

“IN ALL THEIR DIVERSITY:”

Ethnicity and the Anxiety of Nation-Building

in English-Canadian Literary Studies at the End of the Millennium

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that, as a function of global trends, the experiences of cultural identity within the Canadian literary community increasingly exceed, and so render irrelevant, the assumptions of literary nation-building. However, significant prestige within that community depends on the authority of those assumptions, especially the long-lived romantic notion that literary activity should produce a unifying and distinct national identity. I investigate current manifestations of literary nation-building which exploit the recent heightened attention to ethnicity in literary studies in order to conserve authority. I argue that the attempt to imagine a unified national identity in the qualities of difference and heterogeneity is a paradoxical attempt to invest the idea of the nation in the authority of the global pressures that threaten it. This approach occludes the imperative to develop new understandings of identity responsive to the increasing complexity of cultural experiences. The following chapters explore this current manifestation of literary nation-building in three contexts of literary consecration: media response to prize-winning authors; critical analyses invested in recent cosmopolitan theories; and polemical writing concerned with issues of access and representation. My analyses are contextualized by readings of four novels, Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*, Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, and Jane Urquhart's *Away*. These texts produce a sustained critique of identification based in globalization and the celebration of difference.

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**Introduction:
“A Struggle for Community”**

And if globalism has yielded a new generation of cultural radicalism, it also has induced mainstream nationalism to try to reproduce itself in new forms.
– Frederick Buell (324)

The attempt to produce a unified national identity through literary activity in English Canada has most recently been preoccupied by the challenge to address the imperatives of increasing cultural diversity. In “The Uses of Diversity: The Internationalization of English Canadian Literature” (1992), Michael Thorpe comments on the nature of this unprecedented diversity:

The world immigrating to Canada now comes increasingly on its own terms; its many groups are liable to seek new definitions outside traditional West European or Anglo-Saxon culture, whose sense of its past and images of identity are alien to them. Somehow Canada must accommodate the diverse world. (110-11)

Frederick Buell notes that new patterns in the circulation of people and knowledge have meant a change in “the kinds of conversations permitted and empowered” (340). One result of such change is an emphasis on new subject positions in cultural discourse, including, he argues, citing Edward Said, that of the exile and migrant. In the process, expectations of a bounded and stable national culture are under pressure: “Formerly, thanks to the hard work of the era of high imperialism and Herderian nationalism, cultural boundaries seemed simply referential” (337-38). The acknowledgment of such visions of cultural stability and coherence as “sociocultural constructions” (338) is commonplace in Canadian literary studies. Yet, the assumption of the perceived *value* of such constructions persists, often at the cost of exploration into new subject positions.

Thorpe provides a useful example of what is a pervasive assumption in Canadian literary studies, though it is not always expressed as directly. He positions the challenge

to “accommodate” the new cultural diversity within the expectations of national coherence. Thorpe identifies contemporary Britain as the “worst outcome” of the consequences of the “post-war influx of alienated or uncommitted immigrants” (110):

Since the dissolution of Empire, its diverse and probably incompatible elements have reassembled on British soil, in often abrasive propinquity. [...] Never again will Britain enjoy [a] cohesive sense of nationhood. (109)¹

He laments the now threatened expectation of cultural coherence in the name of the nation and sees in Canada the opportunity for a better outcome. In Canada, he argues, the new diversity

necessitates a struggle for community rather different from that urged by Robin Mathews in his *Canadian Literature*. [...] Canada’s amorphous multi-cultural make-up was not in the forefront of his mind, nor was it yet a prominent public issue. (110)

In defining a new struggle for community, Thorpe calls for “the making of Canada in the new, necessary mould shaped by a contracting world” (122).

Because of the persistence of the assumptions I am addressing and the difficulty of attending to several distinct genres, including literary works, criticism, promotional material and polemical arguments, I have adopted a style that foregrounds exempla. It may seem in the following chapters that I single out certain agents for criticism. Taken together, however, my inquiries into individual arguments aim to investigate institutional imperatives as they are revealed in various agents’ participation in the activities of literary consecration.

I investigate a new manifestation of literary nation-building that emerges as a product of the negotiation between an acknowledgment of the pressures of cultural diversity and a reluctance to rethink the expectation that literary activity produce a coherent national identity. Literary nation-building is defined in this study by the

assumption that the legitimate function of literary activity is to produce a unified and coherent national identity. Thus, a product of romanticism, nation-building privileges an understanding of identity as unified and stable. While I do not lay claim to this being a sociological study of the literary field in Canada, my approach is informed by the work of Pierre Bourdieu. In particular, my examination of the persistence of an interest in literary nation-building despite growing pressure on its informing assumption draws on Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power. I interpret the new manifestation of literary nation-building as a product of the institutional pressures on agents as they attempt to secure symbolic power, defined as the authority to determine the legitimate basis of cultural consecration. My methodology allows me to look at nation-building as a particular position available to agents in the struggle to define the literary field and, thus, to secure prestige. In this way, I hope to denaturalize the assumption that literary activity within a nation must necessarily be consecrated as producing a coherent national literature. The persistence of this assumption has meant that other more productive contexts for consecrating literary activity are left unexplored, often despite an apparent celebration of cultural diversity. The opposition suggested here is that between the homogeneity implicit in expectations of a coherent national literature and the heterogeneity suggested by the diversity inherent in Canadian society.

The threat to literary nation-building as a legitimate context for literary consecration is a function of the pressures of globalization, characterized by the increasing circulation and intermingling of peoples and cultures. Stuart Hall's discussions of the new era of globalization and the concomitant emergence of new identities provide a theoretical context for interpreting not only the increased saliency of

cultural diversity in Canadian literary studies but also the threat it represents to traditional, or romantic, assumptions of a unified cultural identity. The challenges of cultural diversity generate a crisis where symbolic power, or prestige, depends on the authority of nation-building as a basis of literary consecration. Responsive to this perceived crisis, a new manifestation of literary nation-building takes shape in engagement with the imperatives of cultural diversity, more and more often expressed through the crucial concept of ethnicity.

This study investigates in particular how ethnicity functions to generate the qualities of difference and heterogeneity in the attempt to imagine a coherent national consciousness. In general, attention to ethnic writers and their works is restricted to the degree to which they can be exploited to produce the national identity. The scope of this dissertation is marked, then, by this concern with how ethnicity is made significant in the interests of nation-building. The definitions of ethnicity and ethnic writing at work here take their shape from the various works under investigation. My intention is not to privilege any definition of either ethnicity or ethnic writing as literary categories; rather, I demonstrate a pervasive construction of ethnicity as an objective quality of difference – a sort of generic difference – and comment on the implications of the various forms of this construction. This study is not, thus, an analysis of what Aritha Van Herk has called “contemporary fiction that might be designated as ethnic” (“The Ethnic Gasp” 75) or what Enoch Padolsky calls “ethnic minority literature” (“Canadian Ethnic” 361). It does not examine the aesthetics of such writing as a distinct or unique body of work, nor does it posit reading strategies for such writing².

Further, the temporal scope of this study is limited to the last decade of the millennium. I am not suggesting that ethnicity has not historically been a feature in literary nation-building but that the significance of an attention to ethnicity in this context has changed dramatically. My investigations respond to what I argue is a distinct moment in the relationship between nation and ethnicity. Specifically, the imperatives of cultural diversity now represent a challenge to the very legitimacy of nation-building. The attempt to secure unity in diversity characteristic of earlier models is no longer an adequate response to such imperatives and, thus, cannot ensure the legitimacy of nation-building as a basis for literary consecration. Placing this study in the context of Canadian literary criticism, I would emphasize its contribution to ongoing discussion about cosmopolitan influences on the consecration of literary activity. The new era of globalized culture prompts a renegotiation of the relationship between the national identity and the cosmopolitan.

Thorpe's argument illustrates the perception that the role of ethnicity has changed. The arrival of what he calls the European wave of immigrants to Canada made, he argues, a "vital contribution to the internationalization of English-Canadian literature" (112):

whether they cling proudly to their native culture or eagerly seek total acceptance by shrugging it off, [earlier "ethnic" writers] recognize that they must live within an overarching 'English' nationhood. (111)

This writing marks a positive influence for Thorpe as it "enlarged Canadian literature with presences from the world elsewhere" (116)³. The positive diversity contributes productively to the aims of literary nation-building, as the responses of rejection and assimilation both affirm the expectation of national coherence. The new diversity

following the post-war decentralization is “unpredictable” (112) to Thorpe arguably because it does not simply enlarge the national context but represents a challenge to the very legitimacy of that context to account for lived experience.

Experiences of cultural multiplicity and difference are frequently articulated, not only in a Canadian context, in some expression of indeterminacy, revealing a struggle to come to terms with being inbetween – simultaneously inside and outside of – two worlds or two cultures. I argue that, in the interests of literary nation-building, this condition of indeterminacy becomes, in various forms, the substantive and paradoxical basis of a newly imagined coherent national identity. Experiences of difference are subsumed as a sort of generic difference which becomes the defining national quality. Critical attention to ethnic writers and their works facilitates this production of the nation. Ethnicity figures as the very failure to fit existing categories of identity, as the exotic commodity of the global marketplace, characterized by its very disconnection from any cultural context, as the inherent failure of representation in language, and, finally, as the inability to resolve tensions between multiple cultural experiences.

The following chapters examine this new manifestation of literary nation-building in three contexts of literary consecration: evaluation, interpretation and analysis of the conditions of cultural production, including issues of access and representation. As a result, my discussion covers a diverse range of genres representing many different positions and interests within the literary field, including media coverage, literary criticism and polemical arguments. The diversity of material, illustrating the pervasiveness of this paradoxical nation-building, points to the strength of the informing institutional imperatives. I also include readings of contemporary novels by Wayson

Choy, Rohinton Mistry, Michael Ondaatje and Jane Urquhart. The structural role played by the fiction in my study is to contextualize the institutional pressures that shape its consecration. The novels produce a sustained critique of the understanding of identity based in indeterminacy.

Chapter one establishes my central assumptions and methodology. I introduce the persistent attempt in Canadian literary studies to figure the national identity as the objectified failure of identification, and I interpret the contemporary version of this construction of the nation as a response to the pressures of global diversity. Finally, I demonstrate how ethnicity is exploited to facilitate the construction. The following three chapters investigate various forms of this national construction. In chapter two, I examine in media coverage of Mistry, Ondaatje and Atwood the production of the nation as global commodity, characterized by the rootlessness and disconnection of the global marketplace. My readings of Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and his short story "Lend Me Your Light" reveal his critique of this identification with the disconnection of the global marketplace. Such identification creates the illusion of belonging based in the actual failure to identify with any context.

Chapter three investigates, in examples of literary criticism focused on interpretation, the production of the national identity as a product of theoretical concerns with disunity, fragmentation and an understanding of identity characterized by difference. Identity is based in knowledge of the very impossibility of determinate identity. Ondaatje's *The English Patient* argues, in contrast, that identity must be understood as something more than the failure of meaning.

In chapter four I consider examples of polemical writing responsive to debate about growing pressures of differentiation on the basis of race and ethnicity in literary studies. The national identity is figured here as the very impossibility of unity as a result of irreducible experiences of cultural multiplicity. Unlike the other novels under study, Urquhart's *Away* privileges identity based in the knowledge of difference. However, as my reading demonstrates, the novel offers its vision only by producing Aboriginal identity as an idealized figurative illustration of this privileged identity. While dependent on a rhetorical celebration of ethnicity as a critical category, the new nation-building limits ethnicity to signifying conditions of exclusion and otherness as the paradoxical bases of identification.

The novels considered in this study address the problem of understanding cultural identity but are not assumed to form any coherent position. The function of each reading is to provide direct commentary on the constructions of identity as difference examined in each chapter. The selected novels are presumed, thus, to indicate the existence of a larger conversation about the nature of cultural identity without constituting any definitive or exhaustive statement of it. Using various historical moments as their settings, the novels engage contemporary questions of identity. They return to historical moments of political and cultural crisis to privilege globally based patterns in the "circulation of knowledge" (Buell 337), thus foregrounding the realities and complexities of cultural diversity in their quest to understand identity. In this sense, I position the novels as revisionist, as saying more about the pressures of the moment of writing, which privileges the implications of the post-war decentralization on understanding cultural identity, than of the periods they address. As Buell notes, this privileging of the current

enables a revisiting of earlier periods defined by supposedly stable national cultures (338). In *Away*, Urquhart returns to the moment of the political founding of the nation both to highlight the complexities of cultural diversity and to position the act of nation-building within the context of a history of global migration. In *A Fine Balance*, Mistry goes back to India in the mid-1970s to highlight the influence, at that time, of an expanding global economy as a significant feature in the quest to develop relevant and productive understandings of cultural identity. Choy, in *The Jade Peony*, and Ondaatje, in *The English Patient*, return to the context of the Second World War, a period of cultural and political redefinition characterized by the breakdown of the influence of the British Empire and increasing pressures of decentralization.

The war and the post-war pressures of decentralization were a catalyst for a determined national coming of age in Canada, especially in the context of cultural production. This imaginative coming of age, rooted in the 1950s and 60s, has been shaped by the multicultural ideal, taking various forms but consistently characterized by the understanding of rigid categories of cultural identity and the privileging of the development of a coherent national culture, despite or within diversity. Stuart Hall's contemporary investigations into questions of cultural identity and the emergence of new subject positions thought through difference are grounded in the historical implications of this decentralization. The novels by Choy and Ondaatje revisit this historical context to privilege the implications and consequences of this decentralization and new subject positions, offering understandings of identity responsive to the complexities and multiplicities of cultural experience.

¹ Stuart Hall's comments on this same event provide an appropriate alternative view. He argues that "the enormous, continuing migrations of labor in the post-war world" are a key feature in breaking up the older unified forms of culture:

There is a tremendous paradox here which I can not help relishing myself; that in the very moment when finally Britain convinced itself it had to decolonize, it had to get rid of them, we all came back home. ("The Local and the Global" 23-4).

The decentralization of Englishness, as well as other centred cultural identities is, he argues, in part a function of the "accelerated pace" (24) of migration.

² There exists much criticism that does examine the particular qualities of so-called ethnic writing, evaluate reading strategies pertinent to such writing and discuss its politics in the Canadian context. See, for example, the works of Himani Bannerji, E.D. Blodgett, Dionne Brand, Barbara Godard, Smaro Kamboureli, M. Nourbese Philip, Enoch Padolsky, Joseph Pivato, and Francesco Loriggio.

³ Thorpe also points to a development of "a true cosmopolitanism" (115) in native born writers, characterized by this expanding of the realm of experience to include both European and African contexts.

Chapter One
 “In All Their Diversity:” Ethnicity and the Anxiety of Nation-Building

The capacity to *live with difference* is, in my view, the coming question of the twenty-first century.
 – Stuart Hall (1993, 361)

[T]he representation of otherness figures with a tenacity that has put considerable pressure on all those involved in practices determining, directly or indirectly, the cultural and political economy of the country.

– Smaro Kamboureli (1993, 202)

The action of works upon works, of which Brunetière spoke, can only take place through the intermediation of authors. And their strategies owe their form and content to the interests associated with the positions which they occupy in the structure of a very specific game.
 – Pierre Bourdieu (190)

In Wayson Choy’s novel *The Jade Peony*, published in 1995, the first-person narratives of three children growing up in Vancouver’s Chinatown in the 1930s and 40s work in part to comment on the nature of cultural identity. The children’s emerging self-consciousness is figured in their pervasive struggles, as the children of immigrants, to negotiate the categories of Canadian and Chinese. Sek-Lung, the youngest of the three, recounts his need to place himself in the social and political world around him:

One day, after shopping with Grandmama and studying the Chinese flag and the Union Jack and the Buy War Bonds posters hanging in Chinatown store windows, I had a burning question. I came home and interrupted Stepmother, who was busy learning how to knit socks for the soldiers in China. ‘Am I Chinese or Canadian?’ (133)

His youthful urgency reinforces the importance of his quest, while the historical cues in the passage reveal the growing failure of these identity categories to account for the reality of his experiences. Sek-Lung encounters on his walk signs of Chinese nationality, the British Empire, and, in the War Bonds, the suggestion of an emerging independent Canadian political identity. His experiences of the multiple intersections of British education, American popular culture, Allied war propaganda, and his Chinese immigrant

family suggest the inadequacy of his question, which is based on the assumption that identity is fixed and unified. The categories of Canadian and Chinese are in fact unstable in the narrative. Each label is used to indicate multiple positionings within the underlying historical context, which includes war between China and Japan; relationships between the Chinese and Japanese within Canada; war between the Communists and Nationalists within China; relationships between China and the West, including trade; immigration and the citizenship policies of Canada, and the two countries' relationship as allies in WWII. The shifting and contradictory associations that shape Sek-Lung's search for identity emphasize the need for an understanding of identity which, in Stuart Hall's words, "is able to address people through the multiple identities which they have – understanding that those identities do not remain the same, that they are frequently contradictory, [... and] that they tend to locate us differently at different moments" ("Old and New Identities" 59). Sek-Lung's search must begin by challenging the efficacy of that initial question and, thus, its assumptions about the nature of cultural identity.

His challenge to the expectations of stable identity is figured as a challenge of adult authority. The adults in the novel acknowledge with concern the children's emerging struggle with their cultural experiences, but, lacking a context for the interpretation of such experiences, understand the children only through their failure to fit existing categories and boundaries:

All the Chinatown adults were worried over those of us recently born in Canada, born "neither this nor that," neither Chinese nor Canadian, born without understanding the boundaries, born *mo no* – no brain. (135)

Sek-Lung struggles with language and kinship terms and is chided by the family for having "no Old China history in [his] brains" (135). Poh-Poh, keeper of Old China

traditions, insists to her grandchildren that they are “China,” but differences in their experiences make it difficult, if not impossible, for her to share the knowledge and skills that she understands as integral to that identity:

Poh-Poh refused to teach me [Jook-Liang] any of her knots. Once she did try, when I was six, but I seemed too clumsy, too awkward, not fearful enough of failure. My six-year old fingers slipped; I clutched at Grandmother’s body, glimpsed her hand raised above me, ready to slap. Then she froze, her hand in mid-strike, held back; tears welled up on her eyes. “No, no, no!” Furious she shook me off. ‘No more teach!’ [...] And there was no other way to learn. [...] [A]ll her womanly skills she would keep away from me, keep to herself until she died: ‘Job too good for *mo yung* girl’. (35)

From Poh-Poh’s perspective, Jook-Liang, the youngest of the children, is fundamentally Chinese and simultaneously unable to be so, left only the category of *mo yung* or “useless.” Perceiving them as neither inside nor outside the culture, the community associates these children with a sense of betrayal¹. Their engagement with the English makes the “born in Canada” children a threat to the Chinatown community. Jook-Liang remembers the secrets surrounding her friend Wong Suk’s papers: “No one would say anything more: a child with a Big Mouth [...] A Mouth that went to English school and spoke English words. [...] Poh-Poh looked at me cautiously” (50). Their potential to betray the secrets (135) of the community introduces into the novel the under-siege conditions of the Chinese community in Canada but also points to the more general betrayal of the boundaries of the traditional cultural identity.

In response to the ill-fitting cultural expectations within the family, the children identify with Canada; but here, again, they are acutely aware of their limited access to the category “Canadian.” The children represent a threat to the cultural hegemony of a British-based Canada, represented in the novel by the school system. Sek-Lung responds to Poh-Poh’s friend Mrs. Lim:

'Who are you, Sek-Lung?' Mrs. Lim asked me.
 'Are you *Tohng Yahn*?'
 'Canada!' I said, thinking of the ten days of school I had attended. (135)

As the narrative continues, however, his determined declaration of identity is combined with a more retrospective view of his relationship to the Canadian identity, suggested by the classroom routines:

But even if I was born in Vancouver, even if I should salute the Union Jack a hundred million times, even if I had the cleanest hands in all the Dominion of Canada and prayed forever, I would still be *Chinese*. (135)

American culture functions as a second basis for a Canadian identity in the novel. Jook-Liang responds to Poh-Poh's criticisms and the sense of separation from her Grandmama's cultural legacy, declaring that "this is Canada" (37) and dreaming up a Hollywood identity. But all the dreaming will not overcome the reality of Hollywood's ethnic hegemony:

I looked again into the hall mirror, seeking Shirley Temple with her dimpled smile and perfect white skin features. Bluntly reflected back at me was a broad sallow moon with slit dark eyes, topped by a helmet of black hair. [...] Something cold clutched at my stomach, made me swallow. (43)

For Sek-Lung and Jook-Liang, the search for self-knowledge depends not on choosing Canadian or Chinese, but on understanding their own lived experiences in a way that moves past the negating implications of the phrase "born 'neither this nor that'" and its underlying commitment to fixed cultural identities.

The Jade Peony can be read as a coming-of-age story for what Stuart Hall calls the "new identities" of the local ("Local and the Global" 39), which, as products of a "diasporic consciousness," will "never be unified in the old sense" ("Culture, Community, Nation" 362). The experiences of the new identities have emerged concomitant with a new global marketplace, characterized by what David Harvey calls

“flexible modes of capital accumulation” (vii). New technologies have made production a transnational process and have “endowed capital and production with unprecedented mobility” (Dirlik 517). As Hall notes, the changes are understood as part of a longer historical process:

The recent integration of financial systems, the internationalization of production and consumption, the spread of global communications networks, is only the latest – albeit distinctive – phase in a long, historical process [of globalization]. (“Culture, Community Nation” 353)

A new level of global unity exists simultaneously with the fragmentation of production at the level of local regions, and the nation has given way to the transnational corporation as the “locus of economic activity” (Dirlik 517). Such changes coincide with the increasing global movement of people and cultures, which in turn generates an imperative to address questions of cultural diversity:

Cultural interpenetration and intermingling have become the global norm, and heightened awareness of cultural difference – the foregrounding of ethnic-national difference everywhere thanks to close juxtaposition of the exotic and the familiar – has become the mark of contemporary global culture. (Buell 312)

In a context where identity is increasingly “thought through difference” (Hall, “Old and New” 51), the categories Chinese and Canadian examined in Choy’s novel become inappropriate markers of identity. In contrast to the adults’ struggles to place them within such categories, or, in fact, to place them as *the failure to fit* such categories, the child-narrators of *The Jade Peony* point to new understandings of identity as provisional and positional, “always open, complex [... and] under construction” (“Culture, Community, Nation” 362). Such identities, Hall argues, are “at the leading edge of what is destined to become the truly representative ‘late-modern’ experience” (362) as cultural diversity is, “increasingly, the fate of the modern world” (361). He argues that the experiences of

“the migratory or diasporic subject [...] coincide with what is increasingly a global experience [...] of living] in a mixed, mongrelized world”: “the condition of all of us [...] is to discover our increasingly diverse cultural composition” (in “Cultural Composition” 213; 212). *The Jade Peony* goes back to the Second World War to articulate a narrative not of the development of a national identity but of the emergence of a new “process of identification” (“Old and New Identities” 54) within the emerging era of globalization. It is responsive, thus, to the new standard of cultural literacy suggested in Hall’s challenge to develop the “capacity to live with difference.” The last section of this chapter offers a reading of Choy’s novel as a coming-of-age story for the new identities. The reading is offered as a means by which to place in context the concerns of the following analysis of the heightened attention to ethnic difference within Canadian literary studies.

II

The same imperative to meet the challenges of cultural diversity in a new global era is addressed within Canadian literary studies, and appears, for example, in an increased attention to ethnicity as a category for literary analysis. However, to evaluate if and how criticism is responsive to this new standard of cultural literacy, it is necessary to understand particular critical mobilizations of ethnicity through the interests that motivate them. In the relatively autonomous literary field, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, agents occupying relationally defined positions compete for “the authority to determine the legitimate definition of the literary work” (“Editor’s Introduction,” *Field* 20)². Understood as a system to facilitate analysis, Bourdieu’s literary field “is not the product of a coherence-seeking intention or an objective consensus (even if it presupposes

unconscious agreement on common principles) but the product and prize of a permanent conflict” (*Field* 34). The presence of ethnicity as a salient factor within the field must not be conflated with the examination of particular mobilizations of it in the struggle for the authority which constitutes the literary field. In his “Introduction” to *Writing Ethnicity*, for example, Winfried Siemerling cites globalization as the basis for the “renewed theoretical interest in ethnicity,” quoting Mary Louise Pratt on the contribution of the “increased integration of the planet, the increasing rapid flow of people, information, money, commodities, and cultural productions, and the changes of consciousness which result” (qtd. in Siemerling 1). However, while he provides a comprehensive account of the multiple conditions and questions which both have enabled and are addressed by the recognition of ethnicity as a critical category, his focus on the multiple significances of ethnicity leads him almost inevitably to an argument about ambivalence. He cites Berry and Laponce³ in stating that ethnicity works both as “a major source of social tensions and political conflicts [... and as a] source of creation and diversification” (qtd. in Siemerling 28). Siemerling then adds: “[t]his double potential overlaps, often in complex configurations, with the Janus-faced semantic potential that marks the category of ethnicity itself as a meeting ground of often conflicting desires and investments” (2). Conclusions of complexity and ambivalence may, themselves, have significant cachet in the current literary climate, but they do not help to understand what motivates a particular mobilization of ethnicity in the consecration of literary activity. The pressing issue is the relationship between the basis of consecration and the way in which a particular understanding of ethnicity is used to achieve it. The conflation of this process into a general condition of ambivalence minimizes the interests underlying particular uses

of ethnicity, placing meaning solely in the term itself, in the fullness of its “semantic potential” rather than in the interests and goals underlying its mobilization. Strategies which mobilize ethnicity as significant are determined by, but not reducible to, the signifying potential of the term ‘ethnicity.’

Literary nation-building has consistently been an authoritative basis of literary consecration in Canadian literary criticism. This study examines how, in the interests of a concern for literary nation-building, agents, as defined by Bourdieu, use attention to ethnicity to respond to the challenge of a new cultural literacy based in the knowledge of difference. By using Bourdieu’s notion of agent, I mean to place emphasis on a particular positioning within the literary field, as it is revealed in examples of individual criticism. My concern is with the various institutional imperatives and restraints that shape this positioning. Like the adults in *The Jade Peony*, agents with national interests hold onto the increasingly unrepresentative assumption of cultural identity as fixed and stable in the attempt to secure the articulation of a distinct national identity as a legitimate basis of literary consecration. As a result, unlike the children in the novel, whose actions foreground identity as provisional and shifting, agents with national interests attempt to reconcile the imperative to address cultural diversity with the search for a distinct and unifying national literary identity. I argue in this study that, responsive to the imperatives of globalization and its privileging of difference, agents produce that very experience attributed to the children of being “neither this nor that,” that *failure to fit any category*, paradoxically as a newly defined unified national identity. Thus, pervasive attention to ethnicity in the Canadian literary community, often appearing as attention to the qualities of heterogeneity, hybridity and difference, does not necessarily indicate an

acceptance of its challenge to the hegemony of a unifying cultural identity as a basis for literary consecration.

