

**COMING AND GOING:
THE EFFECTS OF DISPLACEMENT IN
NOVELS BY ATWOOD, POULIN, ROBIN, URQUHART**

by

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Abstract

In the post-modern world, all nations, including Canada and Québec, are cultural hybrids. Identities are also hybrid, as many different components contribute to their composition, including gender, class, race and nationality. Formed and transformed in a post-modern society, cultural and personal identities are as complex and fragmented as their social landscape. Geographical, cultural and social displacement offers a rich terrain for exploring the complexity of national and self definition. Displacement often results in a broadening of one's perspective, providing insight into the "Other's" point of view. Subsequently, crossing borders can lead to a recognition of the fluidity and multiplicity of both personal and collective identities. Jacques Poulin's Volkswagen Blues, Margaret Atwood's Bodily Harm, Jane Urquhart's The Underpainter, and Régine Robin's La Québécoite are four contemporary Canadian or Québécois novels which explore personal displacement, each one illustrating how it affects both the process of identity formation and the individual's perception of Canada or Québec.

Key Words: Atwood, Poulin, Robin, Urquhart, Canada, Québec, novel, displacement, identity, myths, gender, postmodern, globalization

Dedication

To my loved ones: my family, my friends.

Displaced or at home, we are never alone.

Psalm 139.

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Introduction

In the post-modern world, all nations are cultural hybrids (Hall, "Question" 617). Canada and Québec, whose populations consist of people with origins all over the world, might be seen as cultural collages which exemplify the diversity located within territorial boundaries. Identities are also hybrid, as many different components contribute to their composition, including gender, class, race and nationality. Individuals must embrace, consciously or unconsciously, many different and often conflicting subject positions, which also results in identities with many facets. Formed and transformed in a post-modern society, cultural and personal identities are as complex and fragmented as their social landscape. Geographical, cultural and social displacement offers a rich terrain for exploring the complexity of national and self definition. Displacement often results in a broadening of one's perspective, providing insight into the "Other's" point of view. The subsequent changes that occur in one's worldview can lead to a recognition of the fluidity and multiplicity of both personal and collective identities. Volkswagen Blues, Bodily Harm, The Underpainter, and La Québécoise are four contemporary Canadian or Québécois novels which explore personal displacement, each one illustrating in a distinct manner how it affects both the process of identity formation and the individual's perception of Canada or Québec.

The novel, as a vehicle of cultural production and expression, examines the values associated with "social representations, institutional traditions, and historical memory" (Cote 470). It can therefore serve as an excellent tool for the exploration of complex constructions of personal and national identity. The identities of post-modern subjects are open, unfinished, and involve multiple fragments. As Stuart Hall argues, "the national

cultures into which we are born are one of the principal sources of cultural identity” (Hall, “Question” 611). However, not literally imprinted in our genes, the make-up of cultural identities is subject to change. In “traditional” or pre-modern societies recurrent social practices dominate: “the past is honoured and symbols are valued because they contain and perpetuate the experience of generations” (Anthony Giddens qtd. in Hall, “Question” 599). “Modern” societies, by contrast, involve constant, rapid and permanent change, where “social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character” (Giddens qtd. in Hall, “Question” 599). Globalization plays an important role in the questioning of social practices and therefore in the evolving definition of cultural identities. Anthony McGrew argues that globalization refers to “those processes, operating on a global scale, which cut across national boundaries, integrating and connecting communities and organizations in new space-time combinations, making the world in reality more interconnected” (qtd. in Hall, “Question” 619). With the movement of people in and out of various places and cultures, societies are no longer “well-bounded systems,” nor is the definition of a cultural identity strictly confined. Rather, the phenomenon of migration, one particularly influential since World War II, “has led to a ‘pluralization’ of national cultures and national identities” (Hall, “Question” 627). Within these national cultures individuals and their social practices are exposed to difference, whether through their own comings and goings or those of others. Displacement results in exposure to “otherness” and it complicates or sets in motion traditionally fixed social and cultural boundaries. Novels which recount or represent such an experience of movement

are almost always “oriented towards various changes, or various levels of change, [even] hopes of change” (Cote 471), particularly those involving identity.

Volkswagen Blues, Bodily Harm, The Underpainter, and La Québécoite are all novels which deal with the crossing of borders, borders which are geographical, but also “social, cultural, institutional, national and historical” (Cote 471). In the first chapter of this thesis, an examination of Jacques Poulin’s Volkswagen Blues and Margaret Atwood’s Bodily Harm reveals some of the effects of leaving one’s homeland. As characters leave and look back to their country, they are forced to re-examine their collective and personal histories, their culture, their beliefs and therefore their identities. Both novels participate in the phase of post-modern literature which works to define and then deconstruct national myths and identity (Hutcheon, Introduction 6). The novels differ in that Poulin’s text offers allegorical characters, whereas Atwood’s focuses its more traditional fictional realism through its main character. Although the discussion of Volkswagen Blues deals with the cultural issues the novel allegorizes, while that of Bodily Harm is directed more towards an exploration of character, both readings address the personal and collective evolutions that can result from travel away from a homeland’s physical and social boundaries. In the second chapter we will again consider one novel from English Canada and one from Québec. The protagonists of The Underpainter by Jane Urquhart and La Québécoite by Régine Robin are both outsiders who are displaced into English Canada or Québec. Once again, the Québécois novel deals more explicitly with cultural issues, whereas the English Canadian novel focuses on its main character’s personal experience of crossing borders. However, they each describe how the movement of outsiders into Canada or Québec has an impact on both the displaced individual and the country they

have entered. Although these four novels come from two different cultural communities and describe opposite directions of movement in relation to them, they all function as illustrations of how displacement influences the process of identification, rendering it “more open-ended, variable, and problematic” (Hall, “Question” 598).

Chapter One

Leaving Home: Revising Myths of Self and Other

One of the more striking features of post-modern globalization has been the movement of large numbers of people within and between cultures, exposing societies to difference and cultural diversity. Sociologist K. Robins argues that the crossing of borders fundamentally challenges the “comforts of Tradition... by the imperative to forge a new self-representation based upon the responsibilities of cultural translation” (qtd. in Hall, “Question” 627). Jacques Poulin’s Volkswagen Blues and Margaret Atwood’s Bodily Harm both illustrate the effects of travel, of cultural and social displacement, on one’s view of oneself and others. The movement beyond the borders of one’s own country encourages a “dialectic of identities” (Hall, “Question” 627), not only between Self and Other, but also between the Self one was and newer, evolving or emerging aspects of one’s cultural identity. In this respect, both novels can be seen as representative of certain trends in the 1980s, each one underlining the fluid and plural qualities of post-modern identities, which tend to be less fixed and confined than traditional ones. The displacement of their protagonists leads to a revision of the myths that articulate personal and cultural identities. As each novel unfolds, the protagonists gain a new awareness of the political, historical and social situations that surround them, both at home and abroad. At the same time, some of the founding myths of Canada and Québec begin to crumble, and identities change.

VOLKSWAGEN BLUES

In Québec, after the failed referendum of 1980, there is a new tendency to explore the hybrid and heterogeneous aspects of the nation's¹ cultural identity. Using displacement as a key device for self-examination, this decade's exploration of Québécois identities often takes the shape of geographical and spiritual quests across North America. In a similar manner, the literature of Québec takes on a new shape: "l'espace du roman québécois éclate, se répand en tous sens (en toutes Amériques), en une configuration de déplacements, trajets, allers-retours, pour revenir sur lui-même et en sortir, renouveler sa forme, préciser ses mythes" (Mailhot 19). According to critic Anne Marie Miraglia, several contemporary Québécois novels, like Volkswagen Blues, suggest that "la question identitaire au Québec ne saurait se résoudre que par la récupération de l'aventurier et par la réappropriation de l'Amérique" ("Récit" 30). Through his novel, Poulin reconciles "l'homme québécois avec sa destinée continentale" (Morency, "Permanance" 213) and examines the American part of the Québécois identity with its co-ordinating myths.

In "Le récit de voyage en quête de l'Amérique," Miraglia describes how "la québécoité" appears to be based on the coexistence of "la francité" and "l'américanité" of Québec. For Miraglia, "la francité" implies the linguistic and cultural heritage imported from the old world, where "l'américanité" refers to the geographical, historical and spiritual belonging of Québec to North America. In Volkswagen Blues, Québec's duality of "francité" and "américanité" coincides with the dichotomy of the sedentary and the nomad, the two types of colonizers who populated Québec (Miraglia, "Récit" 31). In the past, Québec valorised the sedentary and agricultural French Canadian over the adventurous *coureur de bois*, but the "récits de voyage" of the eighties mark a positive

¹ I will refer to Québec as a "nation" throughout my thesis, since Québec is lived as a nation (rather than

turn toward the nomadic lifestyle. The protagonists of these novels, older and more intellectual Québécois, break the conforming mould of a stationary life and follow the adventurers of their collective past. Jack Waterman and *La Grande Sauterelle*, the protagonists of *Volkswagen Blues*, traverse North America from the Gaspé to California, making Poulin's novel not only "un récit de voyage" but, more specifically, "une histoire américaine":

un roman dans lequel l'auteur met en scène un ou plusieurs personnages québécois qui, ayant franchi la frontière qui sépare, divise et unit le Québec et les États-Unis, partent à la découverte non seulement de la culture américaine mais aussi de leur propre identité culturelle. (Hodgson & Sarkonak 27)

Poulin's work functions as an "histoire américaine," as he explores and reveals Québec's cultural identities by presenting the North American setting, and its associated geographical, historical and mythological themes, from a Québécois perspective.

"The Great American Dream" is one of the best known and influential myths of America. In the past, people left Europe and various parts of the New World, including Québec, to go west to a land that seemed filled with hope. This land represented the possibility of happiness and material success, as well as a chance for a new beginning. Open to all dreams, America became the Promised Land. Although Jack and *La Grande Sauterelle* are travelling across North America more than a century after the first pioneers, the American Dream still greatly influences Jack:

L'Amérique! Chaque fois qu'il entendait prononcer ce mot, Jack sentait bouger quelque chose au milieu des brumes qui obscurcissaient son cerveau. (Un bateau

as a province or a 'distinct society') by a clear majority of its intellectuals and writers.

languait ses amarres et quittait lentement la terre ferme.) C'était une idée enveloppée de souvenirs très anciens - une idée qu'il appelait le "Grand Rêve de l'Amérique." (Poulin 100)

He describes how the myth has crumbled over time, but can re-ignite like a fire from smouldering ashes (Poulin 101). The rediscovery of a mysterious postcard initiates Jack's journey and quest to find his missing older brother, Théo. Poulin's careful and appropriate placement of the postcard in Walter Chapman's The Golden Dream suggests that the myths surrounding America may be both personalized and internalized by his protagonist and, therefore, by Québécois in general. The "Great American Dream" symbolizes the physical and spiritual needs that motivated the voyage of the pioneers. Although not the explicit reason for their quest, Jack and *La Grande Sauterelle* also have spiritual needs that motivate them, as they desire self-confidence, liberty, happiness and adventure. Jack is reminded of the "Great American Dream" by the sights he sees, including Toronto's Royal Bank Plaza. The building's golden windows rekindle the myth within him, and he exclaims that, "C'était comme si tous les rêves étaient encore possibles" (Poulin 79). Like the pioneers and adventurers of the past, Jack invests hope in the vast land stretched before him.

As Jack Waterman and *La Grande Sauterelle* voyage, they follow the footsteps of the pioneers and re-create the discovery of the American West. They provide a modern version of the opening of the West, reinvesting in the "Great American Dream" by keeping it in their horizon. The protagonists travel diagonally across the continent, but their journey in America is not limited to traversing physical frontiers. They also voyage in time through memory and intertextuality, as their routes and their choice of readings re-trace

the paths of past adventurers, pioneers, emigrants and Théo. Through its explicit intertextuality, Volkswagen Blues absorbs and transforms several books, rendering the protagonists' journey not only a modern exploration of America, but an investigation of its French past, its myths, and its literature (Miraglia, "Lecture" 57). Many of the books they read and discuss are linked to the exploration of America, with their themes of travel to the unknown, and the quest for happiness. These books influence Jack's reconnection to North America, both spiritually and physically. He holds a deep admiration for the spirit and actions of past travellers. He quotes from Benoît Brouillette's La Pénétration du continent américain par les Canadiens français, expressing his admiration for the Canadian *voyageurs*, "qui sont les mieux faits pour supporter, en leur qualité de pagayeurs, les rigueurs d'une expédition en canot... En tant que *voyageurs*, les Canadiens méritent en effet les meilleurs éloges" (Poulin 46). Jack also considers the pioneers, who gave up everything to follow their dreams, incredibly courageous people (Poulin 133). He and *La Grande Sauterelle* use The Oregon Trail Revisited by Gregory M. Franzwa to guide them in their journey, and as they read about the pioneers they begin to identify with them, considering them their friends. Poulin dedicates the majority of chapter nineteen to a discussion of this book, and elsewhere makes reference to other North American texts such as Jack Kerouack's On the Road. Readers learn that Jack Waterman, like his brother, appreciates and is encouraged by the Beatnik author's taste for risk and adventure. As Jack travels geographically and historically deeper into the continent, he finds himself "becoming more and more part of the continent, and his cultural identity defined by [its] history and geography, the United States included" (Winterburn 281).

The displacement of Jack and *La Grande Sauterelle* forces a rupture with the closed and constraining space of Québec society, sending them on an internal exploration. Throughout their journey, the protagonists gather clues about the location and past of Théo, but he is only the ostensible reason for their mission. The real quest, though unconfessed, is that of identity. Readers know the male protagonist only by his pseudonym, Jack Waterman. He is an unsatisfied writer who is discontent with the style of his life and his writing, and is unsure of what to write about next. Jack leaves Québec hoping to find Théo, who represents his double or “la partie de [lui]-même qui a oublié de vivre” (Poulin 137). Through a mixture of memory and imagination, Jack has transformed Théo into a mythic character. As he tells stories to *La Grande Sauterelle*,

la silhouette de son frère grandissait et prenait place dans une galerie imaginaire où se trouvait une étrange collection de personnages, parmi lesquels on pouvait reconnaître Maurice Richard, Ernest Hemingway, Jim Clark, Louis Riel, Burt Lancaster, Kit Carson, La Vérendrye, Vincent Van Gogh, Davy Crocket...

(Poulin 217)

Jack associates his brother strongly with both past and present heroic figures, admitting that Théo is “à moitié vrai et à moitié inventé” (Poulin 137). He considers him a modern adventurer and links him to their childhood hero, Étienne Brûlé, a legendary coureur de bois. According to Jack, Théo also resembles the pioneers because, like them, his brother “était absolument convaincu qu’il était capable de faire tout ce qu’il voulait” (Poulin 137). While travelling across the continent in search of Théo, Jack carries with him the myth of the “Great American Dream,” hoping for an improved self-image and the more intense lifestyle he associates with his brother and his heroes.

Travel leads to a wide range of complex experiences where the practices of crossing and interacting with others trouble common assumptions about a culture (McDowell 208). Jack's interaction with locals and *La Grande Sauterelle*, as well as his state of "extra-territorialité," force him to re-examine the myths concerning the development and the founders of America. By association, he also re-examines the myth of his brother. When in the Toronto Library, Jack learns from the Pinkerton that his glorification of Étienne Brûlé has been misguided. The Pinkerton shocks Jack by calling the coureur de bois a *bum*. Later, *La Grande Sauterelle* explains how Jack's hero had flouted the morals of both Whites and Indians who, in the end, had lost their patience and killed him (Poulin 77). Étienne Brûlé's dual status as hero and *bum* is similar to that of Jack's brother. Théo's character and reputation become increasingly ambiguous as the protagonists accumulate information and piece together the clues of his mysterious past. Jack becomes particularly upset when he learns that his brother had been jailed for possession of a firearm without a permit. While in Kansas City, seeking further information, the protagonists read in an old issue of the *Examiner* that Théo had been accused of beating a museum guard while attempting to steal a historical document. Although Théo has a criminal record, Jack still wants him to be a hero and he defends his brother's actions, concluding that "Théo était un nationaliste. Peut-être même un membre du F.L.Q. Il pensait que la carte était un document original et il voulait l'enlever aux Américains pour la ramener au Québec" (Poulin 146). Jack clings defiantly to his childhood image of Théo, but his understanding of the myths of America's explorers slowly begins to change as conflicting interpretations of Théo and his heroes multiply.

At the end of Volkswagen Blues, the protagonists find Théo, but not the heroic man for whom they were looking. When Jack and *La Grande Sauterelle* first arrive in San Francisco they find a photo of Théo, but the inscription underneath says only “UNIDENTIFIED MAN.” Jack notes that “c’est un peu comme s’ils disaient ‘un homme sans importance’, non?” (Poulin 267). When they eventually find Théo, he suffers from *creeping paralysis*, speaks only English and has no recollection of his brother. With the final image of Théo as “un homme rampant sur le sol comme un insecte” (Poulin 286), Jack sees the limitations of the “Great American Dream” and its power begins to fade. Jack must face the truth that nothing of his childhood image of Théo remains, and he admits that perhaps he loved only “l’image que je m’étais faite de lui” (Poulin 289). He must also realize that America, like Québec, is not the Promised Land. By reading The Oregon Trail Revisited, Jack and *La Grande Sauterelle* learn that the “Great American Dream” failed 30,000 emigrants as well: “‘They didn’t make it.’ Ces émigrants - des hommes et des femmes, des vieux et des jeunes et des enfants - n’étaient pas rendus à destination. Ils étaient morts en route avec leurs rêves” (Poulin 184). Metaphorically, Théo has also died. According to critics Hodgson and Sarkonak, Théo’s *creeping paralysis* is a linguistic and cultural “maladie,” that should be taken as a warning against the dangers of americanization (34). The protagonists of “les histoires américaines” go to the United States looking for adventure, a way to renew themselves, and for lost aspects of their past identity, but Poulin’s novel reveals that “L’Amérique, c’est le rêve même, le Grand rêve dont il faut pourtant se réveiller après qu’il nous a nourris” (Mailhot 25).

Jack Waterman’s interactions with *La Grande Sauterelle* also influence him to re-evaluate the foundational myths of America’s development. Throughout the novel, *La*

Grande Sauterelle tempers Jack's excitement for these myths with a revision of history. Her identity as a Métisse, along with her marginal position in society and vast knowledge of history, render her an appropriate "exploder of myths" (Winterburn 282). As the protagonists explore the Myth of the West, they correct it and recognize the importance of their forefathers, *La Grande Sauterelle* in particular. With a Montagnaise mother and a French father, *La Grande Sauterelle*, whose real name is Pitsémine, represents "une figure métonymique des passages historiques qui s'attachent à décrire le passé des Blancs et des Indiens" (Paterson 607). Pitsémine tells Jack of several incidents of Whites killing Indians, and of how they considered them inferior. She leads him to new perspectives on his heroes, like Buffalo Bill, and on the overall development of the West: "la mémoire amérindienne révèle ainsi la face cachée d'une autre Amérique" (Harel, *Voleur* 180). Poulin uses the Amerindian figure as an element of post-colonial discourse to demythologize the superiority of the European/White colonizer, and to destabilize the official version of history (Vautier, "Comparative" 7). The presentation of Pitsémine's perspective illustrates the fragmented nature of history, the fact that it can have different interpretations and can take different directions. She breaks the linear unfolding of official history, rendering absolute conclusions impossible. In *Le Voleur de parcours*, Simon Harel remarks that *Volkswagen Blues* is "un roman d'ouverture" because "il pose la problématique de l'identité québécoise en la débusquant dans ses différents fantasmes de fondation" (165). Poulin uses Pitsémine to undermine the traditional historical perspective, as well as those aspects of identity which build upon it.

According to critic Jean Morency, "les personnages du roman communient avec [le mythe américain], allant jusqu'à calquer leur métamorphose sur celle qu'il raconte lui-

même” (“Conclusion” 233). Although somewhat reluctant to accept all that Pitsémine teaches him, Jack eventually declares “que toute l’Amérique a été construite sur la violence” (Poulin 129). The degradation of America’s image parallels the disintegration of the grand image of Théo and the French adventurers (Miraglia, “Récit” 34). Throughout the novel, Pitsémine acts as a guide to help clear Jack’s head, where “il y a une espèce de brume permanente et tout est embrouillé” (Poulin 22), but at one point he becomes overwhelmed with his new knowledge. Upset by his growing awareness of the past’s violence, and of the ambiguous nature of his heroes, Jack enters into “le complexe du scaphandrier,” a state similar to a deep depression. When he surfaces, a transformation in his conscience has begun and he is closer to accepting the paradoxical nature of America. His voyage from the Gaspé to San Francisco allows him to re-connect with his past history, but also reveals a less romanticized version of America’s discovery. Jack is now aware of the “Great American Dream’s” incapacity to satisfy all human hopes and desires. Despite the deep ambiguity of America’s myths and past, Poulin’s novel illustrates a post-Referendum tendency in Québec to assume “son appartenance au continent américain, sa participation historique à l’exploration et à l’établissement de l’Amérique du Nord, bref, son américanité” (Miraglia, “Récit” 34).

