he beating the piano just as he had been beaten by those boys?" (214). As the performance continues, we share Danylo's memories of saving prisoners of war: "unexpectedly, the momentum changed. Instead of winding down, it began to build back up with a slow but increasing fierceness. Tears sprung to Danylo's eyes as he remembered what happened. . . . Danylo got angrier and angrier as his memories flooded in. The music fit his mood perfectly" (216-17) — just as, clearly, it

fits with Ian's experiences.

In counterpointing two different sorts of experience in this way, the novel accomplishes a number of things. Unlike the other novels I've discussed, its descriptions of the horrors of the past don't undermine or imply a critique of life in the present — simply because for many of the characters life in the present is so genuinely traumatic, involving fewer but equally unsettling acts of violence and intolerance. Indeed, the counterpointing seems to have the main purpose of highlighting that similarity in order to emphasize the seriousness of intolerant attacks like the ones on Ian and on Danylo in the present: they are more like the events of the war than not. Above all, however, the parallel drawn between past and present events functions to draw sympathy for Danylo, in both past and present. Readers are invited to view his treatment in the present by the Canadian government as equivalent to his treatment in the past by the Nazis, and both as equivalent to the kind of vicious and unwarranted acts of bullying that readers are bound to abhor.

The presence of passages focalized through Danylo also seem to have the main purpose of creating sympathy for him — most significantly by presenting and continually affirming one, and only one, way of understanding the events of the past. The relatively few occasions on which we learn his thoughts are all ones bound to create sympathy for him, first as he mourns the recent death of his wife and then in a series of passages in which he remembers episodes of his life during the war. He discovers his father murdered in the woods, suffers a beating for refusing to vote as commanded, has his sister threaten to shoot him if he doesn't join the resistance and work as a Nazi police officer, is ordered to kill people lying in the street and instead saves their lives by making them do pushups. Readers learn only of moments in which horrific things happen to him or in which he acts heroically; there are no descriptions of the many times in which he must have had to act cruelly in order to keep his cover with the Nazis. As a result, readers have no evidence that might lead them to question his own self-justification:

> What person nowadays could understand the kind of choices he had to make in his youth? Movies and television liked to make war seem like a battle between right and wrong, good and bad. But what if both sides were bad? Stalin on one side, and Hitler on the other? What choices did you have then? If he could live that time all over, his choices would still be the same. The pity was that people nowadays couldn't understand that his was the only noble choice. (57)

As far as the events the novel records reveal, furthermore, it *was* a noble choice — and Danylo did only noble things.

Later, readers come to the testimony at Danylo's hearing in the context of a previous knowledge of Danylo's memories. We know, long before Kat

does, that her grandfather is innocent of what the prosecution's witnesses accuse him of doing. We can only share his dismay as he asks Kat, "Through what eyes are these people viewing me? They must think I am a monster" (154). The case is pre-decided for readers in terms of the one way Skrypuch wants us to understand it — a clever use of the opportunities for one focalized narrative to shape our response to another. As Adrienne Kertzer suggests,

> Soon readers know far more than Kat does, since they have access to the traumatic war memories that the grandfather is unwilling to share with his family. In a Catch-22 situation, the grandfather regards Canadians as too young and naive to know what the war was like, an opinion that has a certain truth to it. Skrypuch takes advantage of this presumed ignorance by encouraging her Canadian readers to sympathize with a man who does not want or is unable to tell his granddaughter exactly what he did during that war. Readers have no alternative but to see the grandfather as someone to love and pity, particularly since Skrypuch nearly always calls him by his first name. (47)

Furthermore, Danylo is the only supposed Nazi sympathizer the novel contains. It's not hard for readers to assume that his innocence stands for the nobility and innocence of anyone so accused. Indeed, the novel encourages just that conclusion. Asked about the possibility that ethnic communities in Canada concealed war criminals after the war, Kat's father says, "it's not likely. . . . In the case of the Ukrainian community, I just can't see it." Her mother agrees: "If there was a Nazi in our community he would be drummed out" (80). Nothing challenges these self-regarding opinions. Indeed, the novel offers many details to erode the possibility of there being *any* former Nazis in Canada and offers none of the information that supports that possibility. A proponent of the latter view is dismissed as a "self-styled Nazi hunter" (82), and the lawyers making the case against Danylo are cold and superior, while those on his side are caring and reasonable. In the court case, the witnesses against Danylo know nothing specific about him, while those on his side are able to confirm his own memories. As for the surely undoubted fact that there was anti-Semitism in the Ukraine before and during the war, Danylo himself admits only this: "There was much distrust. . . . Ukrainians associated Jews with the Communists, and Jews associated Ukrainians with the Nazis. We were wrong" (227). As Kertzer says, "In presenting her case, [Skrypuch] is highly selective in the information that she gives her readers, an ethical issue since Skrypuch obviously wants them to believe [in the novel and through accompanying information about relevant websites] that she gives them access to historical information that they do not have" (49).