Beginning with the notion that “the pairing of literary and nation is in fact a social construction that performs powerful and important cultural work” (3), Sarah Corse demonstrates, in *Nationalism and Literature: the Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States*, that high culture literature has been consecrated as such in so far as it contributes to national distinctiveness:

This cross-national [...] comparison provides empirical substantiation for my argument that national literatures exist not because they unconsciously reflect ‘real’ national differences, but because they are integral to the process of constructing national differences. (12)

This interest in constructing national differences has had a certain value within the economy of the literary field itself, autonomous, but influenced by, the larger political and economic contexts. The search for and definition of ‘Canadianness’ in the national literature has been a pervasive means of securing recognition and prestige. Recent works overtly state the legitimacy of nation-building, suggesting an anxiety in the field about the ability of the project to continue to secure such recognition. In “Multicultural Furor,” written in 1996 in response to criticism of *Other Solitudes*, Linda Hutcheon declares: “[W]ithout words – the words of our writers, but also of ourselves as readers and thoughtful citizens – Canada will never mean anything to anybody” (17). In “A Country without a Canon?: Canadian Literature and the Esthetics of Idealism” (1993), Robert Lecker asserts: “I want to find a Canadian community, I believe there are Canadian ideals” (8). Jonathan Kertzer argues that “[w]e must continue studying how the nation is imagined: how it defines a body of writing as national [...] and how it gives a mission to literary criticism” (*Worrying the Nation* 195). These declarations occur in

works which, in varying ways, address issues of cultural diversity as a reality of the Canadian literary field. The assumption of my study is that the cultural work Corse observes in the pairing of literature and nation, specifically the construction of national differences and cultural unity, is becoming increasingly less valuable within the economy of the literary field. My aim is to interpret the intersection where the attempt to secure the eroding value of cultural nation-building encounters the increasing critical attention to ethnicity and cultural diversity.

The new era of globalization, Hall argues, is shifting the organization of power: “the notion of a national formation, of a national economy, which could be presented through a national cultural identity, is under considerable pressure” (“Local and the Global” 22). The pressures of increasing global diversity are challenging the viability of the unified national identity as a basis for the consecration of writing; experiences and writing increasingly exceed the informing assumptions of this identity, threatening its authority. Hall talks about

two forms of globalization, still struggling with one another: an older, corporate, enclosed, increasingly defensive one which has to go back to nationalism and national cultural identity in a highly defensive way, and to try to build barriers around it before it is eroded. And then this other form of the global post-modern which is trying to live with, and at the same moment, overcome, sublimate, get hold of, and incorporate difference. (33)

As I have been suggesting, the struggle generates at that point where status in Canadian literary studies depends upon the continuing authority of the national as a basis of consecration. The authority to produce the “value of a work of art” (Bourdieu, *Field* 36) secures symbolic power which takes the form of recognition and prestige:

For the author, the critic, the art dealer, the publisher or the theatre manager, the only legitimate accumulation consists in making a name for oneself, a known, recognized name, a capital of consecration implying a power to consecrate objects

(with a trademark or signature) or persons (through publication, exhibition, etc.) and therefore to give value, and to appropriate the profits from this operation. (75)

The crisis in the value of a unified national cultural identity precipitates, in turn, a new manifestation of literary nation-building. Agents exploit the imperative to address difference in their attempt to build “barriers” around their “eroding” understanding of cultural identity.

The struggle for symbolic power, defined as the “degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour” (“Editor’s Introduction,” *Field* 7), in the literary field occurs through the investment of various forms of symbolic capital by agents occupying particular positions. Agents’ strategies to secure or maintain symbolic power involve investments of symbolic capital; such investments are oriented by the position the agents occupy and the relationship of that position to others constituting the field (Bourdieu, *Field* 30; 183). These strategies are manifest in the activity of cultural production, including the production of literary works, criticism, promotional material and polemical pronouncements. They are mediated by an agent’s *habitus*, dispositions which shape how an agent will approach the competition for symbolic power in the field or, as Bourdieu describes it, whether the agent will “perpetuate or subvert the existing rules of the game” (*Field* 183; also “Editor’s Introduction” 17). The goal of struggle “is the preservation or transformation of the established power relationship in the field of production” (*Field* 183). Cultural capital, one particular form of symbolic capital, is

a form of knowledge, an internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts. (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 2; qtd. in “Editor’s Introduction,” *Field* 7)

As a function of globalization, knowledge of identity organized around difference emerges as an important new form of cultural capital. The increased attention to ethnicity as a category of literary analysis can be attributed to the strength of this new capital. Agents disposed by their positioning in the field to preserving the status of literary nation-building as a basis of symbolic power employ a critical attention to ethnicity in order to invest the cultural capital of difference in the national interest. This investment represents an attempt to bring together two contradictory understandings of identity and, thus, two competing forms of cultural capital: an older national one based in unity and a new decentred identity organized around difference. Agents engage with issues of cultural diversity, ultimately imagining the nation in the qualities of difference and heterogeneity, in a paradoxical attempt to invest the national cultural identity in the terms of the new global post-modern. Examples of this investment, represented here by Lecker, Kertzer, and Hutcheon, reveal a rhetoric of social and even moral disorder surrounding the decline of the nation as the basis of cultural identity; however, I believe the supposed crisis for the nation is best understood as a crisis for the authority of nation-building within the literary field. The weakening of the nation as a basis of consecration may in fact be an opportunity for other positions to accrue authority.

When used to align the national identity with the values of the new global market, a writer's ethnicity figures as a very particular quality of difference. The new global commercial culture, Hall's "global post-modern," is characterized by "a kind of commercialized, pleasure- and consumption- oriented cultivation of difference" (Buell 219). Difference is celebrated but, Hall argues, ultimately absorbed into the "peculiar homogenization" ("Local and the Global" 28) of the global commercial culture. Capital

operates “through difference” (“Culture, Community, Nation” 353), circulating “in and through specificity” (“Local and the Global 29). It is this absorptive feature that Harvey queries when he considers the relationship between postmodernism’s attention to ““other voices”” and its embrace of ““anything goes’ market eclecticism” (42). Harvey links the development of postmodernism to the new global capitalism,⁴ arguing that it “swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is” (44) and, thus, renders invisible the implications of its attention to “other voices” which inevitably become subject to the “peculiar homogenization” of the global post-modern. Harvey is critical of that tendency to “revel in the fragmentations and the cacophony of voices through which the dilemmas of the modern world are understood” (116).

Hall is equally critical of the “celebration of fragmentation” which encodes experiences based in cultural diversity in the terms of difference, a practice which, he argues, “doesn’t suggest [...] that anything emerges from it” (213; 214). The risk is that such experiences are ultimately objectified and understood *as* those very celebrated qualities of difference and fragmentation – *as* the knowledge that no truth or essential identity is possible. Harvey suggests that while postmodernism, as he defines it, “opens up a radical prospect by acknowledging the authenticity of other voices, postmodernist thinking immediately [...] ghettoi[zes] them within an opaque otherness, the specificity of this or that language game” (117). In Hall’s terms, in the “trendy nomadic voyaging of the postmodern” (“Culture, Community, Nation” 362), differences are recognized but they are recognized as insignificant; in the end, he argues of particular identities and experiences in the context of the global post-modern, that “they are different – but it

doesn't make any difference that they're different, they're just different" ("Old and New Identities" 52). In the interests of a Canadian national identity, ethnicity signifies as this particular quality of difference but is, in the process, recognized as insignificant except as much as it introduces the quality of difference as the basis of a new national identity.

In the interests of literary nation-building, ethnic writers and their works are used to deploy the experience of being "born 'neither this nor that'" as an objective quality that becomes the basis of a newly defined national identity. Such arguments capitalize on the diasporic experiences of the *failure to fit into any category*, which suggests a condition of radical difference, as the paradoxical basis of a new national identity articulated in the values of the global post-modern. Ethnic writers so positioned are celebrated but rhetorically denied the agency to transform the power relations of the literary field. From the perspective of the children in Choy's novel, the notion of an identity grounded in the objectified experience of being "born 'neither this nor that'" is no more helpful than the exclusion from the fixed categories of identity. In drawing on this objectified experience in the interests of the nation, such arguments in effect replicate the same exclusions characterizing more homogeneous approaches to the national identity, making cultural diversity rhetorically significant but not substantially influential to the understanding of cultural identity. Such arguments rhetorically reject the qualities of homogeneity and unity but, in the end, reveal a reluctance to rethink the very nature of cultural identity, continuing to employ the assumptions of a unified national identity. These residual demands of national interest impede the exploration of new understandings of identity as provisional and, in Hall's terms, "never unified."

While exploiting ethnic writers and their works to signify the difference of the global post-modern, agents foreclose on the politics of the “local” Hall associates with the “new identities.” Hall posits that the new global culture in fact splits – “it goes global and local in the same moment” (“Local and Global” 27). He thus distinguishes a global post-modern recognition of difference from the hybrid and positional identities of the “local” which, while also articulated through difference, “retain strong links to and identification with the traditions and places of [...] ‘origin’ [...] without the illusion of any actual ‘return to the past’” (“Culture, Community, Nation” 362). Hall envisions this particular understanding of identity, a “production which is never complete, always in process” (“Cultural Identity and Diaspora” 222), as a potential site of resistance to the “peculiar homogenization” of the global post-modern. I argue that this foreclosure on the “local” occurs because the attempt to bolster national cultural distinctiveness represents an unwillingness to rethink the very nature of cultural identity. Rather than interpreting identity through difference, and thus substantially challenging the organization of power with the literary field, agents rely on an understanding of difference as a stable and coherent category of identity.

The following chapters explore intersections of nation-building and ethnicity within Canadian literary criticism. I investigate the use of the cultural capital of difference in three contexts of literary consecration, revealing the exploitation of this capital paradoxically to secure the legitimacy of a coherent national identity as the basis of literary consecration. Chapter Two examines how agents interested in literary nation-building exploit the increasingly high profile contexts of the literary prize and the sphere of international publishing. The heightened significance of these contexts marks the

imperatives of globalization. The attention to ethnic writers and their works in these contexts links the national identity to the cultural capital of the global marketplace, characterized by a privileging of difference and heterogeneity. Rohinton Mistry's short story "Lend me your Light" and his novel *A Fine Balance* provide a contrasting comment on the implications of defining cultural identity in the logic of commercialism.

Chapter Three explores the relationship between nation-building and cosmopolitan literary theories characterized by a concern with disunity and discontinuity, a questioning of representation and an emphasis on the nature of language as constituted by difference. The cultural capital of such theories can be understood as a function of the imperatives of the new global post-modern, and has appeared in the Canadian context in opposition to a national tradition based on assumptions of a unity based in liberal pluralism. Agents use ethnicity in a paradoxical attempt to produce a coherent and unified national identity as the natural product of these theoretical approaches. I place this argument within the context of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, which offers a critique of the tendency to conflate the difference of language and a theoretical fascination with the indeterminacy of meaning with the experiences of exclusion and alienation associated with cultural marginalization.

In Chapter Four, I examine how agents exploit the authoritative context of a politics of difference in the interest of the national project. Characterized by concern with representation and access to cultural production grounded in a language of ethnic and racial difference, the polemical context functions as a third manifestation of the cultural capital of difference and heterogeneity. Agents generalize the concerns of a politics of difference which become the constitutive feature of a coherent national

consciousness. In a reading of Jane Urquhart's *Away*, I examine the expectation that a unified national identity, characterized by a generalized quality of difference, will function as alternative to the homogenizing effects of global industry and mass culture.

III

Canadian literary history contains ample precedent for the construction of a national cultural identity within an international or global context. Critical production of the national identity has frequently been based in the tensions of competing American and British cultural influence. *The Jade Peony* comments ironically on this attempt to generate a national narrative, juxtaposing the pervasive influences of both British and American culture with the exclusion of Chinese influences. Jung, the middle child, and his friend Bobby Steinberg quibble over the name of a pet turtle. Bobby objects to the family's naming of the turtle *Lao Kwei*, Old Turtle:

"It's not a *Chinese* turtle." Bobby Steinberg sounded disgusted.

"It's got to have a – you know – British or Canadian name." He thought a moment, [...].

"Why don't you call it *Hopalong*? Like the cowboy."

"That's United States," I protested. "This is a *Canada* turtle." (77)

Bobby's exclusion of the Chinese influence on the national narrative is analogous to Jung's subsequent rejection of any conflation with American culture on the same basis. The adamant rejection of the former in the interests of a national distinction is undercut by the reality of the pressures of American influence indicated by Bobby's suggestion. The terms of rejection are thus exposed as being something other than a general and consistent rejection of foreign influence. Jung's attempt to equalize the nature of American and Chinese influences opens up the space of cosmopolitan power beyond the homogenizing British and American imperial influences.

Choy's fiction revisits the Second World War, thus, with the contemporary challenge to rethink identity. In this revisiting, Choy interprets the War as an early moment in the breaking apart of Western hegemony and imperialism, privileging a history, and thus a coming of age, of the "new identities." The children's ultimate agreement to name the turtle King George reveals the pervasiveness of British imperialism that informs the historical context of the novel. At the same time the children are quick to abandon the turtle in order to spend the dollar Jung's uncle gives them – they head off to the movies, giving "a cowboy cheer" (77). The novel does not attempt to resolve the question of national identity; it is not the coming-of-age story of a nation. Jung, finally, must explain the turtle's new name to his uncle, a process which repositions the discussion between the boys and their decision, illustrating the narrative's refusal to sustain stable identities: "This *low fan doy* here, this foreign boy, said it was a *low fan* turtle" (78). Bobby's intent, of course, is to reject what he reads as a foreign name for the turtle, while here English becomes *low fan*. Jung's own position is shaped by his need to be able to move within these shifting contexts. The novel, then, displaces the search for a unified national identity with this search for identity based in the knowledge of moving between shifting contexts.

The novel's commentary points to a shift in the global organization of power, suggested by Hall, away from a nationally based internationalism and homogenizing imperial narratives to the new globalization organized around difference⁵. In the context of literary nation-building, the role of the international has now shifted in response to the shift in the global organization of power. The position of the label Chinese, as a mark of exclusion from hegemonic systems, has become the focal point of the new global

influence on the national identity. Specifically, as discussed above, no longer excluded, Chinese and other so-called ethnic identities are now made central to a new imagining of the national identity, but only through their ability to mark this previous legacy of exclusion and a radical condition of difference. The search for a different Canadian identity has become the search for Canada as difference, a strategy that draws on the characteristics of the new global organization of culture, but simultaneously neutralizes its challenge to the very idea of a unified national identity. Pressure has shifted from legitimating a particular unified national character (in the qualities of British and American culture), to legitimating the very search for such a character (by an investment in the new global culture's organization around difference). The search is immediately paradoxical, seeking unity and coherence in the context of their very critical debunking. The nation-building examined in this study figures the nation *simultaneously* as a particular difference commodified, and so legitimated, by the global post-modern and as exemplary of it, sharing its very characteristics of being organized around difference. The commodification of the nation demonstrates the imperatives of the new global cultural market. The figurative construction of the global imperatives, as a set of discursive characteristics which can be used to imagine the nation, exposes the struggle between nation-building and the new globalization as competing forms of knowledge.

IV

The double positioning of the nation in relationship to the global cultural market is enacted through the construction of ethnic writers and their works as simultaneously the very difference that signals the label Canadian and as local differences within a larger Canada.⁶ This new double construction reveals the crisis of legitimacy that characterizes

the nationalist interest.⁷ Early critical links between ethnicity and the idea of the nation associate ethnicity, on the one hand, with a cosmopolitan identity, as in John Robert Columbo's "Our Cosmopolitans":

Canadian society of the present and recent past has been relatively provincial or parochial in outlook, and the so-called ethnic writers have consistently offered an outlook that is more sophisticated or cosmopolitan than that of society as a whole. (90)

On the other hand, ethnicity is associated with local specificity, as in Michael Batts' article "Literary History and National Identity," in which he calls for a fully inclusive definition of what constitutes Canadian literature: "recognition and depiction of the multifaceted nature of Canadian literature should do much to promote a sense of Canadianism" (110). In general, however, until 1990 and the publication of *Other Solitudes*, direct attention to ethnicity in the context of literary nation-building was limited. In 1988, Francesco Loriggio argued that the "negative reaction" to multiculturalism "goes hand in hand with the search for the unifying features of Canadian literature in literary criticism [...] undertaken in Canada primarily by [...] thematicism" ("Concluding Panel" 316). Such a search, he asserts, is "animated by [an ...] obsession [with] nation-building [...] and turns] nation and nationhood into moral imperatives whose validity is self-evident, [and] requires no analysis" (316). He suggests that an open dialogue on questions of ethnicity will allow critics to examine the relevance of nation-building as a basis for literary consecration:

The discussion on ethnicity seems, instead, to suggest that it is only by debating these criteria [the self-evident imperatives of nation-building], by accepting their historicity, their partial, more limited role in a theory of society that the relevance, even the moral relevance, of the concepts of nation and nationhood will become fully apparent. (316)

For Loriggio, such a dialogue will help to “understand what it means to live [...] or to think about literature [...] at the end of the twentieth century” (316).

In the subsequent twelve years, Loriggio’s vision has not been realized. Instead, ethnicity, in particular its ability to figure the dominant qualities of difference and heterogeneity, has been put to use by nationalist interests. Since Loriggio’s article, as Smaro Kamboureli observes in “Canadian Ethnic Anthologies,” the imperative to recognize cultural diversity has appeared “mostly in critiques of those institutional practices and established value systems that have fostered a unified vision of Canadian culture” (10). Attention has been on exploring the role of ethnicity as a corrective to notions of unity and false homogeneity characterizing discussions of the national literature. However, the idea of a unifying national literature persists in this exploration.

Some interest has been in refiguring a Canadian literature through an attention to ethnicity. Joseph Pivato, for example, suggests that Canadian literary criticism has moved beyond that “preoccupation with the Canadian identity and the nationalism of English and French Canada” which “tended to neglect the work of ethnic minority writers” (*Echo* 69), arguing that ethnic minority writing provides “an opportunity to study the diversity of Canadian literature and the desire to re-interpret our literary culture” (69). Pivato’s argument works to consecrate ethnic minority writing as the latest transformation of a mainstream Canadian literary culture. Citing “Linda Bortolotti Hutcheon’s” study of irony, Pivato argues that the characteristic decentred position of ethnic minority writing makes it central to a new understanding of Canadian literary culture (83-84).⁸ Pivato’s naming of Hutcheon, an established figure in nationally-defined Canadian literary criticism, within her personal ethnic background is designed to

illustrate the transformation of a 'Canadian tradition' that he posits. In fact, Hutcheon's own recent article "Crypto-Ethnicities," published in *PMLA*, January 1998, similarly illustrates this transformation. She argues that her "crypto-ethnic" status, the "encrypting" of her "ethnic identity" (28) in marriage, initially worked as a "protective mask of assimilation" but that "by the 1990s things had changed considerably. I now find myself living in a culture that officially [...] values difference and views ethnic diversity more with pride than with simple tolerance" (31). Hutcheon positions herself as embodying the experiences, represented in her marriage, central to a newly imagined Canadian culture organized around difference. She asserts the particular Canadian conditions of multiculturalism in contrast to the American context (28-29), emphasizing, thus, a distinct national identity based in multiculturalism and represented by her own experiences, for the audience of *PMLA*. At the same time, quoting Buell, Hutcheon equates this national valuing of difference, "multiculturalism," with the trends of a new globalization: "the poly-ethnic diasporic world of the 1990s allows for multiple postmodern identities [Buell 214]" (32). Hutcheon posits a distinct national cultural identity (distinguishable from that of the United States) in the qualities characteristic of the global organization of culture which threatens it.

Other critics focus on the exclusion of ethnic writing from constructions of Canadian literature. Arun Mukherjee, in her article "Canadian Nationalism, Canadian Literature, and Racial Minority Women" (1995), links the neglect of ethnic and racial minority writing to the imperatives of literary nation-building:

The construction of "Canadian literature" by powerful professors, bureaucrats, editors, publishers and reviewers, the majority of them white males, has been carried out under the aegis of nineteenth-century European notions of nationhood, which proposed that a nation was racially and culturally different from other

nations and uniform at home. A nation's literature, according to such theories, has to reflect the "soul" of the nation, its history and traditions, which are also conceived in terms of a nation's unified "spirit." Canadian literature was constructed in the service of a Canadian nation conceptualized in terms of these ethnocultural theories of nationhood. (87)

Mukherjee asserts that "Aboriginal and racial minority writers" write out of "the specificity of their location as members of racial and minority communities," as such challenging the "universalist stance adopted by white Canadian writers" (90) that underwrites the existing notions of the national literature. In her project to address the racism of Canada's political and cultural institutions, distinct from Pivato's concern with legitimating the symbolic power of his notion of ethnic minority writing, Mukherjee logically does not draw on the authority of nation-building; she rejects it rather than, like Pivato, try to renegotiate it. Mukherjee bases her argument in the authority of the particular context of racial and ethnic community identities.

A third position, represented by Siemerling's "Introduction" to *Writing Ethnicity* (1996), places critical attention to ethnicity as exclusive of, but a natural progression from, a unified national literary identity. Siemerling argues that the "delayed impact of ethnicity [...] had to do with the relatively late institutionalization of the Canadian and Québécois literatures, because a national literary discourse could be seen as a prerequisite for a discourse of ethnicity in literary studies" (10). Unlike Pivato, who positions ethnicity as a category which would renegotiate the national, Siemerling positions it as distinct from, but dependent upon the stability of, the national identity. Like Mukherjee, Siemerling positions as distinct and mutually exclusive those projects that focus attention on ethnicity and those of literary nation-building, but where she configures the relationship as inhibiting, he sees it as enabling. He suggests that it is "understandable"

that in the emerging stages of the institutionalization of the national literatures the focus would first be on “formulating unifying principles” (10) at the expense of ethnicity.

Several critics have gone on to comment that despite the consistent recognition of ethnicity as salient, the critical engagement with ethnic and minority writing is limited. Kamboureli argues in 1994 that despite the critiques of a value system based on unity, “Canadian ethnic literature still remains a minor literature [...] in the sense that its ‘discovery’ is either deferred or is symptomatic of present political and cultural upheavals” (“CEA” 10). In a comparable statement, Mukherjee suggests in 1995 that the obsession with a Canadian identity has “not been replaced by more inclusive theories of Canada and Canadian literature”:

Now we hear talk about postmodernist irony and dominants and marginals, but we do not hear any concerted responses to what Aboriginal and racial minority writers tell us about Canada and Canadian literature. (83)

In the context of a national interest, attention to ethnicity does not translate into an active transformative role for ethnic and minority writers and writing. The potential for transformation is limited, as suggested in Pivato’s argument, to the exploitation of the conditions of exclusion in the reformulation of the national imaginary. The national literature is invested in the new critical saliency of difference and marginality. The gap between, on the one hand, the rhetorical emphasis on ethnicity and, on the other, the lack of substantive engagement with ethnic minority writing may in part be explained, then, by close attention to a particular use of ethnicity. This study examines the particular use of ethnicity to signal a critique of unity paradoxically in the interests of renegotiating a unifying distinct cultural identity. While the examples of nation-building I examine routinely disavow the principles of unity, the attention to ethnicity is conditioned by the

reluctance to reconsider the understanding of identity as anything but unified and stable. The cultural capital of the national identity is threatened, but ethnicity is consistently enlisted to shore up its interests.

Critics have noted, for example, the limited role of ethnicity in the canon debate of the early 1990s, dominated by Robert Lecker and Frank Davey. Kamboureli argues that while Lecker and Davey are concerned with the “inclusionary and exclusionary politics” that determine the literary canon, “their arguments do not reach far enough into Canada’s cultural history to problematize the reasons for its blatant exclusion of ethnic writing” (“CEA” 11). The saliency of ethnicity which occasions the collection of essays *Writing Ethnicity* would seem to indicate the culmination of the critical impulse, identified by Siemerling, to formulate “unifying principles.” However, citing Enoch Padolsky’s observation of the small role ethnicity plays in the canon debate, Siemerling suggests that this neglect might indicate that “the need to review past developments and consolidate positions relative to the main enterprise [“formulating nationally unifying principles”] may still be as important as investments in specific positions based, for instance, on ethnicity” (12). Siemerling, however, does not consider the extent to which ethnicity, understood as difference, and thus as a corrective to the search for cultural unity, is actually being used in the debate to “consolidate” nationally unifying principles. While acknowledging Kamboureli’s argument, this study proposes that attention to the albeit limited but strategic use of ethnicity can reveal much about the current institutional pressures on literary nation-building.

In “A Country without a Canon?” (1993), Lecker introduces the question of difference into his argument for shared Canadian ideals. He sets out to “examine the

implications of the position advanced by [Frank] Davey and [Tracy]Ware [... that] there never was a central Canadian canon” (4). As Davey himself has already noted, Lecker misreads Davey’s statement of a “network of competing canons” and Ware’s notion of the fluidity of the Canadian canon (*Canadian Literary Power* 69) as arguments suggesting “that there is no Canadian canon” (“A Country without a Canon?” 4). This misreading allows Lecker to introduce the issue of ethics:

I am not so much interested in proving or disproving this claim [that there has never been a monolithic canon] as I am in exploring some of the moral, ethical and cultural questions raised by such a position. What does it mean to be a country without a canon? How does the absence of a canon affect our sense of agency, and difference? (4)

In “The Canonization of Canadian Literature,” published in 1990, Lecker asserts the existence of a monolithic Canadian canon, a critical act which both Davey and Ware subsequently challenge. Davey points out that Lecker both validates a canon within the interests of *ECW* and affirms his own self-construction as an astute critic by identifying the limitations of such a canon (“Critical Response”; *Canadian Literary Power*). Lecker’s later article (1993) concedes the absence of such a canon, and then calls for its establishment in the interests of national well-being. It is as if caught out in the act of asserting a centralizing canon, Lecker moves into a more defensive argument. His investment of the cultural capital of a unified national identity failed to generate the expected symbolic power, and so he adopts a different position.