“L’américanité” is one response to Québec’s situation after the failed referendum of 1980. The 1960s and the 1970s were decades of strong nationalist sentiment and political navel-gazing. On November 15, 1976, the Parti Québécois, headed by the popular René Lévesque, took power in Québec, working hard for the nation’s sovereignty. This period of hope and nationalist fervour, however, was followed by crisis and disenchantment. Confident after all their effort, the Parti Québécois decided to hold a

referendum on May 20, 1980, but the result was shattering, as 59.9% voted “non” (Weinmann & Chamberland 241). The failure of the Referendum, along with “la crise de l’énergie et la dépression économique qui suivent [avaient] pour conséquence une profonde restructuration de plusieurs domaines d’activité et [entraînaient] une mutation socioculturelle” (Weinmann & Chamberland 240). In 1962, Hubert Aquin had written an essay called “The Cultural Fatigue of French Canada,” explaining “cultural fatigue” as:

a kind of collective guilt-complex, a psychological state induced by an awareness of belonging to a colonized minority; it is characterized by a sense of dispossession which takes the form of “self-punishment, masochism, a sense of unworthiness, ‘depression,’ the lack of enthusiasm and vigour.” (Purdy, Introduction xv)

In his introduction to a collection of essays by Aquin, Anthony Purdy argues that “cultural fatigue” may be a relevant and meaningful expression to describe Québec after the Referendum of 1980 (xviii), as the nation risked entering a deep political depression. In the eighties, there was a tendency for Québécois to turn away from the sourness of defeat, looking outward for escape and a means to re-invent themselves. Québec’s connection to France did not suffice, and a movement toward English Canada was taboo, reminding Québec of the Conquest, and the depressing paradigm of “colonized and colonizer.” To avoid the “cultural fatigue” associated with this paradigm, Québec then turned South and explored the American part of its identity, further distinguishing the nation from France. Jack’s voyage across America can, therefore, be seen as a cathartic one, as he attempts to bring himself out of a state of personal and collective depression. Volkswagen Blues illustrates how “l’américanité” emerges as a post-nationalist discourse which emphasizes an expanding view of Québécois identities.

Since the 1980s, heterogeneity has become a privileged problematic in Québec, where the concepts of cultural acceptance, plurality, métissage, indetermination and openness to difference have become more and more explicitly discussed. In literature, the movement away from a dominant monoculture and the desire to revise the myth of Québec's unity has led to a recognition of the plurality of the nation's identities (Lequin 32). According to Pierre L'Hérault, Volkswagen Blues reflects contemporary social discourses, as it is open and accepting to all, without hierarchies and discrimination (39). Pierre Nepveu considers the old Volks itself to be a metaphor for the new Québécois culture: "indéterminée, voyageuse, en dérive" et "recueillante" (217). Just as the Old Volkswagen gathers a wide variety of signs, maps, smells and graffiti, and has travelled all over and will continue to do so to destinations unknown, this new culture "allège le centre", en n'y cherchant ni un fondement, ni une vérité stable et définitive" (Nepveu 217). In Volkswagen Blues, Poulin's vision of Québec's plural identities goes beyond traditional dimensions of national identity founded on ethnicity and collective memory. He demonstrates that identity is not innate, but rather "something formed through unconscious processes over time" (Hall, "Question" 608). The unity of personal or collective identities is a fantasy, as they always remain "incomplete" and in the process of "being formed" (Hall, "Question" 608). Poulin's characters illustrate a certain porosity in terms of identity formation, as they appear flexible and open to transformation (L'Hérault 34). Displacement is a privileged terrain for exploring the complexity and hybridity of identities, as well as their potential for change. Jack and Pitsémine's crossing of borders opens and expands those of Québec through the experience of an "extra-territorialité... ayant pour fonction d'interroger la singularité de l'identité québécoise" (Harel,

“Tentation” 281). Their movement across the continent releases repressed nomadic tendencies, and reveals a distinguishing hybridity in Québec’s cultural identity that was once eclipsed by exclusive identification with “la francité” and the sedentary lifestyle (Miraglia, “Récit” 29).

Just as Pitsémine helps undermine the myth of America’s foundation, so she explodes the myth of Québec’s traditional and homogeneous cultural identity. The Métis figures prominently in Québec literature of the 1980s, facilitating discussions of pluralism and crosscultural representations of contemporary Québécois society (Vautier, “Postmodern” 25). The situating of *Volkswagen Blues*’ action beyond the boundaries of Québec also reveals a willingness to explore “l’altérité” and, therefore, the heterogeneous aspects of cultural identities (Vautier, “Postmodern” 26). *La Grande Sauterelle*’s belonging to Québec disturbs the traditional, homogeneous, “vieille souche” definition of a Québécois, because her Métisse status makes her an emblematic figure of heterogeneity and hybridity. Disowned by both the White and Indian communities, Pitsémine falls outside Québec’s social space, and is therefore a marginal figure as well. Her peripheral position allows an investigation into the Self/Other tensions of the Québec “home ground” (Vautier, “Comparative” 7). According to Harel, Pitsémine’s representation as “un personnage étranger” also inaugurates “la possibilité d’une rencontre dialogique, questionnant la rigidité d’une identité québécoise qui ne serait entrevue qu’en termes d’ethnicité, de délimitation territoriale” (*Voleur* 201). As a Métisse, she is “à la fois ceci et cela, le même et l’autre” (Bucher 308), and therefore offers the possibility of a less confrontational perception of difference and multiplicity (Vautier, “Postmodern” 28). Initially, however, Jack has to struggle to accept a more open definition of Québécois identity, thereby

revealing the difficulties of reconciliation with the notion of heterogeneity. He is reluctant to “lose the security provided by his personal/ political/ historical mythology” (Vautier, “Postmodern” 27). He tries continuously to maintain and fit into his old ideals and the images he has of a “true” Québécois. Secretly, he wishes with all his heart that “tous les héros du passé étaient encore des héros” (Poulin 79). A change occurs in Jack, however, and by the end of the novel he appreciates Pitsémine’s Métisse identity, and encourages her to do the same. He tells her that she is not “rien du tout,” but rather “quelque chose de neuf, quelque chose qui commence. Vous êtes quelque chose qui ne s’est encore jamais vu” (Poulin 224). The displacement and decentering throughout Volkswagen Blues of the constraining images of Québec’s identity function in a positive way to make room for the multiplicity that Pitsémine represents.

Several critics, such as Winterburn, Hodgson and Sarkonak, argue that Volkswagen Blues can be read as an exploration of Québec’s cultural identity, as Jack’s quest for Théo and a different lifestyle is not just one individual’s quest, “mais aussi la quête entreprise par tout un peuple pour son identité collective” (Hodson & Sarkonak 33). The appearance in the novel of Saul Bellow, an author who emigrated from Montréal to the United States, underlines this notion of the quest when he comments: “Quand vous cherchez votre frère, vous cherchez tout le monde!” (Poulin 110). Jack finds neither the Théo nor the idealized identity for which he was looking: however, in their place he meets Pitsémine, and together they find something of the diversity of Québec’s identities. Their interactions and their journey across America provide the opportunity for a negotiation “entre la mémoire et la conscience du présent, entre une identité imposée et une identité complètement ouverte” (L’Hérault 30). Jack’s exposure to areas and cultures outside of

Québec widen his perspective and weaken his affection for Québec's collective "nous," as displacement reveals its fragility. As he gets closer to Pitsémine, Jack gains insight into the Amerindian reality and begins to share its implications of plurality and heterogeneity.

Although the ending of the novel appears tragic because Théo is reduced to a vegetable state and the "Great American Dream" is in shambles, the voyage and the underlying quest for identity are not failures. Instead, Jack is now free from his past and the images he has created for himself and for his heroes. His expedition from the Gaspé, the site of explorer Jacques Cartier's landing place, to California's San Francisco, the ultimate destination for adventurers in search of gold of all kinds, has been worthwhile. Morency summarises the trip and its fruitfulness when he writes that,

En pénétrant l'espace-temps du continent américain, Jack se libère de ses héros et de ses démons pour accéder à la conscience, au terme d'un vaste rituel initiatique dans lequel sa compagne métisse... jouera un rôle important, en vertu principalement de sa propre dualité. (Conclusion 233)

In the end, Jack replaces the god he has made of Théo with new ones, those of the Indians in particular: "il souriait malgré tout à la pensée qu'il y avait, quelque part dans l'immensité de l'Amérique, un lieu secret où les dieux des Indiens et les autres dieux étaient rassemblés et tenaient conseil dans le but de veiller sur lui et d'éclairer sa route" (Poulin 290). According to Morency, this substitution finally consecrates "sa vocation nord-américaine" ("Permanence" 223). Now that Jack has accepted the paradoxical nature of America, disposed of his vast pantheon of heroes, and expanded his personal mythology, he is ready to complete his circular journey and return home. Once back in Québec, he must directly face the demands of his old lifestyle and come to a further

understanding of the changes in his identity. Through writing, “he will strive to integrate his experiences of socio-cultural heterogeneity, eventually producing the novel that, we are given to understand through multiple intertextual references, is none other than Volkswagen Blues” (Vautier, “Postmodern” 28). If Jack Waterman has plans to write, then his adventure and investigations will not end with his return to Québec, as he himself declares that writing is “une forme d’exploration” (Poulin 90).

Clearly, the 1980s mark a turning point in perceptions of Québécois cultural identities. According to Harel, the traditional view of Québécois identity as preconstructed with inert attributes changes to one of a nation having open identities that underline the pre-eminence of movement and métissage in Québec (Voleur 291). An examination of gender and gender roles also serves to reveal the changes that occur in the 1980s, because gender is a cultural construction defined through time and space. In the past, particularly during “La Grande Noirceur,” the social discourse of ethnic and religious homogeneity, with its emphasis on the family, had, as one of its functions, the imposition of traditional and constraining sexual identities. During this time, Québécois valorised and clung to what Albert Memmi calls “les valeurs-refuges” (97). They did so in an attempt to protect their culture against the effects of colonization, but the unyielding grip of these values prevented forward movement and any possibility of positive change. “Les valeurs-refuges,” such as the traditional family and religion, were heavily patriarchal and repressive, and therefore had a strong and restraining influence on gender identities. By contrast, the discourses of the 1970s and 1980s participate in a new vision of identities as diverse and hybrid. Gender is embraced as an important sediment to the multi-layered

identities of Québécois, and its construction in literature illustrates the connection between gender and cultural belonging, and the potential for change.

In Volkswagen Blues, the exploration of gender reflects the opening up of Québécois society and its increasing heterogeneity. The attitudes and evolution of Jacques Poulin's characters debunk traditional and confining definitions of gender, while his revisions of "masculinity" and "femininity" mirror the subversion of Québec's founding myths. These myths, including those surrounding America's foundation and exploration, are linked to a fundamental myth of masculinity. Jack transforms his brother into a mythic and "hypermasculine" character by assimilating him to the founders and explorers of America. His correlation of Théo and Étienne Brûlé exemplifies how Jack transforms his brother into a hero. He associates Théo and these historical figures with the attributes traditionally deemed "masculine;" ones which he feels he lacks. According to Jack, Théo is an energetic nomad who is dynamic, virile and aggressive; he manifests all of the qualities that Jack admires at the beginning of his journey. Even his childhood stories depict a Théo "qui aimait les jeux risqués" (Poulin 34) and reveal Jack's admiration for his brother's astounding "masculinity." The unrealistic comparison he makes between himself and his brother "à moitié inventé," furnishes Jack with an image of "le masculin" that for him is inaccessible. Jack's idealisation of Théo as a legendary character with exceptional attributes is dangerous because its constraining dimension leaves out "tout ce qui pourrait apparaître comme négativité, insuffisance" (Harel, Voleur 173). The myths and the images of Théo and past heroes are incomplete, as is the myth of "masculinity." Jack needs the impetus of displacement and Pitsémine's help to enable him to examine these myths, to recognize their gaps and realize their collapse. As he gains a wider perspective

on America, and learns of the violence upon which it was built, Jack's view of "masculinity" begins to change. Pitsémine, with her gender, her Métisse background and her wealth of historical knowledge, has not only shown Jack the hidden and darker side of America, but also that of traditional masculine attributes. Once the myths of Théo and past heroic figures crumble, so does the traditional and glorified myth of masculinity, and Jack is freed from the misleading and impossible ideal images he has created for himself.

Jacques Poulin undermines the confining borders of traditional and stereotypical gender assumptions, not only through his critique of "hypermasculinity," but also through his use of discourses of heterogeneity and androgyny to construct new definitions of "masculine" and "feminine." In Towards Androgyny, Carolyn Heilbrun defines androgyny as "a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes, and the human impulses expressed by men and women, are not rigidly assigned" (x). Categorical gender difference, which is binary and hierarchical, is so engraved in society's unconscious that it is often considered natural. Androgyny is an ideal that dissolves the confines of gender categories, allowing individuals to choose freely their roles and modes of behaviour (Heilbrun x). In literature, androgyny often has a subversive function, and becomes a trope that manifests the refusal to conform to binary oppositions and hierarchies of all sorts (Lamont-Stewart 129). Poulin uses this trope to transcend stereotypical notions of gender in Québécois society, particularly with his displacement of "l'écrivain-mâle-blanc de sa fonction sacrée d'écrivain à la vaisselle et aux diverses tâches ménagères et la femme-métisse-fille-de-camionneur-blanc-et-de-femme-de-ménage-amérindienne de la primitivité et de la mécanique aux livres (c'est elle après tout la "cultivée," elle qui en sait le plus!)" (L'Hérault 34). The multipolar structure of gender in Volkswagen Blues is

significant, as gender functions as a point of reference for Québécois identities, and reflects their potential hybridity.

Although Jack Waterman aspires to follow the traditional concept of “masculine” that he assigns his heroes, the masculinity he manifests is different. With qualities considered “feminine,” Jack’s androgynous character surfaces in several ways: “il est frileux, timide, casanier et, surtout, son tempérament se caractérise par la douceur et la tendresse” (Paterson 610). The quest for his double, Théo, reveals Jack’s struggle against his androgynous personality. Clearly dissatisfied with his character, he labels himself “un faux doux” who is weak, timid, and incapable of being aggressive (Poulin 211). However, while myths of “hypermasculinity” crumble, Pitsémine helps Jack build a new image of masculinity which is softer, yet still valuable. She tells him a story about the habits of the Antarctic’s Emperor Penguins, where the males behave in a tender and “maternal” fashion. As soon as the females have laid their eggs, the males place them in their incubating pouches, and protect them with a special system they have invented: “Ils forment un grand cercle, en mettant les plus faibles d’entre eux au centre, et le cercle tourne lentement sur lui-même... de sorte que chacun à son tour de rôle est exposé au froid et vient ensuite s’abriter au milieu du cercle” (Poulin 61). This story warms Jack, not only physically, but also toward the idea of accepting a new construction of masculinity. Pitsémine continues to reassure Jack by telling him: “Ce que j’aime le plus en vous... c’est votre douceur et votre respect pour les gens” (Poulin 126). Eventually, Jack understands that he is not obligated to be like Théo and his “hypermasculine” heroes. Nor does he have to resemble his image of “l’écrivain idéal” who, in a so-called “masculine” manner, “écrit à toute allure... et vit intensément” (Poulin 49). He realizes that he is still capable of actualising

his dreams while remaining true to himself, as even the courageous pioneers were not superheroes, but simply “du monde ordinaire” (Poulin 133). Poulin’s deconstruction and re-formation of masculinity suggests that Québec in the eighties not only tended to be post-nationalist, but also leaned towards a post-masculinist society. By the end of his physical and internal journey, Jack knows more about himself, and he accepts and appreciates what he has learned. He returns to Québec with the sentiment that he can move more freely within his masculine identity without undermining his cultural belonging to Québec.

Similarly, Pitsémine is a character whose construction ruptures stereotypical notions of gender, and therefore the traditional social space of Québec. She implies the heterogeneous aspects of Québec’s cultural identities not only because of her Métis background, but also because she is a métisse sexually. Androgyny is evident in several different aspects of *La Grande Sauterelle*’s personality: “il caractérise ses vêtements et son aptitude de mécanicienne et de pilote, certes, son tempérament viril (son indépendance et son courage), mais aussi sa sexualité” (Paterson 606). Pitsémine breaks socio-sexual stereotypes because she carries a knife, stays out late, drives well, is passionate about adventure stories, and sexually takes the so-called “male” role. Even her travelling and displacement disrupt the traditional construction of femininity, because travel challenges the strong spatial association between women and home (McDowell 206). Poulin stresses Pitsémine’s androgynous character when she dresses up as a man and manages to give herself “parfaitement l’air d’un garçon” (Poulin 68) by wearing Jack’s clothes, hiding her hair in a hat and disguising her voice. According to Heilbrun, dressing in the clothes of the opposite sex is a subversive performance of gender, because it undermines traditional

gender representations and indicates the wide spectrum of roles open to the individual (29). Pitsémine traverses and dissolves gender's established frontiers. Her construction and behaviour go beyond the confines of any set cultural or gender identity, thereby contributing to the impression that Volkswagen Blues is an exploration of gender, cultural and national identities "qui ne peuvent plus être vues comme *pures*, mais nécessairement *métisses*, non contraintes en des frontières étanches, mais en quelque sorte transfrontalières, lieux de croisement, de confluence" (L'Hérault 28).

The sexual relations within Volkswagen Blues also illustrate the changing and more accepting nature of Québec's cultural identity. Although Jack and Pitsémine are biologically opposites, they do not follow the traditional male and female roles, and their relationship is complementary rather than binary. Their mutually androgynous constructions imply a reconciliation of the sexes, where they may be together, not as opposites in hierarchical positions, but as equal human beings (Heilbrun x). By explicitly demonstrating qualities traditionally associated with the other sex, Jack and Pitsémine reveal an acceptance and appreciation of the "other." Their interactions, which exemplify a mutual respect, encourage personal reflection and illustrate how the quest for one's identity includes others. Pitsémine helps Jack to accept himself, and Jack helps her to have a more positive perception of her Métisse roots. The evolution of the characters' relationship marks an acceptance of cultural and gender differences. Although their pasts separate them, the protagonists are united in the present. At the start of the novel, in the museum at the Gaspé, their separation is visible through the different ancient maps they contemplate, but the gaps of the past close as they progress together in the present, sharing and consulting various road maps of the North American continent (L'Hérault 31).

Although their attempt to unite sexually fails, Jack and Pitsémine still participate in a certain intimacy and solidarity. Just as they are about to go their different ways, “ils se serrèrent l’un contre l’autre, assis au bord de leur siège, les genoux mêlés, et ils restèrent un long moment immobiles, étroitement enlacés comme s’ils n’étaient plus qu’une seule personne” (Poulin 290). They embody a positive gender relationship, as this evocative image suggests, “as a creation of the two as one, an androgynous one, as reaching a form of harmony beyond the self, with another individual” (Socken 71).

In Volkswagen Blues, displacement allows Jack Waterman to step back from the confining physical and symbolic borders of traditional Québécois society. Outside of Québec he is able to better examine both his own and Québec’s cultural identity. Jack’s personal transformation resembles that which is occurring collectively within his nation. Poulin’s construction of gender relations and of androgynous characters reflects the diversity and hybridity of Québécois society and identities, illustrating their fluidity. A similar fluidity and multiplicity of identities is also visible in English Canada and its post-modern writing. The identity transformations that occur in Québec and English Canada during the eighties differ greatly, as distinct founding myths articulate their cultural identities and each nation is immersed in a different political atmosphere. Displacement, however, functions equally well in both literatures as a device for characters to explore and expand their comprehension of themselves and their homeland.

BODILY HARM

Bodily Harm, like Volkswagen Blues, is a novel characteristic of post-modern fiction, as Margaret Atwood's writing challenges stable notions of truth and identity. The novel breaks down some of the founding myths and notions through which its protagonist, Renata Wilford, attempts to shape reality and a coherent sense of herself. Atwood demonstrates how personal and collective identities can be transformed with time and with experience, altering even the most basic assumptions about oneself and of one's culture.

In Bodily Harm, the displacement of Renata, better known as Rennie, ultimately leads to an evolution in her identity by forcing her to examine the way she views and lives her life. In "The Question of Cultural Identity," Stuart Hall describes how "'Place' is specific, concrete, known, familiar, bounded: the site of specific social practices which have shaped and formed us, and with which our identities are closely bound up... they are where we have 'roots'" (620). Québec shapes Jack Waterman, moulding him with the myth of his nation as a homogeneous unit, as well as the myths of America. In a similar manner, Rennie's development in a small Ontario town influences her behaviour, and her perceptions of herself and of others. According to critic Clark Blaise, Rennie is a familiar Atwood creation who struggles with her Southern Ontario Decent: "a sterile, hypocritical, sexless background... [Her] town's name is Griswold, which seems to say it all" (111).