That access is a significant issue. *Hope's War* emphasizes the need to know about past horrors as much as do *Promises to Come* and *The Hunger.*

At first, the war is "a time in his life that Danylo had consciously stopped thinking about" (35). "I can't talk about it," he tells his family (75). But as in the other novels, history must be remembered. Kat "wished her grandfather would actually talk to her about the things he'd had to live through. Maybe then she would be able to understand it. It was a time in his life that he shut the door on. Had it not been for this hearing, Kat wouldn't even know this much about it" (156).

But why does she need to know? *Hope's War* offers an answer to that question similar to but slightly different from the other two novels. There, the past must be known in order to be seen as over and understood as other and opposite to life in Canada now. Here, as the parallel between Danylo and Ian makes clear, life in Canada now has more in common with Ukraine in the war than it ought to. Despite its values of tolerance and diversity, Canada is not as opposite to the past as it should be. Canadians need to know the past, it seems, in order to recognize the present in it, be horrified by what they recognize, and work to make their country more like the ideal place it proclaims itself to be.

As in the other novels, then, *Hope's War* requires that the past be seen as what we in the present must separate ourselves from. Danylo thinks, "Canadians lived such a simple existence. Was there any chance that someone in this world could understand all the things he'd had to deal with in his life?" (37). At first, this sounds like a critique of current shallowness. But we soon learn that someone — Ian — can understand all too well. And in the long run, of course, the simplicity of the lifestyle allowed by the values Canadians claim to espouse is a good thing, a kind of safety whose benefits are foregrounded by the horrific complexities of Danylo's past and Danylo and Ian's present. History comes to stand for the opposite of what Canada declares itself to be and should be. Danylo himself makes that function of the past clear as he thinks about how many people had not prejudged him: "It gave him a sense of relief to know that Canada worked differently from the regimes he had fled" (231). And Kat confirms the relevance of that contrast between past and present as she is appalled that the opposing sides in the courtroom react oppositely to all the evidence:

> Why were both sides not equally concerned with all the deaths? Was one human not equal to another? Kat's heart ached for all of the people who had been destroyed so long ago by two madmen. Whether Jews or Gypsies, Ukrainians or Poles, Russians or Germans, each of these people had been killed because of their race. Kat had assumed that the world had matured since then. . . . (182-83)

In her wish for a contrast, Kat expresses the one correct view of the meaning of the past. The process of contrast transforms the meanings of past events just as Kat transforms the military parachute she uses as a backdrop for Ian's piano performance, putting it to a peaceful purpose contrary to its

original one. Shredded in a war-like act of violence by Ian's attackers, the parachute nevertheless hangs behind him as he plays, a visual equivalent of the way he transforms the violence he experienced into beautiful harmonious music that both expresses and denies the triumph of violence.

As a plea for tolerance, however, the novel describes a surprising number of exclusions from the community, clearly representative of what Canada should be, that form around Kat and her family. That community replicates the novel's representation of the past — it has but one view of the past and of Danylo's part in it. Callie and Beth, at first Kat's friends at her new school, are unable to accept Ian and "see beyond his makeup and outrageous clothing" (38), remain blithely ignorant of what is happening to Danylo, and end up excluded from Kat's circle and flirting with Ian's attackers — also, obviously, excluded. Kat's sister, Genya, is clearly meant to lose reader sympathy when she says, "If Dido [Danylo] truly cared about us, he would pack his bags and move back to the Ukraine. . . . He's obviously done something, and now we're all paying for his past" (69). Like Liberty in *Moonkid*, Genya is the sister who almost chooses "normal" conformity over acceptance of difference, and whose change of mind represents a triumph for the Canadian way that allows her status in the community of the right-minded. Similarly, when Danylo invites the old woman (not yet identified as Jewish), who is holding a placard saying "Nazi lives here" in front of the house (103), inside to their Christmas dinner (to which the Goth Ian and the Vietnamese Goth Lisa have already been invited), he represents an admirable tolerance, a proper way of forgetting the past in the Canadian present; and the woman clearly represents what is presented as a dangerously counterproductive hold on past concerns when she responds, "You expect me to accept your offer? You, a war criminal? And you, who just let two punk neo-Nazis into your house?" (105). Later, triumphantly, she comes to share the required view of the past and to even almost become a member of the community as she offers Danylo her hand after the trial and says, "what I realize now is that the Ukrainians were as helpless as the Jews" (229).