The argument in “A Country without a Canon?” is a defensive and anxious variant of the earlier argument, articulated this time through an investment in the cultural capital of difference and heterogeneity:

We have to grant that in the absence of a canon a number of social constructs attached to canonical ideals will also vanish: consensus, community, social

responsibility, and ultimately ethical challenge. Those who say good riddance to such worn out idealizations need to confront the downside of repudiating the canon. While the country without a canon may be free, plural, ahistorical and self-conscious of the material conditions that account for its contingent status, it may also be a country without moral conviction, without the means of recognizing difference, without standards against which ethical choices can be judged. (7-8)

Lecker's argument works as a coercive contract: the threat of ethical chaos and social irresponsibility is linked inextricably to the loss of consensus. His concern for the moral safety and stability of Canadian society is a vehicle for his move to legitimate literary nation-building – unifying canonical ideals. At the same time, Lecker argues that without a canon, without a consensus on standards, it is impossible to recognize difference. The trump term, “recognizing difference,” is significantly placed not as the product of an awareness of the constructedness of canonical ideals but as the product of the stability of such ideals. He deploys the authority of “recognizing difference” in support of his nation-building. The loss of “our sense of agency, and difference,” (4) implying knowledge of a distinct national identity and, thus, agency, is rhetorically transformed into the loss of the “means of recognizing difference” (8); however, in the process, in this latter recognition of multiple and contesting positions, the connection between agency and difference is broken. Lecker's argument draws rhetorically on a transformative impulse only to objectify it – “recognizing difference” becomes constitutive of the national identity:

Without canons, there is no alterity. From this observation it follows that weak canons, or non-canons, can do very little to promote contestation or social change. With this in mind, I return to an earlier observation about the Canadian canon: because it does not exist, there is no debate about it. A less extreme formulation of this hypothesis would go like this: the lack of debate in Canadian criticism is directly related to the lack of canonical conviction. Lacking a Canadian canon, we have been unable to articulate difference. Alterity has been submerged. Ideology

has been bypassed, blanketed, blanked out. We know no difference. We know no canon. We know no country. We are not. (9-10)

Lecker offers national self-knowledge not through the knowledge of difference, but *as* the knowledge of difference. The national identity is an objectified quality of difference. But this defining quality of difference is generated out of the reality of differences within the Canadian community which are “recognizable” only if illuminated in the context of some established norm, the canon. The argument works to exploit the authority of difference while simultaneously muting its transformative impulse. The differences within the Canadian community are naturalized and objectified as the shared national identity; Lecker argues that some consensus of the community’s ideals, some self-knowledge, will enable the recognition of difference within that community (those differences being interests outside the consensus) which are then, paradoxically, generalized as an objective quality of difference that becomes the basis of a consensual self-knowledge and, thus, Canadian identity.

Lecker justifies his argument for an imagined Canadian community with shared ideals in the interests of “race and gender”:

We consider these interests in relation to a model, and we argue for the importance of this consideration because of that model. [...] Without this model (without a canon) there can be no authentic dissent. Besides, what is the *point* of dissent if it is not to achieve a positive outcome for oneself *and* for others? (14)

Lecker exploits the imperative to recognize the questions of race and gender and to facilitate contestation and dissent. He uses the authority of that imperative to support his argument for a shared national identity. The concern for “these interests” is important only in the context of the larger national model. Ultimately, his argument invokes the objective *idea* of dissent, not any real dissent that might destabilize the centrality of some

ideal set of Canadian values. Dissent is “authentic” here only in as much as it leads to shared national ideals. The national identity is simultaneously the standard initiating dissent and the product of dissent. The recognition of difference is a significant capital investment in the argument, but it must provide a return. It must produce the nation and, thus, reinforce the authority of literary nation-building.

The failure to meet “moral responsibilities” by the recognition of difference for purposes other than producing the community ideal will produce trouble. Lecker anticipates the reservation that “advocacy of an ideal subordinates the recognition of plurality and difference”(13) by imagining the ideal in that quality of “recognizing difference.” This allows him to exploit the authority of the latter in the interests of the former and, simultaneously, envision a potential crisis:

To empower these [...] distinctions [between gender, race and class] is to endorse what Frank Davey calls “theories of ‘interests’ or ‘conflict’” [...] This sounds like a defense of identity politics because it implies that identity is positioned in relation to economic and historical contexts and that identity shifts as these contexts shift. Such theories may recognize difference with a vengeance, but it seems to me that the end-product of such recognition is anarchy. (13)

Stuart Hall suggests that the experiences of globalization require a new understanding of identity as process – as exactly that shifting in response to changing context. But Lecker’s argument has no room for such shifting as he attempts to secure the authority of the national ideal as the legitimate function of literary activity. As a result, Lecker rhetorically exploits the imperative to recognize difference, but, in the final analysis, limits it to a quality that paradoxically constitutes a fixed national identity. He finally rejects, citing it as a source of anarchy, an understanding of identity that would challenge the feasibility of a unifying national identity to function as the product of literary consecration.

In *Worrying the Nation*, Jonathan Kertzer laments the failure of cultural consensus as the nation threatens to become “obsolete” (164) under the pressures of globalization. The needs of multiple “communities seeking a political voice” (27) challenge the “fruitless” search for a unified national identity (164) and, thus, he posits the need to rethink or “worry” the nation and the national literature. Kertzer argues for the legitimacy of the nation as a basis of literary consecration by suggesting, in response to the perceived threat to moral stability and “sociability” represented by the diversity of a global cultural context, that such heterogeneity is in fact enabled by the unique social space of the nation. In this way, Kertzer repositions the nation within the terms of the challenging but dominant context of globalization:

Canada may be declared unsociable in contrast to *authentic nations* (Québécois, Acadian, feminist, gay)[. . .] Nevertheless, the nation regenerates itself as soon as *alternative communities* are proposed and arranged in some larger social field. How is the public forum to be represented in a wide variety of texts, including literature? (165, emphases added)

The idea of nation is secured in the authority of those multiple groups, which are assumed to be singular and unified in interest (as *nations*). Collectively, they reflect cultural diversity in opposition to the homogenizing narrative of one specific nation, Canada. While exploiting the cultural capital of this condition of diversity, Kertzer simultaneously rhetorically demotes these multiple groups from “authentic nations” to “alternative communities” that are ultimately enabled by the Canadian nation. The search for a unifying nation turns out not to be so “fruitless:” “The nation in all its contradictoriness, and perhaps because of its contradictoriness, has been one of the chief means of proposing a sociability that can respect differences” (27-28). A newly authentic Canada, the facilitator of difference, emerges as a legitimate basis of consecration, guaranteed in

the authority of the quest for political representation. Kertzer's argument assumes that the role of the nation as privileged public forum must be guaranteed by the imaginative production of a coherent national identity in literature. The notion of the democratic nation as privileged public forum is significant, but it does not necessarily depend on consecrating its literary representation.

Having secured the nation as the authentic public forum, Kertzer then explores its literary manifestation, assuming that

a literary community, however combative, will produce 'our' literature, however conflicted[,] [...] presuppos[ing] a national forum in which aesthetic excellence, social responsibility, moral worth, and political maturity can be aligned. (22-23)

The alignment naturalizes the nation as a basis of literary consecration. Aesthetic excellence need not be measured in the legitimacy of the nation as the basis of consecration in order to ensure moral worth and social responsibility. Kertzer's reading of *Obasan* illustrates that the interpretive and rhetorical demands of using ethnicity to figure the nation as difference may in fact challenge a sense of social responsibility. Kertzer exploits ethnicity as the latest manifestation of a traditional definition of the national identity as crisis, refigured to address the imperatives of cultural diversity. He cites Herschel Hardin's argument that

ongoing tensions [English/French, regional/federal, Canada/U.S.] will sustain the nation. [...] Canada is still a riddle, but at least it is our riddle[. ... Canadians'] consistent failure [to assert their national identity] is really a success, because it is consistent and so offers *coherence to Canadian life*. (199; emphasis added)

The riddle, Kertzer argues, pervades writing in Canada and has taken several forms based in Frye's "sphinx-like" riddle of the indefinite land, and reappears as "Goldsmith's wilderness, Pratt's lizard, and Lee's Void" (120).

According to this national ordeal, readers will know themselves only by losing themselves in the riddle of their country, as it is cryptically expressed in their literature. (120)

Kertzer contributes to this nationalist critical legacy by adding ethnicity, highlighting the role of the critic who will reveal the “cryptically expressed” riddle of the nation and so reveal Canadians to themselves. The fact that the works of Canadian literature by Pratt, Goldsmith, Lee and, now, he argues, Kogawa, “fail to deliver exactly what they promise – selfhood, nationhood – testifies to their authenticity as Canadian riddles. The justice rendered by Canadian literature, so to speak, finds the reader guilty of being Canadian” (121). The failure of self-knowledge becomes the knowledge of being Canadian.

Specifically, Kertzer argues, it is the self-alienation characterizing the experience of ethnicity in Canada that becomes the moment of finding oneself Canadian:

[T]hemes associated with traditional Canadian literature are radically recast in ethnic writing. The calamities of emigration, exile, and dislocation persist, but they arise from national and racial differences, not from venturing into the wilderness, whether physical or metaphysical. A fearful ‘otherness’ persists, too, but it has different sources. [...] Ethnic literature presents Atwood’s key theme of survival, but predators and prey are redefined by injustice and racism[. ...] The battles between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ are refigured as family and communal disputes, which arise when immigrants are urged to assimilate yet scorned when they try to do so. (123)

The “battles” reveal immigrants’ experiences of being neither inside nor out, of being “neither this nor that.” Kertzer figures this position as distinctly Canadian. Ethnic writing signifies here as national literature in as much as it documents the conditions of discrimination and exclusion from the category Canadian:

in *Obasan* [...] [c]haracters are caught in the riddle of being simultaneously inside and outside their own country. [...] the riddle of national identity finds its most disturbing expression in the episode where Naomi is molested and then gives herself willingly to the molester. (138-39)

Kertzer emphasizes the shift from negotiating the wilderness to negotiating the racism of “civil institutions” (123) but neutralizes the distinction in the shared condition of a knowledge of failed self-knowledge. Exclusion from Canadian identity on ethnic and racial grounds signifies only as the paradoxical basis of a new coherent national identity. The only logical outcome of this argument is the ongoing exclusion of ethnic experience from critical discourse. It signifies, here, as central to the national identity, but *only* as central to that identity and *only* as the objectified condition of its exclusion from that identity. The potential to challenge the existing organization of the literary field is rhetorically neutralized as such writing is objectified as the condition of its exclusion.

The rhetorical claims of moral chaos found in Kertzer’s and Lecker’s arguments demand context. Rather than any breakdown in the social fabric, the claims of social disorder indicate the strength of transformative forces within the literary field that challenge literary nation-building as a legitimate basis of consecration. In *Blood and Belonging*, Michael Ignatieff describes, self-referentially, a cosmopolitan identity: “a post-national state of mind, [... which] simply assumed that in constructing [... its] own way of life [... it] would borrow from the customs of every nation [... it] happened to admire” (7). He distinguishes the changing understanding of cultural identity from the political context:

It is only too apparent that cosmopolitanism is the privilege of those who can take a secure nation state for granted. Though we have come into a post-imperial age, we are not in a post-nationalist age, and I cannot see how we will ever do so. The cosmopolitan order of the great cities – London, Los Angeles, New York, Paris – depends critically on the rule-enforcing capacities of the nation state. (9)

Ignatieff points to the potential for real chaos in the breakdown of the democratic state.

But, unlike Lecker and Kertzer, he does not link this to the breakdown of unified and stable cultural identities. Rather, he argues,

cosmopolitans like myself are not beyond the nation; and a cosmopolitan, post-nationalist spirit will always depend, in the end, on the capacity of nation states to provide security and civility for their citizens. In that sense alone, I am a civic nationalist, someone who believes in the necessity of nations and in the duty of citizens to defend the capability of nations to provide the security and the rights we all need in order to live cosmopolitan lives. (9)

The claims of anarchy and a lack of sociability reveal anxiety for literary authority grounded in a stable national identity in response to the challenges of a new cultural capital organized around this cosmopolitan identity.

Frank Davey similarly privileges the nation as public forum but does not link its stability to the imaginative production of a coherent identity. Davey argues of Lecker that he denies “significance to anything but nationalist constructions” in posing the “extreme alternatives [... of] a country without a canon or a canon that ‘imagines our community anew’” (*Canadian Literary Power* 69). Davey offers, instead, an understanding of Canada as “a field of competing canons” (69). His readings in *Post-National Arguments* (1993) mark a rejection of the search for a unified national identity. His subsequent arguments in *Canadian Literary Power* represent a crucial contribution to thinking about the role of Canada in the consecration of cultural activity, as he shifts the question of the nation from the context of the literary product to the conditions of production:

There is a lot of separate space within Canadian canonicity – many productive writers and institutions focused on specific, and often at least partly transnational, politics and aesthetics, but indifferent to the triumphant or clarion nationalisms Robert Lecker proclaims. But these writers and institutions also help constitute,

collectively, along with those nationalisms, the particular nation and canon Canadians live with, regardless of their wishes or desperations. (77)

Davey's positioning of the nation occurs as he addresses the decentralization of culture, noting how power is increasingly located in multiple and diverse "special constituencies" (16; 21) and articulated more and more in always-changing interactions of national and transnational influences (76). He asserts that national boundaries are "determinative" in that they "enclose and legitimize specially and locally produced institutions, discourses, contestations and practices" (291) and that global or transnational issues are best understood within the "contestations of the national politics" (291). The nation is, in Davey's argument, the privileged context for understanding the production of literary activity. Significantly, this argument does not, however, depend on the assumption that literary activity produce the nation. The viability of the nation as a space of "open political process" (286) depends, rather, on resisting the construction of any supposed coherent cultural identity in the name of the nation.

If Davey's argument, suggestive of Northrop Frye's, is to shift the nation out of the realm of either content or form, and into the context of the conditions of production, characterizing it very much as, in Frye's terms, a "community of communities," Linda Hutcheon's response to the pressures on literary nation-building is more suggestive of Malcolm Ross' critique of Frye. In response to Frye's 1971 delineation of political unity and regional identity – "Identity is local and regional, rooted in the imagination and in works of culture; unity is national in reference, international in perspective, and rooted in a political feeling" ("Preface" ii) – Ross responds: "[O]ur hope of survival as a nation, *in all our cultural diversity*, is a vain hope if in our imagination we are enlivened only by a sense of locality and never by the sense of totality" ("The Imaginative Sense" 149;

emphasis added). Hutcheon, writing in defense of her anthology *Other Solitudes*, distinguishes a Canadian search for a unifying national identity by its concomitant recognition of difference: “[u]nlike the United States, Canada is trying today simultaneously to articulate a totalizing national discourse and to make space for negotiated difference, so to speak, within that consensus” (“Multicultural Furor” 11-12). The space for “negotiated difference” is central to a distinct national identity, but only as it occurs simultaneously with the achievement of cultural consensus. It follows that the negotiation of difference will be limited to the imperative of constructing a national consensus. Hutcheon’s yoking of unity and diversity is made, as it is in Ross, in the context of inhibiting internal disruptions: “Canada [...] is trying to define its collective identity (still!) as it grapples with [...] Quebec nationalism in addition to ethnic and racial division and tensions” (12). Here “negotiated difference” is figured as differences within the nation which impede national identity, as Hutcheon posits the potential for a national identity as *separate from* ethnic and racial divisiveness. However, she goes on in the next paragraph to conflate the two, suggesting that the “complexity experienced by writers – and readers – of Canadian literature, where the Kogawas, Ondaatjes, Bissoondaths, Mistrys, and Riccis *in their very diversity* have been – and are becoming – as *defining* of what is Canadian as the Atwoods or the Findleys have ever been” (13, emphasis in original). The national distinction of “negotiated difference” within the potential for consensus has been produced now as a consensus defined by difference. Hutcheon’s argument is based in the objectification of the ethnic differences as a generic difference or complexity which forms the unique constitutive basis for the national identity. Where Ross envisions a cultural pluralism characterized by unity in diversity,

Hutcheon imagines unity *as* diversity. The ethnic writers define Canada as they signify difference; the national voice becomes the voice of the new global difference. As my analyses in the next three chapters demonstrate, this pervasive use of ethnicity as difference to shore up a national identity simultaneously marks the limitation of access to the national identity for these writers and their works. They are limited to that quality of difference that circulates freely but, in the end, fails to make a difference.⁹

V

The narrative development of Sek-Lung in *The Jade Peony* can be read as commentary on the critical recognition of ethnic identity that defines it as an objective condition of difference. The works by Lecker, Kertzer and Hutcheon reveal the construction of ethnic identity as the experience of being “neither this nor that” in order to exploit difference as a constitutive feature of a newly defined national identity. By figuring ethnic identity as “the always something left over” (Hall, “Old and New” 51), agents are able to celebrate diversity and trade on the cultural capital of difference while rhetorically resisting any challenge to the understanding of identity as unified and stable. Sek-Lung’s development depends on his rejection of those models of identity that position him as *mo no* in favour of an understanding of identity that engages, rather than forecloses on, his multiple and contradictory experiences; his experiences in the playground emphasize his actions and positionings rather than his failure to fit any existing position. Choy’s novel, thus, demonstrates that, in Hall’s terms, “[m]eaning is [...] a wager. You take a bet. Not a bet on truth, but a bet on saying something. You have to be positioned somewhere in order to speak. [...] You have to come into language to get out of it” (“Old and New Identities” 51). Sek-Lung’s rejections of adult authority

illustrate his developing understanding of identity as based in this notion of a provisional wager.

The children's father is an authority figure and yet largely silent in the narratives. He senses that the new experiences of his children will demand new forms of knowledge and understanding, but his expectations of identity limit his ability to grasp that knowledge. A politically active journalist and writer of opera, Father engages the social and political changes that form the context of community and family dynamics in the novel:

Father worried about China, about the civil war there between the Communists and the Nationalists; he worried about our schooling and worried about the Japanese; he worried about Kiam wanting to fight for Canada when Canada did not want the Chinese. [...] And things he worried about, he wrote about in the newspaper, and then worried about what others would think. (191-92)

A writer and critic, Father is effectively paralyzed in the act of self-positioning, unable to reconcile the political complexities and contradictions around him, yet driven by the assumption that he must find some stable place to stand.¹⁰ As a political critic during the war, he is silenced by the complexities of relationships between the Chinese and Japanese, in a Canadian political context. And at home, in contrast to the traditionalism represented by his mother, Father emphasizes how the family “must all change, be modern, move forward, throw away the old” (162): ““After all these dirty wars are finished [...] those who understand the new ways will survive”” (162). Yet, in response to his children's complaints about learning Mandarin, he reveals his conflicted state: “Father was silent. He wanted his children to have both the old ways and the new ways” (147). His expectation, shared by all authority figures in the novel, of a stable and unified identity restricts his perceptions. The death of Mrs. Lim's daughter Meiyang

marks this crisis of cultural literacy in the novel. Her relationship with Kazuo is unrecognizable within the social spaces of the novel, including family, school, and community and they always meet outside, in the park. Likewise, the school is unable to provide a safe space for their relationship. Her aborted pregnancy and resulting death suggest a failure within the adult community to understand and accept the realities of cultural diversity and, thus, in Hall's terms, a failure in the capacity "to live with difference." At this moment in the narrative, it is not Sek-Lung's father, who has been unaware of her impending tragedy, but Sek-Lung himself who offers the possibility of understanding the new ways.

As I discussed at the beginning of the chapter, Sek-Lung's experiences are governed by two cultural models: the hegemony of British imperialism represented in the school system and the traditionalism of his Grandmama. The school system promises to unite the "untidy mixed bunch of immigrants and displaced persons" (180) within an assimilated Canadian identity, held together by the values of and loyalty to British imperialism. Grandmama attempts to reproduce from Sek-Lung's local experiences a traditional Chinese identity. These models are attempts to respond to the unique experiences of the second-generation immigrant children; however, both sustain expectations of unified cultural identity, labeled Canadian or Chinese, and thus inevitably produce the children only as illustrations of the failure to fit either category. The two models represent the opposition between assimilation and traditionalism that frequently distinguishes debate about cultural identity in an immigrant or diasporic context. Seen from Sek-Lung's perspective, the two positions are conflated as equal sources of confusion, frustration and danger. Each is portrayed as a naïve paradise, secured by an

unbending and strict authority that obscures rather than engages the complexities of the historical moment. In Sek-Lung's narrative, the opposition of Canadian and Chinese is conflated and rejected, rhetorically displaced as the dominant tension by the childhood struggle against adult and institutional authority. This struggle enacts a rejection of the expectations of those fixed categories of identity that position the children inevitably in the category of *no mo, neither this nor that*.

Sek-Lung's classroom is presided over with military precision by Miss Doyle, as proxy for the authority of the British Empire:

Not only did she prefer to stand at attention for most of the time she spent with us, she expected every boy and girl in her class to adopt her military bearing, her exact sense of decorum. We were an unruly, untidy mixed bunch of immigrants and displaced persons, legal or otherwise, and it was her duty to take our varying fears and insecurities and mold us into some ideal collective functioning together as a military unit with one purpose: to conquer the King's English, to belong at least to a country that she envisioned including all of us. (180)

The students are kept in line with a desk ruler and the strap "hanging next to the large Neilson Chocolate Map of the World at the front of the classroom" (175). The map illustrates the interconnectedness of global consumerism and institutional education, as features of the cultural hegemony of British imperialism, underwritten ultimately by a strict and unforgiving discipline. The children are united, joined in knowledge of the King's English, by supposed forms of voluntary consumption enforced by unbending authority. The rhetoric of war employed in discussion of the classroom points to the novel's historical context but is ultimately romantic and naïve, a call for courage and unity which ignores the complexity of the students' various positions and loyalties. Ironically, it is the very partisanship of war that becomes in the novel a marker of that

complexity. The school, for example, is unable to prevent violence when the Japanese become targeted.

Sek-Lung's education comes as much from his Grandmama as it does from the school system. The model of an inclusive Canadian identity offered by Miss Doyle demands a rigid obedience to established rules of decorum. In the same way, the model of Chinese identity offered by Sek-Lung's Grandmama demands unwavering acceptance of the past. When she dies, she leaves for Sek-Lung her "most lucky possession" (149), the jade peony given to her as a girl in China: "In the centre of this semitranslucent carving, no more than an inch wide, was a pool of pink light, its veins swirling out into the petals of the flower. 'This colour is the colour of my spirit,' Grandmama said" (148). The colour is sacred as a representation of her memories and her past in old China. Together, Grandmama and Sek-Lung build a special windchime to be used to commemorate her death. Silk the colour of the jade pendant holds together and gives order to the windchime, linking it to the essence of her spirit: "The silk [of the windchime] had to match the pink heart of her pendant, for the colour was magical for her: it held the unraveling strands of her memory" (149). The pieces of the windchime have been gathered from all over the city, in the new world, but are given order and meaning according to the essential influence of her past memories and traditions: "We spent most of our time exploring stranger and more distant neighbourhoods, searching for splendid junk" (146). The collected pieces of glass suggest Sek-Lung's multiple experiences and the influences he encounters. His Grandmama's lesson is to gather and give meaning to the new, the unfamiliar and the diverse within the determining boundaries of the traditional culture and her essential identity and memory: "*Daaih ga*

tohng yahn,' Grandmama said. 'We are all Chinese.' Her firm tone implied that this troubling talk about old and new ways should stop" (147). From Sek-Lung's perspective, her model is not different in implication from the influence of the school and the focus on new Canadian ways, where the values of a loyal and brave British imperialism give order as does the revered memory of a Chinatown elder.

In both models, a sense of sacred purpose is combined with an inflexible authority. Where Miss Doyle uses the steel edge ruler to shape her students into "soldiers," Grandmama demands that local experiences in the new world conform to the memories and order of the old world. Sek-Lung describes how Grandmama, building the windchime,

[p]icked out a fish-shaped amber piece, and with a long needlelike tool and a steel ruler, she scored it. Pressing the blade of a cleaver against the line, she lifted up the glass until it cleanly snapped into the exact shape she required. Her hand began to tremble, the tips of her fingers to shiver, like rippling water. (148)

Sek-Lung's experiences in the new world are scored and cut to fit within the expectations of the traditional Chinese identity. The problem addressed in the novel is that they never fit. In the same way, for all his loyalty to Miss Doyle and her classroom decorum, Sek-Lung never fits wholly within the Canadian identity she offers. Grandmama's increasing frailty suggests the growing inability of such a model of cultural identity to account for Sek-Lung's experiences. In the same way, Miss Doyle is forced to use the letters of her already deceased brother to reinforce the values of the British imperial subject. The letters grasp the students with their romance in much the same way as Grandmama's stories of magic from old China. In both cases, while the notion of an authentic stable cultural identity is rendered anachronistic, the stories themselves maintain value as influences on the imagination.¹¹

Miss Doyle's classroom, with all its military discipline, is figured as a space of redemption – a paradise offering respite from the betrayal of difference:

At recess, our dialects and accents conflicted, our clothes, heights and handicaps betrayed us, our skin colours and backgrounds clashed, but inside Miss E. Doyle's tightly disciplined kingdom we were all – lions and lambs – equals. We had glimpsed Paradise. (184)

The true act of betrayal is arguably the equality offered in this kingdom. Miss Doyle tells her students that “‘a name is a name, [...] always be brave enough to be proud of yours’” (176), but the terms of her authority, supported by the overblown rhetoric of manifest destiny, are revealed by her indiscriminate pronunciation of their names, demonstrating a negligence towards particular differences:

each vowel of any name, however multisyllabled, whether it was Japanese, East Asian or Eastern European, Italian or Chinese, was enunciated; each vowel cracked with the clarity of thunder. (175)

The children are betrayed by the comforts of assimilation that depend on the erasure of difference. Mrs. Lim's house also figures as a paradise:

The porch was just large enough to hold a dark old sofa. I suppose it seemed like Paradise to her, [...] peering through her shelter of roses and leaves and thorns to look down at the rest of the world. [...] I started claiming, carefully, one step after another. I tried not to look down. Tried not to shake the staircase. [...] I knew what torture she had in store for me: ten thousand Chinese sayings to memorize. (202-03)

Sek-Lung moves with caution up the measured stairs, as restrictive and fatalistic as the ruler in Miss Doyle's hand. He is acutely aware of his role as a betrayal to the boundary of each paradise – in his inability to learn Chinese sayings and, in the classroom, with the very particularity of his name and accent. In this case, Mrs. Lim ultimately liberates Sek-Lung by not forcing him to learn the Chinese sayings. Slightly younger than Grandmama, she is more resigned to the limitations of the *mo no* children and gives up on the boy.