Rennie grew up in this grey and grisly world, surrounded by old people: her grandparents, her great-aunts, her great-uncles, and even her single mother who, despite her youth, walked, spoke and dressed like the elderly. The atmosphere of the town was Gothic and heavy with oppressive maxims, which were hypocritically declared and rarely followed. Rennie refers to Griswold as her "subground... something that can't be seen but is nevertheless there, full of gritty old rocks and buried stumps, worms and bones; nothing

you'd want to go into" (Atwood 18). She used to say that "those clamouring for roots had never seen a root up close" (Atwood 18), whereas Rennie apparently has and therefore wants to keep them below the earth's surface. She hopes that her roots are "merely something she defines herself against," but realizes "it's not always so easy to get rid of Griswold" (Atwood 18).

In Bodily Harm, Rennie's "subground" seeps through to the foreground, revealing its stain on her identity. Rennie's mother remains in Griswold all of her life, tending to the needs of her own ill mother. Rennie, however, at a young age obsesses about getting away because she "didn't want to be trapped, like [her] mother" (Atwood 58). Eventually, she goes to university, freeing herself of the town's "greydom" and confining borders, but she cannot escape what she refers to as the "diseases typical of Griswold" (Atwood 64). When she is working as a reporter in Toronto, Rennie considers the kind of honesty she inherited from Griswold "less as a virtue than a perversion, one from which she still suffers" (Atwood 64). She carries with her the town's Puritan beliefs and dark Gothic myths, often thinking of how Griswold would react to the incidents in her life and to the people she meets. These reflections drip with the town's negativity and pessimism. For example, when a man breaks into Rennie's apartment and leaves a rope coiled on the end of her bed, "She knew what Griswold would have to say about it. This is what happens to women like you. What can you expect, you deserve it. In Griswold everyone gets what they deserve. In Griswold everyone deserves the worst" (Atwood 18). As Rennie reminisces about her relationship with Jake, an ex-lover, she notes how her circle of happiness swelled and then diminished, and she adds the following comment: "In Griswold they believed that everything evened out in the end: if you had too much good

luck one day, you'd have bad the next. Good luck was unlucky" (Atwood 72). One could not avoid getting caught in the whirlwind of Griswold's judgmental gossip and retributive values, because everyone knew what went on in everyone else's life: "In Griswold, everyone knew everything, sooner or later" (Atwood 55). To avoid condemnation and to avoid being ostracised, the maintenance of a good and proper surface was very important in Griswold.

The atmosphere of Griswold was extremely repressive; all feelings, things and people deemed inappropriate were hidden and forced beneath the surface. The standard for which the town's people strove was to be "decent." Rennie's grandmother and mother "displayed a stern sense of decency and propriety, classifying certain kinds of unacceptable behaviour" (Rubenstein 266). Rennie reflects on how "They all have the category, it gets passed down like a cedar chest, though they each put different things into it" (Atwood 156). Among her mother and her aunts, decency "was having your clothes on, in every way possible," and its opposite was "flashy or cheap" (Atwood 55). "Decent" was judged by what was visible, and was equated to what the town decided was "normal." As a member of the Griswold community, you could make choices to keep your family respectable, and the "best way to keep from disgracing it was to do nothing unusual" (Atwood 55). As a child, Rennie was trained not to disrupt the smooth surface of situations nor the family reputation. The three things she learned well reflect the repressive morals of the town: "how to be quiet, what not to say, and how to look at things without touching them" (Atwood 54). Cleanliness, an important value in Griswold, meant not only keeping your sheets white and your furniture shiny, but also meant keeping your "*dirty laundry*" tucked away. In a town where dryers were considered useful "not

because they were easier but because they were private,” it was crucial not to hang “disreputable stories” out in public (Atwood 179). With hopes of remaining a respectable family, the adults surrounding Rennie drilled Griswold’s repressive myths and maxims into her head, until the town’s social practices formed part of her identity.

At the beginning of Bodily Harm, readers learn that Rennie lives her life as a tourist, even when at home in Canada. Seeing life through the eyes of a tourist is seeing life only on the surface; it “is a metaphor for a deliberate refusal to commit oneself to life, to risk the vulnerability of active participation” (Carrington 46). The emotionally cold and unhealthily spiritual climate of Griswold, with its negative morality and vacant formalisms, is the “genesis of [Rennie’s] tourist mentality” (Carrington 49). The town disapproved of any display of intense emotion, of feelings that broke through the surface of one’s composure and decency. In “The Thematic Imperative: Didactic Characterization in Bodily Harm,” Mary Kirtz describes how Rennie’s grandmother was “a pillar of Griswold society” and, embodying its values, was “emotionally frozen” (6). Rennie vividly remembers a time in her childhood when she did something wrong, and her grandmother shut her alone in the damp, dark cellar:

The light is coming in through the window, weak yellowish winter light, everything is very clean, and I am cold. I’m crying, I’m holding my grandmother around both legs... I feel as if I’m holding on to the edge of something, safety, if I let go I’ll fall, I want forgiveness, but she’s prying my hands away finger by finger. She’s smiling; she was proud of the fact that she never lost her temper... I’m crying because I am afraid, I can’t stop, and even if I hadn’t done anything wrong I’d still be put down there, for making a noise, for crying (Atwood 53).

Due to her momentary “indecenty,” Rennie is literally forced below the earth’s surface, demonstrating the town’s repressive mentality. Her grandmother’s only response to her tears of fear and discomfort is the comment: “*Laugh and the world laughs with you... Cry and you cry alone*” (Atwood 53). Later on, we learn through Rennie’s flashbacks that this cold woman hallucinates the physical loss of her hands; symbolically, she has already lost her ability to touch and empathize, along with her compassion. According to critic Frank Davey, the consequence of Rennie’s upbringing is that “Rennie herself grows up afraid to do wrong, afraid to be noticed, afraid to use her hands,” and therefore, as an adult, “she will look at the world without touching it, write in banal words that don’t touch their subjects, enter ‘love’ relationships that barely touch the feelings of the lovers” (70). In other words, Rennie avoids “depths,” profound thoughts and emotions, preferring to depend only on the surfaces of reality for survival and as a means of self-definition.

Part of Rennie’s legacy from Griswold is the myth that the visual sense is superior to the other senses. The myth implies that the visual sense is a trustworthy base upon which to make firm conclusions, with no need to search deeper into situations or people. With this myth in mind, Rennie utilizes her keen observation of surfaces to make a living, writing “lifestyle” articles on trends, relationships and the superficial “Ins and Outs” of society. She becomes “a quick expert on surfaces,” knowing that they “determined whether or not people took you seriously” (Atwood 26). Critic David Lucking argues that “Rennie’s addiction to the world of surfaces and appearances is not meant to be viewed as a purely individual phenomenon, but rather as characteristic of the culture to which she belongs” (80). Atwood’s novel catches the beat of the 1980s “*très nouveau-*

wavé” Toronto (Blaise 111), where the passionate political movements of the 60s and early 70s are gone, and an examination of style takes precedence over a deeper look into current social problems. Both Volkswagen Blues and Bodily Harm depict the decade’s turning away from politics to the private, though they turn in separate directions, and for different reasons. Québec turns toward the outside world to get out of its complex of defeat and fatigue. English Canada, on the other hand, which has enjoyed a greater degree of openness to the world, enters a period of political conservatism, and becomes fascinated with its own surfaces. Atwood reveals Canadians’ personal navel-gazing, materialistic values, and participation in “commodity culture” (Leonard 90). She demonstrates “the extent to which social relations, gender, and even subjectivity itself all depend on the simulated universe of consumerism” (Leonard 90), making Rennie Wilford a woman “who has defined herself by what she buys, by the trends she adheres to, and by her detailed knowledge of the latest style” (Leonard 95). Rennie gets caught in the “suffocating conformity of expectation” that is part of this trendy Toronto culture (Smith 252), and “Instead of writing about the issues, she [begins] interviewing the people who were involved in them. The *in* wardrobe for the picket line, the importance of the denim overall, what the feminists eat for breakfast” (Atwood 64). The foregrounding of Rennie’s superficial interaction with her environment suggests that “the social and cultural *milieu* of Toronto plays a decisive role in [her] characterisation” (Rao 117).

Rennie’s identity and pattern of thought are also influenced by her Canadian nationality. According to Hall, national culture is a discourse that constructs meanings, influencing and organizing both our actions and our conception of ourselves (“Question”

613). National cultures construct identities “by producing meanings about “the nation” with which we can *identify*; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it” (Hall, “Question” 613). Hall agrees with Benedict Anderson that national identity is an “imagined community,” dependent on the representational strategy deployed to construct a common-sense view of national belonging (“Question” 613). Just as Jack reflects Québec, in Bodily Harm Rennie is “a miniature portrait of Canada” because she attempts to be neutral and harmless (Patton 154). She represents the country in which she lives, in much the same terms as she herself is perceived by different characters (including herself at times), “as naïve, as politically uncomplicated, as obscurely old-fashioned” (Irvine, “Here” 88). Rennie affirms Canada’s neutrality, believing it to be a positive characteristic. She emphasizes this trait within herself, declaring that “she aims for neutrality; she needs it for her work, as she used to tell Jake” (Atwood 15). Further on in the novel, while Rennie is away, she encounters an old American couple with a similar image of Canadians as inoffensive and harmless. They ask Rennie if she is a Canadian, commenting on how they “always find the Canadians so nice, they’re almost like members of the family. No crime rate to speak of. [They] always feel quite safe when [they] go up there” (Atwood 186). Rennie too, believes that Canada is a safe place, trusting that as a first world citizen she is “safe.” With this sense of security, she maintains her neutral stance and continues her existence skimming along the surface of reality.

Rennie carefully chooses the level of her participation and her investment in both life and relationships. She recognizes and cultivates a “detached defensiveness”

(Carrington 46) which stems from her roots in Griswold but also manifests the 1980s trendy culture of Toronto and the neutrality associated with Canada as a whole. Rennie's alienation from the "depths" of life results in a superficial lifestyle with no serious commitments or interactions. In "Another Symbolic Descent," critic Ildikó de Papp Carrington gathers key words from Bodily Harm to reveal and describe Rennie's choice of a shallow lifestyle; "by thus living her life 'off to the side' (p.26), she is always 'a tourist,' which she defines as being a 'spectator, a voyeur' (p.125). She believes that tourists do not get hurt in life; they are 'exempt' (p.78), because they can always keep their 'options open' (p.227)" (Carrington 46). Rennie confesses that the majority of her friends are "really just contacts" (Atwood 16) and that she considers sex merely "a pleasant form of communication, like gossip" (Atwood 102). In actuality, her detached attitude, and concern only for fashion, style and surfaces, "masks a profound hopelessness about the world. She doesn't think a better world is possible" (Kates 12). She slips into what Davey refers to as the "unthinking madness of mechanical action - the cliché 'openness' of her Toronto friends' mottoes, 'go with the flow,' 'keep your options open'" (60). Rennie carries on in this blank lifestyle until the surfaces her "stable" identity depends upon begin to crack. Despite her preference for surfaces, Rennie is left no choice but to sink into the depths of reality.

The surface of Rennie's life cracks gradually in Bodily Harm, slowly revealing a reality that was once concealed by her illusions and "tourist vision." Margaret Atwood engages her readers in a "narrative game of Clue" (Wilson, "Artist's" 210) by strategically switching between first and third person narrators, and by her layering of different places,

times and experiences. However, as Carrington does in "Another Symbolic Descent," it is possible to arrange chronologically the various cracks in the surface after reading the entire novel. Looking back, readers can see how these cracks prepare Rennie for her evolution from "tourist to reporter" (Brydon, "Atwood's" 99). The first split appears while Rennie is researching an article "on pornography as an art form" (Atwood 207). Without too much difficulty, she views the diverse pornographic material that has been seized by the Toronto police, but the "grand finale," a picture showing "the head of a rat" poking out from a black women's vagina, shocks her and makes her vomit. At that moment, she "felt that a large gap had appeared in what she'd been used to thinking of as reality. What if this is normal, she thought, and we just haven't been told yet?" (Atwood 210). For a couple of weeks afterward, Rennie has a hard time making love with Jake, as he enjoys sadistic fantasy games in bed. Although she does not want to be afraid of men, this first crack in the surface gives Rennie the feeling that she is being used by them as "raw material" (Atwood 212) and she is no longer as comfortable in her present lifestyle.

A wider crack in the surface occurs when Rennie is diagnosed with breast cancer and must have a partial mastectomy. Underneath the smooth surface of her skin, Rennie's cells have been dividing and growing incorrectly, subjecting her to bodily harm. She is shocked:

Nothing had prepared her for her own outrage, the feeling that she'd been betrayed by a close friend. She'd given her body swimming twice a week, forbidden it junk food and cigarette smoke, allowed it a normal amount of sexual release. She'd trusted it. Why then had it turned against her? (Atwood 82).

This crack in the surface is a “literal mutilation” (Carrington 47) and Rennie constantly fears that something inside her body will break through the skin’s surface. She dreams that she is “full of white maggots eating away at [her] from the inside” (Atwood 83) and is afraid that her scar will come undone, “split open like a faulty zipper, and she will turn inside out” (Atwood 80). Later, Rennie dreams that she is once again in the operating room, that her body is divided into two parts, so that one is floating above, observing the other being opened up. Instead of breast cancer, however, this time it is “the heart they are after” (Atwood 172), suggesting “an emotional opening that deepens the effects of Rennie’s partial mastectomy” (Irvine, “Collecting” 62). Her actual operation exposes her to new ways of seeing, restoring in the most brutal way possible “the severed contact between ‘surface’ and ‘depth’... between Rennie and the body in which she has up to then merely been a tenant” (Lucking 82).

The next crack, the ending of Rennie’s relationship with Jake, is a direct result of the previous cancerous one. Jake is “a packager” who also manipulates and focuses on surfaces. Rennie, aware of his disgust at the changes to her surface, cannot bear to be touched by him. In the end, Jake moves on to another woman, leaving Rennie to analyse the surfaces upon which they had based their relationship. The following day, another split in the surface occurs. Just as Rennie’s body has been invaded by malignant cancer cells, an intruder invades her living space. The invader is not a thief, but rather a man with harmful intentions, as the “length of rope coiled neatly on her quilt” (Atwood 13) implies. Throughout the novel, Rennie wonders who was “at the end of the rope,” and she refers to him as the “faceless stranger” (Atwood 41). When alone in her apartment, Rennie can’t

“shake the feeling that she is being watched,” and she begins to see herself from the outside, “as if she [were] a moving target in someone else’s binoculars” (Atwood 40). According to Rubenstein, both the “invasion” of cancer and the invasion of her dwelling space alter Rennie’s perception of herself (261). Slowly, she is beginning to understand that she is in far less control than her “smug Toronto experience can envisage” (Smith 258). Rennie tries to escape the horrors of “real life” by flying to the Caribbean Islands for a working vacation (Atwood 16) but, ironically, it is here that “a seismic split in the surface of Rennie’s life” occurs, resulting in the major transformation of her identity and lifestyle (Carrington 52).

As the surface cracks, Rennie’s personal identity gradually shifts, undermining her sense of a stable self. Hall describes the result of such shifts as the dislocation or de-centring of the subject (“Question” 597). The conjunction of this de-centring with physical, cultural and social displacement often results in a “crisis of identity” because “something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty” (Mercer qtd. in Hall, “Question” 597). Bodily Harm suggests that a true discovery of self can only occur under uncanny circumstances, “where the normal historical and social co-ordinates which contribute to reinforce a sense of identity, are gradually lost” (Rao 52). Rennie’s voyage leads her into such circumstances and an experience of doubt and uncertainty, forcing her to re-examine herself and the way she lives. Atwood uses the terrain of displacement to question the supremacy of the visual sense, one of the myths that Rennie uses to stabilize her identity. As Rennie “stumbles through the present on the Caribbean island and memories of the past in Toronto, the

surfaces of perception and relationship are constantly shown to be deceptive” (Smith 256). From the moment she lands at the island’s airport, she finds herself “in a landscape full of oddly undecodeable messages” (Howells 122). For example, Rennie mistakenly assumes Elva to be a religious maniac because she is wearing a T-shirt with the slogan ‘PRINCE OF PEACE.’ Eventually, she learns that the woman is the mother of Prince, one of the island’s election candidates. Rennie’s visual observations result in another misunderstanding when Dr.Minnow, also an election candidate, takes her on a tour of the local prison, Fort Industry. He shows Rennie an unusual construction which she registers as a “child’s play house... and wonders what it is doing here” (Atwood 104). She soon discovers though, that the dilapidated construction is a gallows. By illustrating the uncertainty and subjectivity of visual conclusions, the novel renders dubious the reliability of the eye, thereby undermining seeing as a privileged means of access to certainty and truth (Rao 104). Rennie begins to doubt the sureness of surfaces, and therefore has doubts about herself. She learns “the cloying unreliability of her Torontonion view” (Smith 256), thereby losing a social co-ordinate that had reinforced her sense of identity.

Due to her position as an outsider, Rennie’s view of the Caribbean and of herself is fragmented and distorted. Uncertain of what is going on around her, she over-reacts when confronted by locals, like the deaf mute whom she mistakes for someone with evil intent. Paul, her future lover, describes her behaviour as “Alien reaction paranoia... Because you don’t know what’s dangerous and what isn’t, everything seems dangerous” (Atwood 76). Although certain aspects of the island remind Rennie of Griswold, such as the concern with “indecenty” (Atwood 223) and, later, the funeral of Dr.Minnow (Atwood 250),

Rennie needs new interpretative strategies to understand the world around her. However, any sort of “definite interpretation is shown to be problematic since places and identities are revealed to be equivocal and ‘double’” (Rao 110). She learns that people do not fit neatly into pre-determined categories. Paul’s description of the island inhabitants underscores the notion of identity and truth as shifting constructs: “Anyway, almost nobody here is who they say they are at first. They aren’t even who somebody else thinks they are. In this place you get at least three versions of everything, and if you’re lucky one of them is true” (Atwood 150). As systems of meaning and cultural representations multiply around Rennie, she too is confronted with the possibility of multiple identities. The islanders create various identities for her, several of which she could assume temporarily. Dr. Minnow would like her to be a more serious journalist, some consider her a CIA agent, and others mistake her for a “friendly lady” or prostitute. While spending time with Paul, Rennie also finds her self-definition shifting from travel writer to “secretary” on vacation (Atwood 222). Displacement underlines the fact that the post-modern subject, who is conceptualized as having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity, “is formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us” (Hall, “Question” 598). Rennie can no longer easily interpret surfaces, nor can she hide behind the shallow and fixed image of her identity as a trendy, neutral magazine reporter.

Rennie’s trip to the islands of St. Antoine and St. Agathe becomes an internal journey, where “the discovery of self and of place are synonymous” (Grace 34). In one of its final sections, readers learn that the novel is actually a prison tale. Rennie is locked in

one of Fort Industry's tiny cells with Lora Lucas, a Canadian woman who had moved to the islands, and they are telling each other about their lives. Rennie discovers depths of the island that the tourist brochures did not include, and at the same time explores her own depths. As Rennie describes her remote past in Griswold, her recent past in Toronto, and her immediate past on the Caribbean islands, she begins to understand how the fragments of her experience are organically connected (Rubenstein 260). Atwood uses this discovery to illustrate the complexity and multiplicity of identities, the fact "that each person contains several 'stories' which must somehow be synthesized for coherence of personality" (Rubenstein 260). The exotic and distant Caribbean Islands become the space where Rennie meets her double and her darkest self (Rao 11). Away from Canada, Rennie no longer has the familiar platform of surfaces upon which her lifestyle and identity depend. Critic Shannon Hengen argues that Rennie is forced by her lack of these familiar surfaces and the language and behaviour that attend them, "to reconstruct an identity not from North American media images but from the people around her" (90). Dr. Minnow, Paul and Lora Lucas are three main characters who affect Rennie, helping to shatter her tourist vision and the barrier or television frame she places between herself and living. Just as Pitsémine helps Jack in Volkswagen Blues, these characters educate Rennie and make her more culturally aware, acting as guides in her evolution from "escape narcissist" to "responsible citizen" (Fand 168).