As in *The Hunger*, Skrypuch insists in *Hope's War* on the relevance of the events she describes to Canadian ideas about multiculturalism, here by making those people who become Kat's friends and end up believing and supporting Danylo a multicultural group. Kat has in common with her Vietnamese Goth friend Lisa grandparents who pick mushrooms, and we learn that the street where Kat's grandparents lived when they came to Canada is now occupied by Vietnamese immigrants (but not, as Kertzer points out, that the same neighbourhood was once home to Jewish immigrants). Lisa's parents, who "came over as Vietnamese boat kids" (119), support Danylo — because, they say, his case represents a threat to all immigrants, a betrayal of the multicultural ideal of Canada that allows the past to remain alive in the Canadian present where it ought not to be. Mean-

while, it seems, those on the other side in Danylo's case are all old Jews (although rarely if ever named as such), depicted as unable to learn the supposedly one clear lesson of history — that holding grudges is bad — and move beyond it. One can be part of the multicultural ideal only by giving up one's investment in the past and reinventing it as what is over and done with.

Toward the end of the novel, Kat shares her cultural heritage by showing her non-Ukrainian artist friend Michael how to make pysanky — Ukrainian decorated eggs. Meanwhile, she herself makes pysanky according to her own new designs, albeit ones based on traditional patterns. These two acts are clearly meant to represent an appropriate transformative use of the past. Later, in despair when her grandfather loses his case, Kat breaks the egg she has decorated with a symbol of hope. But in the end, she takes heart and tries to glue the egg back together, in language that resonates intriguingly in a context of Canadian discourse about multiculturalism: "slowly and painstakingly, she began to take the broken shards, and one by one and glue them onto a canvas in an intricate mosaic" (241). It's no accident, surely, that mosaic, a central trope for Canadian multiculturalism, is the last word in the novel. And it's revealing of the monochromatic monologue that all these books, which theoretically and dialogically celebrate diversity, tend to insist that all the shards of this particular mosaic should belong to one assertively mono-cultural Ukrainian egg.

One final novel in this group (in which one character's memories of horrific events in another place counterpoint the thoughts of a more typical Canadian teenager) varies substantially from the pattern I've been describing: Michèle Marineau's *The Road to Chlifa*, published originally in Quebec in French in 1992 and appearing in an English translation by Susan Ouriou in 1995. The novel describes the arrival of Karim, a Muslim from war-torn Lebanon, at a high school in Montreal, as viewed both by himself and by a fellow student, an unnamed girl whom Karim thinks of as "the one who is always watching me but who never says a word" (21). After a few sections counterpointing Karim's and the unnamed girl's views of events at school, Karim is seriously wounded by a classmate in a fight that erupts on a class ski trip as he tries to save My-Lan, a Vietnamese refugee, from an attack by a group of her male classmates. The pages that follow — the bulk of the novel — describe Karim's memories of the horrific events in Lebanon that led to his arrival in Canada: the death of his girlfriend, a long and dangerous trek to a village in the mountains with his girlfriend's infant brother and her sister Maha, and the rape and murder of Maha, the memory of which has triggered his response to the brutalization of My-Lan. After a brief description of Karim's recovery and a few final comments from the unnamed girl, the novel quickly ends.

The Road to Chlifa does in many ways follow the pattern established by the other novels: the contrast between life in Canada now and life in a

violent other place in the past, the counterpointing of the differing responses to the same events of an immigrant to Canada and a mainstream Canadian, a concern with behaviours appropriate in a multicultural society and a specific focus on how events elsewhere in the past do or should influence our life in Canada now. But *The Road to Chlifa* differs from the other books in some telling ways.