Sek-Lung's freedom, however, is based on Mrs. Lim's assumption of his *mo no* status, "neither this nor that." Sek-Lung's ultimate silence, in the classroom and in the face of the Chinese tongue twisters, indicates his simultaneous exclusion; Sek-Lung knows he will never be Canadian just as he knows he will never understand Old China. His subsequent growth involves developing a new connection between betrayal and identity.

In a reversal of narrative expectation, Sek-Lung's development takes him out of the institutions of home and school and into the playground. He says finally of Miss Doyle, "I was [...] wanting to please [her ...] [a]nd yet, when her staunch authority focused on me, I suddenly wanted to be forgotten, left alone, ignored" (185). Likewise, he comes alive only when freed from Mrs. Lim's "scowl [...] in disapproval of the spoiled *mo no* boy standing before her" (205), following Meiyong outside to play. Sek-Lung's inability to fit within the expectations of these spaces is figured as the excess of childhood play:

Against her thundering authority there was no appeal. For example, if an innocent boy went home and complained Miss Doyle had unfairly seized his favourite tin fighter plane, which happened to slip out during Silent Reading, that boy would get a worse strapping at home. (185)

Sek-Lung's failure to thrive within the benevolent but rigid authority of paradise is figured as the escape into childhood play. However, this embrace of childhood play is not escapism, but an engagement with the complexity of Sek-Lung's experiences. It is the adult institutions that are figured as romanticized and naïve. The narrative's figuring of childhood play as the site of complexity and development not only works to comment on the eroding authority of the models of assimilation and traditionalism, as I have been arguing, but also on a subsequent emphasis on the theoretical concern with play in language, which can be used to obscure or displace a consideration of the importance of

position-taking, of taking, in Hall's terms, a "wager" on meaning. Play in the novel is not an escape but an engagement with the underlying historical complexities and the space of narrative development.

Sek-Lung comes of age, as it were, in the space of the playground. Miss Doyle and Grandmama offer naïve and harmonious romanticism as resolutions to the conflicts and ruptures of war, obscuring rather than engaging the challenges and experiences faced by the children. In contrast, the playground is a war zone. Sek-Lung is constantly playing war games, acting out through play the contradictions and tensions of the historical moment. As well, the playgrounds themselves are marked by these tensions:

Then it came to me: Powell Ground. It was officially called Oppenheimer Park, but Chinese and Japanese found the name difficult to pronounce. And Oppenheimer Park, Powell Ground, was Little Tokyo – Japtown – enemy territory! [...] Like the soldier I was, I knew Meiying had made a bad mistake: only a girl would think that every playground was the same. (209-10)

The space of the playground is the space of complexity in the novel¹². In trying to name the space, Sek-Lung moves through multiple positions and associations, each of which is open to him as a possibility, but each demands sacrifice and betrayals. Sek-Lung must engage with this and seek self-consciousness through this process of associations and betrayals.

The dynamics of the playground provide Sek-Lung with a model for negotiating his cultural experiences and, thus, developing an understanding of identity. He notes of Stepmother and Meiying:

They were talking in code to each other, like secret friends, allies, just as I did with the Han boys when the white boys that sometimes played with us could be tricked, defeated, by the conspiracy of our speaking Chinese. (230)

If Meiying's struggle represents in the novel a crisis of cultural literacy, it is in his experiences with her that Sek-Lung begins to grasp new forms of knowledge that, in his father's words, will be necessary to survive. Here, Sek-Lung learns to form alliances, thus to take a position, however provisional and strategic, among the many possibilities. He asks Meiying why she still talks with Kazuo after the war begins: "'We're friends, Sekky,' she said. 'Friends have alliances. You know what allies are?'" (218). Here the rhetoric of war is more realistic than the romantic expectations of courage and bravery offered by Miss Doyle, validating the notion of identity in terms of a provisional position-taking rather than essential unity. Sek-Lung incorporates his encounter with Kazuo into his war games: "The whole adventure was inexplicable and deeply exciting. I wanted to shout, to give my Tarzan yell. [...] I had become a soldier and confronted the enemy" (214). In the process, he makes choices, alliances, and develops his self-consciousness:

The faster Meiying walked, the more boldly my mind embraced my new knowledge: *I, Sek-Lung, could turn her in*. I glanced up at Meiying. Her eyes seemed to glitter; perhaps the wind was too strong. Don't cry May,' I said. 'I won't tell on you.' (214)

Sek-Lung's sense of self emerges out of the agency of the choice, out of the act of alliance-building which means choosing a position, however provisional and unstable.

The formation of such alliances, such identifications, involve necessary betrayals. Later, on his way outside to play, Sek-Lung must lie to his father: "We were joining other boys to form alliances and play war. [...] 'Just a minute,' Father said. 'Where do you go with the Hans?' 'MacLean Park,' I said. [...] 'Always.' I selected some planes [...] and ran out of the house" (236). In the space of the playground, betrayal is renegotiated, linked to agency and power and necessary to strategic position-taking. The arguments I

have discussed above would create the illusion of harmony as “difference,” trying to find the most porous and even paradoxical formulation of unity possible in order to invest the cultural capital of difference. The novel, in contrast, privileges not models of unity but of strategic alliances, an understanding of identity as a kind of guerilla warfare.

The father’s inability to recognize the new realities of cultural difference is addressed in the actions of his youngest son. After the death of Meiyong, it is Sek-Lung, not the father, who is present as a source of strength and hope:

I followed her upstairs. She was looking in the dresser mirror, with an old silk shawl around her shoulders. It was the one with gold flowers that her girlhood friend in Old China had given her. [...] I thought, as Meiyong must have often thought, how lovely she looked. Her eyes were wet. ‘Mother,’ I said. ‘I’m here.’ She reached out to me. I took her hand and pressed into her palm the carved pendant Grandmama had left to me. (238)

In this closing scene, Sek-Lung names his Mother, legitimating his own experiences and giving to her recognition of her story, long denied by Grandmama and the traditions of Old China. The act of naming involves the betrayal of his beloved Grandmama but also the recognition of her influence as part of his experiences. Ultimately, the novel asserts the value of such acts of alliance by linking them with a resulting recognition of story. Meiyong literally gives Sek-Lung a narrative for his birthday: “Inscribed on the first page, both in her Chinese calligraphy and in English, were my name and the title, neatly printed: A PILOT’S ADVENTURE – A STORY FOR MY FRIEND SEK-LUNG” (233). He is able, subsequently, to recognize his mother. In the act of naming, the significance of the jade peony shifts away from signaling the essential memories and traditions of Grandmama and Old China to signaling an act of identification that, suggestive of Hall’s “local” identities, carries within it knowledge of the past but is a response to immediate

experiences. Sek-Lung's coming of age is figured in his renegotiation of the jade peony from a talisman of fixed cultural identity to a marker of an act of alliance.

¹ In the narratives of the three children, Choy investigates multiple categories of identity politics, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, as they intersect with family relationships. In Jung's story, his coming into knowledge of his homosexuality is central and is entwined with his growing sense of belonging in the family. The novel's exploration into sexuality does not, however, intersect directly with the questions of ethnic identity I am examining.

² "All critics declare not only their judgement of the work but also their claim to the right to talk about it and judge it. In short, they take part in a struggle for the monopoly of legitimate discourse about the work of art, and consequently in the production of the value of the work of art" (Bourdieu, *Field* 36). See also the "Editor's Introduction," 6-7.

³ Barry, J.W. and J.A. Laponce, editors. *Ethnicity and Culture in Canada: The Research Landscape*.

⁴ Arif Dirlik notes both David Harvey and Fredric Jameson as representative of the position that perceives "a relationship between postmodernism and a new phase in the development of capitalism that has been described variously as late capitalism, flexible production or accumulation, disorganized capitalism, and global capitalism" ("The Postcolonial Aura" 309).

⁵ Buell, for example, discusses the impact of the perception "that the core has been undergoing several transformations: the United States, like England before it, has been losing its hegemony over what appears to be a more plural, up-for-grabs world system, and core countries, internally, have lost their centered coherence" (143). In this new system, hegemony is enacted through difference, according to Hall, rather than through homogenous cultural narratives.

⁶ For further analyses of the objectification of differences for the purposes of Canadian identity, see Smaro Kamboureli, "The Technology of Ethnicity," in which she argues that "official multiculturalism grants ethnicity subjectivity, but it does so without granting it agency" (212-13). See also Himani Bannerji, "On the Dark side of the Nation." Bannerji emphasizes the dependence of Canadian nationhood on the "difference" of "those whom the state has named 'visible minorities,'" which grants English Canada "the legitimating device of transcendence through multiculturalism" (109).

⁷ This study is concerned with the critical function of ethnicity in literary interpretation. For a more focused attention to the interpretation and characterization of ethnic literatures see E.D. Blodgett, Smaro Kamboureli, Francesco Loriggio, Eli Mandel, Enoch Padolsky and Joseph Pivato.

⁸ For further discussion of this tendency see Sylvia Söderlind, "Back to the Future: Plus or Minus Canadian?" and Barbara Godard, "Structuralism/Poststructuralism: Language, Reality, and Canadian Literature."

⁹ See also Smaro Kamboureli's critique of "Multicultural Furor" in *Scandalous Bodies*, 164-65; 174.

¹⁰ In *Scandalous Bodies*, Kamboureli addresses this issue in terms of her own role as "diasporic critic," questioning the "disciplinary, hence totalizing, intent that informs the gestures of self-location:" "The pressure I felt to position myself, instead of resolving my tensions, kept pointing to various layers of my subjectivity, revealing my identity to be unsettled, continuously disrupted, determined by different alliances of different occasions" (5). The father's ultimate silence in Choy's novel is indicative of his failure to move past the expectations of a totalizing identity.

¹¹ The difficulty Father faces in the novel is his belief that to embrace the modern, for him Canadian, way of life means a rejection of past tradition and memory; he has thus no way to reconcile the multiple influences. The narrative, in contrast, advocates the notion expressed by Hall of retaining "links" to the past and to tradition without the illusion of any essential "return" ("Culture, Community, Nation" 262).

¹² The sad irony of Oppenheimer Park coinciding with both the father of the atom bomb and Little Tokyo further illustrates this complexity.

Chapter Two

Selling the Nation in a Global Market: Ethnicity and Prize-winning Authors

The last story they liked the best of all because it had the most in it about Canada[.] ... Father said if he continues to write about such things he will become popular because I am sure they are interested there in reading about life through the eyes of an immigrant, it provides a different viewpoint; the only danger is if he changes and becomes so much like them that he will write like one of them and lose the important difference.

– from Rohinton Mistry, "Swimming Lessons." (248)

Forget ice wine. Forget communications technology and women's hockey teams. The quintessential Canadian growth industry is literary fiction.

– John Bemrose (2001, 65)

Rohinton Mistry's short story "Lend me your light" (1987), the narrative of a young man's emigration from Bombay to Toronto, comments on the allure of global commercialism as a context for understanding new experiences of cultural diversity. On the eve of his departure, Kersi Boyce acknowledges the confusion that surrounds his journey:

[A]s I slept on my last night in Bombay a searing pain in my eyes woke me up. It was one o'clock. I bathed my eyes and tried to get back to sleep. Half-jokingly, I saw myself as someone out of a Greek tragedy, guilty of the sin of hubris for seeking emigration out of the land of my birth, and paying the price in burnt-out eyes: I Tiresias, blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the one to come in Toronto. (179-80)

As with those of the children in *The Jade Peony* who are labeled "neither this nor that," Kersi's experiences, shaped by emigration, exceed traditional unified categories of identity, leaving him "blind" in an undefined space. His subsequent search for self-consciousness figures the struggle for an understanding of cultural identity organized around difference. Unlike the children in Choy's novel who reject identity based in their failure to belong, Kersi, in his quest for insight, ultimately identifies with the indeterminacy of "throbbing between two lives." Specifically, he tells his story in a language of consumerism and identifies as global consumer, understanding his

heterogeneous cultural experiences as commodities. Kersi's continuing confusion at the end of the story marks Mistry's comment on the insubstantial nature of the global marketplace as a basis of identification.

In his exchanges with Jamshed, a wealthy acquaintance from Bombay who has immigrated to New York, Kersi explores the complexity of cultural identity. In response to Jamshed's disdain for all things Indian, Kersi voices feigned enthusiasm for Little India in Toronto, where one can

gorge [on] *bhelpuri*, *panipuri*, *batata-wada*, *kulfi*, as authentic as any in Bombay [... and] browse through the shops selling imported spices and Hindi records, and maybe even see a Hindi movie at the Naaz Cinema. (182)

Kersi offers authenticity as a counter to Jamshed's disavowal of the past. The irony of his own response is not lost on Kersi, however, who as a child in Bombay craved a diet of western movies and music. He feels "ashamed" that Little India fails to generate nostalgia for him (182). Either choice, rejection or authentication, is based in the assumption of identity as unified and stable, and neither adequately accounts for Kersi's experiences. Blind within this impossible opposition, Kersi strives for insight by exploiting consumerism, approaching his experiences as commodities.

Kersi describes dinner parties with Parsi immigrants who go to Little India with the "air of tourists" (182):

These were the virtuosi of transatlantic travel. If someone inquired of the most recent traveler, 'How was your trip to India?' another would be ready with 'What airline?' The evening would then become a convention of travel agents expounding on the salient features of their preferred carrier. [...] Of Bombay itself the conversation was restricted to the shopping they'd done. (182-83)

The "airline clique" (183) purchase their way through the challenges of cultural diversity in an unrooted consumerism, disconnected, in their circulation through the global

marketplace, from any engagement with particular differences. The notion of Bombay as shopping experience is true also for the "collectors of bric-a-brac, self-appointed connoisseurs of art and antiques [who] must have acquired their fancies along with their immigration visas" (183). Lightly mocking the dinner party crowd, Kersi's narrative is ironic; as he tells his own story, his self-construction is revealed to be based in the same assumptions. A language of consumerism pervades Kersi's first-person narrative, especially his accounts of cultural intermingling. Describing his childhood in Bombay, he emphasizes the desire for foreign goods: "Everyone except my brother and I seemed to have uncles and aunties smitten by wanderlust, and Jamshed's supply line from the western world guaranteed for him a steady diet of foreign clothes, shoes, and records" (175). Jamshed's wealthy family meant he had access to items like the much coveted original soundtrack to *My Fair Lady*, "selling in the black market for two hundred rupees" (175). Young Kersi is finally granted an afternoon with his older brother and Jamshed to listen to the record and build model airplanes imported from England or the U.S. Describing his life in Toronto, Kersi again emphasizes commercialism. In his account of Little India, cultural experience is understood as something to be consumed.

Kersi negotiates the multiplicity of his cultural experiences in the role of global consumer, with the potential to consume, but remain untouched by, difference. In this context, the diversity of his cultural experiences is no longer inhibiting but a coveted basis of identification. After two years, Kersi decides to return to Bombay for a visit, imagining that he has a clear understanding of his relationship to India and his place in Canada. In fact, Kersi brokers his relationship between the two places through the circulation of commodities:

I packed chocolates, cheeses, jams, jellies, puddings, cake mixes, panty hose, stainless steel razor blades – all the items I used to see displayed in the stalls of the smugglers along Flora Fountain, always priced out of reach. I felt like one of those soldiers who, in wartime, accumulates strange things to use as currency for barter. What was I hoping to barter them for? Attention? Gratitude? Balm to soothe guilt or some other malady of the conscience? I wonder now. And I wonder more that I did not wonder then about it. (186)

In his purchasing and distribution of commodities, Kersi circulates between Toronto and Bombay on much the same terms as the food in Little India and the panty hose and records in the stalls in Flora Fountain. Kersi, as global consumer, is left finally with only the very fact of his unrooted circulation as the basis of identification. In the search to understand identity, he avoids the inadequate opposition between rejection and authentication but pays the price of engagement. Every experience understood as commodity is accommodated only as it simultaneously loses its particularity, signifying only as generic difference. Kersi identifies with the diverse and multiple consumption of difference, but it is the difference of the global post-modern. At the end of the story, he is still confused and begins to wonder about the implications of this faith in commercialism. As I suggest at the end of this chapter, identification with global commercialism leaves Kersi unable to engage with the world around him.

In his later novel *A Fine Balance* (1995), Mistry returns to the problem of cultural disconnection as a response to a changing cultural and economic landscape. Maneck Kohlah responds to the modernization that threatens his family's traditional way of life by identifying, as Kersi does, with the sense of disconnection characteristic of the new global economy. The novel revisits India in the 1970s at the time of the government-declared state of Emergency, and explores the intersection of the struggles for national political and social order and the globalizing pressures of modernization. The novel

highlights the influence of the latter, as it addresses, in this context, the contemporary challenge for new understandings of identity that result from the imperatives of globalization. When Maneck is a child, the Kohlah family business thrives in its idyllic mountain setting. At the centre of the business is a soft drink, Kohlah's Cola, made from a family recipe and bottled on the premises. Maneck's adolescence coincides with a loss of innocence in the mountain settlements: "[T]he day soon came when the mountains began to leave them. [...] Roads, wide and heavy-duty, [were built] to replace scenic mountain paths too narrow for the broad vision of nation-builders and World Bank officials" (248). The story of the Kohlah family figures the struggle between two competing forms of capital, as the self-sustaining locally rooted family business is overwhelmed by the scope and speed of global commercialism:

Snuggled amid the goods that the loathsome lorries transported up the mountains was a deadly foe: soft drinks, to stock the new shops and hotels. [...] The giant corporations had targeted the hills; they had Kaycee in their sights. They infiltrated Mr. Kohlah's territory with their boardroom arrogance and advertising campaigns and cut-throat techniques. Representatives approached him with a proposition: 'Pack up your machines, sign over all rights to Kohlah's cola, and be an agent for our brand. Come grow with us and prosper.' (254)

The shift from Kohlah's Cola to Coca-Cola marks the imperatives of the new economy.¹ As the family business and traditional way of life become increasingly unviable, Maneck is sent away to study in the city. In his subsequent coming of age, the novel comments on the implications of identification with the disconnection of the global economy. Maneck, growing into a role defined by the new economy, does prosper but his fate forces an evaluation of this identification.

Maneck's father responds to the competing forms of capital through an understanding of identity as unified and stable. He assumes a rigid opposition between

the family's traditional way of life and its necessary rejection in the embrace of modernization. Facing the chaos of modernization, he watches the transformation of his pristine mountain landscape and weeps phantom tears from an eye lost labouring for his beloved family business. He is dismayed by the arrival of the "new breed of businessman and entrepreneurs" (253) and refuses to mimic their marketing: "[w]ord of mouth had been good enough for his forefathers, he said, and it was good enough for him" (240). Ensuring his ultimate decline, Mr. Kohlah refuses also their offers to join them, choosing to stand behind Kohlah's Cola; "[f]or him it was not merely a business decision but a question of family name and honour" (254). While he sacrifices himself to the traditional ways, he rejects them as an option for his son who is sent to embrace the new economic opportunity.

Maneck's relationship with his father is characterized by a persistent failure of communication, figuring the son's struggle with this rigid opposition between authentic tradition and the embrace of modernization. Such an opposition cannot account for Maneck's sense of connection to both his past and the new ways. When he leaves his father for the city, Maneck begins a search for an understanding of identity more responsive to his experiences. During their train journey to the city, his fellow traveller, the proofreader, challenges Maneck, and arguably the reader:

'Please always remember, the secret of survival is to embrace change, and to adapt.' [...] 'You see, you cannot draw lines and compartments, and refuse to budge beyond them. [...] You have to maintain a fine balance between hope and despair.' (268)

Maneck's survival depends on a means of identification that exceeds the rigid compartments of his father's vision. He responds, however, by resisting engagement with either context, disavowing all sense of connection. He identifies with the very

disconnection that results from the unsuitability of his father's opposition. As he moves through the narrative, Maneck rejects the past and rarely contemplates the future. He understands memory only as a source of loss and pain: "what was the point of possessing memory? It didn't help anything. In the end it was all hopeless. [...] No amount of remembering [...] could change a thing about the misery and suffering" (392). Near the end of the novel, Dina attempts to engage Maneck, telling him the story of Om and Ishvar: "His voice was lifeless. Empty as his face, she thought" (704). Unable to negotiate a relationship between the traditional way of life and his new experiences, Maneck strives to exist only in the briefest fragment of the present, leaving himself with no context for the interpretation of his experiences. His self-consciousness grows around this very absence of context.

At the end of the novel, the proofreader reveals to Maneck that survival comes with the ability to tell one's own

full and complete story, unabridged and unexpurgated [...] because it helps to remind yourself of who you are. Then you can go forward, without fear of losing yourself in this ever-changing world. (700-01)

Maneck has, however, repeatedly shed his story, leaving himself only the experience of being lost as the basis of identity. Returning to India for his father's funeral after an eight-year exile in Dubai, he says to his mother: "'You sent me away, you and Daddy. And then I couldn't come back. You lost me, and I lost – everything'" (686). He finds, in trying to give an account of his life in Dubai, that he is unable to transcend his cultivated detachment:

He searched his mind for things to add, and realized he did not know the place, didn't want to. The people, their customs, the language – it was all alien to him now as it had been when he had landed there eight years ago. His uprooting never

seemed to end. 'Lots of big hotels. And hundreds of shops selling gold jewelry and stereos and TVs.' (679)

In response to the pressures of the new economy, Maneck's uprooting follows the logic of the global marketplace, from village to cosmopolitan city, to, finally, exile into a world of pure commercialism where the particularity of place and culture is insignificant. Maneck's complete disconnection, his rootlessness, places him at the centre of the new economy; he is one of the few in the novel to prosper. His alienation from particular contexts enables him to identify easily with the disconnection characterizing pure commercialism. When he returns to India, Maneck has only a vague understanding of the political situation developing on the streets outside the taxi windows. He is the new global consumer, circulating in and through difference, rootless and disconnected.

II

Challenged by the complexities of globalization, Maneck and Kersi each invest their identity in the disconnection of the new global marketplace. A similar investment occurs within Canadian literary studies as a means of legitimating literary nation-building. When he writes in *Maclean's* of *The English Patient* that it "has achieved almost Coke-like levels of global penetration," John Bemrose illustrates the cultural capital of the global marketplace in Canadian literary studies. He goes on to link that capital to a distinctly national voice, noting that the success of *The English Patient* makes Ondaatje's subsequent novel *Anil's Ghost* (2000) "the most anticipated Canadian novel of the year" (78). In the following, I will look at media response to commercially successful writers Michael Ondaatje, Mistry, and Margaret Atwood, including literary prize announcements, book tour coverage and reviews. The media exploit the writers'

international commercial success to produce the national identity in the qualities of the global marketplace.

The nation emerges in one of two forms. As global commodity, the nation is characterized as a distinct cultural experience, legitimated by its success as it circulates in the global marketplace. Atwood's nationalist capital is linked to her international success in such a way as to produce the nation as global commodity. In the process, "Canadian" is produced as a singular and distinct cultural identity, significant, however, only as commodity, characterized by rootlessness and difference. As global consumer, the nation is again produced as the difference of rootlessness and disconnection. In the case of Ondaatje and Mistry, the media seek to exploit the capital of their experiences of cultural diversity for the national interest. In order to exploit these experiences, the media figure the writers as, like Kersi, circulating in and through the difference of the global marketplace but remaining untouched by it. They thus embody the very condition of that circulation, characterized by rootlessness and disconnection. In this role, the writers and their work – the product of their diverse cultural consumption – become significant in the production of a national identity. In the process, Mistry and Ondaatje are disassociated from the substance of their experiences of cultural diversity, which are simultaneously made crucially significant and completely emptied of substance, signifying only as commodity and, thus, as the inconsequential difference of the global post-modern.

This media response points to debate concerning the material and symbolic value of a literary text. As Sarah Corse has demonstrated, the symbolic distinction of a national literature has traditionally been established through the disavowal of commercial success. The recent rise in both the commercial prestige of literature and the profile of the literary

prize in Canada is a function of the imperatives of globalization, specifically the pervasive commercialism of the global marketplace that works in and through difference. The increasing cultural capital of literature's commercial value within the literary field represents a threat to the symbolic project of literary nation-building. The spectacular authority accrued by the Giller prize since its inception in 1994 is illustrative of this new cultural capital. Consistent comparison and competition with the Governor General's Awards demonstrates the pressures of this capital on traditional nation-building. Giller Prize Founder Jack Rabinovitch works with publishers and booksellers to mount a highly visible publicity campaign for each year's short list ("The rewards of awards" 14) for what the media calls Canada's "most prestigious literary award" ("Giller Glam" 40). The commercial energy joins seamlessly with the award's production of a national cultural elite, evidenced in the guest list for the awards ceremony. Invitations are exclusive – the Giller Prize awards dinner is the only literary party you cannot buy your way into ("For love and literature" 28). At the same time, to be invited as a shortlisted author inevitably generates commercial success. Prize-winning and nominated books are commodified in ways that other novels are not, given new cover blurbs and stickers advertising the nomination. In the context of the Giller prize, the notion of elite national culture is becoming less distinct from and, in some sense, increasingly dependent upon commercialization.

The authority of The Governor General's Awards, notoriously committed to reflecting the diversity and regionalism of the nation,² has traditionally been based in the symbolic value of literary nation-building. In 1991, Val Ross noted that the roster of winners "revealed a remarkable regional and multicultural range" ("Mistry's journey

reaches its goal” C1). Since then, as the values surrounding the Giller Awards suggest, the stakes have changed in the quest for authority. Rabinovitch attributes the Giller’s success to the absence of “political input, [...] the judges can be as politically incorrect and individualistic as they want” (qtd. in “For love and literature” 28). In contrast to the Governor General’s Award’s reputation for a commitment to politically correct representation (Renzetti “Two big book contests” Newswire), the Giller prize, described by Renzetti as “blue chip,” privileges commercially viable writing. Literature is evaluated for its worth as investment, consecrated for its potential to accrue commercial value. The approach to jury selection for each prize, as described by prize representatives, reinforces this distinction. The Governor General’s Awards seek regional and gender representation while the Giller prize “tries to get the highest profile names” (“Two big book contests”). The Giller supports its taste for commercially viable writing with a substantial marketing budget. The Governor General’s Awards, pushed into a “more marketing-savvy mode” (Lahey 7), have had to refocus on winning commercial appeal (“The rewards of awards” 14) with an increased marketing budget in an effort to sustain their authority. The new Griffin Poetry Prize offers a final and definitive example of a shift to commercial values in the consecration of literary activity. The \$40,000 prize, now the richest in Canada, is designed, according to founder Scott Griffin, “to lift the profile of poets. [...] We felt that the award had to be of *sufficient size* that it would make a statement, [...] that poets and poetry were *just as important* as novelists and their work” (qtd. in Lauxious and Mazey A1; emphasis added).