Rennie's tourist vision is magnified when she literally becomes a tourist of the Caribbean islands, trying hard to maintain a careful distance. Her camera symbolizes her tourist vision and identity, because she uses it like a "reversed" telescope "to make 'close'

experiences more distant and to reflect or deflect feelings which threaten to impinge or penetrate” (Wilson, “Turning” 139). Rennie observes other tourists, remarking that they are people like her, “transients... [who] can look all they want to, they’re under no obligation to see, they can take pictures of anything they wish” (Atwood 186). Rennie learns that the island was once a British colony, and that her “working vacation” coincides with its first election since the departure of the colonizers. Dr. Minnow would like Rennie to write about it, considering it her duty as a reporter to report “the truth of the matter” (Atwood 134), but Rennie does not want to be involved. As a tourist, she feels she has the right to pick and choose what she sees or photographs, and she only wants to “snap” what is picturesque. At one point, Rennie dreams that she is searching for her missing hands, which suggests that like her Grandmother, she, with her detached attitude, has lost her ability to touch and to feel compassion. When she finds herself in situations that are “too real,” unwanted or threatening, she imposes “the frames of television, video and movie screens,” wishing that she could “change channels, turn down the volume, or ‘switch off” (Wilson, “Turning” 142). Rennie’s denial of reality is underlined when in the cell she tells herself to “Pretend you’re really here... Now: what would you do?” (Atwood 284). Reality finally hits her when Lora hoists her up to look out the small window of their cell, and Rennie registers the gallows of the “tourist site” that Dr. Minnow had shown her. There, the dumb and deaf man, “a synecdochic figure... representing all powerless, and therefore voiceless, people” (Kirtz 123), is being tortured by the police. Rennie recognizes that the blood she sees is not a prop, and she “understands for the first time that this is not necessarily a place she will get out of, ever” (Atwood 290). Dr. Minnow, who wins the election, is murdered before Rennie is put in prison, but it is in the

cell that she comprehends his sense of duty to “imagine things being different” (Atwood 229) , and his desire for her to report the activities of the island. Her camera and tourist vision have failed to protect her, forcing Rennie to revise “the myth that one can ever be isolated from responsibility” (Patton 166).

In the 1980s, Québec and English Canada shared a tendency to acknowledge globalization in their respective writings. Globalization is “about the compression of time and space,” where boundaries have become permeable and “economies and cultures are thrown into intense and immediate contact with each other” (Robins qtd. in Hall, “Question” 622). Volkswagen Blues and its treatment of “l’américanité” hints at globalization, but Poulin’s contemporary, Jacques Godbout, addresses the issue directly and explicitly in Une Histoire américaine, referring not only to Québec and California, but also to a third-world country, Ethiopia. Atwood, too, sets her novel in a third-world country and, like Godbout, undermines the notion that Canada and individual Canadians can maintain a positive and real “‘neutrality’ in an increasingly interdependent ‘global world’” (Patton 145). Dr. Minnow is “a major catalyst in the reawakening of Rennie’s political consciousness” (Lynch 50), as he insists that she become aware of all the effects of Canadian aid to the island. He explains to Rennie how the aid and the naiveté of the “Sweet Canadians” are dangerous because they help support the island’s corrupt government. Bodily Harm illustrates how moral neutrality is actually a crime of collaboration (Rubenstein 272) and it exposes Canada’s conflicted identity as both aid-giver and repressor (Brydon, “Atwood’s” 96). Dr. Minnow is aware of the consequences of globalization and tells Rennie that Canada has yet to learn that “[there] is no longer any

place that is not of general interest” (Atwood 135). While reviewing his lectures in prison, Rennie realizes that “there are no neutral corners, even in forgotten little islands” (Blaise 110), and that “No one, not even the Canadians, can stay outside contemporary political violence” (Irvine, “Here” 88). Although Rennie herself aims for “neutrality” and “invisibility” (Atwood 15), Atwood reveals that “pure tourism is no longer possible in the modern world, that sight itself is a political act, and that every tourist has the potential to be also a terrorist” (Patton 154). Diana Brydon links tourists to voyeurs, and tourism to pornography, as both activities use the “concept of ‘aesthetic distance’ as a respectable cover for aggression” (“Caribbean” 183). She also describes how Bodily Harm equates tourists with new imperialists, “happily exploiting a country they can easily leave behind” (Brydon, “Caribbean” 183). For both Rennie and Jack Waterman, travel results in a growing awareness of the violence hidden behind trusted myths, though Jack learns more about the past, and Rennie of the present. By the end of her trip, Rennie no longer emphasizes her neutral stance, but instead is embarrassed by the attempted neutrality of the Canadian official, to whom she refers as “the neutral-coloured Canadian” (Atwood 191). Although at one point she would have agreed with him that as Canadians “we don’t make value judgements” (Atwood 296), Rennie has changed and envisions leaving the island with a definite position, condemning political violence.

At the same time as Rennie’s tourist vision and “neutrality” fail her, Atwood undermines her protagonist’s belief in the myth that as a first-world citizen her “nationality makes her ‘exempt’ from St. Antoine’s ‘third world’ violence (203), [and Rennie] eventually sees that a perfectly normal sort of gendered violence drove her from the ‘first

world' to begin with" (Melley 92). Paul's talk of "Democracy and freedom" as "a whole bag of tricks" (Atwood 240) widens Rennie's cultural awareness, and she becomes more skeptical of "all the western social myths on which her constructions of reality have so uncritically depended" (Howells 122). While watching the beating of the deaf and dumb beggar from her prison cell, the remaining bit of faith Rennie had in her invulnerability fades away. She understands that she cannot take refuge in "her Canadian city code" (Smith 255) and that "She is not exempt. Nobody is exempt from anything" (Atwood 290). As Rennie experiences "an erosion of confidence in civil order and her own safety" (Howells 122), she senses that there is no longer a boundary between "a *here* and a *there*" (Atwood 290). Overwhelmed by a dark revelation of "universal complicity in evil" (Lucking 89), Rennie feels "She's seen the man with the rope, now she knows what he looks like" (Atwood 290). He comes to represent the malignant, the "criminal," and the potential brutality in all men. Atwood uses the malignant cancer cell as symbol of all that can cause bodily harm and illustrates that it pervades both third- and first-world societies, "including hypocritical Griswold with its punishing cellars" (Wilson, "Artist's" 215) and supposedly "decent" values. In the final section, when the Canadian diplomat assures Rennie that "the situation is normalizing" (Atwood 296) and asks her to suppress the violent scenes she has witnessed, she thinks to herself, "The situation is normalizing, all over the place, it's getting more and more normal all the time" (Atwood 296). Critic Timothy Melley considers this cynical remark a testimony to Rennie's "heightened awareness of political repression on St. Antoine and to her new realization that violence may be made normal, acceptable, and thus invisible, in first-world North America" (93). Rennie now knows that she is not exempt from the potential of bodily harm in the third

world, nor of the harm that exists in her very own country. Her perspective on her own situation alters and despite her cancer she begins to consider herself “lucky” (Atwood 301).

As Rennie finally acknowledges the darker side of reality, she looks into her own “spiritual cancer” (Lucking 87), a depth and a part of her identity which had also been covered with surfaces. While in the cell, Rennie dreams about the faceless stranger: “The face keeps changing, eluding her, he might as well be invisible, she can’t see him, this is what is so terrifying, he isn’t really there, he’s only a shadow, anonymous, familiar, with silver eyes that twin and reflect her own” (Atwood 287). The “criminal” is also in Rennie, who as “a voyeur” (Atwood 125), uses tourist vision and disconnects herself from the suffering of others (Bouson 129). Her game of imagining alterations to people’s surfaces, and her stereotypical judgements, such as that of Lora as “cheap,” are forms of oppression, objectifying and denying the full humanity and identity of others. Even if she does not directly brutalize them, she has “exploited others’ rights to their own lives, values, or tastes; silence about ‘raw material’ supports colonization” (Wilson, “Artist’s” 222). Despite the depressing knowledge of the pervasive evil in the world and in herself, Rennie’s recognition of this malignancy is part of the final stage in her transformation. As her full name, Renata Wilford, suggests, from this darkness she will be re-born and “will cross over” surfaces to a more fulfilling life and a deeper identity.

Just as Jack Waterman’s voyage leads to a widening of perspective, Rennie’s trip enlarges her comprehension of life and of herself, allowing her spiritual survival. In an ironic way, Rennie’s trip to St. Antoine restores “health and perspective” (Blaise 111),

resulting in “the breastless and symbolically handless Rennie’s transformation toward wholeness” (Wilson, “Artist’s” 201). Davey argues that, in Bodily Harm, amputation is more than the literal removal of Rennie’s breast. He explains amputation as “a means of avoiding ‘*massive involvement*’ - with cancer in the case of Rennie’s illness, with human poverty and unhappiness in case of her ‘lifestyle’ articles” (71). The full life, on the other hand, involves “risk” (Davey 71), taking action, and truly connecting with others. As Rennie is forced to spend time with Lora in Fort Industry, her perspective continues to widen. Atwood uses Lora, Rennie’s darker double who has grown up abused and in cellars, to question Griswold’s definition of “decency.” “Indecently,” Lora gives sexual favours, but her motives are compassionate, and perhaps even noble. She gives of herself to gain information about her boyfriend, to improve cell conditions and, indirectly, to protect her cell mate from having to perform such unpleasant acts. When she senses Rennie’s disapproval, she remarks that Rennie would not even “put out to save [her] granny” (Atwood 285). Unbeknownst to Lora, in the past, Rennie would not even hold the hands of her senile and panic-stricken grandmother. Only when Lora is near death after a brutal beating, does Rennie, wondering what to do with the body, recall “the final piece in the fragmentary recollection of her grandmother whose hands were ‘missing’” (Rubenstein 273). She remembers the soothing action of her mother, who took hold “of her grandmother’s dangling hands, clasping them in her own” (Atwood 298). The retrieval of this crucial memory results in the recovery of Rennie’s own “amputated” hands, and the protagonist is finally able to make a real connection. Rennie grabs hold of Lora’s hand to pull her back into consciousness, at the same time rescuing her own denied self from beneath the surface: “this is a gift, this is the hardest thing she’s ever done”

(Atwood 299). The new Rennie has the ability to identify with others, and she knows that “to connect to another person in empathetic touch, is the only real antidote to what she has seen and experienced” (Rubenstein 273).

In Bodily Harm, an examination of gender and gender relations is revelatory of the multiplicity and fluidity of identities. According to Sonia Mycak, for Rennie, “sexual relationships with men involve a narcissistic investment in a relationship through which she imagines herself” (476). Rennie’s various lovers reveal different needs and aspects of her identity. Her relationship with Jake reflects her desire to remain “superficial,” avoiding the risks involved with profound love and commitment. This relationship is a dangerous threat to her subjective identity, as it revolves around Rennie being “packaged” and used “as an inanimate body upon which Jake may play out his desires” (Mycak 475). Rennie’s affair with Daniel, her doctor and surgeon, illustrates her desire for safety and normalcy, particularly after her upsetting operation. Rennie realizes that Daniel is like Griswold “as it would like to be,” as he is a “normal” and “fine decent man” (Atwood 196). Her relationship with him reveals that, despite Rennie’s effort to distance herself from Griswold and its ideals, part of her identity still stems from her “subground”; this insight does not fill Rennie with joy. Rennie’s relations with the various men demonstrate her gradual movement from surfaces towards depths. Her relationship with Jake depends on “surfaces” and it shatters as they begin to crack. With Daniel, on the other hand, there is at least some depth as her interest in him develops because he has seen what Rennie looks like on the inside, and she is curious about his access to this “deeper” knowledge. Mycak argues that Rennie’s relationship with the risk-taking Paul demonstrates that corporeal

affirmation is necessary for the positing of Rennie's subjective identity (476): "she's open now... she enters her body again ...she's solid after all, she's still here on the earth, she's grateful, he's touching her, she can still be touched" (Atwood 204). Just as Pitsémine helps Jack to accept himself as he is, Rennie's interaction with Paul leads to a profound change in her view of self; she comes to terms with herself, despite, and in full acknowledgement of, her illness.

The overall changes in Rennie's identity and understanding of the world are mirrored by those in her perception of women's situation and of "femininity." Displacement leads Jack Waterman to a wider definition of masculinity, altering his dream of a "hypermasculine" lifestyle; in a similar manner, displacement forces Rennie to re-evaluate her position and character as a woman. Rennie leaves Griswold because she hates the oppressive and servile existence of the town's women, particularly that of her mother. She "amputates" this part of her life and rejects the maternal role because she thinks it might hinder her, but she removes herself too far from her "feminine identity." This "amputation," like the literal one of her breast, leaves Rennie without the important ability to provide life-nourishing care. In *Volkswagen Blues*, "la mort de Théo confère à l'oeuvre son aspect positif: elle semble permettre l'évolution décisive des autres personnages" (Morency, "Permanence" 215). Similar to Théo's "insect-like" condition, Lora's horribly beaten body represents a sacrifice that helps lead to the changes in Rennie's identity. Lora releases Rennie from "the imprisonment of herself" (Hansen 12), allowing her to break out of the matrophobia she suffers. Rennie's mental and physical connection with Lora at the end of the novel illustrates her reappropriation of the female

powers of healing that she has witnessed in women, such as her mother and Elva. With their connection, Lora and Rennie, like Jack and Pitsémine, experience solidarity and “become one” (Irvine, “Here” 98). Rennie leaves the Caribbean feeling the shape of Lora’s hand in hers: “It will always be there now” (Atwood 300). Rennie has become a woman who recognizes her connection not only with all women, regardless of their class and status, but with human beings in general.

According to critic Sunaina Singh, Bodily Harm is a post-feminist novel that deals with the “myth of liberated women” (45). Jacques Poulin attempts to create a post-masculinist world, while Atwood questions the existence of a post-feminist society. In the early 1980s, feminist fervour abated “with the knowledge that women were no longer inferior,” but Atwood uses her novel to “evaluate the depth of liberation that women are supposed to have attained” (Singh 53). When Rennie enters the post-feminist atmosphere of Toronto, she feels, with smug confidence, that “she need not worry about anyone trying to exploit her” (Singh 53). Once again, the cracks in the surface of her life, such as the revelation of being “raw material,” her mastectomy, and then the violence of the Caribbean, show her that she is still subject to things beyond her control. When Rennie learns the story of Lora’s abusive past in Canada, the tale further shatters the myth that the country is above violence and exploitation; the much vaunted freedom of women is only a delusion (Singh 55). With the recognition of her own culpability, of the fact that she, like many women, has been complicit in the victimization of other women, Rennie is now able to take action against the manifest and latent oppression of her sex. Instead of being a “blank page” that Jake doodles on (Atwood 105), “she stops being text and becomes

writer" (Irvine, "Here" 98). Rennie's identity is now that of the engaged "subversive" that the corrupt islanders initially feared her to be (Atwood 295).

Displacement leads to a widening in perspective and change in identity for both Renata Wilford and Jack Waterman. Each character returns to his or her respective nation, changed for the better. They are stronger in the attributes which Atwood assigns to writers: "human imagination, in the many forms it may take; the power to communicate; and hope" (Atwood, Second 397). Atwood believes that "fiction is the guardian of the moral and ethical sense of the community" (Atwood, Second 346), thereby giving writers a serious responsibility. Assuming that, upon their return home, Jack Waterman and Renata Wilford write Volkswagen Blues and Bodily Harm respectively, one can see that their novels (and therefore the novels of Poulin and Atwood themselves), are written with their different national communities in mind. They have hope that their personal transformation may lead to an alteration in their nation's collective and cultural identities. Displacement helps Jack realize the potential fluidity and openness of identities, enabling him to write a confident, tender, and gentle Québécois novel about America, without succumbing to the stereotypes of typical "masculine" road novels, like those of Jack Kerouac. Through writing, Jack will share his experience of "américanité" and heterogeneity, attempting to further open Québec's perceptions of its cultural identity. He illustrates Québec's turn from narrow nationalist politics to the personal, whereas Rennie demonstrates that the "personal is political" (Brydon, "Atwood's" 103). She, too, hopes that her transformation into a responsible and engaged citizen, which exposes the falseness of Canadian consumer society, will affect the cultural identity of her country. Regardless

of the fact that Bodily Harm's ending is open and written in the future conditional, readers understand that whether or not Rennie is actually rescued, her will *has* changed. She plans on giving a different answer to the question "what kind of world shall you describe to your readers?" (Atwood, Second 333). Her movement from a "deliberately marginalised position" to "a passionately committed moral stance towards political issues relating to gender and colonial oppression" (Howells 118) is one that marks and demonstrates the fluidity of identity, suggesting that the same transformation is possible for the collective identity of Canada.

In the post-modern world, physical, geographical and social displacement has become increasingly common. The world is a global arena where people and cultures can flow between frontiers and borders, making "contact with each 'Other' (an 'Other' that is no longer simply 'out there,' but also within)" (Robins qtd. in Hall, "Question" 622). Moving outside the borders of their nations, Jack and Rennie make this contact with the "Other" that is now also a part of themselves. Their identities are no longer the same, nor is their perception of both their homelands and lands abroad. In a similar manner, the "Other" may physically enter Canada and Québec, presenting an outsider's perspective on their cultures. Our second chapter will address the fictional representation of this phenomenon of movement from without to within.

Chapter Two

Permanent Tourists: The View from Outside

Globalization disrupts the settled contours of personal and national identities as displacement exposes their closures to the pressure of difference, “otherness” and cultural diversity (Hall, “Question” 627). In Jane Urquhart’s The Underpainter and Régine Robin’s La Québécoise, outsiders enter into English Canada and Québec, observing and absorbing their respective cultures. The two protagonists, a painter and a writer, present an outside view of these nations, which they express, in part, through their personal artistic aesthetic. Although both outsiders, the manner of their individual displacement and crossing of borders differs. In The Underpainter, Austin Fraser’s prolonged and repeated visits to Canada force him to re-evaluate his preconceived notions of the country, and of himself. In La Québécoise, the migrant protagonist’s presence in Québec contributes to the progressive changes in the nation’s cultural identity. Both works can be considered novels of the nineties, because, although published in 1983, La Québécoise was not widely read by Québécois until its second publication in 1993. Robin’s novel was ahead of its time, and its first English translation, a mark of its belated recognition, was published in 1997, the same year as The Underpainter. These novels both illustrate how one of the effects of globalization “has been to trigger a widening of the field of identities” (Hall, “Question” 627). The identities of both traveller and immigrant, as well as their perception of the host country, are influenced by the experience of displacement. Urquhart and Robin portray this experience and the changes it brings about, at the same time revealing the potential fluidity and multiplicity of identities in the post-modern world.

THE UNDERPAINTER

When outsiders enter Canada or Québec, they arrive with distinct backgrounds, often viewing those cultures from a perspective different from those who have lived there for a long time. Many outsiders come to a foreign country with preconceived notions or myths of its cultural identity. In Jane Urquhart's The Underpainter, the protagonist, Austin Fraser, is a painter who visits Canada's northern shores of Lake Superior every summer for fifteen years. By choosing to narrate through the voice of an American artist, Urquhart expresses her interest in "how an artist would view our landscape and geography. I liked this idea of the other view of us, and wanted to explore that, I really wanted to get inside that mind" (Urquhart qtd. in Smith, "After" 18). Urquhart writes in the first-person, using the point of view of Austin, an eighty-three year old man who is re-examining his life. The novel opens in a present set in 1977 and in Rochester, New York, but readers soon follow the character into his past. Austin receives news of the death of his former model and mistress, Sara Pengelly, which renders him nostalgic and reflective of the times he has spent in Canada. Born in 1894, the span of Austin's life, and therefore of his memoir, stretches across much of the twentieth century. Critic Neil Besner describes how, in this wide frame, "Austin traces the mutual misapprehensions of Americans and Canadians looking across Lake Superior at the other's landscape and culture" (227). Outsiders' powers of observation are often heightened by displacement, and through their detailed observation of the new culture and landscape they may adjust or reject the myths with which they arrived. For Austin, this process of re-evaluating preconceived notions takes requires his initial physical displacement, and also his repeated return to Canada. Years later as he writes his memoir, a mental "displacement" back to the north completes his re-evaluation of his past.

The Underpainter presents an American view of Canada and Canadians as being relatively insignificant, boring, feminine and inferior. At the beginning of the novel, Austin describes his country's view of Canada:

The country across the lake never really takes shape in the collective imagination of here. Cold, distant, separated by enough water that the curve of the earth makes it invisible, the far shore disappears swiftly from the memory... The impression left behind is as vague and fleeting as the various intensities of light over the lake, which change before they fully register in the mind... (Urquhart 37)

When Austin's father makes a lucky investment in a Canadian silver mine, he refers to the location which brings him new wealth as "Some godforsaken place in Canada called Cobalt" (Urquhart 41), suggesting his impression of the place as remote and even uncivilised. At the beginning of the summer of 1913, after Austin's first year of classes at the Rochester Art Institute, his father takes him to his new lakeside summer property in the Canadian town of Davenport. Although it is the summer "playground" of his fellow countrymen (Urquhart 47) with its pure air and clean water, Austin has no desire to leave Rochester for Canada. He would rather spend time working on his casual friendships with the "cultural élite" of his city (Urquhart 44). Despite this preference, Austin leaves to go north. While moodily exploring Davenport he befriends a young Canadian named George Kearns. George lives a life that is very different from Austin's, as he works in a china hall and helps out in his father's neighbouring grocery store when needed. Austin is drawn to George's golden beauty, but is even more attracted by George's fascination with his own lifestyle and art, "having never before been so admired" (Urquhart 51). Although he appreciates his friendship with George, Austin regards George and his lifestyle as

uncomplicated and inferior to his own. The following summer, when Austin and his father return to Canada, he is less reluctant, “but still uncertain as to what a summer spent far from what [he] considered then to be intellectual stimulation might have to offer” (Urquhart 68). At this point, Austin clearly holds both himself and the United States to be superior to Canada, classifying Canadians as less interesting and less intelligent.