As do the focalized characters in the other novels, Karim feels himself and wants himself to be isolated: "That's all I wanted — isolation, indifference, and invisibility — on my first day in this hellhole called a high school" (14). But according to the unnamed girl, his arrival has a profound effect on the others. Before he came,

> a certain balance had been struck in the class. I wouldn't go so far as to call it a love-in or perfect harmony. Let's just say it was livable. In other words, in spite of different tastes, attitudes, personalities and cultures, we managed to live side by side without killing each other. . . . And then, overnight, everything was thrown out of whack because a guy who wanted nothing to do with anyone had a knack for stirring up passions. As though his just being there had stripped away all the politeness, the compromises, all the habits we used as buffers to let us be in the same place without bumping into each other. (15)

But despite all that, Karim remains relatively isolated even at the end of the novel. While he becomes friendly with a boy in the class and learns to accommodate himself to a city he first hated, there is no sharing of the story of his past; while readers learn it, none of his classmates do. The unnamed girl calls Karim a catalyst (15), and the novelist confirms the significance of that in her epigraph for the first section of the novel, called "Catalysis": "CATALYSIS: the change in a chemical reaction brought about by a substance (catalyst) that is unchanged chemically at the end of the reaction. — *Webster's*." Karim remains unchanged by the end of the book, and so do each of his classmates. Karim and his attacker are civil to each other, but no more than that, and the unnamed girl concludes, "If I had to sum up the atmosphere in the class or the changes over the year, I'd say we seem to breathe a bit easier. It's definitely not heaven on earth, but it isn't the cold, artificial place we all lived in without ever touching or knowing anything about each other. We talk more. We get involved" (140). But clearly, not very involved — just enough to get along. Compared to the communities formed in the other novels, this is a space shared by people perceived as inherently different and separate, and entitled to remain so despite the space they share. They don't end up sharing just one right way of looking at things, and the unnamed girl, who hardly entered Karim's consciousness and by the end of the novel seems to have completely left it, sums up what she understands this way: "I'm better off keeping my opinions to myself" (140).

A second significant difference has to do with the comparison the novel makes between life in Beirut in Karim's past and life in Montreal in his present. Karim begins with an ironic attitude that reiterates the critique of Canadian complacency in the other novels: "After all, what are wars, death, bombs, orphans, fears, remorse and tears? Real tragedy is not having enough styling gel or lipstick, or forgetting to turn on the VCR to tape the hockey game or the Thursday night soap" (22). But he is wrong. Like the Canada of *Hope's War*, his high school turns out to be a brutal and potentially violent place — and it represents a diverse culture that has the same potential for violence as did the formerly peaceful multicultural society of Lebanon. Indeed, what happens on the ski trip mirrors what happened in Lebanon. Karim complains that people nostalgically imagine life before the war as "heaven on earth. Lebanon was the 'Switzerland of the Middle East.' Beirut was an oasis of peace, a meeting place, a haven for tolerance. . . . Everyone loved his neighbour. Races and religions lived side by side in an atmosphere of harmony and respect" (74). But Karim knows the utopia never existed:

> Under the surface of their illusion, problems abounded that eventually had to erupt. There wasn't just tension between Christians and Muslims. There was tension between rich and poor, the right and the left, people from the cities and people from the country . . . there was friction pretty well everywhere on all sides. And with the eruption of the first events, everything fell apart. (75-76)

As described here, the history of Lebanon parallels the situation in the high school and Karim's catalytic effect on it.

Unlike the other novels, then, *The Road to Chlifa* does not view the past and its effects on those who lived it as something to be known in order to be purged and moved beyond. The effects inevitably survive into the present. The important thing is to realize that they do, in order to understand the consequences for the people thus affected living together in the same space. Early in the novel, we hear how My-Lan suffered horrors equivalent to Karim's in Vietnam, and the unnamed girl suggests the same is true even of the Canadian boys who attack My-Lan: "if someone had based a TV miniseries on them, everyone would have cried buckets over their past, present and future misfortunes. But having to put up with them every day in class didn't make us want to bawl in compassion, only scream in rage" (25). Karim similarly concludes: "What do I know of the unhappiness of others? By what right did I decide that only my own suffering was worthy of interest?" (136). If everyone is conscious of the possibility that everyone's history is equally unsettling, then everyone must share the burden of preserving the communal calm.

Indeed, the novel seems to include its second focalization, the unnamed observer, to make exactly this point. She never learns and presumably never

will learn what readers come to know — Karim's memories of his friend Maha's rape and death that led him to explode at My Lan's attackers. It's what she does not know — the ways in which Karim's past makes him individual and different — that requires the safety of a space which allows him to keep his memories and himself intact without exploding.