Increasing media attention to the commercial prestige of Canadian literature, especially in an international context, is further measure of the cultural capital of

globalization in the literary field. Media reviews of 1996 are illustrative, the year being variously described as “stellar,” “stunning” and “vintage” for English Canadian fiction, both in domestic and international markets (Anderson 9; “Bright lights” 64; “A vintage season” 48). A *Maclean’s* article suggests that the year’s “outstanding crop” of books will make up for last year’s “dismal sales” (“A vintage season” 48). Strong offerings by Margaret Atwood and Guy Vanderhaeghe were joined by several “dazzling” (“A vintage season” 48) and “outstanding” first novels, including Ann-Marie Macdonald’s *Fall on Your Knees* and Ann Michaels’ *Fugitive Pieces*, both of which “caused a sensation in international publishing” (“Bright lights” 64). The success of this writing is measured in commercial terms. Canadian literature becomes a fine wine, a distinct locally grown product ideal for export, with a price indexed to reputation. First-time novelists in Canada are now courted by literary agents making unprecedented offers for international distribution and film-production rights (Renzetti “Tales from the buzz bin” C1)³. Canadian publishers and agents at the annual book fair in Frankfurt basked in unprecedented attention, prompting Knopf publisher Sonny Mehta to declare: “[i]t looks like the end of this decade belongs to Canada” (qtd. in Anderson 9).

The trend appears to continue in 2001. In an article in the April 7th *Globe and Mail*, Michael Posner notes the abundance of money being spent to purchase, promote and award Canadian literature, both domestically and internationally: “Something has happened to CanLit. Something extraordinary” (“The new write stuff” R1). The headline for the article links the “big advances” and “aggressive promotion” of first-time writers to publishers’ attempts to “satisfy the world’s craving for Canlit” (R1). The question of a distinct national literature appears to become urgent and lucrative at the very moment

when writing and the experiences of writers seem increasingly to exceed such distinctions. This attention to the growth and success of Canadian literature is suggestive of the national emphasis in the 1960s and 70s. However, this time writing is legitimated not as producing a distinctly national voice but as a commercial product, revealing a privileging of the commercial over the symbolic as the basis of consecration. This attention to the commercial viability of Canadian literature is arguably not distinct to Canada but is a function of the pervasive global marketplace that moves in and through specific cultural contexts, bestowing the particular recognition of commodification.

While this commercial celebration appears as a nationalist resurgence, generating attention around Canadian literature, its underlying assumptions in fact represent a threat to the symbolic project of literary nation-building. Responses to a speech in 1997 by then Minister of Trade Art Eggleton concerning culture and the global market reveal this perception that an emphasis on international commercial success represents a threat to literary nation-building. Eggleton spoke on the viability of protecting Canadian culture in the context of the changing demands and realities of a global marketplace. He argued that approaches to Canadian culture and cultural policies are now challenged by both technological change and the reality that “Canada is increasingly obliged to follow international trade rules as the price of admission to the global marketplace” (“Our culture” 3). Eggleton advocated relaxing protective cultural policies and programs, asserting that the ability of Canadian artists “to survive in the long term will depend on their ability to find an international audience for their works” (3).

Robert Everett-Green’s response, in the *Globe and Mail*, takes the position that the advocacy of commercial success as a measure of recognition and, so, survival,

facilitates the erosion of national distinction. His reading of Eggleton's argument upholds an opposition between the articulation of a distinct national identity and the material value of commercial success:

Eggleton's comments were a fairly predictable move in a contest of ideas that has been going on in Ottawa for decades. The terms of the struggle can be reduced to one question – call it The Question. Is culture the activity of a nation or the product of an industry? (C2)

He is wary of what he perceives as Eggleton's expectation that artists' survival be based on success in an international "open market" – a market that negates the significance of literary nation-building. In a contemporaneous *Globe and Mail* article, Rick Salutin maintains the same opposition, criticizing Eggleton's assumptions about the imperative of global competition and arguing that the financial success of Atwood and Ondaatje in London is "[not] proof our society is benefiting." Indeed, by celebrating the "economic phenomenon of an artist," he argues, "Canadian culture may have collaborated in creating [a ...] confusion between culture and commerce" (C1):

[A]n Art Eggleton [can talk] as if the role of art is to be a winner in the global marketplace, [but ...] the truth is that artistic value – for artist and audience – has *nothing* basic to do with commercial 'success.' (C1)

Everett-Green and Salutin both assume that the legitimate symbolic value of literary activity in Canada is to produce the national identity and so contribute to society's well-being. They make their arguments through a fixed opposition between material and symbolic values. At the same time, they disavow the significance of the changes in technology and the global circulation of culture. These imperatives of globalization, as I have been arguing, introduce a new form of cultural capital and so represent a threat to the symbolic project of literary nation-building. Because they disavow rather than attempt to negotiate the imperatives of globalization, Everett-Green and Salutin are left

arguing against them with only the eroding cultural capital of traditional nation-building, based in assumptions of shared territory and a unified cultural identity. In the process, I argue, they miss the calculation in Eggleton's "confusion between culture and commerce."

Eggleton makes the same assumption that the legitimate symbolic value of literature is to produce knowledge of a distinct national identity. However, in asserting this assumption he does not disavow the material; rather, he conflates the material and symbolic values of literary production:

The survival of the strong, distinctive, Canadian voice is closely linked to the survival of a strong and distinctive Canada. Culture can take the form of goods or the form of service, but at root it is neither of those things. It is the expression of everything that makes us, collectively, Canadians and no other. (3)

Eggleton's first lines, classic advocacy of literary nation-building, are reinforced not by the rejection of global commercialism but by its embrace. He leaves unresolved the relationship between the legitimation of cultural activity in the "form of goods or [...] service" and its legitimation "as an expression of everything that makes us [...] Canadians." In this way, he ensures the concomitant potential to achieve a distinct Canadian voice in the "form" of a material commodity, which circulates in a global marketplace. For Eggleton, the imperative to compete in the global marketplace comes not at the expense of a distinct national culture but in the offering, and so legitimating, of that culture as commodity. Eggleton's confusion of culture and commerce does not imply the subordination of a distinct national culture to global commercialism but rather the possibility that the values of nation and industry could be one and the same. He conflates the symbolic and material values of the literary product, and the distinct national culture emerges as global commodity.

The media responses examined in this chapter follow Eggleton in exploiting the cultural capital of global commercialism to bolster nation-building. In *No Logo*, Naomi Klein argues that the notion of "unmarketed" public space is under siege (5)⁴. And there is no reason to think that literature is immune to this trend. The publication in *Saturday Night* of an excerpt from Mordecai Richler's *Barney's Version* as an ad for Absolut Vodka is exemplary. Klein describes the marketing strategy for Absolut Vodka:

its product disappeared and its brand was nothing but a blank bottle-shaped space that could be filled with whatever content a particular audience most wanted from its brands: intellectual in *Harper's*, futuristic in *Wired*, alternative in *Spin*[. . .] The brand reinvented itself as a cultural sponge, soaking up and morphing to its surroundings. (17)

In the process, content – in this case fiction – is neutralized as rootless commodity. Particular differences between the contexts of the marketing are insignificant, serving to illustrate only the brand's ability to persist in and through difference. The increasing significance of the commercial value of literature suggests the cultural capital of globalization, which works in and through specific cultural contexts, like Klein's "cultural sponge," producing culture as commodity. The traditional disavowal of commercial success to further literary nation-building becomes futile at a moment when the former carries so much cultural capital within the literary field. The media paradoxically articulate the national identity in the terms of the commercialism that threatens it, imagining the nation as the difference of the global marketplace, characterized by rootlessness and disconnection. The strategic conflation of material and symbolic values allows an investment in the cultural capital of the global marketplace while occluding the challenge globalization represents to the symbolic activity of

national-building. Specifically, agents commodify the national identity at the expense of rethinking nation-building and its assumption of a unified identity.

Ethnicity facilitates this commodification. The critical attention to a writer's ethnicity legitimates a connection between the national identity and the cultural capital of difference. Writers signify as national in as much as they produce the difference of the global marketplace. At the same time, the condition of cultural diversity within Canada is conflated with the objective qualities of difference and disconnection characterizing the global marketplace. In the process, the conditional role of the ethnic writer in the national community is naturalized as constitutive of the national consciousness and, further, legitimated as the difference of global commercialism. Writers are metaphorically naturalized as Canadian on the basis of their inability to be literally naturalized as immigrants. Experiences of cultural diversity signify only as the generic difference of commodity. Thus, the ethnicity of the writer is central to legitimating a connection between the global commercial culture and the national context, but it fulfills this role only as it signifies the rootlessness and disconnection of global commercialism⁵. At the end of this chapter, I suggest that Mistry's fictions function as cautionary tales against this identification with the difference of the global marketplace. The fates of Maneck and Kersi suggest that identification with the pervasive circulation of production and consumption obscures the possibility for political engagement. Each character pays a price for choosing the distraction of global consumerism.

III

In 1995, Avie Bennett, then of McClelland and Stewart, received an honorary degree from the University of Toronto. His speech conflates the celebration of a distinct

Canadian literature with the promotion of McClelland and Stewart and the achievement of international commercial success. By placing his comments within a language of tolerance and diversity, Bennett acknowledges the current imperative within the Canadian literary community to celebrate diversity. His association of celebrated ethnic writers with a global commercial context becomes the substance of the national identity. Bennett's status as an agent of literary nation-building depends on the authority of the imaginative production of a distinct national identity. His speech, thus, exploits the cultural capital of diversity but occludes its challenge to the legitimacy of literary nation-building. Bennett emphasizes how much more "tolerant" (59) Canadian society has become since his own university days, and suggests that the Canadian publishing industry has contributed significantly to this change: "Our stories [...] become richer and more diverse each publishing season." "The award winning works," he argues, of writers like Michael Ondaatje, M.G. Vassanji and Rohinton Mistry,

writers with origins far from our borders[, ...] are indeed making Canadian literature more vigorous, and bring us international respect. These authors come from all over the world, but what they have in common is this: *they are, in all their diversity, part of the new Canadian voice* (60-61, emphasis added).

In promoting the M&S line-up, Bennett posits a singular and unified national voice – published by McClelland and Stewart – that is characterized by multiplicity and difference. Bennett's recognition of Ondaatje, Vassanji and Mistry is grounded in their "origins far from our borders." Their ability to signify as national is restricted to their ability to signify the objective quality of difference. The authority of a global cultural market, characterized by the qualities of difference and heterogeneity, becomes the guarantee at the basis of Bennett's formulation of a Canadian voice. The strength of the

national literature is measured in its commercial success, facilitated by McClelland and Stewart.

Writers like Mistry and Ondaatje, whose “origins” are elsewhere, become in Bennett’s speech all the same in their diversity. Their individuality as writers and the uniqueness of their literary visions are denied in Bennett’s effort to contain them – or the quality of diversity – as Canadian. In comparison, Bennett refers to Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro and Robertson Davies as “some of the most *distinctive* voices in Canadian literature ... whose works are deeply *rooted* in Canadian soil” (60, emphasis added). Here, in reference to writers with more established connections to an older era of nation-building, Bennett emphasizes the possibility of multiple “voices.” The distinctiveness of these voices suggests, again, the qualities of difference and multiplicity. In this case, he locates these qualities as rooted and organic; they are present in Canadian soil. The individuality of the first group of writers is occluded in the rhetorical desire to capitalize on their potential to signify diversity; they are only significant in how, as subjects of a global culture, they constitute a quality of diversity that simultaneously and paradoxically becomes the new Canadian voice. This ability to constitute an objective quality of diversity marks the limit of their access to the label Canadian. The writers in the second group begin as Canadian. The individuality of each Canadian writer becomes significant as the origin of the coveted quality of diversity, ready for export as the ideal commodity in the global marketplace. Where previously cultural diversity has been integrated as unity in diversity, now, in response to the pressure of the global market, unity is figured *as diversity*.

Media coverage of Mistry and Ondaatje frequently invests in what Susie O'Brien has called the "vaguely defined cultural and political authority" (800) of those writers who can be seen to be speaking out of Pico Iyer's "noisy and polyglot and many-hued global village" (qtd. in O'Brien 800). The writers' association with this context is figured in the media in a logic of consumerism. Mistry and Ondaatje are understood to circulate rootless and disconnected in this global context. Their cultural capital, based in the diversity and mobility of their backgrounds, is exploited not as a basis to reconsider literary nation-building but, paradoxically, as the substantive basis of a newly imagined national identity. Writing about British media response to Ondaatje's Booker win in 1992, Kenneth Oppel notes with hurt dignity that

[s]ome British reviewers seemed uncomfortable classifying Ondaatje as a Canadian, most strikingly in the *Financial Times*, which described him as 'a Sri Lankan poet, domiciled in Canada' as if Canada were simply an accidental and probably temporary resting place on a longer voyage. (Oppel 13)

Oppel points to what he understands as reluctance in the British media to give credit where credit is due. But such discomfort appears in the Canadian media as well and indicates a larger pressure on the assumptions of national literary identities. Marion Finlay writes of Ondaatje in the *Toronto Star*: "The 48-year old author, who was born in Sri Lanka and moved to Canada when he was 18, said he considers himself a Canadian writer" (Finlay A1). The boundaries of the national literature are far from clear, and here, Ondaatje's own authority is invoked in an attempt to draw them. Announcing Mistry's win of the Giller Prize in 1995, the Canadian Press wording echoes the British media's classification of Ondaatje: "[t]he Bombay-born, Brampton, Ont. – based Mistry [...] won the Giller" ("Literary Awards" 25). Mistry writes about India, in English, from Canada. His Giller success foregrounds the issue of his national status and the media

announcement responds by placing emphasis on the diversity of his cultural experiences. He provides significant cultural capital for Canadian literature exactly because of this diversity; however, this diversity is also a threat to the very notion of literary nation-building. Opiel closes with a quotation from *The Guardian*: “now it seems that it is possible to be a Canadian writer even if the person has not been born in Canada. There is an acceptance of the foreign born” (13). As the following examples demonstrate, however, in the interests of nation-building, this is true but often only to the extent that a writer can be positioned to produce the nation as the rootless disconnection of the global marketplace.

Mistry’s fragile status as a Canadian writer depends largely on his international success and identification with a global cultural context. His ability to signify the qualities of difference and heterogeneity provides irresistible cultural capital for nation-building. In 1991, he won the Governor General’s Award for English fiction and was nominated for the Booker prize. In her article announcing his Booker nomination Val Ross figures the accomplishment as national. (“Mistry Shortlisted” C1) She simultaneously emphasizes Mistry’s connection to both Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul to place him within the authority of the global cultural context. Three months later, the Canadian press announcement of Mistry’s Governor General’s Award disassociates the writer from a national status:

In one of several upsets in this year’s Governor General’s Literary Awards, Indian-born Rohinton Mistry beat out Margaret Atwood to win the English fiction prize. (“Indian-born author beats Atwood for top prize” C 29)

The distinction from Atwood, nationalist icon, reinforces Mistry’s foreignness, not only emphasizing the cultural diversity of the prize list itself but also making his win that

much more illicit. *The Montreal Gazette* includes the same wording and interprets the win as evidence confirming

immigrant writers as a major force on the Canadian literary scene. Along with Mistry, notable fiction by writers from visible minorities has been produced by M.G. Vassanji, Cecil Foster, Montreal's Dany Laferrière and Eile Ollivier. (Demchinsky D1)

In the context of the national prize, Mistry is again significant as a source of difference, but now that difference is generated from his conditional association with the national identity.

Read together, the two literary prize announcements reveal a consistent attention to issues of cultural difference. In each piece, Mistry becomes the locus for the imperative to address difference as a distinctly national quality. At the same time, the ability to generate the objective quality of difference marks the limit of his access to the national identity. In the national context of the Governor General's Awards, difference is produced in the labeling of Mistry as "immigrant writer." By restricting or conditioning his access to the label Canadian, Demchinsky uses him to generate proof of the new generic difference constituting the national literature and, by extension, identity. Immigrant writers are a significant "force" in the national literature, yet significance is based in the very terms of traditional exclusion from that literature. The article emphasizes the condition of exclusion; Mistry's difference from Atwood generates the quality of difference that characterizes the new national identity. Further, that exclusion, as immigrant, is based on and so emphasizes his association with a larger global context, forging a link between difference within the nation and the defining difference of the global village. The importance of this connection is reinforced by his shifting status as a Booker prize nominee. Here Mistry's Canadian status is not so conditional. His place in

the “many-hued global village,” characterized by difference and heterogeneity, coincides with his direct access to the label Canadian. Mistry's capital is based in his ability to figure difference; critical celebration of Mistry allows the difference of Canadian diversity to be figuratively equated with the difference of a global culture. Media produce the multiplicity of Mistry's cultural experiences as an objectified quality of difference. Mistry himself becomes like the global consumer, identified as the detachment from all contexts.

The difference generated by Mistry's exclusion from the national identity becomes indistinguishable from the difference and detachment of the global marketplace. The legitimacy of a unified national identity is achieved, paradoxically, by exploiting the increasing inability of such an identity to account for the new experiences of cultural multiplicity. In a *Toronto Star* feature article, “How Mistry maintains that fine balance” (1996), Judy Steed says of the author: “[h]is demeanor is polite, watchful. If he still feels somewhat detached from Canadian society, it's a useful state of mind for a writer” (J1). Steed justifies Mistry's detachment, as an immigrant, as the condition that enables him to write the stories that are then claimed and celebrated as Canadian fiction. Mistry's limited access to the national identity – his difference and detachment from that identity – is transformed into its defining quality. The conditions of Mistry's detachment are naturalized to secure the authority of a coherent national identity as the basis of literary consecration. This image of the nation requires the continuation of the conditions of exclusion.

Media response to Mistry's commercial success and literary awards frequently includes a rhetoric of enablement. Val Ross locates Mistry within a context of cultural

diversity, writing of *A Fine Balance* that it “bridges some culture gaps as it reveals others” because it evokes Dickens and Rushdie and has been cited for its unique contribution to the “Indian literary tradition” (“Keeping the world at bay” E6). She then identifies Canada as the ideal location for the writer who engages such diversity:

Mistry’s need for peace order and (relatively) good government – Canada, Brampton version – is understandable when you read his novel, *Such a long journey*. It is a tidal wave of humanity at its smelliest and most chaotic. (E6)

Ross legitimates the national context as the guarantee against the chaos of cultural diversity. Canada becomes the space from which to negotiate the imperatives of globalization, enabling, thus, Hall’s determining experiences of the 21st century. Ross’ comments both claim Mistry for Canada and distance him in order to occlude the threat his experiences represent to the expectation of a unified national culture. His writing is enabled by, rather than an organic product rooted in, Canada; yet, once produced, his fiction is celebrated as Canadian. Writing in *The Toronto Star*, Philip Marchand also mediates Mistry’s national status through a language of enablement. His desire to claim Mistry as Canadian forces Marchand to negotiate the idea of the national literature: “His [Mistry’s] books’ locales might not be Canadian but their mindset is” (F1). Mistry generates for the national context two distinct sources of difference, which are then conflated to ease anxiety about nation-building:

Living in the relative quiet of Brampton suits him, then. And this is why his novels may be Canadian, after all, if Canadian is a state of mind as well as a geographical locale. Canadian is the quality of reserve and forbearance which echoes his own personality, and allows him the psychological space to write in the first place. (F7)

Mistry’s association with the difference of a global context provides significant cultural capital, forcing Marchand to expand the definition of the national literature beyond

geography. At the same time, just as he invests this capital, he reinstates a unique Canadian space as the very condition which enables Mistry to write. Here, Mistry generates difference in his distinction from Canada, which echoes but is independent of his writing.

The sense of national enablement is frequently tied to a rhetoric of obligation. This rhetoric reveals finally an anxiety around Mistry's status as a Canadian writer. While accepting Mistry as a Canadian writer allows investment in the cultural capital of the global market, it simultaneously exposes the eroding significance of traditional understandings of a unified cultural identity. Agents interested in nation-building invest the capital by restricting the writer's access to the national identity, basing it on his ability to signify difference, which then becomes a generic national quality. The nature of the investment occludes the challenge this cultural capital represents to the very assumptions of a unified national cultural identity. The rhetoric of obligation, suggesting that Mistry's writing ought to include "Canadian" experience, exposes this occlusion and, thus, a certain anxiety about the legitimacy of nation-building. Elaine Kalman Naves writes in the *Montreal Gazette* that "Canadian critics have wondered aloud about when Mistry would write a 'Canadian novel'" (H1). Ken McGoogan's interview with Mistry in the *Calgary Herald* includes the question of "whether he will ever write about this country" (C1). John Geddes writes in the *Financial Post* that

it would be provincialism of the worst kind to suggest that Mistry [...] should turn his attention to his adopted home. Yet I wonder if any Canadian moved by his compassionate voice can help wondering if he will ever tell a story set in this country. (26)

Ross goes on, in her article, to question Mistry about "a novel set in Canada." His answer, "if it comes to me" (E6), is more patient than his response to Philip Marchand –

“Ah, the eternal question” (qtd. in Marchand) – four years later. Marchand ultimately undermines his production of the national identity by asserting an expectation of local setting: “many Canadian readers [...] feel there’s something vaguely wrong with Mistry not writing about the country he has lived in for 20 years. Especially now that Mistry, 43, is becoming a presence in the international literary scene” (F1). Marchand posits a national reading community that conditions Mistry’s relationship to the nation while simultaneously capitalizing on his global appeal for that national interest. Mistry, as a source of global capital, cannot remain unrecognized in the Canadian literary field; however, with recognition are the anxieties of an eroding literary authority. Marchand’s readers can only assume he includes himself within this community.

In contrast to Mistry, Ondaatje’s status as a Canadian writer is less negotiable and he is rarely included in discussions of immigrant writing. Media emphasize Ondaatje’s apparent transcendence of category, both national and literary, exploiting this sense of borderlessness to bridge the national and the global. In *Maclean’s*, Brian Johnson asserts Ondaatje’s association with borderlessness in a blending of political and literary rhetoric. He begins with details about Ondaatje’s position as writer-in-residence at Columbia University’s Presbyterian Hospital, writing of Ondaatje that he

is our most international author. Quintessentially Canadian, his fiction deciphers identity and bleeds through borders. He writes with the compassion of a literary peacekeeper, [...] he is an author in search of a history. [...] A writer without borders. (“Michael Ondaatje” 67)

The passage invokes a familiar and appealing myth of national identity – the peacekeeper – and defines it in the characteristics of the transnational efforts of Doctors without Borders and other NGOs. In the figure of Ondaatje, as “international,” the borderlessness and rootlessness characteristic of the global culture become “quintessentially Canadian.”

Taras Grescoe, writing in *Quill and Quire* about Ondaatje's reception at a Paris bookstore, exploits the writer's popularity to invest the national in the capital of a borderless cultural sphere. She begins by suggesting that the assembled crowd was there "not only because of his writing: English-Canadian writers are hot stuff" ("Paris Match: Diversity of English-Canadian Writing Connects"). Ondaatje's nationality is the distinct draw; he is popular because he is Canadian. At the end of her article, however, Grescoe attributes audience response to the currency of a borderless cultural market, defined by the "co-mingling" of cultures:

their references to the novel's themes rather than the author's nationality [...] underline what has long been clear: Ondaatje is part of the English-language literary world – a sphere that is border-less. It is the lingua franca that writers worldwide have turned to. (4)

Ondaatje plays a double role in the discussion as Canadian and as member of the borderless cultural sphere. Grescoe initially establishes these positions as distinct only to conflate them in the figure of Ondaatje; this allows her to broker a connection between global and national space, positing a distinct national identity characterized by borderlessness. She thus legitimates a distinctly national identity in the terms of the context that threatens it. Ondaatje's commercial success validates the connection. At the same time, Ondaatje signifies as an example of the differences within Canada, which, in Grescoe's argument, taken together produce Canadian writing as a "diverse community of ideas." Canadian writing, constituted thus by difference and heterogeneity, then becomes associated in a second, more figurative, way with the qualities of the new lingua franca, characterized by a "co-mingling of cultures." Ondaatje, as rootless and borderless, signifies the difference of global culture as he signifies the constitutive difference within Canadian society. When Grescoe attributes French attention to Canadian literature as

recognition of “the diversity and complexity of Canada,” she asserts the literature’s ability to look like the new lingua franca of a global cultural sphere.

Capitalizing on the international success of Mistry and Ondaatje, media produce the writers as the cultural disconnection of the global marketplace, which then becomes the substantive quality of a newly imagined national identity. The writers are at once celebrated for their experiences of cultural diversity and figuratively denied any engagement with particular cultural contexts. In contrast, media response to Atwood’s international success commodifies her particular local context as artifact, circulating difference for sale in the global marketplace. Atwood’s authority is based in her established connections to literary nationalism. Her contributions to discussion about the national identity and her role as icon of Canlit. are exported for circulation in the global market. Media discussion of Atwood’s Giller win in 1996 highlights international commercialism, emphasizing her success as national export: “Margaret Atwood, one of the biggest international names in Canadian writing, has won this year’s Giller Prize” (Ross, “Margaret Atwood wins” E6). Titled “Atwood Industry goes global,” Val Ross’ cover story on the *Alias Grace* book tour produces the writer’s international success in commercial terms. Ross cites Atwood’s assistant, Sarah Cooper, who figures the writer as “a little industry in herself” (A1). In this production of Atwood, constructions of the national identity consistent with the literary nationalism of the 1970s are legitimated as commodity. The ability of a distinct Canadian voice, figured in Atwood’s commercial success, to circulate in the global marketplace validates the production of that identity as the basis of literary consecration.