In “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” Stuart Hall defines a stereotype as “a one-sided description which results from the collapsing of complex differences into a simple ‘cardboard cut-out’” (215). In stereotyping, different characteristics run together or are condensed into one, making an exaggerated simplification which is then attached to a subject or place (Hall, “West” 215). These simplifications are a form of oppression as they effectively deny people personal power and identity (Lynch 52). Similar to Rennie’s stereotyping in Bodily Harm, which objectifies and negates the full humanity of others, Austin’s view of Canada and its citizens denies the multiplicity and complexity of their identities. The denial of complexity is comparable to a denial of importance. Like Rennie, Austin keeps his relationships with both George and Sara on a superficial level. He labels Sara as a woman who is gentle, natural, and at one with the land. At one point he thinks he is interested in the working class, and he sees in Sara “the embodiment of all that” (Urquhart 319). Although she is a Cornish miner’s daughter and does appear closely linked to the land, Austin’s perception of Sara, as of Canada, is incomplete. He labels her, and makes her inseparable from the landscape he comes to paint, thereby denying her the possibility of truly existing elsewhere. In later years, when Sara surprises Austin in New York, he is cold to her, feeling that “[she] had no place, no relevance at all, in this part of my life. She belonged in a light-filled room in the north [...]. Her presence in my city life,

my winter life, was unacceptable” (Urquhart 98). Austin’s comprehension and perception of Canada are limited and slanted as he sees the country only during the summer months when he paints. In the same way, he makes a “cardboard cut-out” of the Sara he seasonally visits. Austin believes that his composition of Sara is absolute: “I believed that I was drawing - deliberately drawing - everything out of her, that this act of making art filled the space around me so completely there would be no other impressions possible beyond the impressions I controlled” (Urquhart 170). Although Austin can paint and draw Sara’s body two-dimensionally, he seems to perceive her identity in only one.

Austin believes that, because he has captured Sara on so many canvases, he knows every aspect of her. He is startled when he learns that his knowledge and understanding of her is incomplete. Sara’s identity is more complex than Austin initially believes. He knows all of the objects in her house because “she had opened every drawer, every cupboard of her house to my dispassionate scrutiny, to the crazy inventory [he] was making in my sketchbooks” (Urquhart 164), but there are certain things she has not told Austin. Although they present “a fortuitous combination of landscape, class and gender” (Urquhart 143), his paintings of Sara do not explore or reveal her untold secrets, nor her profound depth. In his paintings and in his conception of her, Austin freezes Sara in one setting and in one season. One summer, when he is not intending to teach at The Art Student’s League the following autumn, Austin decides to stay until the end of September. This decision allows him to see the change in seasons, with its surprising storm-filled “days of gale-force winds, rain, and crashing breakers” (Urquhart 166). By chance, he sees a fox that quietly visits Sara once all of the tourists have left the island, and he is curious about its peaceful presence in Sara’s company. For the first time, Sara “denies”

Austin something, telling him that he cannot paint the fox: "He doesn't belong to you... You never would have seen him at all if you hadn't stayed" (Urquhart 177). Although all of the summers Austin spends in Silver Islet run together, he remembers this visit with striking clarity because it has been "as if Sara were some other woman altogether and Silver Islet Landing some other place" (Urquhart 166). The break in Austin's summer pattern of coming and going to Lake Superior forces him to recognize that his perceptions have been narrow, and that he has more to know of Sara and the land she inhabits.

Despite Austin's perception of Canada and Canadians as less significant and stimulating than the United States, he invests the vast and distinct northern part of Canada with superior spirituality. Towards the beginning of his memoir, Austin remembers how in his childhood his mother used to take him for winter walks to a nearby river and cemetery in Rochester. She would proudly declare that they were northerners, and inform him that, "[the] north is the birthplace of spiritualism. [...] The north is where spiritualism lives" (Urquhart 26). When Austin is nine years old, his mother dies from scarlet fever, but her passion for the north remains and develops within him. In "Landscape of the Heart," Kate Clanchy explains how the Canadian wilderness used to be considered "a site of summertime artistic pilgrimage, especially for the painters of the Twenties and Thirties" (Clanchy 16). As an artist, Austin has two chief mentors who influence the development of his aesthetics: Robert Henri and Rockwell Kent. He discovers in Rockwell a similar passion for the north as there are three issues about which Rockwell's views never waver, one of them being "the spiritual superiority of the north" (Urquhart 142). Austin describes how his mentor, who at one point had lived in Newfoundland, liked Canada and the clarity of the far north. Just as Rockwell was always "trying to shed the city - in spite of his love

for it - always trying to shed it so that he could disappear into weather and open country” (Urquhart 178), Austin, having discovered the gorgeous north shore of Lake Superior, returns there each summer “lured by landscape and by Sara” (Urquhart 145).

In her novel, Urquhart looks at Canadian and American artists and the creative opportunities available to them. The Underpainter reveals how Americans “have more money, more chances to develop their skills and sophistication, and more likelihood of attention and success” (Ross). George implies that the limitations of his artistic endeavours are a result of china being “the only thing I can do... in this place” (Urquhart 51). Despite the novel’s revelation of Canada’s lack of artistic audience and means for educational training, Urquhart’s portrayal of the country inverts the myth of Canada as a land without opportunity and significance: “the Canadian north is the land of richness and liberty and the American south is the impoverished, constricting environment” (Robin, “Underpainter” 4). In his summers spent in Canada, Austin finds a truly majestic landscape whose design works as a magnet, continually attracting him. The north becomes Austin’s exotic place of inspiration, just as Tahiti was the exotic land in which Gauguin lived on “ecstasy, quiet, and art... in amorous harmony with the mysterious beings around [him]” (Hunter & Jacobus 43). Although Austin would lose his connection with Sara and the north each winter, by May he would have convinced himself “that what was luring [him] to the north was the knowledge that it was there, and only there, that [he] was able to begin another year’s worth of art” (Urquhart 201).

Not only do the majority of American characters verbalize their belief in the spirituality of the north, but the geography of The Underpainter also suggests its deep emotional impact, as “each stride that Austin takes towards fuller feelings and richer

relationships is taken in a northward direction” (Robin, “Underpainter” 4). Ironically and in retrospect, Austin comes to see that the china hall, to which he initially condescends, is “home to [him] in a way that nowhere else had ever been” (Urquhart 146). In the north he is surrounded by people who are sensitive to their emotions and willing to invest them in others. After an intense conversation with George about his unrequited love for Vivian, a beautiful local girl, Austin sees passion in George’s face and “is able to turn and see the summer landscape as [he] never had before” (Urquhart 60). He writes that this was “the first time I felt the scene before me to be one of perfect harmony. I had never before suspected it was possible that landscape - this impression - might be a compensation for misery, for loss” (Urquhart 60). Urquhart depicts the Canadian landscape as well as its inhabitants as strongly spiritual. Austin attributes this spiritual tendency to their cultural identity. In his review of The Underpainter, Roger Robin describes how Sara becomes more than an artist’s model for Austin, she becomes “a model of a real person, fully feeling and firmly engaged in her time and place. In another inversion, Urquhart gives the characters with the fewest resources the richest inner lives and the greatest wisdom” (Robin, “Underpainter” 4). In spite of his egotistical attitude about himself and his country, Austin detects something special about the northern atmosphere and Sara: “Lake Superior. How strange that Sara lived beside a body of water, a body of deep currents, bearing that name” (Urquhart 84).

In The Underpainter, Austin’s aesthetic practice functions as a metaphor for his identity and for his approach to Canada. He represents “the embodiment of the cold ambition that seems to many to mark the evolution of modern art,” refusing “to commit his own emotions either to canvas or to human relationships” (Ferris D5). Austin’s artistic

career can be divided into two major periods. In the first, he is a realist painter “depicting his model’s body and features, the objects that surround her in her cabin... and a landscape that speaks of human desolation, absence, and loss” (Gezari P2). In the second, he is a “conceptual artist who obscures the realistic images he continues to produce by painstakingly overpainting them with multiple layers of colour...” (Gezari P2). This technique, which gives the novel its title, evolves in part from Austin’s overly eager absorption of Robert Henri’s dictum that the artist is called “to paint, not what he sees in the world, but, as purely, rigorously, and detachedly as possible, his response to what he sees – to paint, as it were, himself as he is affected by what he sees” (Besner 228). By “underpainting,” Austin progressively erases, obscures and glazes over the representational, human and more realistic aspects of his work. As critic Neil Besner suggests, the “chillingly abstract and intuned aesthetic” adumbrated by Henri’s theories “fits all too well with the contours of Austin’s own developing personality, affirming and rationalizing the propriety of rigorously distancing himself from relationship, intimacy, or feeling, from embodiment in lived experience” (228). In another of his lectures, Robert Henri remarks that a “work of art in itself is a gesture and it may be warm or cold, inviting or repellent” (Henri 86). As Rockwell Kent later notes, Austin’s work is “[cold]...as...hell” (Urquhart 261). Unable to accept this criticism, Austin further isolates himself and breaks his friendship first with Rockwell and then with Sara, whom he blames for the flaw in his work: “‘This is an aesthetic decision,’ I told her. ‘I’m not talking about character’” (Urquhart 264). Austin’s “aesthetic decisions,” the icy tone of his art and even his present home, a large, white, modern, minimalist house that he feels “suits [him] so well” (Urquhart 34), reflect the “interior Arctic” of Austin’s identity (Urquhart 216).

In his 1956 essay "The Dehumanization of Art," José Ortega y Gasset describes the temperament of the modern artist, along with some of the characteristics of the new art. When admiring more traditional art, such as that of Romanticism or Naturalism, viewers "are brought into contact with interesting human affairs" and there is an invitation for "sentimental intervention" (Ortega y Gasset 9). Ortega y Gasset argues that works of this kind are only "partially works of art," because all that is required to enjoy them is "human sensibility and willingness to sympathize with our neighbour's joys and worries" (11). In contrast, to those "possessed of the particular gift of artistic sensibility" (Ortega y Gasset 11) modern art provides true artistic pleasure. The critic calls the new art an "artistic art," one that focuses on the transparent pane of a window rather than the scene beyond it (12). The shift towards "pure art," a movement that Austin seems to follow, includes a tendency to eliminate "the human, all too human, elements predominant in romantic and naturalistic production" (Ortega y Gasset 11). In traditional art, "[man], house, mountain are at once recognized, they are our good old friends; whereas in a modern painting we are at a loss to recognize them" (Ortega y Gasset 19). According to the critic, modern artists deform reality and shatter its human aspect; their art "is inhuman not only because it contains no things human, but also because it is an explicit act of dehumanization" (Ortega y Gasset 21). Austin's underpainting results in the impossibility of recognition. His style, like his, is cold, literally and symbolically repressing emotions in an attempt to "triumph over human matter" (Ortega y Gasset 21).

Austin's artistic sensibilities influence the way he perceives and interacts with the Canadians he meets. In his essay, Ortega y Gasset implies that in order for the artist to produce "pure art" he must, in a sense, "dehumanize" himself "with a maximum of

distance and a minimum of feeling intervention” so that his sensibilities can focus on “colour values, lights, and shadows” instead of the joy, pain or suffering before him (16). Austin spends hours observing and interacting with Sara and George, but because of his artistic creed he is never able to “enter the fray of experience” and participate fully in their lives, nor perhaps his own. Like Rennie’s initially detached attitude in Bodily Harm, Austin takes the modern aesthetic and Henri’s teaching too much to heart and chooses to remain aloof from the world: “My teacher taught us to stand in front of the world while overlooking altogether the world’s response to us; unless, of course, that response were an acknowledgement of our own innate superiority, our special vision” (Urquhart 84).

Ironically, “although Austin asserts his superiority over the lower-class Canadians he befriends, he would be at a loss without access to the vivid and gripping stories of their lives, which he uses as fodder for his art” (Goldman). The Canadian characters in the book live “full” lives, take risks, and make meaningful, profound connections with others. For example, Sara risks loving Austin and braves long harsh winters alone; George “surrounds himself with breakable things and is himself broken, by war and unrequited love” (Krauss X06); and Augusta, George’s friend, cares so deeply for her family and friends that when she loses them in the First World War she returns from overseas a shell-shocked nurse, addicted to morphine. In contrast to these attractively vulnerable characters who actually “enter the landscape” and “venture into the woods,” Austin experiences life second-hand and “merely snaps the pictures, ‘fixes’ the images. They show; he tells” (Krauss X06). In his memoir, Austin provides a quick summary of his life, revealing his lack of “*massive involvement*”:

I missed the Armory Show by one year.

I participated in neither war.

I never travelled farther north than the opposite shore of Lake Superior.

I avoided love. (Urquhart 34)

He admits that he was different from the Canadians he met, saying “then there was me, dismissing relationship so casually” (Urquhart 34).

Austin lives like a voyeur, “having been taught that the only value an experience holds for an artist is in the art which arises from it” (Fairweather F1). With reference to Sara, Austin writes:

I wanted every detail of her in my painting - her body, her ancestry, her landscape, her house - wanted the kind of intimacy that involved not just the rendering of her physical being but also the smell of her skin and hair; the way she moved around her kitchen, the sounds at the back of her throat when she made love...

(Urquhart 170)

At the same time, “[he] would have preferred not to have been known by her at all” (Urquhart 170). When Sara tries searching for the map of his character, Austin simply tells her that he “feels things privately” (Urquhart 173). He does not want Sara “to see the man [he] really was” (Urquhart 104). Austin’s underpainting is “an aesthetic game of hide and go seek” with the public (Fairweather F1). It emphasizes his desire not to be seen, as his transformation of realistic portraits and landscapes to indistinct abstractions leaves “only a hint of the absence of emotion which created them in the first place” (Fairweather F1). Voyeurism “is predicated on being *outside*” and it confirms, in part, the notion of exclusion (Armstrong 239). Austin wants to remain *outside* and succeeds in doing so. However, on one occasion while watching Sara sleep he is embarrassed and ashamed by

his own voyeurism. As discussed in the section on Bodily Harm, Diana Brydon links tourists and voyeurs because they both use “the concept of ‘aesthetic distance’ as a respectable cover for aggression” (“Caribbean” 183). Austin uses this same cover, but is ashamed of his voyeurism “not because his gaze is prurient but because it is so disengaged, remote, and heartless” (Gezari P2). Although he does not change his lifestyle, Austin has his first sense that his behaviour might not be right and he “can never bring [himself] to tell Sara that [he] had seen her naked face (Urquhart 104).”

Austin is both a literal and metaphorical tourist in Canada. Looking back and writing his memoir Austin is aware of his status as a “permanent tourist”²: “I was a tourist then. I sense that I have remained a tourist” (Urquhart 69). The reason behind his “tourist vision” and lifestyle does not lie in his hometown, but rather in his artistic ideology. Unlike his mother, who “despises cameras because they ‘stop things’ and ‘obliterate’” (Goldman), Austin spends his life seeking and selecting a “good view” to frame (Urquhart 141). From the first moment he sees Sara sweeping his hotel porch, Austin imagines “the sharp edge of a graphite pencil capturing the motion, the gesture. Freezing it” (Urquhart 14). While Rennie looks for the “picturesque” to avoid the darker part of reality, Austin takes from the visual only that which attracts his eye and can therefore be made into art. He becomes “a master of selectivity” and is “able to discard frivolous stimuli at will” (Urquhart 82). Robert H. had taught him that “unless it could be turned into art, absolutely nothing was worth [his] time” (Urquhart 84). Austin can select a “good view” and in his old age can use his eidetic memory to recall specific “scenes,

² I am borrowing the term “permanent tourist” from the title of P.K. Page’s poem “The Permanent Tourists,” just as Diana Brydon does on page 183 in her article “Caribbean Revolution & Literary Convention.”

faces, landscapes, rooms, qualities of light -- but he cannot establish relationships, and always, in the name of his art's sake, he must preserve a scrupulously impersonal distance from his subjects, including Sara" (Besner 229). Austin's position as a tourist never wavers, his "outsider status" being the "greatest safeguard for his 'pure' art" (Ferris D5).

The "cold intimacy" of Austin Fraser's aesthetic and tourist vision, along with his mixture of conflicting notions of Canada as less significant yet valuable in its spiritual superiority, form a base from which the artist is able to become an exploiter. In a manner similar to Bodily Harm, The Underpainter equates tourism with irresponsibility, where Austin, as a tourist, is a new imperialist who feels he can exploit a country he can easily leave behind (Brydon, "Caribbean" 183). In his memoir, Austin tells bits and pieces of the histories and stories of the Canadians he meets, those he has been collecting and then recording in his sketch pad and on his canvases. For two decades, between the ages of twenty and forty, Austin has been a collector "in the gathering period of [his] life" (Urquhart 33). He refers to himself as "an accumulator, a hoarder" who "trespassed everywhere and thieved constantly" (Urquhart 33) and now, later in life, he is haunted by "robbed histories, stolen goods" (Urquhart 34). In her will, Sara leaves Austin her cabin in the north even though she had already given him so much of herself and the story of her past, including her father's "sad history as a transplanted Cornish miner" (Urquhart 79). Austin, frustrated by the constant crashing of images in his mind, feels the legacy she leaves him was a deliberate act of cruelty, "revenge for [his] selectivity as a taker" (Urquhart 79). His interactions with the Canadians and their landscape are not only chilly, but also exploitative as he "uses friends and lover as models, sources of inspiration, and counterpoints to his own life" (Ferris D5). Austin's confession that "I absorbed

everything I could, used it in my art, but gave nothing of myself in return” (Urquhart 180) reveals how his relationship with Canada and Canadians is self-interested.

The literal exploitation of the Canadian landscape by Austin’s father, a wealthy capitalist investor who mines for silver, is linked to the figurative one of Austin (Besner 230). Both Austin and his father look at Canada with an imperialist gaze, seeing its “raw materials” as a means to increase their personal wealth. Robert Henri had told Austin that “[art] is a kind of mining... The artist a variety of prospector searching for the sparkling silver of meaning in the earth” (Urquhart 84). Recalling this analogy, Austin thinks of his father and men like him, whose investments “tore open the wilderness, penetrated the earth, moved mountains, and who ultimately were responsible for creating the furious machines that would eventually be used in the wars” (Urquhart 84). The language of the recollection connotes great violence and a rape of sorts. Austin recalls looking at the Canadian landscape and wanting to fit the shape of “The Sleeping Giant” into one of his paintings. At the same time, he recognizes that both he and his father “had exploited this landscape -differently, it’s true - but we had exploited it nevertheless” (Urquhart 327). Austin agrees with Robert H.’s comparison, declaring that art, like mining, is about success, ambition, greed and “exploitation at the expense of nature and humanity. And, in the end, sometimes beauty” (Urquhart 84). Austin alludes to the fact that the production of his art can be destructive; he may destroy the real beauty of the subject he paints and his gestures might hurt the subject itself.

Sara is a very natural woman who understands the land, so that Austin readily associates her with her landscape. This connection between woman and land is not new, as many artists and writers have made the link before. In “Degas and the Female Body,”

Carol M. Armstrong describes how the female nude, “when free of narrative situations, is most often constituted frontally and horizontally - as a kind of landscape, its significant part of the torso, its limbs merely elongations of the line created by the supine, stretched-out torso” (237). Austin is aware that his wealthy New York audience is fond of his nude paintings of Sara. In Bodily Harm, Rennie fears that she is being used by men as “raw material;” in The Underpainter, Sara is the actual “raw material” for a man’s art. Austin sees the Canadian landscape as a view he can frame and sell, and he thinks of Sara as a body that can be “frozen into poses [he] could also frame and sell” (Urquhart 98); thus he transforms both her and her country into marketable objects. The Underpainter depicts Americans as neo-imperialists and, in illustrating Canada’s relation to the United States, it raises concerns about “the disquieting parallels between Canada’s identity and women’s identity in society” (Goldman). Critic Marlene Goldman remarks that Austin’s attitude toward Canada and Sara “specifically recalls Northrop Frye’s observation that, after the Northwest Passage failed to materialize, Canada became a ‘colony in the mercantilist sense, treated by others less like a society than as a place to look for things.’” Urquhart’s novel seems to suggest that the American outsider perceives Canada with its land, inhabitants, and convenient location, as a place worthy almost exclusively of exploitation.