The novel makes its vision of an ideal multicultural society as one in which people are allowed the space to remain separate and different in an impassioned speech by Pascale, a member of the class who is an immigrant from Haiti, as she responds to a comment by one of the native-born Quebecers that weirdly replicates the conscious or unconscious celebration of a tolerance that erases difference, which is the apparent message of the other novels. When Sandrine asserts that "ideally . . . one day we'll all look alike, pale brown, and we'll all speak the same language, Esperanto" (28), Pascale responds in this way:

> No way! Your ideal's for robots. . . . Everyone alike! What happens when someone's born with green spots or just one arm or two heads? What happens if someone's ideas are kind of different or they have weird tastes?
>
> Me for instance, I love my black skin, my laugh that some people find too loud. . . . Believe it or not, not everyone dreams of being white. . . . We aren't all alike. And when anyone bothers to try to see the differences, they lump us together by country of birth or skin color or religion. The big blocks don't exist. What does exist are unique individuals who shouldn't be judged before you get to now them. In my case, I demand the right to be me and not some curiosity or ethnic specimen. . . . I demand the right to have many characteristics, sometimes even contradictory ones, but that are mine. (29-30)

Pascale's vision of what she should be allowed to be — different and separate but equal and equally admitted to the same shared space — is quite different from the one affirmed by the English Canadian novels I've considered here. It is much less monologic and monochromatic. It seems, furthermore, to echo Quebec's idea of itself as a sovereign community separate from but allied with the larger community of Canada. It also echoes the vision of Canada enunciated by Stephane Dion, Canada's Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and himself a Quebecer:

> 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 these echoes, the differences between *The Road to Chlifa* and the other novels seem to confirm my original assumption that the pat-

terns of these books do, in fact, resonate in terms of Canadian — and especially, I now see, English Canadian — discourse about Canada. It is however, a challenge to that assumption — and a heartening one — that *The Road to Chlifa* is one of the few Canadian novels for young people written in French to be translated into English.

Nevertheless, the most significant thing I've learned from my investigation of these novels has to do with their similarities rather than their differences. Why might so many Canadian writers and publishers be drawn, over a number of decades and in different parts of the country, to produce books that replicate the same patterns and ideas? It's tempting to suggest that their doing so reveals a consistency of thinking about history and its connections to multiculturalism that might be identified as distinctly Canadian. Before leaping to that grandiose conclusion, however, I have to acknowledge the more likely possibility that the similarities in these books emerge from values operating in the field of children's publishing. As members of a creative community, the authors, editors, and others involved in this enterprise tend to share a humane, liberal-minded and, at least theoretically, progressive mindset that privileges the tolerance and celebration of individual difference. Furthermore, Canadian educators and the curricula they produce and transmit share that mindset, and encouraging such attitudes is a major concern in the education of young Canadians. As a result, books like the ones I've been investigating seem to be the ones most likely to find success in the Canadian children's literature marketplace — the ones that are therefore most likely to be written, published and purchased. But saying there are values that Canadians with power in the fields of publishing and education want young Canadians to learn and share is really just another way of saying that the values are markedly, if not distinctly, Canadian. The repeating elements in the novels I've investigated might offer, then, nothing so grandiose as insight into a distinctly Canadian identity, as knowledge of a vision widely shared by those in English Canada charged with the care of children, of what Canadians ought to think about each other, and about what Canada ought to be. As expressed in the novels I've been investigating, that vision turns out to have a rather unsettlingly intolerant underside. Further investigation to determine if versions of the repeating features I've found also exist in a wider range of English Canadian texts for children — texts about history, for instance, or about people of differing backgrounds that don't feature alternating narrations — seems to be called for.

Notes

1 The article appeared in a special issue of *CCL* devoted to considerations of the "Shared Characteristics of 'Mainstream' Canadian Children's Fiction" (2003) as identified by stu-

dents in classes taught by Mavis Reimer and me and described in an earlier *CCL* article, "Teaching Children's Literature: Learning to Know More."

2 The villainous Montana of Julie Lawson's *Destination Gold!* — a young adult novel I discussed in "Of Solitudes and Borders" — is one such character. The narrator of Margaret Atwood's adult novel *Surfacing* asserts of such people, "It doesn't matter what country they're from . . . , they're still Americans, they're what's in store for us. What we are turning into" (129).

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