To sell Atwood on the global market is to sell specifically that familiar production of Canadian identity as the very crisis of identity. Atwood herself participates in this marketing. Asked, during the Italian book launch of *Alias Grace* in 1997, why she has such a loyal Italian following, Atwood responded: “I couldn’t tell you. And even if I knew, as a Canadian I couldn’t tell you” (qtd. in Pollett C5). Behind the typically coy wording, Atwood asserts a distinct Canadianness, characterized by modesty and a struggling self-consciousness, as the basis of her popularity and commercial success. “In typically Canadian fashion,” Pollett argues, “Atwood appeared slightly embarrassed by all the superlatives used to describe her work” (C5). Atwood’s quotation perpetuates the cliché of a crippled Canadian self-consciousness. This uncertainty surrounding the national identity is objectified as the distinct national identity, validated by its success as commodity. However, as commodity, identity is static and its significance is limited to the role of local difference circulating in the global marketplace. Canadianness is recognized and celebrated but is insignificant in this context except as commodity. In the process, identity is disassociated from the process of engagement and negotiation. Identification becomes a process of consumption rather than production.

Ross positions her production of Atwood as global industry as a justification for small-press publishing in Canada:

[T]he appearance of a new Atwood novel is an international event. It is a chance to agree, for once, that something good got its start in Canada’s small presses, aided by Canada Council seed money. (“Atwood industry goes global” A6)

Media celebration of the international success of both Atwood and Ondaatje frequently points to their roots in Coach House press and the benefits of other small presses.

Perhaps one factor that makes Mistry’s status as a Canadian writer almost illicit is his

lack of connection to such entrenched signs of national authority. Such arguments in support of small presses are, in this context, at once statements of nation-building and reactions against the mass commercialism of a multinational economy. The assumption is that the success of the Atwoods and Ondaatjes offers protection against the “coca-colonization” (Kostash “Ethnic adventure” 124) of culture. Literary nation-building, however, with its assumption of unified identity, lacks the capital to stand in resistance to the capital of global commercial culture. The investment of the national identity in the qualities of the global marketplace in fact occludes this erosion of authority and, thus, undermines rather than justifies arguments for a local cultural infrastructure. Further, it precludes exploration into understandings of identity that might in fact challenge such commercialism.

The logic of economic globalization exceeds the need for a distinct national infrastructure. Matthew Fraser argues in the *Globe and Mail* feature “When Content is King” that media globalization does not imply “centrality and homogenization” but rather “a creative fusion between local content and global markets.” He notes that in a “borderless world,” as power passes from national regulators to global consumers, “market power will shift away from large distribution systems [...] and toward producers of content” (D1). Like Eggleton and the media responses studied above, Fraser identifies the global market as the only option for sustaining the idea of a distinct national identity:

[I]n the rapidly emerging global entertainment industry, Canadian content rules will be utterly unnecessary – producing Canadian content will not only be necessary but a matter of survival. Indeed, it will be the key to our success. (D1)

Canadian content will survive as commodity, but it will be significant only as the rootless difference of the global post-modern. Fraser also acknowledges, however, that this

survival comes at the expense of a local infrastructure for cultural production. The consecration of national distinctiveness as global commodity legitimates the global marketplace and so undermines arguments for a unique infrastructure. Agents like Ross would like to have it both ways. For Ross, a strong small-press culture is evidence that the national identity is secure as the basis of literary consecration. She calls for the continuing support of such presses as she paradoxically invests the eroding national identity in the system that threatens them.

My argument does not imply, as Fraser's does, the irrelevance of a locally based infrastructure to support cultural production, but, rather, the irrelevance of calling for one in the name of literary nation-building. Support for such an infrastructure is strong; Ondaatje, for one, is vocal about the value of his roots at Coach House press. However, arguments for its value do not necessarily have to be tied to the expectations of literary nation-building. The refusal to let go of the imperative that culture produce a unified national identity is inhibiting arguments for the material support of cultural activity in Canada that could work in opposition to the mass commercialism of a global marketplace. Ironically, to protect the threatened nation-building, media exploit the commercialism of the global marketplace, occluding possibilities of identification within a politics of the "local". Arguments for a grassroots publishing industry, as a means of resistance to the "peculiar homogenization" of global commercialism, would be more effective if based in a commitment to rethink the understanding of identity. They need to be based in a rethinking of the unified identity of literary nation-building and in an emphasis on the process of identification thought through difference.

IV

The stories of Maneck and Kersi can be read as cautions against investing identity in the disconnection of the new global economy. Maneck, the most economically successful of the main characters in *A Fine Balance*, is the least able to meet the proofreader's challenge to maintain the balance between hope and despair. The cost of his disconnection is figured in Avinash's chess set. Resentful of his friend's political engagement, Maneck remains uninvolved and, in his flight to Dina's flat, fails to pursue Avinash's mysterious disappearance. Dina returns the game to Maneck at the end of the narrative, and he tries unsuccessfully to leave it behind, first with her and later at the Vishram café. It remains with him at his death to signal his guilt over Avinash and, thus, as a reminder of his inability to engage with the world around him: "Maneck's last thought was that he still had Avinash's chessmen" (710). Like Maneck, the media response discussed in this chapter addresses the pressures of change by identifying with the seemingly natural logic of global commercialism. The understanding of identity as disconnection allows agents, as it does Maneck, to appear in their argumentation to adapt to the pressures of the new economic and cultural organization while occluding the underlying challenges for a new understanding of identity.

Dina's changing relationship to her patchwork quilt offers a useful contrast to the understanding of identity as disconnection. The scraps of fabric in the quilt mark the stories which, linked together, become the narrative of her life. Unlike Maneck, Dina places value in memories as the basis of a developing self-consciousness: "[the tailors] were trusting her with bits of their past, she realized, and nothing could be as precious"

(467). After returning to her brother's house, Dina seeks comfort in the quilt to help her retell the stories, but the past threatens to overwhelm her as it does Maneck's father:

[t]he patchwork had transformed her silence into unbidden words. [...] She was frightened of the strange magic it worked on her mind. [...] She did not want to cross the border permanently. (665)

Dina puts the quilt away and adapts to her new circumstances, moving forward on the strength of memory without becoming lost in the past. She continues her relationship with the tailors who come to eat at her brother's house: "Those two made her laugh every day" (712-13). The balance is marked in the quilt, which returns as a pillow supporting Ishvar on his rolling platform. The quilt shifts from representing a fixed story to signaling the participation of memories and experiences in the interpretation of the present.

Kersi's struggle for self-knowledge is not as absolute as Maneck's, but his story also marks the failure of identity as rootless disconnection. Similarly, too, this failure is measured in opposition to the political engagement of another character:

There you were, my brother, waging battles against corruption and evil. While I was watching sitcoms on my rented Granada TV. Or attending dinner parties at Parsi homes to listen to chit-chat about airlines and trinkets. (184)

Returning home from India at the end of the story, Kersi recognizes, as he displays "the little knick-knacks bought in handicraft places" (192), that the commodification of his experiences has not explained them:

I discovered I'd brought back with me my entire burden of riddles and puzzles unsolved. [...] I gave way to whimsy: I Tiresias, throbbing between two lives, humbled by the ambiguities and dichotomies confronting me [...]. (192)

He is left only with a sense of guilt brought on by thoughts of his brother and a sense of the emptiness of an identity based in consumption. Both works by Mistry express

distinct unease around leaving India and the rejection of political engagement. Both works express a confusion entwined with a guilt about leaving that is compounded by the ease of getting lost within the all-consuming commercialism of the global marketplace.

¹ Later in the narrative, Maneck, nostalgic for the now ruined Kohlah's Cola, mentions the banning of Coca-Cola by the coalition government for its refusal to release its secret formula.

² See, for example, Rex Murphy's commentary "Reading, writing and more writing."

³ Renzetti compares Nino Ricci's slow ascent in the 1980s to Andrew Pyper's reception. "It has been a bang-up year for Canada's debutante novelists, many of whom were escorted in handsome style onto the dance floor of international publishing" (C1).

⁴ Klein argues that the corporate obsession with "brand identity" is "waging a war on public and individual space: on public institutions such as schools, on youthful identities, on the concept of nationality and on the possibilities for unmarketed space" (5).

⁵ For a discussion of ethnicity and marketability from the perspective of ethnic minority writing and discourse, see Smaro Kamboureli's *Scandalous Bodies*, especially pages 88-92: "When diversity becomes equivalent to consumption, then the immigrant condition survives only as the residue to its historical materiality" (88).

Chapter Three

The Nation as “international bastard:” Ethnicity and Language

Perhaps what all of us have to look at more closely is the perspective, the positioning implied by the concept of ethnicity as it is used and how it has been translated and responded to by the institutions and realities of our society.

– Enoch Padolsky (1990, 27)

Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* explores the problem of cultural identity as the characters negotiate the end of an era of political and cultural organization. As Lorna Irvine notes, the novel, set at the end of the Second World War, “illustrates, by its very imagery and content, the breakdown of Empires” (144), demonstrating “crises of legitimation, not only for the dispossessed characters whose fiction this is, but also in terms of the institutions of western culture” (140). Kip’s thoughts about Hana in the English patient’s bedroom emphasize the urgency to interpret such crises as they produce the potential for new forms of cultural interaction:

If he could walk across the room and touch her he would be sane. But between them lay a treacherous and complex journey. It was a very wide world. And the Englishman woke at any sound, the hearing aid turned to full level when he slept, so he could be secure in his own awareness. (113)

Kip presages a new form of self-knowledge that will emerge from the decentralization of cultural and political influence, suggested by the sleeping English patient. He struggles through the narrative to control the interpretation of his own experiences and actions but too often feels, as he does while Hana sleeps in the field, “as if in someone’s rifle sights, awkward with her. [...] Within the imaginary painter’s landscape” (114). The scene in the bedroom dramatizes an optimistic response to the decline of an homogenizing Western influence, suggesting the possibility of self-invention:

But what he does is this. He is halfway across the room, his hand sunk to the wrist in his open satchel which still hangs off his shoulder. His walk silent. He

turns and pauses beside the bed. As the English patient completes one of his long exhalations he snips the wire of his hearing aid[. . .] He turns and grins towards her. (115)

With the snip of the wire, Kip challenges the authority of the West to legitimate his actions and define his identity. The decentralization of political and cultural power means for Kip the opportunity for a new understanding of identity, organized around difference and disunity, responsive to his own particular experiences of cultural diversity. Like Choy, Ondaatje, thus, returns to World War II to introduce contemporary questions about cultural identity, privileging the context of this resulting decentralization and the concomitant imperatives to *rethink identity*.

The English patient's own attempt to interpret this decentralization impedes the narrative realization of Kip's optimistic response. The relationship between Kip and the English patient figures the struggle Stuart Hall identifies between the "new identities" of the local, organized around difference, and the centred identities of the declining national era. Kip's opportunity to explore new understandings of identity occurs concomitant with the English patient's growing sense of insecurity: "Sometimes at night the burned man hears a faint shudder in the building. He turns up his hearing aid to draw in a banging noise he still cannot interpret or place" (15). In response to this insecurity, the English patient conflates his experiences with Kip's. He tells Hana: "Kip and I are both international bastards – born in one place and choosing to live elsewhere" (176). The English patient's response, thus, is to produce a singular identity definitive of the new decentralizing global culture. He posits a unified identity characterized by difference and rootlessness. The differences between his and Kip's experiences become insignificant in this assertion of a shared identity, characterized by difference. In this conflation of their

experiences, the English patient paradoxically perpetuates an understanding of identity as unified and coherent, consistent with the older era of cultural organization. This conflation, while privileging multiplicity and difference, erases their different relationships to the process of cultural decentralization – Kip’s emerging opportunity for self-invention is a crisis of legitimacy for the English patient – and thus neutralizes the nascent opportunity, represented in Kip, for a new understanding of identity organized around difference and disunity. This erasure is exposed in the characters’ different access to the identity of “international bastard,” specifically their different means of signifying the qualities of rootlessness and difference. The English patient’s self-construction as “international bastard” is produced in terms of the indeterminacy of language, and thus suggests an unlimited possibility of identification. Kip, in contrast, signifies as “international bastard” through the naturalization of his experiences of exclusion within Western culture. His experiences, thus, suggest an impossibility of identification. The English patient’s linking of the two men in a single identity conflates the unlimited possibility for identification in language with the impossibility of identification based in experiences of cultural multiplicity.

Describing his experience of the desert, the English patient invents himself within the indeterminacy of language and representation:

It was as if he had walked under the millimetre of haze just above the inked fibres of a map, that pure zone between land and chart between distances and legend between nature and storyteller. [...] The place they had chosen to come to, to be their best selves to be unconscious of ancestry. Here, [...] he was alone, his own invention. He knew during these times how the mirage worked, the fata morgana, for he was within it. (246)

He locates the possibility of self-determination outside the realm of determinate meaning.

The English patient identifies himself as the failure of representation. Within the mirage

of language itself, the only invention – the only identity – is that of pure difference. Going into the desert, he says of himself and the other explorers: “[w]e disappeared into landscape. Fire and sand. [...] I wanted to erase my name and the place I had come from” (139). The desert into which they disappeared figures the difference of language: “[It] could not be claimed or owned – it was a piece of cloth carried by winds, never held down by stones and given a hundred shifting names long before Canterbury existed” (138-39). The English patient renegotiates identity as difference itself produced in the endless possibility of signification. Identity emerges paradoxically as the very insignificance of identity: “There were rivers of desert tribes, the most beautiful humans I’ve met in my life. We were German, English, Hungarian, African – all of us insignificant to them. Gradually we became nationless” (138). The explorers, in all their diversity, are unified in the shared quality of insignificance, but only through the removal of the desert tribes from the spaces of political and cultural power. Blurring the “rivers of desert tribes” with the landscape itself, the English patient constructs a rhetorical experience of difference and erasure that forms the basis of his self-construction.

In contrast, Kip generates the qualities of rootlessness and difference very much within the spaces of political and cultural power. Kip says to the English patient: “I grew up with traditions from my country, but later, more often, from *your* country” (283). His experiences of cultural mobility and diversity result in his self-identification as the foreign other, silenced and invisible. In this context, he signifies the privileged quality of insignificance as a function of racial exclusion. Reflecting on his sudden key role in the British military unit after the death of Lord Suffolk, Kip considers this familiar position: “He was accustomed to his invisibility. [...] H]is self-sufficiency [...] was [...] a result of

being the anonymous member of another race, a part of the invisible world” (196). The English patient’s positioning of Kip as “international bastard” exploits this experience of exclusion from British identity, naturalizing it as the basis of a newly renegotiated identity for the decentred global context. As he envisions for himself an escape from determinate identity, the English patient secures Kip within the context of fixed cultural identities, or, more specifically, within his exclusion from the fixed categories of identity. Kip explains to Hana his attempt to occupy this position of exclusion and invisibility: “I had discovered the overlooked space open to those of us with a silent life” (200). However, as I discuss at the end of this chapter, Kip’s narrative is ultimately a rejection of this position of difference and invisibility as a productive basis of cultural identification.

The English patient’s identification as “international bastard” is based on faith in the unmediated circulation and consumption of knowledge. His comments on Herodotus reveal the assumption of coherence that guarantees his understanding of identity:

I see him [Herodotus] as one of those spare men of the desert who travel from oasis to oasis, trading legends as if it is the exchange of seeds, consuming everything without suspicion, piecing together a mirage. ‘This history of mine,’ Herodotus says, ‘has from the beginning sought out the supplementary to the main argument.’ (118-19)

In his construction of the desert, the English patient envisions a coherent space of signification characterized by the simultaneous potential for the circulation and consumption of all knowledge. His vision privileges the supplementary, suggesting, in opposition to a singular story, an unlimited multiplicity and diversity of experiences available for consumption. All knowledge is available to be consumed without suspicion. Yet, particular experiences within this space of diversity are united, finally, in a shared

condition of indeterminacy and inconsequence, suggestive of a mirage. This condition of shared inconsequence is the basis of his understanding of identity. The English patient legitimates his vision as a central image in his narrative of Katharine and Almásy:

All I desired was to walk upon such an earth that had no maps. I carried Katharine Clifton into the desert, where there is the communal book of moonlight. We were among the rumour of wells. In the palace of the winds. (261)

Kip's experience of the "palace of the winds" is much less romantic. While the English patient floats in the endless possibility of signification, Kip generates the qualities of difference and insignificance as a function of his exclusion from the process of identification. He is an "international bastard" because of his restricted ability to participate in the consumption and circulation of knowledge. In the end, Kip's experiences expose the illusion of unsuspecting consumption, highlighting the mechanisms of power and privilege that inevitably position him within the "communal book of moonlight." His response to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki emphasizes the struggles for power that are obscured in the English patient's romantic communal vision: "He feels all the winds of the world have been sucked into Asia" (287). Kip closes his eyes and "sees the streets of Asia full of fire. It rolls across cities like a burst map [...] This tremor of western wisdom" (284), indicting the English patient's complacency towards the notion of identity as indeterminate – "We disappeared into landscape, Fire and sand" (139). Finally, Kip gives the English patient his own earphones, and forces him to listen to "this tremor of Western wisdom."

II

In his construction of them as "international bastards," the English patient conflates Kip's experiences with his own self-construction in the indeterminacy of

language. His vision fixes Kip within the terms of colonial exclusion and, so, neutralizes the hope implied in the latter's smile as he snips the wires of the hearing aid. The same conflation occurs within Canadian criticism as a means of securing the legitimacy of literary nation-building. Agents exploit recent cosmopolitan theoretical approaches to draw on the cultural capital of difference and heterogeneity in the interests of literary nation-building. This criticism shares a privileging of disunity over unity, fragmentation over coherence, a questioning of the nature of representation and an understanding of language and identity as constituted by difference. As a product of such interpretive approaches to literary activity, the national identity emerges very much in the form of the "international bastard" envisioned by the English patient. Ethnic writing is central in this criticism to legitimating the application of such theoretical concerns to the national literature, but it takes on this role solely through the normalizing of its traditional social exclusion within Canadian society, and it signifies, in the end, only as the objective qualities of exclusion and difference. The interpretation of ethnic writing in this context thus positions the ethnic writer much as the English patient positions Kip, as the natural signification of difference. The criticism, thus, reinforces the same conflation made by the English patient of the "trendy nomadic voyaging" of the global post-modern (Hall, "Culture, Community, Nation" 362) and the experiences of social and racial exclusion.

In the following, I examine, in essays by Alison Conway, Robert Kroetsch, Linda Hutcheon and Smaro Kamboureli, how a new manifestation of literary nation-building deploys contemporary theory in the negotiation of the relationship between the imperative to address cultural diversity and the production of an homogeneous national identity. These agents align their arguments with the former imperative, which they link

to a critical concern with questions of language and representation, and, thus, disavow assumptions about cultural unity and distinctiveness. However, a critical attention to ethnicity, in which the difference of ethnic writing in Canada signifies as the difference constitutive of language and identity, paradoxically produces a coherent national identity in the qualities of difference and heterogeneity. Ethnic writing becomes exemplary of the new national literature defined by difference; however, its potential to signify as difference and thus as national is dependent upon naturalizing its exclusion from the traditional homogenizing definitions of the nation. Both Frank Davey and Francesco Loriggio critique this connection between the tenets of recent literary theory and ethnic writing. I go on to examine the role of ethnic writing in postcolonial approaches to the redefinition of a national literary tradition. Essays by Tamara Seiler and Donna Bennett argue that the historical practice of articulating a singular national identity is closely related to, rather than opposed to, an emphasis on the diversity of writing in Canada. These agents argue that together the two projects constitute a newly posited coherent national tradition which, in its defining difference and heterogeneity, gains authority as advancing the study of postcolonialism itself.

At the end of the chapter, I consider *The English Patient* as a cautionary tale that challenges its reader to reject the English patient's vision, carefully wrapped though it is in the alluring romance of Almásy and Katharine. Kip's own narrative turns on the rejection of the English patient's conflation of their positions and, thus, of the alignment of ethnic identity with the difference of language itself.

The arguments discussed in this chapter have roots in the ongoing debate between cosmopolitan and native approaches to the national literature. The perceived threat of

contemporary theory to the project of nation-building is reflected in T.D. MacLulich's article "Thematic Criticism, Literary Nationalism, and the Critic's New Clothes." (1987) MacLulich positions the native and sociologically based thematic criticism as the guarantor of literary nation-building and places it in opposition to "the labyrinthine intricacies of European critical theory" (18), thereby highlighting the cosmopolitan roots of such theory:

None of this [post-thematic] critical activity, however, addresses the question that motivates the work of the major thematic critics: what is 'Canadian' about Canadian literature? [... This] is the only question that will justify our isolating Canadian literature as a distinct field of inquiry. (31)

His central concern is the legitimacy of a national approach to literary interpretation. His repeated appeals to protect the idea of a Canadian literature as a distinct and legitimate field of analysis suggest an anxiety about the national context: "if we discard thematic criticism entirely, we may wake up one morning to discover that we need to reinvent it in order to justify staying in business" (33). MacLulich, in response to theoretical assumptions that threaten this concern, advocates an established model, thematic criticism. By "we," MacLulich really means those, like himself, whose authority "in [the] business" of literary criticism is based in the cultural capital of literary nation-building. Underlying his argument is a reluctance to reconsider assumptions about the relationship between literature and nation: "In fact, the practice of dividing literature into national units is deeply, and perhaps inextricably, embedded in the way we study literature"(20). He argues that the "desire to identify a distinctively Canadian literature has its origins in the widely prevalent assumption that every self-respecting nation ought to have its own linguistic and cultural identity" (19). As experiences and identities increasingly exceed the boundaries of traditional national units, however, the role of

literature in the process of cultural identification seems unnecessarily hampered by this conventional practice and its underlying assumptions.

MacLulich aims his argument at “anti-thematics” like Barry Cameron and Michael Dixon who argue in their introduction to the *Minus Canadian* volume of *Studies in Canadian Literature* (1977) that “Canadian literature deserves treatment as part of the autonomous world of literature” (qtd. in MacLulich 17). MacLulich reacts to their rejection of a social context for understanding the national literature: “The anti-thematics were explicitly opposed to discussing the question of national identity, because they did not want literary criticism to be contaminated by politics or sociology” (17). He argues that “the idea that literary works are autonomous products of the literary imagination seems to directly contradict the idea that literary works embody [...] the essential spirit of a particular group of people” (24). MacLulich, however, misreads the goals of Cameron and Dixon in his assumption that they are not concerned with identifying a distinct national cultural voice. Their introduction demonstrates a form of literary nation-building that emerges through a rhetoric of disavowal consistent with their privileging of a formalist approach.

Rejecting, as MacLulich points out, the critical emphasis on the “*Canadian*” of Canadian literature, referring to a sociological approach to literary analysis they perceive as characteristic of thematic criticism, Cameron’s and Dixon’s argument values a “minus-Canadian” emphasis on formal values and the study of literary works as “autonomous verbal structures” (139) in the context of “an autonomous world of literature” (138). Yet the goal of their proposed criticism shares the same drive to articulate a shared cultural identity:

[Formal values] are the key to an understanding of what *Canadian* means as a literary term. Form is the universal in art, and its study permits us to discern how our writers have made specific adaptations and choices which distinguish them from the common background of literature in general. To ignore such value and search only for sociological uniqueness in our literature is to deny ourselves a clear perspective on Canada's cultural identity. (141)

Cameron and Dixon are not really choosing or rejecting a national basis for the consecration of literature; rather, they argue for a shift of 'Canadian' from a social or content-based context to a formal context. The distinctly national or "plus" quality emerges here as formal variation within the universal context of literary forms. The debate between MacLulich and the "anti-thematics" is really a debate over how best to mark the distinct national literature. As Lianne Moyes argues in her article "'Canadian Literature Criticism': Between the Poles of the Universal-Particular Antinomy" (1992), the two streams or traditions, cosmopolitan and native, are in fact "radically continuous with one another"(29) in criticism and the use of the binary opposition "allows critics to [...] naturalize and authorize the hegemony of specific interests within the Canadian literary/political context" (29). MacLulich and Cameron and Dixon invoke the opposition as a rhetorical basis to support their respective arguments for sociological or formal analysis, but the underlying interest in understanding a national cultural identity is consistent. While MacLulich may object to the shift of the national identity from a sociological to a formal category, his argument is misleading in its suggestion that Cameron and Dixon "outlaw national identity as a possible topic for literary study" (25). What is in dispute is the context – sociological versus formal – and not the subject – national identity – of the criticism.

The relationship in Canadian criticism between literary nation-building and the advocacy of a cosmopolitan approach, such as the one Cameron and Dixon offer, has

long been characterized by claims of disavowal. A.J.M Smith's definition in *The Book of Canadian Poetry* of the cosmopolitan tradition, for example, emphasizes "the universal, civilizing culture of ideas" in opposition to "what is essentially and distinctly Canadian" (qtd. in Kokotailo, "The Bishop" 163). However, just as in the criticism of Cameron and Dixon, underlying this rhetoric of disavowal is a consistent concern with a distinct national tradition. In his article on the critical relationship between A.J.M Smith and John Sutherland, published in 1992, Philip Kokotailo argues that ultimately the critics posit similar visions of a unified national tradition of English-Canadian poetry based in a harmonizing of the contradictory cosmopolitan and native streams, marking the coming of age of the literature. The "evaluative norms" of the critics

promoted a literary ideal of maturity attained through compromise. [...] In literary terms, that is, Smith and Sutherland promoted a concept of unity in which the constitutive elements – both native and cosmopolitan – maintained their distinctive identities. In the tradition of English-Canadian poetry, as they constructed it, the harmonic wholeness of a poem sustains, and is vitalized by the confederation of these resonant parts. (78)

In this case, the nation, as it is represented in the mature poem, emerges as the unique combination of universal and particular features.¹ Similarly, Cameron and Dixon rhetorically disavow, yet implicitly reinforce, the national as a basis of literary consecration. While the opposition between cosmopolitanism and nativism is pervasive as a rhetorical strategy in Canadian criticism, the meaning of and relationship between the terms, as well as the relative place of the nation, are constantly renegotiated in the interests of the particular context. Since the "Minus Canadian" volume, the eroding value of cultural distinctiveness and unity has complicated the attempt to produce a unified national identity within a universal or cosmopolitan rhetoric. In fact, the criticism I will consider in the following pages is attentive to cosmopolitan theory but shares with

MacLulich's argument, in contrast to works like "Minus Canadian," an anxiety about the very status of literary nation-building.