The interactions between Austin and Sara raise questions of power in gender relations. Critic Linda Nochlin argues in “Women, Art, and Power” that representations of women in art “are founded upon and serve to reproduce indisputably accepted assumptions held by society in general, artists in particular, and some artists more than others about men’s power over, superiority to, difference from, and necessary control of women” (1). These assumptions coincide with those linking a woman’s “identity with the

realm of nature” and defining her existence “as object” (Nochlin 2). Robert Henri had taught that “[art] is a manifestation of constructive power,” maintaining that the artist owns, controls, and can freely manipulate any subject that has caught his attention (Henri 253). This notion has serious implications for the relationship between artist and model and, in the case of The Underpainter, the relationship between a man and a woman.

Potentially, the model who finds herself lower in a hierarchy of power may be objectified and dehumanized, subjected to the power of the artist. When Austin was in Robert Henri’s art class, the models he drew “never seemed quite real to [him]” (Urquhart 73). His instructor rarely spoke to the girls who posed, teaching that it was “the artist’s response to the subject, not the subject itself, that was important” (Urquhart 73).

Urquhart further complicates the relationship between the artist and his subject by making Sara not only Austin’s model, but also his lover. Unlike the harmonious relationship of equals found between Jack and Pitsémine in Volkswagen Blues, that of Austin and Sara is lopsided because Austin, with his cold artistic mentality, only “takes” and does not treat Sara as though they were on the same level. His labelling and permanent placement of her on the summertime shores of Lake Superior implies his sense of superiority and desire for control, as well as his denial of her full humanity and the fluidity of her identity.

Austin’s own identity construction influences his relationship with Sara. Jack and Pitsémine are androgynous characters whose relationship demonstrates a respect and acceptance of the other. Austin Fraser, on the other hand, manifests a more traditional concept of “masculinity,” denying any “feminine” aspects of his identity. Rockwell Kent advises Austin that “[women] are like forests... You can’t just enter them, you must let them enter you as well. You must let their fluidity form one-third of your character”

(Urquhart 143). However, unlike his absorption of Robert Henri's lectures, Austin either does not understand, or simply does not take Rockwell's words to heart. He maintains a "masculine" outlook on life, wanting to be in control and not wanting sentiment to cause reverberations in his life. Rennie, we recall, "amputates" the "feminine" and caring part of her identity, whereas Austin never allows such a characteristic to develop within him. His relationship with Sara exemplifies his mentality as he tries to keep everything constant and the emotional level calm and unfluctuating. In his memoir, Austin recalls his belief that "by controlling [his] own responses, [he] could control Sara's as well" (Urquhart 166). When Sara decides to visit Austin in New York she breaks out of his "cardboard cut-out" construction of her. Austin thereby loses some of his control and, surprised, responds with his own "crazy form of panic" (Urquhart 98), treating her cruelly. Austin admits that, after Sara's quiet departure, he continued "to reconstruct the woman I knew waited for me on the northern edge of the largest of lakes, to separate her completely from the woman who had, against my wishes, visited me in the city" (Urquhart 99). The entire episode "bruised [Austin's] memory in some way" (Urquhart 99), affecting his sense of control over Sara and his emotions. He justifies his treatment of Sara by saying: "Between the artist and the model, you see, there must always be a distance" (Urquhart 99); but for Austin there must also be a distinct distance between his visible "masculine" character and his repressed (almost non-existent) emotional side. Just as he covers the realistic and representational images of his art, the underpainter erases his "feminine" side.

Austin's "masculine" mentality coincides with the "masculine" attributes of Modern art. According to Ortega y Gasset, history rhythmically swings back and forth between the poles of sex, "stressing the masculine qualities in some epochs and the

feminine in others” (48). The modernist tradition “had increasingly partaken of the methods and logic of science,” a field deemed to be “masculine” (Hunter & Jacobus 357). Critic Margaret Walters describes how Austin’s most recent work, a series called *The Erasures*, lends “itself to contemporary critical discourse on topics such as absence, abandonment and ‘the suppression of femininity in contemporary society’” (F1).

Therefore, as the case of Austin shows, modern art and the temperament of the modern artist “point to a time of masculinity” (Ortega y Gasset 48). In *The Underpainter*, Sara is representative of Canada through her strong association with the landscape, but George Kearns also represents Canada and its cultural identity. Throughout the novel the identity of this young Canadian becomes increasingly linked to his livelihood and passion for china. Despite his lack of respect for it, Austin can see that the china painting “defined George somehow. He was the lake, it was the wind” (Urquhart 92). Austin’s treatment and attitude towards George and his work in the china hall exemplify his view of Canada, which he perceives as “feminine” and inferior. The aesthetic conflict between George and Austin is that of Romanticism and Modernism. To Austin, George’s picturesque china is “feminine” and represents “the ‘pointless decoration’ which is anathema to modernist art” (Marchand M21). To a “serious art student,” china painting is a pastime of which he disapproves (Urquhart 51). Austin first sees George in an apron, a piece of clothing traditionally associated with women, and he feels that “this white apron separated [George] from [him] entirely” (Urquhart 51). On outings when George would bring a cardboard folio in which to press the flowers he wanted to use for his designs, Austin would sneer at the practice “as much for its girlishness as for its unsuitability to the making of what [he] believed, then, to be ‘real art’” (Urquhart 52). What Austin denies or

obliterates in himself, he sees and finds in George. The two artists are “polar opposites” (Marchand M21), not only in the style and type of art they produce but also in the sense that Austin considers himself more “masculine” than his “feminine” friend George.

Just as Austin views china painting as a humble and subordinate art, he views George as inferior “because of his craft, and because of his lack of schooling, wealth and social connections” (Greene 3). Where Austin sees “only a kitchen dish,” George sees “a complete world” (Urquhart 76) that “chronicles and celebrates the beauty of everyday life” (Greene 3). While the china painter describes and analyses one of his pieces, Austin contemplates what he considers the terrible grinding dullness of George’s life:

How pathetic that he should have to spend his days contemplating kitchen china.

There was a kind of horror in it, futility. I almost disliked him at that moment, for my own certainty that nothing at all was ever going to happen to him. The shop seemed smaller, narrower than it had just moments before. I became aware of a staleness in the air. (Urquhart 77)

Austin’s attitude toward George and his craft reflects his view of Canada. A passage describing the art of Toronto and Montreal ateliers makes explicit the link between china and Canada, particularly in Austin’s eyes. The china of these ateliers “was given a particularly Canadian flavour. Typical landscapes from each of the provinces were popular along with detailed renderings of specific flora and fauna” (Urquhart 74). For example: “Nova Scotia... was fishing boats; Quebec, winter scenes with sleighs; Saskatchewan, sheafs of wheat and grain elevators; British Columbia, groups of mountains, and so on” (Urquhart 75). The whole collection gives Austin the impression that “George’s country was a toy country; one to be played in, and played with, but one to

be locked away with the dolls when you reached a certain age” (Urquhart 75). Austin’s opinion of George’s china parallels his outsider view of Canada as boring, less significant, and easy to exploit.

The artistic difference between Austin and George “seems to mirror an emotional difference.” George is “warm-hearted and passionate,” whereas Austin is “remote and unengaging” (Marchand M21). Urquhart herself makes a comparison between the characters, describing George as an amateur artist who “loves his art and is beyond fashion and ideology,” and Austin as embodying “the artist as celebrity phenomenon... hyped by the media to the point where his art gets lost, and he becomes a fashion. [He] is the successful artist, but he is not a good one. He cannot stay connected to his own soul” (Urquhart qtd. in Robin, “Underpainter” 5). As described earlier in this chapter, Austin’s aesthetic and approach to life are cold and distant. In contrast, George appears to be more sensitive to his subjects and to those with whom he has relationships. He is willing to risk being broken. George acts as a foil, hi-lighting Austin’s lack of sensitivity and a caring heart. Their difference becomes particularly noticeable with the advent of World War I. Austin is disengaged from the war right from its onset. When he sees George off, he is surrounded by Canadians displaying a strong sense of unity and patriotism, and he feels “alien, excluded; my American nationality, my lack of uniform making me appear to be almost like another genus and species” (Urquhart 91). His alienation from the Canadian war experience increases, however, when George returns from overseas deeply changed by what he has seen and experienced and Austin cannot empathize with him. On one of his visits to Davenport, Austin’s writing about a particular art critic is interrupted by the uncontrollable shaking and spastic twitching of George’s torso and hands. Austin

finds himself holding George's hands in his own, surprised that a war that had been over for ten years could still cause such a violent reaction in a man. He cannot understand, nor does he attempt to grasp the depth of George's sufferings. Unlike Rennie's holding of Lora's hands, Austin's clasp of George's is not a moment of redemption, nor an act of "intentional kindness" (Urquhart 207). Austin remains as aloof as possible from the incident. However, he does gain some sort of insight into the icy depths of his personality. As he returns to reread his writing about the art critic, he notes that "the tone of it was mean-spirited, cynical. There was nothing amusing about it at all" (Urquhart 208).

In The Underpainter, Urquhart explores the catastrophic influence of the war on Canadian life, "exposing the devastation wrought in the lives of the thousands of young Canadians who fought in the last wars and who returned... 'with minds full of horror to a landscape with no physical evidence of war'" (Clanchy 16). The novel hints at horrifying and "unpaintable war-trauma" (Padel 4). When George is in Europe during the war, he has the opportunity to visit Monsieur Lambert, a well-know artisan, who shows him his beautiful works. Later, overcome with sorrow, George explains to Austin that "the war finished them off altogether. Nothing beautiful and fragile could survive it" (Urquhart 190). While in Lambert's studio, George realizes that there are two worlds of art: "'One up there,' he pointed towards the ceiling again, 'and one down here, a little closer to earth'" (Urquhart 192). He tells Austin that there is "only one world of art now [...] Yours" (Urquhart 193). George's sense of pain and loss regarding the fact that "'beautiful, fragile' objects were no longer being made," reflects his sense that during the war "[everything] was dying" (Urquhart 191). According to critic Philip Marchand, the vital principle of The Underpainter is a mood, a tone of sadness which emerges not only

from Urquhart's imagination but from something deep in the history of Canada: "It is the sadness of stoic self-denial, of huge sacrifices made for unquestionable ends, of small and large renunciations, that haunts our collective past and rises so powerfully out of the pages of this novel" (M21).

Initially, George begins painting on china because that is the only medium available to him, but in the aftermath of war and abandonment he comes to value it precisely because it has the ability to "contain" (Robin, "Underpainter" 5) and therefore to give. These aspects of George's craft, which Austin arrogantly undervalues, reflect the china painter's character. After his return to Canada, George lives with Augusta who, as a nurse in the war, has also been traumatized. She and George physically and emotionally nourish and care for one another, revealing a deep and tender relationship that is foreign and startling to Austin. George writes Austin regular letters about Augusta, whereas Austin, who only later realizes he could have told George anything, never even bothers to tell him about Sara. In January of 1937, the distinction between Austin and George becomes blatantly obvious. While in New York, Austin bumps into Vivian, the girl George had loved in his youth. After a casual one night affair, the two decide to visit George in Davenport. In the past, Austin had never probed into the important details of George's life in an attempt to maintain a certain distance, and as he drives the icy roads to Canada he does not consider how this surprise visit might affect his friend. He soon learns that Vivian and George had married and that the very next day she had left him. The visit, which is filled with tension and intense emotion, ends when George decides to drive Vivian to the train station in Toronto. Before he leaves, however, George, finally frustrated with Austin's insensitivity and glacial inability to care, removes a painted tea-

cup from a shelf in his shop and thrusts it in Austin's face, saying: "At least I could have taken some nourishment from this... At least I could have filled it again and again with warmth. Can you say the same thing about anything you've done?" (Urquhart 284). At that moment Austin gives no response. Not until much time has passed and Austin himself witnesses tragedy does he come to recognize the iciness of his personality, along with the significance of his Canadian friends, the intensity of their relationships, and the profound impact of the war on their country and lives. His memoir, however, reveals his answer to George's question, and that answer is no.

The events that occur on the winter evening in 1937 are the catalyst for a serious change in Austin. Austin spends the night waiting in the china hall with Augusta. She tells him the story of her life, giving him the details of her childhood, her brothers, her special friend, the war, her addiction to morphine, and her time with George during and after their shared experience at a psychiatric hospital for war veterans, all of which Austin recounts in his memoir. At the end of this section, entitled *Night in the China Hall*, Augusta and George both commit suicide. Before George's service overseas, he had informed Austin that he was to inherit his private collection of precious china, and now "the shards of [this] china collection were strewn like petals all around the room" (Urquhart 311). These broken pieces of china were Austin's first inheritance and they contained a message which "spelled out... that George believed that I had never understood, that I was responsible, that the scene that greeted me in this boyhood room had been created by me as surely as if it were a painting I had completed with my own hand" (Urquhart 312). Austin admits that what had transpired was worse than a deliberate act of cruelty, "[it] was an act of carelessness" (Urquhart 312). After the death

of his friends, “controlling things, ordering them, became untenable,” and Austin removes his “dangerous self from the innocent traffic of humanity,” begins to look inward and no longer “takes” from the world (Urquhart 215). Only now is he fully aware of how damaging his cold aesthetic and approach to life and relationships have been.

Austin considers his true inheritance “uncertainty” (Urquhart 217). As the surfaces upon which he stands break and the structure of his lifestyle and identity folds, he questions his perception and treatment of Canada and his Canadian friends. As an old man he asks unanswerable questions about the opinions and lives of his friends, wondering how long he had refused “to look at George, to learn him, to come to know him?” (Urquhart 309). For years since the time of his inheritance, Austin has been slowly reassembling the broken china collection, finally sharing George’s passion for the art “closer to the earth” (Urquhart 192). Towards the end of his memoir Austin completes the last piece of the collection. It is a landscape by a Staffordshire potter which is titled “Ontario Lake Scenery,” but it portrays “elegant ladies, a ruined castle, several mountains, and East Indian tents” (Urquhart 336). Austin, recognizing the painted terrain as a “theatrical mirage, a fantasy,” reflects upon his own “complicated preconceptions” of Canada and Canadians (Urquhart 336). After he learns the full history and marvellous facts of the Canadian locals, he rejects “the myth that Canadians are boring” and of no serious importance (Urquhart qtd. in Howells et al 20). He sees his mistake in believing “that nothing important would ever happen to a young man who sat in an apron behind the counter in a Canadian China hall” (Urquhart 336), and acknowledges that his aesthetic had “[blocked] his view, keeping him distant from his own life” (Urquhart 337) as well as from others. After sweeping up the shards scattered across George’s room during that fateful

winter visit, Austin knows exactly what he is going to do: "I was going to drive north" (Urquhart 313). He makes plans to meet Sara at the Port Arthur hotel, intending to expose his life and himself to her, seeking her forgiveness for his icy distance, his cold scrutinizing and framing of her body and her being. Austin wants to be "exonerated" (Urquhart 331), but in the end he drives away before she arrives: "In all fairness, ultimately, I could not bear to pollute her strength with my own damaging weaknesses. I panicked in the face of the possibility of happiness" (Urquhart 334). Although Austin can now recognize both Sara's and his own full humanity and the possible breadth and depth of their emotions, he is too afraid and still unable to let Sara into his life. Austin misses his chance to renew their relationship and to find redemption through Sara.

In the end, Austin performs his repentance through his memoir and final painting, *The Underpainter*, both of which reveal the effects of his interactions with Canada. Like Jack Waterman and Rennie Wilford, Austin also writes about his own transformation. Although he is never able to put to good use the lessons he has learned, his story of "cold intimacy" is a warning to others. Just as Jack's displacement leads him to explore and accept "l'américanité" as part of his identity, Austin's travels north lead him to explore and accept a "Canadian" aspect of himself. His accumulation of Sara's cabin and more specifically of George's china collection, parallels a change in Austin. Before the war when George tells Austin about his will, he pictures his "orphaned collection destined for a foster home, another shore" (Urquhart 90), but when Austin actually does bring the china to the United States, he also carries with him the symbolism of George's craft and being in the world. Austin's once prevailing "masculine" identity gains a sensitive and more "feminine" side. His collection of the pieces of his Canadian friends' lives no longer

reflects a selfish thieving, but instead takes on a new meaning. Jean Baudrillard writes, in “The System of Collecting,” that invariably it is *oneself* that one collects (12). A given collection is made up of a succession of pieces or terms, “but the final term must always be the person of the collector” (Baudrillard 12). In a similar manner to his reconstruction of the fragmented china collection, *The Underpainter* is Austin’s attempt to reassemble himself with the details of all he has experienced, both first and second-hand. He plans to include the meaningful persons, objects, histories, places and views of those that touched his life, from his mother, Sara, George and Augusta to Rockwell and even Vivian. This final canvas, “at long last, pays homage to them, and acknowledges what they mean to him” (Walters F1). Austin will paint himself as the “implacable rock man” (Urquhart 340), similar perhaps to “The Sleeping Giant” of the Canadian landscape, surrounded by miles and miles of ice. Alone in New York, Austin will keep this unglazed painting close to him so that he “may look at the images there, from time to time,” images “full of all the possibilities that we believe exist in alternative landscapes, alternative homelands. Hills and trees, gold-leaf birches, skies and lakes and distances” (Urquhart 340) - Canada.

LA QUÉBÉCOITE

As we have seen in our discussion of the three previous novels, displacement often leads to the transformation of personal and cultural identities, revealing at the same time their fluid, multiple and fragmented nature. Régine Robin’s *La Québécoite* explores the effects of displacement by hypothetically placing the immigrant protagonist, a Parisian Jew, in three different Montreal neighbourhoods and in different personal relationships,

each time focusing on a distinct aspect of the protagonist's identity. Symbolically, the unnamed protagonist, or the Québécoise, is an autobiographical projection of the novel's narrator and of Robin herself. Robin is an immigrant or migrant writer who expresses and participates in the "come and go" between two places, the process of re(de)territorialization, and an experience of drifting (Lequin 31). Simon Harel argues that there is an "interrogation panique" that accompanies the narration of her novel, a questioning based on "Qui suis-je en ce lieu qui m'apparaît inconnu?" ("Montréal" 164). While the protagonist struggles to solve the puzzle of who she is, and attempts to establish herself in Québec through physical and intellectual tactics, Robin reveals that a single and simple answer to this question is impossible. The Québécoise tries to understand and appropriate Québécois culture in several ways, particularly through her wandering and observation, her identity as a woman, and her personal relationships. However, she encounters from both herself and Québec a resistance that blocks her path to successful assimilation and complicates her search for a coherent and unified identity. Unlike Austin Fraser who visits Canada only during the summer and maintains the status of a "permanent tourist," the unnamed protagonist of Robin's novel moves to Québec seeking intimacy with its people and culture. Her position as an outsider in intimate contact with Québécois culture influences both her personal identity and her perception of her new country. La Québécoise, like Volkswagen Blues, undermines the myth of Québec as a unified and homogeneous culture. According to Michel Foucault, the subject is relational and contingent (qtd. in McDowell 22). Rather than being a fixed and stable entity which enters into social relations with all its facets in place, the subject is "always fluid and provisional, in the process of becoming" (McDowell 22). Robin uses the displacement of

her protagonist to reveal not only the fragmented and fluid nature of personal identities, but also the potential hybridity of cultural ones, the fact that constructions of collective identity are also in the “process of becoming.”

The migrant protagonist of La Québécoise attempts to establish herself in Québec by means of physical, psychological and intellectual strategies. Her primary strategy is wandering. The title of Phyllis Aronoff's translation of the novel, The Wanderer, identifies “l'errance” or “wandering” as a central theme of the work. Metaphorically, the Québécoise wanders between two cultures, their codes of behaviour, language, and politics. On a literal level, she physically wanders through the streets of Montréal to orient herself and to apprehend her new city. As an outsider her sense of observation is keen and Montréal presents her with an “expérience de la surstimulation sensorielle” (Harel, “Montréal” 157). Her wanderings are an opportunity to absorb the physical and cultural details of Québec. Using the words of a traditional Québécois song, she comments that Québec “n'est pas un pays, mais l'hiver” (Robin 60) and she therefore tries to learn about its snow and temperatures: “Tu apprendras les différentes qualités de neige et la poudrière qui cingle le visage” (Robin 60). Her senses are finely tuned to the city's sights, sounds and smells: “Salut, respiration asthmatique de la ville. Tu te sens bien. Les quartiers roses, les quartiers lilas, les quartiers bleus, les quartiers gris, flâneries - déambulations - À l'écoute des bruits, des odeurs - les villes cannelles - les villes curry - les villes oignons” (Robin 23). The narrator compares herself to the protagonist and writes: “Tu aimais toi aussi, comme elle, te perdre dans la ville, épouser le quotidien inquiet, vivre à son bruit”

(Robin 173). For the Québécoise, wandering is a way to make the city her own, to learn its routes and routines, and to join its ongoing bustle of activity.