MacLulich's argument in favour of a return to thematics and the sociological context for national identity is a response to the threat to nation-building. It is based in a disavowal of the new cultural capital of difference and heterogeneity. At one level, his argument functions to discredit a new form of knowledge and bolster the critical practice on which his own authority is based. However, the advocacy of such a return to an approach based explicitly in the qualities of unity and coherence is unlikely to be a successful antidote to the new cultural capital of difference and heterogeneity. As Davey argues,

[t]hematic criticism, with its simplified structuralism, weak epistemology, and ignorance of the critique of metaphysics that had been ongoing in Western philosophy since Hegel, had been no match for the arguments poststructuralism had directed against it in the 1970s and early 80s. (*Canadian Literary Power* 266)

While there is something in MacLulich's warning about the implications of criticism concerned only with "cultivating the recondite pleasures of the text" (33), it does not follow that that such critical concerns necessarily replace a concern with literary nationalism. MacLulich argues, in reference to *Narcissistic Narrative* and *A Theory of Parody*, that "Hutcheon's approach [the use of international literary theory] can never justify making Canadian literature a separate object of study" (33). However, as I discuss in the following pages, Hutcheon's subsequent work, illustrative of a new form of nation-building, in fact reveals an attempt to link theoretical concerns with language and nation-building through a critical attention to ethnic writing.

Where MacLulich rejects the new theory and looks to a traditional critical past, the agents examined in this chapter illustrate an attempt to exploit rather than disavow the

authority of contemporary cosmopolitan theory and its new focus on discontinuity and difference. The new cosmopolitanism they illustrate follows the same pattern as earlier models in its rhetorical disavowal of nation-building, but ultimately engages in a paradoxical deployment of the cultural capital of difference in the interests of a coherent national identity. It is paradoxical because the cosmopolitan is now defined specifically through the erosion of the national. And this is where ethnic writing takes a place in this ongoing debate, as ethnicity becomes the vehicle facilitating this paradoxical nation-building. Agents' attention to ethnicity works to suggest an inherent connection between the national identity and the cultural capital of difference. Specifically, ethnicity signifies in arguments simultaneously as an historically excluded social position within Canada and as a formal, generic, characteristic. Agents employ ethnicity as simultaneously a social and a formal characteristic, conflating the two categories. As a result, the nation emerges as the natural subject of a theoretical concern with difference and, thus, as the subject of cosmopolitan theory.

III

Robert Kroetsch has worked consistently to introduce a questioning of language and representation into debate about a distinct Canadian literary tradition. In "Disunity as Unity: A Canadian Strategy" (1985), originally delivered at a conference of the British Association for Canadian studies, he argues for resistance to privileged meta-narratives as a way to resist the threat of the "empires" of America and the USSR that, in asserting their meta-narratives, "turn all other societies into postmodern societies" (22-23)². The idea of Canada maintains cultural significance and continues to be a legitimate context of consecration for writers like himself because it is undefined: "This willingness to refuse

privilege to a restricted or restrictive cluster of meta-narratives becomes a Canadian strategy for survival” (23). Kroetsch also suggests, however, “that the writing of particular narratives within a culture is dependent on these meta-narratives,” defined as the “assumed story [that] has traditionally been basic to nationhood” (21). In order to secure the authority of the national, and, by implication, the conditions for his own writing of particular narratives, he must thus pose a meta-narrative:

Canadians cannot agree on what their metanarrative is. [...] [T]his very falling apart of story is what holds our story together. [...] Canada is a postmodern country. (21-22)

Frank Davey says of Kroetsch’s criticism: “it is Canadianness that, in some momentary but privileged Heideggerian unveiling, these various theories are directed to reveal” (*Canadian Literary Power* 256). He argues that the effect of many of the essays in *The Lovely Treachery of Words* is “to deploy simultaneously the power signs “Canadian” and “Theory” to interlegitimate one another and ‘reveal’ Canada to have been the unsuspecting subject of [...] post-structuralist theory” (257). Out of disunity comes unity and the articulation of a distinct and unified national identity in the qualities of that which threatens it.

Ultimately, Kroetsch's understanding of difference reveals the limitations of his claim to offer a break from the modernist assertion, represented in his article by Frye’s criticism, of “the oneness, the unity, of all narrative” (24). When he argues that “the unity is created by the very debate that seems to threaten the unity” (25), Kroetsch leaves little theoretical space for analysis of the enactment of debate; in the end, authority rests in the possibility of debate rather than in its practical manifestation. Particular challenges to the very idea of unity itself are neutralized, another constitutive feature of that which it

challenges. Kroetsch offers Rudy Wiebe's *Big Bear* as the "archetypal Canadian": "The divisions within him become the mark of his unified 'Canadianness'" (29). The idea of debate functions only to produce the new unifying signifier "Canadian."

Ethnicity appears at the end of Kroetsch's article as a final guarantor for the argument. He uses the fact of ethnic experience in Canada as rationale for his construction of Canada as postmodern. He declares that "[w]e are held together by that absence [of narrative]. There is no centre. This disunity is our unity" (31). He goes on: "Let me end, however, by glancing at one meta-narrative that has asserted itself persistently in the New World context – and that is the myth of the new world" (31-32). This argument is a restatement of his article "Grammar of Silence" (1984); the one meta-narrative of the New World is the "characteristic narrative of the ethnic experience" (Grammar 84). Kroetsch's formulation of "Canadianness" is thus demonstrated in the supposed characteristics of ethnic experience. His argument homogenizes ethnic experience, fixing it as the illustration of the assumed inherent disunity of narrative and identity. He illustrates his argument in a reading of *Settlers of the Marsh*, going back to this early novel with a contemporary theoretical focus and highlighting current questions of identity. Kroetsch argues that at the beginning of the novel, in the silence of a blizzard,

two men are unhooked from their old stories, and from the unified world-view [...] the two immigrants enter into the Canadian story. And the hero is, again, two, as if the disunity is so radical that it physically splits the hero. And yet, out of that division comes the discovery of unity. (32)

This understanding of the narrative of ethnic experience invokes in the interests of Canadianness the authority of a global cultural condition characterized by migration and hybridity. In his introduction to *Ethnic Studies in Canada* (1982) Kroetsch argues that

ethnic writers “who for a variety of reasons may for several generations remain, if not outsiders, at least marginal participants in Canadian society, are particularly apt symbols for twentieth-century man” (“Introduction” v). But then these inherent outsiders in Canadian society, as symbols of the new global culture, become the illustration of the national meta-narrative. The narrative of this experience demonstrates “Canadianness,” as Kroetsch’s argument invests his construction of the national in the authority of the global cultural condition.

Kroetsch’s identification of ethnic writers as symbols of a larger global cultural experience is suggestive of Stuart Hall’s argument, but Kroetsch’s argument then attempts to objectify the experience as a coherent national identity. Ethnic experience is, as a result, celebrated as illustrative of the terms of contemporary cosmopolitan theory, yet simultaneously removed from the assumptions and mechanisms of that theory – it is able to *be* a meta-narrative. Ethnicity is the meta-narrative of the impossibility of meta-narratives, and, in this role, is distinctly Canadian. Kroetsch’s criticism uses ethnic writing but maintains it as separate from the implications of the theoretical arguments and, thus, from the mechanisms of the cultural change they suggest.

While influenced by Kroetsch’s critical approach, Alison Conway, in “Ethnic Writing and Canadian Literary Criticism” (1989), integrates her attention to ethnicity more overtly within her theoretical approach. Conway’s focus on the characteristics of ethnic writing is central to her rejection of thematic criticism in favour of a poststructuralist emphasis on questions of language and form. Her article is a response to the imperative to address issues of cultural diversity: “The purpose of this paper is not to ‘represent’ Canadian ethnic writing, but rather to raise the subject of ethnicity as an issue

with which critics of Canadian literature must contend" (53). Conway challenges thematic criticism for its "quest to establish common belief in a Canadian 'identity' [which] necessarily involved the denial of significant differences amongst Canadians" (54). She explores how "the concept of ethnicity [might] disrupt this homogeneous tradition" (58). Despite this disavowal of unity, Conway's understanding of ethnicity and its relationship to the national identity reveals more of a continuity with thematic criticism than she openly admits. Specifically, her argument is an attempt to articulate a unified national identity. Conway is critical of thematics for its "refusal to recognize difference" (57). Arguably, however, the underlying problem with thematic criticism in the argument is not simply its failure to address diversity, but its failure to secure the authority of literary nation-building. She legitimates nation-building in the authority of a critical attention to inclusion. Her recognition of difference addresses the blind spots of thematics but denies engagement with particular differences and the challenges they pose to the understanding of identity as unified.

Conway's declared purpose is to analyze "the way in which the 'characteristics' of ethnic writing interrupt the ideology of 'sameness' which controls thematic criticism" (53). Her challenge to thematic criticism's "ideology of 'sameness'" involves the conflation of two arguments. She argues that thematic criticism is based on the false assumption of a single unified identity. As well, she argues that it produces an anglo-centric tradition based on the exclusion of ethnic writing. The conflation of these distinct arguments occurs in her understanding of the "characteristics of ethnic writing": "Ethnicity [...] represents difference established by social, political, and historical circumstances, often most noticeably marked by language" (53). The difference of ethnic

writing that is a product of the circumstances and experiences of the Canadian context is the difference of language; in this way, the article links the national identity to the qualities of language itself:

the problems encountered by the ethnic writer demonstrate that difference divides language and subjectivity, and hence ethnicity challenges the term 'Canadian signature' [...] The Canadian 'identity' is recognized to be split within itself [...] for there exists no 'whole' which might encompass all of the self-divided subjectivity in Canadian society. (59-60)

The experience of exclusion from the category Canadian becomes the basis of a newly imagined national identity paradoxically constituted by difference. Further, this new national identity is secured in the authority of a theoretical examination of the nature of language and identity. Conway is critical of a policy of multiculturalism which, in its concept of "unity in diversity," "whitewashes questions of gender, race, ethnicity and class" (60). She argues that in the field of literary criticism, where the critic has access to knowledge regarding questions of language and form, it is possible to outline the potential for a "*genuinely* multicultural discipline" (60). Such a discipline appears to argue for unity *as* diversity.

The quality of difference emerges from two distinct sources in the article; ethnic writing signifies simultaneously as the difference constituting language and as difference within Canadian society. When ethnic writing signifies the difference of language, it demonstrates "the Canadian 'identity'" (59), discernible through Conway's "*genuinely* multicultural discipline." In this way, she invests the national in the authority of a critical imperative to recognize difference and heterogeneity. In her argument, however, the precondition for ethnic writing to signify the difference of language is the experience of exclusion within the nation. At the same time, ethnic writing is understood as writing by

those groups within Canada that, by their historical exclusion, can be positioned as marginal and different from “the Canadian ‘identity.’” The article naturalizes the exclusion of ethnic experience within the nation as that which produces the distinct national identity constituted by difference. Conway’s argument conflates a formalist concern with language as constituted by difference and the experiences of ethnic exclusion within Canadian society. As a result, the same writing that demonstrates the new national identity simultaneously signifies as difference within the nation, two significations that together amount to a second construction of the nation as constituted by difference. The significance of ethnic writing is limited in the article to its ability to provide a generic quality of difference. The argument exploits the idea of difference to secure nation-building but does so at the expense of attention to particular differences that would threaten the viability of the coherent national identity.

Conway’s article ultimately functions to conserve the authority of nation-building as a legitimate basis for the consecration of literary activity. Her critical attention to ethnicity works to secure the legitimacy of a distinct national identity:

Contrary to the discourse of thematics, I believe that a critical practice which emphasizes difference will further enable Canada in its struggle to maintain national autonomy[. . .] The vitality of regional and cultural groups suggests their strength is constituted by their difference. (64)

The nation is secured in the cultural capital of difference. Conway ultimately invokes a rhetoric of inclusion that is based on the naturalizing of exclusion, exposing the underlying anxiety of the argument. The vitality of the regional and cultural groups is not, notably, in their multiple differences; the significance of ethnic writing is limited to the characteristic of its exclusion. Strength is not constituted by the particular differences but only by the potential to signify the quality of difference as the basic principle of

language. Conway's argument does redress the exclusion of thematic criticism in its enthusiastic recognition of difference; however, that recognition is limited to the demands of nation-building.

Like Conway, Linda Hutcheon mobilizes multiculturalism as a critical strategy or "discipline" in her Introduction to *Other Solitudes*, published in 1990. She positions her revisioning of the national literature squarely within the imperative to recognize cultural diversity:

The purpose of this collection of fiction and conversations is to investigate not only how multiculturalism is *lived* but how it is *written into* Canadian life. The cultural richness that immigration has brought to this country has changed forever our concept of what constitutes 'Canadian literature'. (6)

By identifying the writing in the volume as a function of what she calls the "institutionalization of multiculturalism" in both Canadian society and literature (15), Hutcheon exploits the double possibility of "lived" and "written into" for the purpose of naturalizing the national as a legitimate basis for literary consecration. The conflation of the distinction between the "lived" and the "written into" works to legitimate her canonical revision. She makes an appeal to changing immigration patterns as the direct source of a new understanding of Canadian literature, naturalizing both the national context itself and her own canonical revision, in the terms of cultural diversity. From a Bourdieu-informed perspective, any construction of the national literature must, however, be considered a function of the interest of an agent occupying a position within the field, and not directly of changing social demographics. Hutcheon's appeal draws on the cultural capital of difference and heterogeneity in her reference to the changing social context without acknowledging how, within the logic of the literary field, such capital threatens the very assumptions of literary nation-building as a legitimate basis of

consecration. The argument thus trades on the cultural capital of ethnic writing but rhetorically denies it any agency to transform the literary field, except in as much as it reinforces the legitimacy of nation-building.

Hutcheon also makes use of a double construction of ethnicity as social condition and as literary category to define a coherent national literature. The volume embraces the multiple voices that have been neglected in Canadian society: “This expansion of what is published – and thus, taught and read – as ‘Canadian’ is one of the most exciting and productive results of multiculturalism [...] in Canada today” (15). Ethnicity signifies here as a social condition, referring to the condition of exclusion from the label ‘Canadian.’ Simultaneously, Hutcheon invokes ethnicity as a generic category for literary interpretation: “What we may have become more aware of is that for a Hodgins, for instance, a certain Irish element cannot be ignored, nor can the Irish-Scots for a Munro” (15). Employing the two understandings of ethnicity, Hutcheon posits a coherent and shared national condition – of ethnicity constituted by difference – that is a product of a multicultural ideology. Difference is understood as the distinctive feature of the national literature. The unrecognized or, in Hutcheon’s terms, “ex-centric” condition of ethnic writing within Canada introduces the coveted quality of difference into the national context, and that quality then becomes simultaneously and paradoxically a generic interpretive category, legitimating a coherent national literary voice as the basis of literary consecration.³

At the same time, Hutcheon argues for a connection between the shared condition of difference characterizing the national literature and the difference of contemporary theory:

[T]he literary products of Canada's multicultural ideology can be seen to partake of both cultural phenomena [postmodernism and postcolonialism]. Their common valuing of the 'different' and what has been considered marginal over what is deemed central has marked a major shift in cultural thinking. (9-10)

The effect of such a connection, finally, is the production of a coherent national literature as a product of contemporary theory and its concern with difference. The argument is originally legitimated by the experiences of ethnic exclusion within Canadian society, which are in turn generalized as a shared national experience of difference, and then shown to be consistent with the concerns of cosmopolitan theory. Ironically, in the process, employed in the interests of producing the national, particular cultural differences are rhetorically limited in their potential to initiate shifts in cultural thinking.

Hutcheon's explanation of the volume's title, as meant to "recall and revise Hugh MacLennan's earlier designation of Canada as two 'two solitudes'" (1-2), reinforces a rhetorical link between her proffered canonical revision and the terms of her own theorizing of postmodernism, characterized, as Davey argues, "as a conflicted discourse [...] which is frequently complicit with the ideologies it acts to refuse, and as a parodic discourse that must maintain the discourses it parodies" (*Canadian Literary Power* 260). Hutcheon's canonical revision is certainly responsive to the fact that, as she notes in "Multicultural Furor," "a liberal humanist notion of universality [has been replaced by a] postmodern valuing of difference" (16). However, in the objectification of difference as a new shared national condition, her response rhetorically functions to reinforce the unifying impulses of literary nation-building. Hutcheon argues that the volume's aim to read Canadian writing "in a multicultural context is not to homogenize differences" (5) but

[i]t is, in the end, to help ourselves understand that there are ways of seeing the world, and of writing in and about it, that may be different from our own ways – whatever they might be – and valuable because of that difference. (5)

The argument does, however, position difference, limiting its significance to the production of a national tradition⁴. Particular differences within Canadian society are the justification for her argument, but, ultimately, they signify only together as difference itself. Despite the rhetorical privileging of difference, the language of the passage suggests a coherent reading community and the assumption of a shared national condition manifest in the national literature.

In her article “‘Ethnic Literature,’ ‘Minority Writing,’ ‘Literature in Other Languages,’ ‘Hyphenated-Canadian Literature’ – Will it ever be Canadian?” (1996), Natalia Aponiuk includes *Other Solitudes* in her analysis of how so-called “ethnic literature” in Canada is excluded from the category of “Canadian Literature.”⁵ She is forced, however, when discussing the volume, to change the terms of her argument, suggesting that *Other Solitudes* “rigidifies the division of Canadian literature into that of ‘the first and founding nations’ and ‘multicultural fictions’” (3). Here, no longer one side of an opposition, ‘Canadian literature’ refers to the opposition itself. The shift suggests how, in contrast to Aponiuk’s argument, *Other Solitudes* does make “multicultural fictions” integral to a redefinition of the national literature. In fact, Hutcheon produces Canadian literature as the condition of radical difference implied by that opposition. In practice, however, if not appearance, Aponiuk’s argument that the collection perpetuates the exclusion of ethnic writing is valid. The significance of the “multicultural fictions” is limited to the implications of their exclusion. Aponiuk does not take into account how the collection invests in the cultural capital of multicultural identities and experiences.

She argues that what links the multicultural Richler, Ondaatje, and Skvorecky in the collection “is that they are not of British or French origin. They are, therefore, ‘multicultural’ writers, international recognition and recent legitimation by the *Oxford Companion* notwithstanding” (3). *Other Solitudes*, however, is predicated not on an opposition between “multiculturalism” and “recognition” but on their association; it invests in the authority of writers like Ondaatje and their connection to a global cultural context but simultaneously limits the threat that context represents to literary nation-building.

In her Introduction to her own national multicultural anthology, *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* (1996), Smaro Kamboureli addresses the issues that form the basis of her criticism of *Other Solitudes* and Hutcheon’s other criticism⁶. She defines the contributors to her anthology as “Canadian writers” in order “to dispel the ‘marginality’” attributed to them and so avoid “consolidating [their] minority positions” (3). Critical of a “tokenism” that “assigns a single meaning to cultural differences” (3), she emphasizes the multiple differences “of race, of ethnic origin, of gender, of place, of ideological affiliations, or of thematic concerns and aesthetics” (1) characterizing the literature. She argues that “[d]ifference, then, is always a matter of intensity, and is weighed differently in given historical moments. Its meanings are variable, shifting, even provisional” (3). Kamboureli does not include writing from what Hutcheon calls the “first and founding nations”; she avoids what she critiques in Hutcheon – the positing of ethnicity as a general category – which risks erasing the uneven histories of access to the label ‘Canadian’ (*Scandalous Bodies* 172).

Focusing only on the designated multicultural literature, her discussion does, however, employ the same double construction of multiculturalism, as social and formal category, in the interests of producing a coherent national model in the terms of contemporary theory. While Kamboureli emphasizes the “nuances” of difference (3) to avoid collapsing the writing into a shared condition of marginality, she does impose her own basis of coherence under a national banner: “The narrative that emerges from these comments [by the writers and in the literature] is, then, one of contradictions, of differences. What is consistent is the anxiety many of these authors share about any homogenous image of Canadian culture” (6). Kamboureli, in this argument, does not so much rethink the problem of a singular national identity through a concern with questions of representation as she does refigure the nation *as* this concern. The anxiety of the multicultural writers towards a homogeneous national identity is linked to, and reinforces, the particular and defining “Canadian anxiety” about identity. The former, based in the questioning of the very legitimacy of a unifying national cultural identity, is paradoxically exploited to produce that identity. “Canadian literature,” as evidenced in Kamboureli’s volume, is characterized by the questioning of unity and sameness. The nation is figured in the valued terms of contemporary theory and the justification for this rests in the very “nuances of difference” that characterize the literature in the volume.

Multicultural literature stands, in Kamboureli’s argument, as a reflection of society. In reference to the volume’s title, she argues: “*Canadian Multicultural Literature*. In some respects, one word too many. For Canadian literature is, should be thought of, as reflecting the multicultural make-up of the country” (1). At the same time, multiculturalism stands as a preoccupation with questions of representation:

In my selection process I was guided by the belief that multiculturalism disputes certain kinds of representation, the kinds that are built around the principles of sameness, of cohesiveness, of linear development. (5)

The first use of the term invokes the critical notion that literature reflects the nation and, thus, implies the assumptions of coherence and unity, while the second use of the term is grounded in the questioning of those very assumptions. While she avoids “tokenism,” Kambourelis imposes the determining quality of a concern with representation on to ethnic writing, at least in as much as it signifies as “Canadian literature”.

Using this double construction of multiculturalism, Kambourelis first equates the challenge to “sameness” and “cohesiveness” in language and narrative with a challenge to the “persistent attempts to compose a unified vision of Canadian culture” (1). Then, paradoxically, Kambourelis asserts this very challenge as the basis of a coherent image of a newly constituted national literature. She raises the problem of a singularly defined national identity within the concern for a viable national cultural identity:

I believe that within this complex web of historical changes, cultural differences, and politics there still remains the fundamental question of what constitutes Canadian identity. But in the 1990s this question has been reconfigured, and, I think, irrevocably so. For we can no longer afford to think of Canadian identity in singular terms. Its imaginary cohesiveness has already collapsed upon itself. Nor can we afford to cavalierly dismiss the current interest in cultural differences as a mere fad, or an obsession. (12)

While Kambourelis’s argument addresses the issues of singularity, it perpetuates the “imaginary cohesiveness” within a rhetoric of difference. She does not really posit a reconfigured form of this question of the national identity, exposing a reluctance to rethink assumptions about the nature of identity and its relationship to literature:

The literature in *Making a Difference* offers different soundings of the social and cultural body of Canada. Since its beginnings, the making of Canadian literature has coincided, in many respects, with the making of the Canadian state. Far from being a Canadian phenomenon alone, this overlap shows how literature, like other

cultural expressions, measures the pulse of a nation. What might be particularly Canadian, however, is the kind of anxiety that has continued to characterize both what Canadian literature is and what constitutes Canadian identity. (6)

Stuart Hall, in contrast, argues that addressing the experiences of migration and cultural diversity might lead to such rethinking. Kamboureli, in this passage, offers two familiar assertions. Literature is best interpreted as a measure of the national psyche; this assumption depends on the understanding of identity as unified and coherent – the nation as a closed and continuous *body*. As well, she invokes the tradition of a national anxiety as the basis of identification. Kamboureli's argument embraces the imperative to challenge a homogeneous notion of Canadian identity but does so while perpetuating the assumption that literature be understood as producing a coherent national culture.

In sustaining the assumptions of cultural coherence, Kamboureli limits the significance of the writing in the volume:

The writers in this anthology make a difference because, when read together, they invite the reader to consider the social, political, and cultural contexts that have produced Canadian literature in general and their work in particular. As a collage of voices, *Making a Difference* fashions an image of Canadian culture that reveals how we have come to our present moment in history. (1)

Kamboureli uses ethnic writing to produce the nation within a theoretical questioning of unity, suggesting not, as does Hutcheon, a long history of Canadian literature as marginal, but a consistency with the long-standing national anxiety about identity. Functioning within the expectations of a coherent national image, the questioning of representation can never engage in a questioning of the very nature of identity as unified. The writers “make a difference” only within the assumption that literature be interpreted as producing an image of the national culture. Kamboureli's “image of Canadian culture” takes its distinction from the terms of contemporary theory, including a

commitment to questions of representation. Rhetorically positioned to produce a national image that is increasingly anachronistic, such writing, in all its difference, arguably fails, in Hall's terms, to make a difference. It is valued only for its ability to signify difference in the interests of the nation. The argument forecloses on the possibility that such "nuances" might suggest a challenge to the very notion of the nation as a basis of literary consecration.

Frank Davey suggests, in *Canadian Literary Power*, that in "the 1990s in Canada, the margins get increasingly crowded, as numerous groups vie for the legitimacy marginality can bestow" (284). He argues that "[p]ostmodernism's struggle against hegemonies have (sic) been taken up within Canadian literature by various constituencies under specialized banners" (285). Davey is critical of the conflation of the struggle of postmodernism, which he argues has come to denote in this context "a complex of textual convictions and practices," (286) and the struggles of socially and culturally defined groups. The latter, he argues, mark the "depoliticizing of postmodernism as a sign" (286). The nation, then, does not appear in Davey's arguments as a rehearsal or product of contemporary theory, but, as I discussed in chapter one, as the "network of institutions" (70) that facilitates literary activity. By shifting the idea of the nation to the context of production, Davey moves it outside the opposition of social and formal designations and thus, arguably, away from the expectations of coherence and unity. His contribution to the cosmopolitan/native debate might, then, be characterized by this sidestepping, configuring the nation as that which enables, but is not a product of, cosmopolitan theory, refusing the legitimacy of the opposition itself.

Davey's positioning of the nation supports his call for a new approach to cultural resistance: "[t]he political task that this depoliticizing of postmodernism creates is the finding of new common ground among those with continuing interest in opposing hegemony" (286):

the success of all [the constituencies'] projects depends most of all on an effort to valorize *politics*, to enrich and open political process so that contestation and negotiation within it are available to as many groups within one's culture and literature as possible. (286)

Davey asserts the value of ongoing political process as an effective counter to the hegemony of global industry and mass culture. He argues of this contestation and negotiation that "it is in all our interests [...] that such debate not be foreclosed, that it remain 'political,' and that 'Canada' remain a site of dialogue and argument" (292). Attempts to posit a coherent voice of resistance depend on assumptions of identity as unified and stable and arguably compromise the potential for open political contestation. The political task set by Davey illustrates the need to rethink the expectation that the production of a coherent national identity, even in all its diversity, can be an effective opposition to the hegemony of multinational culture and industry. This expectation may in fact impede the opportunity for resistance in the interests of multiple and diverse constituencies.