The protagonists of both The Underpainter and La Québécoise take stock of what is around them in order to become familiar with the people and their surroundings. However, as they gather their information it becomes clear that each has his or her own intentions. Austin Fraser wants to know absolutely everything about Sara, her body, her history and the objects around her, and he plans to use his sketch pad collection of information to produce his art. His approach resembles that of a thief or voyeur as he wants to appear invisible, maintaining a defensive distance from his subject. The Québécoise on the other hand, is not a voyeur who wants to remain “unseen,” but rather someone who would like to participate fully in her new culture, wanting to be recognized. For her, enumeration is an intellectual attempt to register Québec, and she tries to seize the “réalité de la Métropole par la magie du langage, de l’incorporer à son altérité par la nomenclature,” giving the text “une allure d’inventaire, de catalogue” (Couillard 26). Numerous lists of banks, subway stops, restaurants, historical events, menus, political parties, tastes, boutiques, and so on, are dispersed throughout the novel, memorializing and fixing their initial strangeness. This information, gathered during the protagonist’s wandering, leads to her progressive understanding of Québec and its culture. It also functions to domesticate the fear and anguish that accompanies her displacement (Harel, “Montréal” 157). The Québécoise, like Austin, exemplifies Baudrillard’s theory that “it is invariably *oneself* that one collects” (Baudrillard 12). As the protagonist collects, she gives “body to her existence”: “Noter toutes les différences. Tout cela finirait bien par donner de la réalité, tout cela finirait bien par lui faire comprendre le Québec, et Montréal

et le parler d'ici, tout cela finirait bien par prendre la configuration d'une nouvelle existence" (Robin 185). Behind the lists of mundane details lies a need for comprehension and coherence, but only the occasional redundancy of the protagonist's gathered information offers any sort of satisfaction (Frédéric, "écriture" 495). The ambulations and enumerations of the Québécoise help her decrypt Montréal and to construct her new city topographically (Frédéric, "Montréal" 61), but just as Austin cannot "capture" all of Sara, the protagonist is unable to derive a single and coherent image of Québécois culture and of herself. The "fully unified, completed, secure, and coherent identity is a fantasy" (Hall, "Question" 598).

Simon Harel argues that the act of migration is accompanied by "un processus d'individualisation," which he defines as "la capacité de se situer dans l'espace de manière à y inscrire - psychiquement - un habitat" ("Montréal" 160). In *La Québécoise*, gender plays a major role in this process, aiding the immigrant's social integration into Québec. The discussion of *Volkswagen Blues* illustrates how gender is an important sediment or point of reference for the hybrid Québécois identity, just as it is a key fragment of an individual's identity. Therefore, when the Québécoise searches in her "besace identificatoire" and finds "les femmes, leurs recherches, leur combat, leur écriture" (Robin 127), she is able to use her gender to answer, in part, the central question: "Qui suis-je en ce lieu qui m'apparaît inconnu?" (Harel, "Montréal" 164). Gender, like other aspects of the subject, is fluid. According to Linda McDowell, it is "a construct that is congruent with the dominant discourses and practices of a particular location" (McDowell 55). This definition implies that gender, or the conception of gender, can be transformed in the process of migration, becoming a means of assimilation to the national culture of a new

location. In La Québécoise, the feminist notions and discourses which are circulating in Québec influence the protagonist's concept of gender. Judith Butler calls the body "the cultural locus of gender meaning" (qtd. in McDowell 40), which suggests that there is a relation between bodily perception and the culture at large. In Montréal, the protagonist, like the narrator, can breathe more freely than in Paris. Removed from France's heavy hierarchies she reappropriates her body and feels "plus relaxe dans ma peau de femme - à part entière - égale - moi-même. Les femmes d'ici avaient un air de liberté inconnu de moi, un autre rapport à leur corps" (Robin 138). Volkswagen Blues demonstrates how the hierarchical dichotomy between the two sexes is being questioned and weakened in Québec. By adopting contemporary ideas on gender found in Québécois society, the protagonist of La Québécoise feels as though her body has been returned to her: "Une peau, des ongles, des cheveux" (Robin 139). The transformation in her construction of gender renders her similar to the other women she meets and assimilates her to one part of Québécois culture. The Québécoise's declaration of being "neuve ici" refers to a newness in her identity that is directly linked to Québec and the influences of its culture.

After adapting to Québec's concept of gender, the protagonist integrates herself even further into the culture by participating in the political movements of Québécois women. According to Hall, feminism began as a "movement directed at challenging the social *position* of women [and it] expanded to include the *formation* of sexual and gendered identities" ("Question" 611). In the same way, the protagonist's political participation results in her solidarity with other inhabitants of Québec who share a similar identity politics. This solidarity helps transform the fragmented city into a "cité conviviale" (Frédéric, "écriture" 501). The terms "metropolis" and "politics" share the

same etymon, *polis*, which means “city” in Greek. Madeleine Frédéric argues that political activity connects citizens, thereby giving meaning to a city (“écriture” 502). Unlike Austin Fraser, who isolates himself from experiences of solidarity, the Québécoise’s active role in the militant life of Québec allows her to join and apprehend part of Montréal and its culture. La Québécoise depicts Québécois culture as one that welcomes political engagement, accepting its various forms of activism. In the first section of the novel, the protagonist’s husband suggests that participation in political struggles, including those of women, is a good way to make oneself welcome in a new neighbourhood. In the second section, the narrator inscribes her protagonist into the feminist movement because it is “quelque chose d’humaniste, de bien accepté, d’encouragé même” (Robin 103). The Québécoise’s political engagement is more visible in this section where, although she is married to a Québécois, she has a greater sense of exclusion and of being an outsider. For the displaced protagonist, feminist causes are something to which she can relate and that she can understand: “un langage en commun. Quelque chose de vaguement universel qui lui permettrait de ne pas sentir la démembrure” (Robin 118). The “feminine” identity the protagonist finds in her “besace identificatoire” provides a sense of recognition with Québécois women and their struggles, demonstrating again that gender is an important part of assimilating to Québec.

Another gender-based way of integrating into Québec is the protagonist’s identification with Québécois women writers. The feminist movement in Québec was particularly powerful throughout the late 60s and 70s. At this time the application of the discourse of decolonization, first used in Québec during the Quiet Revolution, shifted and was mobilized to express the position of women in Québec. Feminist writing refined and

displaced Hubert Aquin's notion of "le malheur d'expression," incorporating it into a revolutionary aesthetic of women's writing (Purdy, "Shattered" 31). During this period, women begin to "write themselves," as Rennie does at the end of *Bodily Harm*. It is contact with this influential writing that helps render the protagonist "plus relaxe dans sa peau" (Lequin 39). She reads the feminist works ferociously and discovers that she likes "la hardiesse revendicative, la hardiesse de ton, le bonheur d'écriture" (Robin 138). The voices of these women writers are so important and notably visible in Québec that the narrator declares: "Ce pays t'était apparu comme un lieu de parole féminine, un lieu où les femmes avaient quelque chose à dire, à crier... L'écriture, sans doute le véritable pays de ces femmes en quête d'un pays" (Robin 138). Both the narrator and protagonist establish links with Québec because they relate to its women writers and their works which fight conditions of marginalization and dispossession. The narrator inscribes herself "dans la foulée de l'écriture au féminin partageant avec les auteures nées ici des visions de femmes fort semblables" (Lequin 35). Evidently, the definition of Québec is expanding and becoming more heterogeneous. It no longer depends solely upon ethnicity, and therefore the protagonist is able to assimilate to parts of its culture.

The narrator lives in the "lieu de parole féminine" found in Québec, but neither she nor her protagonist has a sense of truly and completely belonging to the country. Her assimilation to Québec's construction of gender, her new appropriation of her body, and her participation in feminist causes and writing, all aid in the migrant's integration into parts of Québécois society, yet she never loses the sense of being an exile. Although she actualizes Simone de Beauvoir's famous saying, "On ne naît pas femme: on le devient," the migrant also exclaims that "On ne devient pas québécois" (Robin 54). The narrator,

like the protagonist, belongs to the world of writing, but because of her migration and situation in “l’entre-deux,” she also lives in “l’entre-dit,” struggling to figure out “pour qui écrire et dans quelle langue” (Robin 204). Her associations with Québécois women and their marginalization are not powerful enough for her to write only for them, for their culture, and in their language, nor do they dominate and erase the other fragments of her identity and their respective connections. Despite her assimilation to various parts of Québécois culture, particularly those relating to women, the Québécoise cannot settle in Québec.

Psychologically, total assimilation to a country is almost impossible. The identity of a subject is not biologically defined, nor is it singular or firmly fixed. Instead, the subject assumes different identities at different times, “identities which are not unified around a coherent self” (Hall, “Question” 598). According to Hall, “[within] us there are contradicting identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about” (Hall, “Question” 598). The narrator of *La Québécoise* mentions that her character “doit bien avoir quelques contradictions, quelque fragilité” (Robin 60). Displacement highlights the internal divisions and multiple aspects of a subject’s identity, as migration to a new place often results in an even greater fragmentation of one’s identity. This result renders the “processus d’individualisation” more challenging and complicated because, psychologically, the diverse fragments of one’s identity may desire different “habitats.” The protagonist’s inscription into the various areas of Montréal, and into relationships with men of different types, illustrates the multiplicity of her identity. Although personal relationships can often be characterized in terms of power and domination, the protagonist’s relationships with men with particular

attributes tend rather to reveal the different fragments of her own identity, just as Rennie's relations with Jake, Daniel and Paul reveal the different aspects of her composite self.

On the level of narration, the use of the conditional underlines the idea that these men are projections of the narrator's fragmented identity. In his article, "Inscribing Difference: The Changing Function of the Alternarrated as a Site of Intersystemic Interference," Anthony Purdy discusses the "alternarrated," a term proposed by Gerald Prince. The "alternarrated" is a category that includes "all the events that do not happen but, nonetheless, are referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text" (Purdy, "Inscribing" 730). All expressions of impossibility or unrealized possibility, of unfulfilled expectations and purely imagined worlds, may be found in the wide range of expressions embraced by this mode (Purdy, "Inscribed" 730). The narrator uses the alternarrated in her creation of *La Québécoise*'s "hypothetical world." Writing in this mode, she has the freedom to manipulate her protagonist's world, installing her where and as she wishes. The liberty of the alternarrated reinforces the idea that the men of the novel reflect the various identity fragments of the protagonist, along with her different desires and feelings regarding the process of assimilation.

By marrying a specific type of man in each of the novel's sections, the protagonist is able to frequent their communities, thereby affirming certain parts of her own identity. While Rennie Wilford tries to cut off or ignore her roots, the protagonist of Robin's novel would like to establish some. Marriage to a fellow inhabitant of a place, regardless of their original homeland, establishes connections and associations with the territory in which one dwells. It therefore participates in the "processus d'individualisation" as a means of inserting oneself into a place, enabling it to become physically and psychologically

a “habitat” (Harel, “Montréal” 160). As the narrator of the novel tries and tries again to install her character into Montréal by placing her in complex relationships with various men, Régine Robin inverts the traditional metaphor, one used by Austin Fraser, which associates woman and country. In La Québécoise, the narrator links the protagonist’s lovers to various areas in Montréal: Snowdon, Outremont, and around the marché Jean-Talon. A community is “a small-scale and spatially bounded area within which it is assumed that the population, or part of it has certain characteristics in common that ties it together” (McDowell 100). Therefore, the association of the men, and through them the protagonist, with their respective communities is an affirmation of their identities. They can recognize a part of themselves in their neighbours, demonstrating, as does Volkswagen Blues, that the search for one’s identity necessarily includes others. Although the protagonist returns to Paris at the end of each section in La Québécoise, her personal involvement with others allows various fragments of her identity to invest, at least temporarily, in Québec.

The Québécoise’s Jewish heritage, like her gender, forms a key fragment of her identity. The discourses of Jewish history and culture that permeate La Québécoise emphasize the importance of this fragment in the protagonist’s hybrid composition, at the same time revealing the potential plurality of the Jewish identity itself. The novel consists of a vast range of references to Jewish culture, such as pieces of personal family history, culinary specialties, traces of important ancient writings, citations from religious texts, and intertextual references to poems and passages of prose (Kwaterko 181). Régine Robin recuperates the collective past of the Jews using “une parole commémorative et emphatique, s’appuyant sur la mémoire identitaire collective” (Kwaterko 179):

Prendre une voix solennelle, entrer dans la légende. Le messie reviendrait du pays des tribus exilées de l'autre côté du Sambatyon. [...] Il arriverait à Jerusalem près du mur occidental là d'où, dit-on, la présence divine ne s'était jamais éloignée. Ce jour-là, tous les Juifs morts en Palestine ressusciteraient, les autres morts en Diaspora ressusciteraient quarante ans plus tard. Leur montrer que réel et légende se mêlent, que les Juifs y croyaient. (Robin 161)

The Québécoise herself attempts to write a text with an "historical" perspective, as her own protagonist, Mortre Himmelfarb, is an old Jewish professor from central Europe who is in the midst of preparing lectures for a Jewish history course offered at McGill University. His work focuses on several historical and emblematic figures, particularly those of Sabbatai Zevi, David Reveni, Salomon Molcho, and Jacob Frank- "[qui] rappellent une tradition d'hétérodoxie religieuse et de subversion culturelle (du XVI au XVIII^{ème} siècle) qui a bouleversé l'histoire du judaïsme européen" (Kwaterko 178). These figures "incarnent tous un décentrement identitaire à l'égard de l'ordre socioculturel juif" and they symbolize plurality within the Jewish identity (Kwaterko 178). Their presence in the text exemplifies how the intertext of Jewish history is central to La Québécoise and to the identity of the protagonist. These figures also demonstrate that discourse on Jewish identity cannot be reduced "à aucune hégémonie discursive, à aucun paradigme identitaire juif (passéiste, religieux, laïque, assimilateur, diasporique, sioniste)" (Kwaterko 180). The heterogeneity found within the story of Mortre Himmelfarb mirrors that of La Québécoise in general, in that both reveal the potential plurality and hybridity of personal and cultural identities.

In “Snowdon,” the first part of *La Québécoite*, the protagonist’s husband foregrounds the part of her self that would like to remain faithful to her Jewish culture. She marries a Jewish Pole whose parents immigrated to America after World War II. Together, they set up their lives in Snowdon and live in the house of the Québécoite’s aunt, Mime Yente. The protagonist’s decision to marry another Jew and to live in Snowdon reflects her desire to affirm her connections with Jewish culture (Lequin 36). Snowdon is “un quartier d’immigrants à l’anglais malhabile où subsiste encore l’accent d’Europe centrale, où l’on entend parler yiddish, et où il est si facile de trouver des cornichons, du Rôle natté et du matze mail” (Robin 23). The protagonist and her husband are intellectuals, as she herself is an author who would give “quelques cours aux Jewish Studies de McGill” while her husband “qui aurait fait ses études à McGill et à Columbia enseignerait l’économie politique à Concordia” (Robin 31, 32). The narrator expresses how the couple “serait bien” (Robin 36), how they feel at home with each other, upholding and sharing the Jewish culture, and enjoying their chosen living space. Despite these links, however, the protagonist still feels heavy moments of intense isolation and rupture. She notes “un vide” in her life and asks herself if there is “quelque chose d’autre?” (Robin 36). In a tone suggestive of her suffering, the Québécoite declares that “ON NE DEVIENDRAIT JAMAIS VRAIMENT QUÉBÉCOIS” (Robin 37), indicating that she is not settled in Québec. The protagonist feels at ease with her husband and in the Jewish community; however, the other fragments of her identity, particularly those which desire assimilation to Québécois society, are not satisfied.

The second section of the novel, “Outremont,” foregrounds that part of the protagonist’s identity that wishes to assimilate to traditional Québécois culture. She

marries a “true” ethnic Québécois, and tries to integrate into “la bourgeoisie québécoise, des fleurs de lys en fer forgé partout accrochées à son balcon” (Robin 102). Her house is significant because its “fleur de lys” motif reflects her husband’s self-positioning and represents the society to which she would like to assimilate. According to sociologists Carsten and Hugh-Jones, “If people construct houses and make them in their own image, so also do they use these houses and house-images to construct themselves as individuals and as groups” (qtd. in McDowell 93). “La maison” is a central theme in La Québécoise as it is connected to notions of “settling down” and “feeling at home” which are particularly pertinent to migrants. Traditionally, “la maison” or “the home” is considered a “feminine place,” but Robin complicates this association because in each section (particularly the last two), the men are the ones linked to homes, along with the communities in which they are found. Gaston Bachelard argues that “dwelling and the home are a key element in the development of people’s sense of themselves as belonging to a place” (McDowell 72). The Québécoise understands this notion and, with hopes of belonging and integration, she inserts herself into “the home” through her relationships with men.

The political stance and position of the protagonist’s Québécois husband support the idea that he is a projection of the side of her that wants to comprehend the dominant culture in Québec. The narrator creates her husband as “un avocat, ou un psychiatre, un professionnel en tous les cas devenu sous-ministre ou haut fonctionnaire, passant une grande partie de la semaine à Québec” (Robin 101). She describes his political engagement and subsequently his strong nationalist sentiment: “Il aurait commencé à faire

de la politique au temps R.I.N. soutenant la gauche du mouvement et aurait appuyé le Parti québécois dès sa naissance” (Robin 106). When her husband recounts his experiences to the protagonist, she shares his profound joy and passion with the “sentiment d’exister enfin d’appartenir à une longue filiation de luttes” (Robin 106), feeling that they get along well together. The husband and his thinking reflect tendencies in the protagonist that want to belong to the “Nous si fréquemment utilisé ici” (Robin 54), but the other fragments of her identity are afraid of this exclusivity:

La peur de l’homogénéité
 de l’unanimité
 du Nous excluant tous les autres
 du pure laine
 elle l’immigrante
 la différente
 la déviante. (Robin 133)

Divided by conflicting desires to assimilate and yet to resist Québécois culture, the protagonist is “inintégrable” (Robin 134). She rejects major Québécois figures such as Lionel Groulx, Duplessis and Henri Bourassa (Robin 54), and sees other, more negative connotations to “la fleur de lys”: “[elle] a pour [la protagoniste] d’étranges connotations: royalistes, antisémites, nobliaux imbus de leurs anciens privilèges” (Robin 134). At times, the traditional Québécois culture appears saturated with stereotypes and “cultural racism,” which sociologist Paul Gilroy links to “the idea of race and the ideas of nation, nationality, and national belonging” (qtd. in Hall, “Question” 618). The culture leaves the protagonist with the impression that “les étrangers” are undesirable, as they are considered

“tous communistes, tous subversifs, tous révolutionnaires” (Robin 82) or “[voleurs] de job” (Robin 87). They are therefore “réduits au silence, à l’errance, à la perte de leur Histoire, de leur mémoire, enfermés dans le mythe” (Robin 83). The Québécoise’s hesitation to assimilate to the traditional culture of Québec is understandable as it would require her to deny parts of her identity and lead to friction with her own different beliefs.

Despite her desire for assimilation, the Québécoise cannot ignore the conflicting demands of her other dimensions. The issue of power relations within the couple is particularly relevant in the second part of *La Québécoise*. In this marriage the protagonist risks being dominated by her Québécois husband. His passion for Québécois politics pushes the protagonist to say that it would have been “impossible de dire NON” in the referendum of 1980, “de voter avec les tenants des multinationales” (Robin 133), even though she does not fully support this view. On the one hand, the husband represents what the protagonist would like to be, but on the other, he exemplifies those aspects of Québec that exclude her from the community she desires. During painful discussions or arguments, “il aurait pris l’habitude de lui dire que n’étant pas d’ici, elle n’y connaissait rien” (Robin 132). They often discuss political issues and she tries to understand, but her husband, who is strongly linked to politics and the public sphere, puts her “entre parenthèse” (Robin 148). He dominates her and places her in the private sphere, rendering the home she has chosen stifling. In this relationship, the position of the Québécoise also undermines her potential for self-determination. When in the company of her husband, she must deny the diversity and multiplicity of her identity. The narrator asks, “-se sentirait-elle bien dans sa peau ‘d’ethnique’ les soirs où son mari resterait à Québec?” (Robin 144),

which implies that she ordinarily suppresses this other dimension of her personality. The attempt at integrating the protagonist into Québécois culture through the mediation of a Québécois husband ends in failure. She cannot live peacefully in the exclusivity of one fragment of her identity, when other parts of her intellectual and emotional make-up resist her husband's domination his opinions, and at the end of "Outremont" the protagonist returns to Paris once again.

Throughout the novel, the Québécoise resists letting go of Paris and of her European past. Her "Je me souviens" will always signify something different from the motto on the front and back of Québécois vehicles. For her, the expression leads to a description of personal and family memories in France and elsewhere, whereas for most Québécois it alludes to various layers of the nation's collective past. She has difficulty understanding the local culture and making herself understood, as she holds onto her Eurocentrism and seems unable to adapt to speaking French and thinking American. She is nostalgic for the universals of the Jacobin project of the French Revolution. Even amongst her friends, the Québécoise panics in the fragmented physical and social landscape of Montréal, asking "N'y a-t-il rien d'universel ici?" (Robin 158). Familiar and old dates and names in Québec reinforce the gaps between the protagonist and her new and old cultures: "Des noms familiers. Quartier latin, Saint-Denis et pourtant. Elle se sentirait au fond de ces cafés beaucoup plus dépaysée que sur la Main. Le langage, les noms propres seraient des pièges. Elle le sentirait" (Robin 148). She struggles in Québec: "Coupée de son Histoire, projetée dans une autre. Le manque. L'espérance pourrait-elle être la même partout dans le monde et pourrait-elle s'y retrouver?" (Robin 118). While the

various fragments of the protagonist's identity, both new and old, each search for the most stable and fitting "habitat," the difficulty and challenges of the "processus d'individualisation" become increasingly evident.

In the final section of La Québécoise, "Autour du marché Jean Talon," the protagonist enters a relationship with a Paraguayan immigrant which reflects "sa peau 'd'ethnique'" and allows her to live her "difference." In his company she can laugh about her mixed and plural identity. As migrants, they would understand one another and "sentiraient entre eux comme un magnétisme étrange" (Robin 178). The protagonist moves into her lover's home and finds herself close to the marché Jean Talon in a neighbourhood of Italian and Latin-American immigrants. She now lives amongst the "ethnics" she refers to as "son vrai pays" (Robin 143). In contrast to her white-collar, Québécois husband of "Outremont," her lover works in a carton factory and remains "éternellement un citoyen de seconde zone" (Robin 183). He lives permanently on the margins of society, excluded from the nation's politics. Together, they dream of elsewhere, they wander the city, and they can see that "[le] Québec tout doucement s'en irait vers une société plurielle sans qu'il y paraisse. Témoins de cette métamorphose inconsciente, ils en seraient aussi les obscurs et anonymes artisans" (Robin 202). This lover is a projection of the protagonist's desire for difference and "une certaine pluralité de cultures" (Lequin 36). They are at home with each other but, as with her previous relationships, this one provides only the illusion of settlement and rootedness. For the protagonist, no single identity can align all of her different identity fragments into one,

overarching and coherent “master identity” (Hall, “Question” 601) and the satisfaction of one fragment does not lead to overall happiness and settlement

The protagonist’s dispersion resembles that of Montréal, as it is a “Ville schizophrène/ clivée/ déchirée” (Robin 81), with rich and poor, French and English, Canadian and American aspects all jumbled together. The three parts of La Québécoise illustrate the fact that both she and Québécois society are plural and fragmented. A bus ride along Sherbrooke, “cette rue-fleuve, cette rue caméléon, cette rue jungle,” reveals starkly contrasting neighbourhoods, passing Westmount and its luxurious “maisons spacieuses de pierres [et] espaces riants pleins de joggeurs et d’enfants” (Robin 81) on the way to the Sherbrooke “des pauvres de la mélasse, du bas de la ville... un Sherbrooke dépotoir” (Robin 82). This road, synecdochic of Montréal, presents the protagonist with several different worlds, in none of which can she find her place. Each Montréal district is only one part of Québec’s cultural continuum and, psychologically, is only “un habitat” for one fragment of the protagonist’s identity. Although it is rich in variety, the protagonist sees Montréal as a dislocated space:

Ville Schizophrène
 patchwork linguistique
 bouillie ethnique, pleine de grumeaux
 purée de cultures disloquées
 folklorisées
 figées
 pizza
 souvlaki

paella (Robin 82)

a place that does not provide the ground she needs in order to establish firm roots.

Ironically, Austin Fraser has no desire to “be Canadian,” but in the end, through his changes and inheritances, Canada becomes a part of him and he wants to keep images of the country close by him. It is the Québécoise who, despite her desire for full integration, cannot remain in the country, as “rien ne peut arrêter l’errance [physique et de l’identité], diminuer la nostalgie ou créer une certaine cohérence” (Lequin 36).

As the Québécoise enters into different relationships and explores the “dédale hétéroclite et coloré” of Montréal (Robin 147), she begins to understand the city, its characteristics, and her place - or lack of place - as a migrant in its midst. She is able to learn about Montréal and its various fragments, but at the same time “la ville [l’]engloutit” (Robin 52-3). She loses herself: “Tu as perdu ton âge et ton nom” (Robin 173) and she becomes nothing more than “la rumeur douce de cette ville sans cohérence, sans unité” (Robin 173). She feels the wearisome need to continue wandering: “Impossible de faire le tour de cette ville, de l’assimiler, de se l’incorporer. Impossible simplement de s’arrêter quelque part, de poser son balluchon, de dire ouf!” (Robin 173). The urban geography of the city is an “espace mouvant” (Robin 138) where the protagonist cannot settle or find rest. Instead she must continuously wander: “Toi perdue, à nouveau l’errance” (Robin 63). The protagonist’s sense of exile and perpetual wandering stems immediately from her experience of immigration, but also participates in the “travail de la judaïté” of the text, as the Jew is the archetypal figure of displacement. The Jewish discourse of the novel presents “des traces de l’oppression qui évoquent explicitement la condition des Juifs, leur

expérience historique et leur conscience” (Kwaterko 175). The Québécoise makes explicit the link between her “errance” and her Jewish heritage: “Depuis toujours nous sommes des errants. Immigrants. Immergés. Immer toujours” (Robin 63). Her sense of continual wandering and living between places is heightened in the patchwork of Montréal, as her “temps de l’entre-deux” includes not only being “entre deux langues, entre deux villes,” but also wandering between “deux villes dans une ville” (Robin 63). *La Québécoise* deals with issues of integration, while it links Québec’s heterogeneity to “la problématique fictionnelle de l’univers culturel juif” (Kwaterko 171): “Assurément, la présence du Juif comme figure interposée permet une mise en scène de la disparité culturelle de Montréal, de son caractère de plus en plus fragmenté et cosmopolite” (Kwaterko 163).

Robin’s collage technique manifests the fragmentation, incoherence and sense of “unsettlement” which permeates *La Québécoise* on several different levels. Just as Austin’s aesthetic reflects his identity and his perception of Canada, the aesthetic of collage found in *La Québécoise* renders the fragmented identity of the protagonist and her perception of Québec. The migrant’s identity and life experience are split between “la mémoire d’un passé européen,” “un présent québécois” and “l’Histoire socio-culturelle de la collectivité juive” (Purdy, “Altérité” 56). The corporeality of the text, therefore, not only reflects the pluralized and fragmented nature of both the protagonist and Québec, it also expresses and represents the experience of displacement. According to Anthony Purdy, this experience is:

one of rupture and disorientation, reflected in the collage technique of the text which is made up of multiple flashbacks, geographical displacements, *mises en*

abyrne, lecture notes, snatches of dialogue and poetry, lists of all kinds, interpolated texts, advertisements, newspaper clippings, television guides, and hockey scores. (“Shattered” 30)

The novel’s reference to various times and locations, its internal division into three parts, its traces of different languages, and its narrative schizophrenia that oscillates between *Je*, *Tu*, and *Elle*, all indicate the complicating and pluralizing effects of migration. Although writing helps in the process of assimilation, as “un acte de transmutation et création d’une nouvelle appartenance, d’un nouvel territoire” (Lequin 31), it is also a means for the migrant to recover “sa parole occultée, pour prendre son espace” and recount the experience of displacement (Couillard 26).

In the postface to the 1993 edition of her novel, Robin explains that her only ambition “en reprenant les techniques du collage” was to “fictionnaliser l’inquiétante étrangeté que crée le choc culturel” (“nouveaux” 207). Through her eclectic collection of verbal snap shots she had hoped to create memories, fixing the strangeness of her new home. She had wanted to capture her disorientation and sense of rupture before she became accustomed and it disappeared (Robin, “Writing” 174). Collage has its roots in Modernism’s synthetic cubism, where it symbolized, in part, a “curious combination of banality and metaphysical doubt” (Hunter & Jacobus 143). According to the painter Max Ernst, inherent to the technique of collage is the conception of alienation and disorientation (Hunter & Jacobus 177), sentiments which accompany the experience of displacement. The technique was used by the early twentieth-century avant-garde, breaking with the traditional organic aesthetic of realism and naturalism. Cubism, which

introduced collage and is a movement that influenced Austin Fraser's art, was initially considered disruptive with its aesthetic of "dis-organisation." The fragmentation of its subjects was "dehumanizing," and its use of real-life material defamiliarized "pieces of the everyday." The construction of La Québécoise employs different aspects of the collage tradition. The text recalls the "Found Art" or collage constructions made by Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948) with the everyday and waste materials he collected on his walks. Richard Hamilton's (1922-) use of "popular culture and its visual embodiment in advertising imagery and signs" (Hunter & Jacobus 152, 332) is also visible in Robin's work. Sharing in the potential heterogeneity and multiplicity of the collage aesthetic, La Québécoise presents "[autant] de facettes, d'images familières ou non de la culture francophone nord-américaine d'un Montréal kaléidoscopique et pluridimensionnel dont l'essence échappe à toute récupération par le dehors" (Couillard 26). The aesthetic functions well as a medium to express the experience of initial strangeness and alienation, as the multiplicity of its fragments and its appearance of disorganization contribute to a corresponding sense of incoherence. Despite its liberating and playful appearance, the collage technique of La Québécoise expresses the anguish that accompanies displacement, fragmentation, uncertainty and lack of coherence.

The novel's aesthetic of collage also reflects the post-modern "crisis of representation" (Jameson viii). The protagonist's story is not a linear and classical story of immigration (a departure, a landing, an installation) but rather displays "[un] refus radical de représentation" (Kwaterko 176):

Il n'y aura pas de récit

pas de début, pas de milieu, pas de fin

pas d'histoire.

Entre Elle, je et tu, confondus

pas d'ordre.

Ni chronologique, ni logique, ni logis. (Robin 86)

The collage technique illustrates the absence of fixed order associated with post-modernity and the experience of “déterritorialisation.” This experience results in “une écriture migrante”:

Il n'y aura pas de récit

tout juste une voix plurielle

une vois carrefour

la parole immigrante. (Robin 88)

According to Józef Kwaterko, this “parole immigrante” also corresponds to “la mémoire de l’anéantissement, à l’angoisse de l’émiettement identitaire” (176). In La Québécoise, the migrant and Jewish experiences are conflated through this “parole migrante,” the protagonist’s perpetual wandering, and the aesthetic of collage. The protagonist “*est Québécoise et, en même temps, ne l’est pas*” (Purdy, “Québécoise” 102). The reference to her as “la Québécoise” implies an unfamiliarity with the local language, but also plays on the word *coi* (feminine *coïte*) which means “silent” or “rendered silent” (Atkins, *et al* 153). In the case of the protagonist, her voicelessness refers to her marginal position as an immigrant, as well as to what Adorno refers to, in Negative Dialectics, as the Holocaust’s dessemanticization of all words (ch.3). The *t* in *la Québécoise* is the “trace des ‘impossibilités linguistiques’ (13) d’une postmodernité ‘après Auschwitz’” (Purdy,

“Altérité” 58), where “tout message, tout récit ainsi que le yiddish, la langue de création, sont frappés de silence” (Kwaterko 173). The protagonist is “une immigrante à la ‘voix muette, scellée’ (85), une tzigane, une juive, qui sait bien que ‘tout ça débouche sur Auschwitz’ (76) et sur l’indicible, sur ‘l’impossibilité de vivre après’ (136)” (Purdy, “Altérité” 57).

La Québécoise’s collage composition suggests the absence or impossibility of figuration after the horrors of World War II, just as The Underpainter alludes to the “unpaintable” trauma of World War I. The fragmentation of the text implies the inability or refusal to make a coherent history or story after the revelations of inhumanity on such a scale. The narrator expresses this incapacity, writing that: “Il n’y a pas de métaphore pour signifier Auschwitz pas de genre, pas d’écriture... Rien qui puisse dire l’horreur et l’impossibilité de vivre après. Le lien entre le langage et l’Histoire s’est rompu. Le langage n’a plus d’origine ni de direction” (Robin 141). In our post-modernity, the expression of a coherent unified identity, whether personal or collective, is impossible as everything has become “irreprésentable” (Robin 15). Anguish and unhappiness permeate the protagonist’s story: “Elle sentirait qu’elle ne pourrait jamais tout à fait habiter ce pays, qu’elle ne pourrait jamais tout à fait habiter aucun pays” (Robin 147). Her incapacity to settle and her unsatisfying returns to Paris lead to the realization that she is condemned to wander forever amongst the fragmented landscape of “l’entre-deux,” rendering La Québécoise “un roman de l’échec” (Purdy, “Altérité” 58); there is, however, an element of hope in the text.

La Québécoise presents a Montréal whose fractured landscape and cosmopolitanism is “un hors-lieu vécu dans l’aliénation et le malheur, dans le désir des enracinements” (Robin, Roman 185) but it also presents the possibility of a fertile and plural society that would acknowledge “la nature mouvante de sa citoyenneté” (Verthuy 84). In The Underpainter, Austin has, if anything, a negative effect on Canada and the Canadians he knows, as his carelessness and exploitation of the land and its people result in tragedy. The background of English Canada is quite diverse as people came to Canada from all over Europe and elsewhere. Although Austin’s presence reiterates the closeness of Canada and the United States, it does not modify traditional constructions of the Canadian identity. In contrast, the protagonist of La Québécoise participates actively in the opening up of Québec’s cultural identity by contributing to its heterogeneous and plural aspects, in her role as “L’AUTRE dans le MÊME” (Robin 183). Her “parole immigrante” is ambivalent. It is weak, “[habituée] à l’errance et à l’incertitude, au fragmentaire, au flou,” and yet powerful as “une parole inassignable ‘inquiète,’ ‘dérangée,’ ‘déplacée’ [qui] ‘travaille le tissu même de cette ville éclatée’(198)... capable de provoquer les changements, de tisser l’avenir” (Lequin 36). La Québécoise illustrates the fact that the opening up of Québec society, which Volkswagen Blues implies, is still very much in gestation. Robin’s use of the conditional or “alternarrated” recalls not only the ending of Bodily Harm, but that of Hubert Aquin’s Prochain épisode, as the protagonists of both novels project the completion of their respective missions in a more or less problematic future. In Aquin’s novel, the “alternarrated” serves the purpose of what Gerald Prince refers to as *discounting*: “It insists upon the ability to conceive and manipulate hypothetical worlds or states of affairs and the freedom to reject various

models, conventions or codes for world- and fiction-making” (qtd. in Purdy, “Politics” 108). Robin’s novel, particularly in the last section, hints at a more positive experience of “l’entre-deux,” one which would encompass the constitution of “un nouvel imaginaire social, d’une identité floue, pluri-culturelle, ‘identité de traverse’” (Purdy, “Altérité” 55). Within La Québécoise is the desire for a Québec whose fragmented construction and cosmopolitanism will be a celebratory collage, not an anguished lament. The Québécoise not only lives this growing cultural collage, she also helps produce it. The re-publication of the novel in 1993, and the appearance of an English translation in 1997, indicate that the “parole immigrante” of the “voiceless” wanderer has woven its way into the pattern of Québec’s cultural tapestry, and that it can now be heard.

Conclusion

Volkswagen Blues, Bodily Harm, The Underpainter and La Québécoise all

illustrate how globalization and its ensuing displacement of individuals have consequences for personal and collective identities. As a result of globalization and the growth of cultural homogenization, national identities are being eroded (Hall, "Question" 619). This erosion takes particularly interesting forms, and is most strongly contested, in Québec where, in the 1980s following the failed referendum, there was an "éclatement de la culture nationaliste" (Kwaterko 192) and a disintegration of traditional, narrowly defined identity boundaries without, however, any wholesale abandonment of the nationalist project. Each of the novels discussed in this thesis presents a different view of Canada or Québec and their respective cultural identities, which underlines the fact that as nations they do not have a single, coherent and unified definition. Régine Robin feels that literature "est précisément ce qui vient défaire les identités, ce qui déconstruit, érode les certitudes identitaires, met à la mal le familialisme sécurisant dans lequel il est si facile de s'enfermer" ("Introduction" 306). The expression in the arts of the nations' collective identities is diverse and comes from a variety of voices. Urquhart feels that "[our] national identity may be that we don't have a fixed idea of our identity or of what our role in the world ought to be," and she sees this as a positive thing because "we are much more flexible" (qtd in Howells *et al* 19). According to Stuart Hall, while national identities are declining in the post-modern and globalized world, "new identities of hybridity are taking their place" ("Question" 619). Displacement "unhinges the stable identities of the past" while "it opens up the possibility of new articulations - the forging of new identities, [and] the production of new subjects" (Hall, "Question" 600). Jack Waterman, Pitsémine and

the Québécoite may all be referred to as Québécois, but the adjective varies in its meaning when applied to each character, demonstrating the hybridity of the national identity.

English Canada has seen a similar shift and expansion of what the term “Canadian” encompasses, though it has always had a plural dimension, as manifested for example in its regional composition. Individually, the novels of Poulin, Atwood, Urquhart and Robin demonstrate to various degrees the potential heterogeneity of identities, but when studied together the multiplicity of both personal and collective identities present in the postmodern world becomes undeniable.

The hybridity of personal and cultural identities portrayed in these novels reveals how late-modern societies are “characterized by ‘difference’” (Laclau qtd. in Hall, “Question” 600). Although globalization is leading to the erosion of national identities, other more “local” or particularistic identities are being strengthened by resistance to this movement (Hall, “Question” 619). In The Canadian Postmodern, Linda Hutcheon argues that the postmodern “different” is “starting to replace the humanist ‘universal’ as a prime cultural value” (ix), which is “good news” to the increasingly diverse populations of Canada and Québec. She quotes critic Laura Mulvey who says that, “Canadian culture is not yet a closed book” (Hutcheon xi). The novels of displacement discussed in this thesis all represent in different ways the cultures of Canada and Québec as open and fluid, in part because each novel is itself not a “closed book.” In all of the novels there is a revisitation of the past: Jack thinks back to his childhood with Théo, Rennie to Griswold, Austin to summers up north, and the Québécoite to Paris and her family’s European history. As postmodern texts, however, these works also demonstrate how the past is something constructed or reconstructed: “its meaning cannot be eternal and is certainly not

unchangeable” (Hutcheon, Introduction 22). Hutcheon describes postmodernist “recording” and “inventing” not in terms of products, but as processes which, like identities, are not fixed, closed, eternal and universal (Introduction 19). The endings of Volkswagen Blues, Bodily Harm, The Underpainter and La Québécoite all make some sort of reference to the future, which supports the idea of the novels being “open-ended.” As readers, we anticipate Jack’s return home to write with the Indian watching over him, Rennie’s plans to be a subversive reporter, Austin Fraser’s painting of his final and unglazed masterpiece, and the Québécoite’s belonging to a fertile and positively pluralized society in Québec. The emphasis throughout the novels on metamorphosis of character, along with the allusions to further transformation in the future, reinforce the notion of postmodern identities as being fluid. Robin argues that writing “permet aux identités de se jouer et de se déjouer les unes des autres. Elle constitue des frontières poreuses, traversées par les rêves” (“Introduction” 307). The frontiers and boundaries associated with writing, nation and identity have indeed become porous and are able to absorb differences which promote change. As a consequence of the hybridity and fluidity of their identities, individuals in the postmodern world can now define themselves “par rapport à la société non pas comme un lien, mais comme une potentialité de liaisons en perpétuelle transformation” (Kwaterko 196).

As the works of Poulin, Atwood, Urquhart and Robin illustrate, identity is “une unité ouverte, en devenir, ni déterminée, ni prédéterminée, capable de se perdre ou de se renouveler, se transcendant elle-même” (L’Hérault 41). In the globalized world, with the increasing occurrence of displacement, identities are not fixed, “but poised, *in transition*, between different positions,” products of complicated cross-overs and cultural mixes

(Hall, "Question" 629). Oscillating between "Tradition and Translation" (Hall, "Question" 629), many individuals, and not only immigrants, find themselves in a sort of "entre-deux," in a culture of hybridity. Although for some the relativism of this hybridity brings anguish and a difficult indeterminacy, it can also be "a powerful creative source, creating new forms that are more appropriate to late-modernity" (Hall, "Question" 630). Postmodern literature marks "a turning from positive trust in a system to an acceptance of responsibility for the fact that art and theory are both actively 'signifying' practices - in other words, that it is we who both make and make sense of our culture" (Hutcheon, Introduction 23). As postmodern "processes," Volkswagen Blues, Bodily Harm, The Underpainter, and La Québécoise are all rich texts which deal with questions of social and cultural hybridity, at the same time demonstrating that, despite their erosion and transformation, national identities still play a role in the world of the late twentieth century.

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