In his consideration of the treatment of ethnic writing in the Canadian context, Francesco Loriggio is critical of the reluctance to rethink assumptions of coherence and unity in understanding cultural identity. Further, he comes to implicate contemporary theory in perpetuating this ongoing reluctance. In "The Question of the Corpus: Ethnicity and Canadian Literature" (1987), he advocates the notion of "tensional totality" (63) as a critical approach more appropriate than those based on either coherence or incoherence:

“The in-betweenness of ethnicity, its simultaneous tangencies with language and culture, could seem, rather, to call for paradigms that assert both stability and instability, the centrifugal and the centripetal” (60)⁷.

The arguments examined above exploit ethnicity simultaneously as both a social and a linguistic designation, but in doing so maintain the sanctity of the opposition, using that double role to reinforce, rather than question, the opposition between stability and instability in the understanding of identity. They exploit that opposition as the basis of competing theories, ultimately using an attention to ethnicity to invest the cultural capital of disunity and difference in the hidden interests of the former, coherence and unity, in order to bolster the legitimacy of the national identity as the basis of literary interpretation. Loriggio addresses the limitations of both sides of the opposition. Ethnic writing, he argues, challenges the assumption in thematic criticism of a closed coherent system based in the equivalence of language and culture (“The Question” 59):

the addition of ethnic texts shifts the emphasis from the model and the cohesion it imposes on the corpus to the internal dynamics. [... D]ominant and subordinate voices, majority and minority cultures, official and non-official languages permute with each other. (“The Question” 59)

In introducing the possibility of alteration, Loriggio names the very threat that the arguments discussed above work to neutralize; they attempt to commodify the difference of ethnicity without granting agency to ethnic writers to challenge assumptions about a coherent cultural identity and the context for literary interpretation.

The very multiplicity of writing in Canada forms the basis of Loriggio’s challenge to thematics, and he immediately anticipates the potential relevance of more recent theoretical concerns: “where multiplicity is, there difference, intertextuality, polyphony, dialogue and the other notions that constitute the most powerful *argot* of current criticism

will more likely and more legitimately be” (“The Question” 60). However, he argues, if ethnicity is not addressed by the assumption of a coherence of language and culture, it is also not addressed by the assumption “that discourse may be inherently fragmentary and multivocal” (60). Such an approach, he argues, claims “an intrinsic essentiality for literary discourse” (60) and so removes from consideration the temporality and so specificity of the condition of ethnic writing:

Minoritarian discourses [...] cannot be defined on purely literary, intrasystemic grounds: they send back neither to form as such nor to genre or styles for accreditation, but, rather, to historical phenomena. (“History, Literary History, and Ethnic Literature” 42)

Ethnic writing must be interpreted with “reference to” its history and the circumstances of its writing. For Loriggio, ethnic literature reveals the limitations of literary theory that fails to “deal with the dialectic between stability and instability, order and disorder” (“History” 44). In the end, he argues, ethnicity, “the multifocality, the stepping in or out of selves, of positions it allows, is an ontological condition” (“The Question” 65). He argues that this condition is marked by Canadian literature:

The problem in contemporary Canada is not just how to react to the lack of national ghosts (to the ghost story *manquée* that is Canadian literature) but also how to react to the superabundance of unmonumentalized, nondescript, small-time, small-space ghosts hidden in every household or under our skin. (65)

Thus, Loriggio asserts that “Canadian literature or Canadian criticism [can be used] to interpret, to ‘read’ theory” (66).

Loriggio is less interested, however, in literary nation-building than in exploring, in terms similar to Hall’s, ethnic writing in the context of the processes of globalization:

Decolonization, the changes in the demographic composition of many new countries through continuous migration, the influx of wave after wave of immigrants, have created a new breed of individuals, a new subjectivity and hence new virtualities, new categories of discourse. (“History” 31)

Understanding ethnicity as a new kind of knowledge, Loriggio posits the particular historical and temporal circumstances of ethnic writing as its constituting features. His characterization of the “new subjectivity” is based in the experience of “disemia”⁸ :

The most proper denominator could be said to be a hodge-podge of customs, the doing, the knowing, we consign to the rubric ‘culture’ but it is also more than that. Up to now, literary criticism has carried out its role – intellectual, institutional – on the largely unexamined premise that literature, culture, territory and language coincide. The literature emerging in Africa, in Asia, or being written by ethnic authors in Canada and elsewhere, is a literature of non-coincidence [...] Their culture of origin often differs from the language they write in. A discrepancy, large or small but there somehow, keeps linguistic enunciation, literature, culture territory, always out of synchrony. (32)

Loriggio invokes here an understanding of identity which approximates Hall’s notion of the “local,” with its emphasis on process and hybridity. The only subject position not available to the ethnic writer, Loriggio argues, is that “full” subjectivity associated with the traditional national cultural identity, based in the coincidence of culture, land and language. The new subjectivity and the new knowledge it represents, also a particular historical construction, thus challenges, as I have been arguing, the cultural capital of the national identity as the basis of literary consecration. Critical approaches that either exclude ethnic writing in the desire for coherence or, as discussed above, include it as an objectified mark of incoherence, foreclose on its challenge to older understandings of identity based in unity and coherence. By exploiting the theoretical opposition between coherence and incoherence, agents are able to manage the critical engagement of ethnicity in the interests of literary nation-building, upholding the romantic assumptions of the coincidence of land, language and culture.

Loriggio’s emphasis on the notion of “tensional totality” as an interpretive approach demanded by ethnic writing demands an acknowledgment of the condition of

“non-coincidence” that the criticism discussed above avoids. Loriggio questions whether “one is doing multicultural texts such a service by consigning them to poststructuralist theory,” which occludes their features every bit as much as a thematic approach (“Multiculturalism and Literary Criticism” 196). He argues that ethnic discourses are normalized by and become allegories of such theories (195), revealing how these theories are unable “to confront the specter of pluralism without diminishing it” (198):

Poststructuralism integrates [minorities] into the here and now [... but] such relocation is mandated by precise theoretical assumptions, and the very process which installs minority literatures into society dilutes or erases altogether their idiosyncrasies, their identity. (198)

Poststructuralism, he argues, in its “reduction of dialogue to polyphony” (199), recognizes ethnic writing at the expense of agency:

Without the [... r]eciprocity inherent to dialogue, there would [be] no provisions by which to effect real change: societies would, for all intents and purposes, lapse into pure repetitiveness, into cultural consciousness. The opposite of continuous negotiation is uncaring ossification, a continuous spinning of the cultural wheels. (200)

When ethnic writing signifies as this understanding of difference, as an ungrounded “spinning of the cultural wheels,” it suggests the authority of the global post-modern while denied the potential to “effect real change.” The understanding of ethnicity as the difference of the global post-modern protects nation-building from the transformative potential of those “idiosyncrasies” of particular acts of cultural identification. Loriggio emphasizes the need to “acknowledge the presence of minority discourses without normalizing them” (“History” 45) but is acutely aware of the risk that poses to the national identity as a basis of consecration. Nation-building is threatened, he argues, citing Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, by any “epistemological advantage” granted to those whose experiences result in “double consciousness” (in “Multiculturalism” 195). He

cites Henry Giroux to point out that such advantage requires that cultural differences play a substantive role in “the discourses and practice of democratic life” (in “Multiculturalism” 195). In the interests of nation-building, the use of theory has been effective exactly because it celebrates diversity without granting this “epistemological advantage.”

IV

Donna Bennett and Tamara Palmer Seiler both explore the question of literary nation-building within the context of postcolonial theory. Each agent connects the search for a singular national identity and the imperative to address cultural diversity within Canada as consistent features of a newly imagined postcolonial nation. Their recognition of the complexity and heterogeneity of the Canadian cultural condition supports their claims of critical advancements in the study of postcolonialism, as the multiplicity of the Canadian context becomes demonstrative of the very diversity of that field of theory. In the process, particular differences are left unexamined, functioning solely to produce a unique national complexity. In effect, while it works to construct a particular manifestation of postcolonial literature, ethnic writing in Canada is denied the mechanisms of resistance and cultural change rhetorically guaranteed by the theory.

In “Multi-Vocality and National Literature: Toward a Post-Colonial and Multicultural Aesthetic” (1996), Seiler articulates the need for a “new, post-colonial [...] reading strategy within the current Canadian context” that will reveal as “interrelated”

the long-standing concern over the need for and difficulty of nurturing a strong and “authentic” Canadian culture, and the currently high profile [...] concern over the need for and difficulty of nourishing the cultural expressions of groups heretofore largely marginalized in Canada. (149)

Unlike Hutcheon and Kroetsch, Seiler rhetorically positions the search for a unified national identity as consistent with, rather than in opposition to, the growing imperative to acknowledge cultural diversity, suggesting an affinity between the older nation-building, based in the assumptions of unity and cultural coherence, and a newer critical concern to resist such unity. Seiler's argument relies on a double construction of the postcolonial to bridge, in the name of a distinct Canadian "evolution," two competing systems of literary interpretation, one based in the cultural capital of unity and one in difference. In the process, the argument occludes the fact that different understandings of identity underwrite these forms of cultural capital. Seiler invokes the postcolonial as a "body of literatures" that are linked, and here she cites *The Empire Writes Back*, "emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre" (2 qtd. in Seiler 149). She also understands the postcolonial as an interpretive "reading strategy appropriate to our polyphonic postmodern era" (149). By linking, under the banner of decolonization, homogeneous Canadian acts of literary resistance against British and American culture and resistance by minority and Aboriginal writers within and against Canada, Seiler's argument links, as the product of her postcolonial reading strategy, the contradictory systems of interpretation. The no longer "fashionable" idea that "Canadian literature could express a single national character," challenged by "the context of increasing globalization," is, she argues, "in important ways related to the idea of multiplicity that has replaced it" (151). Seiler's investment of nation-building in the cultural capital of globalization turns on its production as an act of decolonization. However, while both may be measurable in an historical context of decolonization, the expression of a singular national identity implies assumptions of unified identity while

the newer cultural capital of multiplicity is, as I have argued throughout, based on the erosion of that very understanding of identity. Linking them through the assumptions of unity and coherence, implied in the notion of a “body of literatures,” indicating an homogeneous cultural group shaped by the act of resistance, allows Seiler to occlude the very different assumptions about identity operating within the two concerns in the Canadian context. Her argument works to reinforce the terms of the search for a national character, nullifying the “resistance [...] against Canada” which now signifies only as a feature of a new postcolonial nation.

By positing this link, Seiler secures interest in the nation as a basis of literary consecration:

A post-colonial, multicultural aesthetic can allow an appreciation of both as discourses that, in complex interaction, express Canadian experience on the margins of several empires – an experience that continues to be shaped not just by difference but by various kinds of difference. (163)

Particular experiences, whether in the articulation of a national identity or in defiance of such an articulation, signify together, in Seiler’s argument, as the difference constituting Canadian experience. Seiler posits an interpretive approach in the terms of the “polyphonic postmodern era” that ultimately and paradoxically sustains the assumptions of identity as unified and stable, establishing the centrality of the national experience, in all its diversity, as the basis of literary consecration. The very diversity of the experiences of decolonization constitutes in her argument the distinct nature of Canadian experience, of Canada’s “particular evolution” (160). Seiler’s argument highlights the very particular differences not only between the interest in a national identity and resistance to it, but also between various minority and Aboriginal interests (152; 154). However, while she secures the cultural capital of such attention to difference, she

simultaneously obscures the particular nature of the interpretive reading strategies, collecting them as illustrations of her new postcolonial multicultural aesthetic. The differences are rendered insignificant as her emphasis serves only to reinforce the overall particularity of the national “evolution.” Challenges to the assumptions of a unified national identity are restricted to producing a new understanding of the Canadian condition. In equating a concern to establish a unified national identity with a concern to resist such an identity, the article ultimately privileges the goals of the former.

In “English Canada’s Postcolonial Complexities” (1993), Bennett argues that one “could read an inchoate postcolonialism out of the whole history of the Canadian literary and cultural dialogue” (170):

Discussing the way Canadian writers and critics have, over a period of time, brought Canadian literature into existence and learned to conceive of it as having autonomy is hardly new [... nor] exhausted and unprofitable. But when we frame the coming into being of Canadian writing as a postcolonial topic it does look somewhat different. At the same time, we must be cautious [... as] it is important that we not lose sight of the range of postcolonial choices in a nation as diversified as Canada. Because of this complexity, Canada [...] supplies a site on which the postcolonial model itself can be tested and refined. (172)

Bennett’s argument works to redefine literary nation-building within the terms of a postcolonial critical approach, so that the coming into identity of the nation becomes an exemplary postcolonial act. Bennett argues that “to speak of postcolonialism is to focus attention on those who have sought independence and who view the imperial country’s proprietary claims as invalid” (168) but emphasizes the flexibility and diversity of a postcolonial critical approach, the authority of which, I argue, is very much based in this ability to suggest such multiplicity and complexity. The uniqueness of the Canadian situation, in all its complexity, in turn, reinforces the authority. Bennett, like Seiler,

employs her understanding of postcolonialism to connect the older nation-building and the contemporary critical attention to multiplicity and difference:

[P]ostcolonialism allows one to focus on the cultural work those nations have done, or needed to do, in order to give birth to, or revitalize, autonomous cultures in regions previously dominated by externally imposed ways of perceiving, understanding, and responding. To describe a country as postcolonial in this sense could simply be to imply a coming of age, or a coming into identity. Thus early stages of postcolonial criticism [...] might be those that [...] affirmed a distinct cultural identity. (169)

This argument again erases that contradiction of cultural capital – unity and coherence in contrast to disunity and difference. The argument for their coexistence as the distinctly national condition ultimately reinforces and validates the former while neutralizing the latter. Bennett's argument sustains assumptions about identity as unified and authentic and attempts to justify them within the terms of postcolonial criticism.

Ultimately, Bennett's argument denies the very substance of postcolonialism, as she defines it, to those interests that question the claims of Canada as an imperial country. Specifically, by linking, as part of a coherent narrative, the search for a distinct national identity and particular challenges by minority groups within Canada, Bennett posits the unique complexity of a Canadian postcolonial context but limits the potential of the latter interests' challenge to the predominance of the national context in literary consecration. The assumptions of her own argument sustain the authority of a Canadian cultural identity as the legitimate basis of literary consecration. Her argument turns on understanding the evidence of the challenge or resistance of minority groups within Canada as a mark of difference; those challenges are rhetorically precluded from shifting the centrality of the nation in literary consecration. Produced as evidence of the distinct

Canadian condition, these challenges are effectively denied the category of postcolonial, as Bennett defines it:

Theory and writing that identifies itself as postcolonial, therefore, have often emphasized the view that, before authentic native expression can be glimpsed [...] externally imposed narratives, mythologies, values, and perspectives need to be stripped away. (168)

In Bennett's argument, the "externally imposed narrative" of a unified national identity is not stripped away so much as repositioned as a product of the imperatives of cultural diversity. Challenges to the national as a basis of literary interpretation do not transform the critical and cultural map. Her definition of postcolonialism as a challenge to the invalid claims of the imperial country is in effect denied to the minority writing within Canada that supplies a significant amount of the authority for a postcolonial approach to Canadian writing in the first place.

Bennett's attention to the "new multiethnic writing" (189) reinforces her bolstering of nation-building. The currency of this writing, indicative of a new global cultural condition, is arguably the motivating force behind her search for Canada's "inchoate postcolonialism." Bennett asserts that "the construction of ethnic identity increasingly comes to play a role within Canada that resembles the role Canada plays as a postcolonial nation" (188). The "multiethnic writing" produces a literature that,

in its accounts of immigrant experience and cultural otherness, may resonate with Canada's preexisting postcolonial condition partly because the ethnic writers' backgrounds are often already postcolonial. These writers from other postcolonial countries now find themselves relocated within a new postcolonial society. (189)

The authority of these writers, and she cites as examples Neil Bissoondath, Dionne Brand, Austin Clarke, Nino Ricci and Joseph Skvorecky (189), is grounded in their importing of supposed postcolonial experience, linking Canada to a larger global cultural

condition. Their experiences “resonate” with a Canadian condition that includes the search for a singular cultural identity. At the same time,

readers may feel that the exploration of otherness in such stories [...] in which struggle is always necessary to stave off a loss of self-identity, becomes almost allegorical because it offers so many parallels to the struggles that have long existed within Canada and that Canada faces as a postcolonial nation. (190)

Bennett posits a coherent nationally defined body of readers to experience the allegorical effect. The multiethnic writers and their writing reflect but do not participate in the renegotiation of the national culture. The significance of the writing is limited to this role:

The poems and narratives produced by recent immigrants to Canada speak to the culture at large because these individuals are both settlers full of hope and refugees in an alien environment. Their stories may therefore be seen as having continuity in a cultural fabric begun by the early English settlers [as well as Scots, Irish and Chinese]. (189)

The writing signifies within the vision of a coherent literary tradition; its role is limited to its ability to reflect and reaffirm the basic expectations of a coherent national narrative. It speaks to an assumed “culture at large,” suggesting a unity of experiences and concerns, but is able to do so only on the basis of its inherent “alien” status within that environment. Any challenge to the imposition of a unifying national identity is neutralized as only a reinforcing “allegory” of the national condition. This new ethnic writing works to define a new Canadian postcolonial condition but is, as a condition, denied access to both categories Canadian and postcolonial.

Finally, the new multiethnic writers speak only, in Bennett’s argument, to the “culture at large” in as much as they produce the experiences of cultural difference and otherness. If this writing fails to provide these qualities as the basis of the allegorical connection, it can not “speak to the culture.” In fact, Bennett positions differently in

relationship to the nation certain immigrant writers who do not take up the thematic concerns of immigrant experience. In a footnote, she addresses those writers, such as Mistry and Faludy, who

do not write of their immigrant experience, or do so only occasionally; instead they tell of the life they knew before they immigrated. For such writers, Canada is not – or not yet – the place of the imagination but the safe haven from which they can record their narrative of displacement. (205)

Such writing is excluded from Canada's "inchoate postcolonialism," as it would challenge the centrality of the nation as the basis of literary consecration. Here, Bennett produces the nation in a new construction – as a space enabling the experiences of the new global cultural condition.

V

Kip's narrative echoes his work as a professional sapper. It traces his effort to decode experiences of cultural diversity and to achieve an understanding of identity that is responsive to those experiences. His search for self-consciousness contains a hidden trick, and Kip makes an error, consuming without suspicion the products of western culture. Unsuspicious consumption implies an acceptance of the illusion that cultural consumption grants the agency to participate in the processes of cultural change. In general, Kip consumes almost nothing without suspicion. His caution as a sapper permeates his character – "his mind, even when unused, is radar, his eyes locating the choreography of inanimate objects for the quarter-mile around him, which is the killing radius of small arms" (87) – and serves to highlight his mistake. As Kip follows the lines of war through Europe, he seeks solace in art:

[e]very night he had walked into the coldness of a captured church and found a statue for the night to be his sentinel. He had given his trust only to this race of stones, moving as close as possible against them in the darkness. (104)

In the chaos of war, Kip turns to the universal stability of art. He embraces culture with a faith in its ability to provide recognition and sense of belonging. Culture becomes the ultimate distraction, culminating in his reliance on the short wave radio and popular music to block out thought as he works as a sapper:

[L]ater he would need distractions. Later, when there was a whole personal history of events and moments in his mind, he would need something equivalent to white sound to burn or bury everything while he thought of the problems in front of him. The radio or crystal set and its loud band music would come later, a tarpaulin to hold the rain of real life away from him. (194)

The white noise of the radio, like the “communal book of moonlight,” serves as a distraction, creating the illusion of recognition while obscuring the underlying structures of power which naturalize Kip’s identity as foreign ‘other.’ Ironically, Kip’s unsuspecting consumption, motivated by the need for stability and belonging, buries the extent to which his access to British culture, illustrated by his success as a sapper, is determined by the conditions of his exclusion.

The distraction of unsuspecting cultural consumption enables Kip to do his job in the service of the British military:

He was pulling the radio earphones on over his head, so the sound came back into him, fully, filling him with clarity. He schemed along the different paths of the wire and swerved into the convolutions of their knots, the sudden corners, the buried switches that translated them from positive to negative. (101-02)

His actions coincide with the movement of music, suggesting that his professional skills are enabled by his embrace of western culture. However, Kip’s professional success is inseparable from his construction as difference within that culture – from his role as professional ethnic:

If he were a hero in a painting, he could claim a just sleep. But as even she [Hana] had said, he was the brownness of a rock[. ...] And something in him

made him step back from even the naïve innocence of such a remark. The successful defusing of a bomb ended novels. Wise white fatherly men shook hands, were acknowledged, and limped away, having been coaxed out of solitude for this special occasion. But he was a professional. And he remained the foreigner, the Sikh. His only human and personal contact was this enemy who had made the bomb and departed brushing his tracks with a branch behind him. (104-05)

While positioned to play the hero, in the end Kip is unable to locate himself within the role as he is denied the potential for self-determination and agency. Hana's demand that Kip provide a point of stability and order – “you have to be a still bed for me, let me curl up as if you were a good grandfather I could hug” (103) – occurs simultaneously with her emphasis on his race. The connection emphasizes his limited access to a British identity, figured here as the quintessential hero. He provides stability and reaffirms order only in as much as he signifies difference. His success as a professional sapper, protector of Western culture, is inseparable from this identity. Hana's desire to recognize Kip as difference impedes rather than enables his potential for self-invention. In contrast to the traditional heroes – the wise white fatherly men – Kip, burdened with the imperative to supply the desired quality of difference, is denied the complexity of self-determination; he is granted recognition without agency. While positioned within the tableau of Western culture, Kip is denied the agency to participate in its construction. Kip's faith in his consumption of Western culture is undermined as he realizes the limitations of an identity based in exclusion and ‘otherness.’ The passage calls for the renegotiation of the narrative hero; Kip's “successful defusing” of the complexity of cultural interaction will demand the rejection of this identity based in exclusion. While the English patient's identification of Kip as “international bastard” seeks to celebrate this identity as

difference, Kip ultimately rejects an understanding of identity that precludes the agency to participate in processes of cultural change.

Kip's realization of his limited cultural agency is marked in his response to the news of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Within the "palace of the winds" and the "white noise" of the radio lie the structures of power and authority that position his experiences of cultural diversity, limiting him to the identity of 'other.' The same wires that carry the distraction of unlimited cultural consumption bring news of the bombings, exposing these structures of power. The news travels up the wires, exploding in Kip's ears, to reveal his mistake of unsuspecting consumption – the trick within the 'bomb' of cultural interaction:

[Hana] sees him in the field, his hands clasped over his head, then realizes this is a gesture not of pain but of his need to hold the earphones tight against his brain. He is a hundred yards away from her in the lower field when she hears a scream emerge from his body which had never raised its voice among them. He sinks to his knees as if unbuckled. (282)

In the light of the betrayal, Kip confronts his limited ability to participate in the production and circulation of knowledge:

I sat at the foot of this bed and listened to you, Uncle. These last months. When I was a kid I did that, the same thing. I believed I could fill myself up with what older people taught me. I believed I could carry that knowledge, slowly altering it, but in any case passing it beyond me to another. (283)

His consumption of Western culture has been predicated on his inherent difference, exposing the illusion of belonging. Kip's words echo the English patient's vision of Herodotus in the desert, exchanging knowledge like seeds, piecing together a mirage. His identity, however, takes shape through his exclusion from that very economy. He consumes knowledge but is unable to transform or circulate it. Kip retreats from his

error, retracing, in his journey back through Europe, the process of his engagement with Western culture:

He was travelling against the direction of the invasion, as if rewinding the spool of war[. . .] He rode the Triumph up the steps to the door of the church and then walked in. A statue was there, bandaged in scaffold. [. . .] He wandered around underneath like somebody unable to enter the intimacy of a home. (290-91)

The narrative is not a rejection of cultural interaction in the context of increasing social and political decentralization and diversity but a search to interpret the experiences of cultural diversity without leaving the subject always fixed “in rifle sights,” objectified as difference.

Ondaatje’s narrative as a whole contains a trick that parallels Kip’s unsuspecting consumption of western culture. Figured as a bomb, the novel demands suspicious consumption to find its trick: “A book, a map of knots, a fuze board, a room of four people in an abandoned villa lit only by candlelight and now and then light from a storm, now and then the possible light from an explosion” (111-12). The challenge of the novel is to reject the authority of the English patient and his vision of the “palace of the winds,” alluring though it is wrapped in the romance of Katharine and Almásy. The English patient’s identification as “international bastard,” much like the constructions of the national identity examined above, conflates the difference of language with the difference of social exclusion to generate, paradoxically, a singular identity constituted by difference. The process exploits Kip’s experiences while limiting his potential for self-invention. The rejection of this conflation exposes the limitations of an identity based in the conditions of cultural exclusion, legitimating Kip’s retreat at the end of the novel in search of a more productive understanding of identity. Anthony Minghella’s movie adaptation provides an example of a reading of the novel which falls for the trick,

privileging the distraction of the romance of Katharine and the English patient. In its removal of the context of the nuclear bombing and its near-removal of Kip, the movie shunts aside the narrative rejection of the English patient's vision, leaving intact the authority of his understanding of identity and cultural coherence. That there exists a North American cultural reluctance to step outside the safety of this distraction, evidenced in the reluctance to rethink an understanding of identity as unified and coherent, is reflected in the explosion of commercial success surrounding the movie.

¹ In a subsequent article on Frye, "From Fathers to Sun: Northrop Frye and the History of English Canadian Poetry" (1999), Kokotailo demonstrates Frye's "recreation" (59) of Smith's and Sutherland's model for a mature literary tradition. Frye's approach differs, he argues, in its emphasis on "synthesis" over "harmony" (58):

Frye reveals his own drive to serve the same end: a present unification of the divided past. Yet what he discerns and promotes is not a poetic confederation that equals the sum of its balanced native and cosmopolitan parts, but rather a literary synthesis that fuses perceiving subject with perceived object and thereby transcends all centripetal or centrifugal considerations. (58)

In Frye's model of synthesis, poetic unity is figured as a unique product which transforms its constitutive parts. As a result, Kokotailo argues, this model of poetic maturity "ultimately subverts" (59) the ideal of literary confederation found in Smith and Sutherland, decentralizing the idea of national unity. He suggests that Frye strives to hang onto a sense of "a Canadian national unity to be discerned through literature" (62) by viewing Canadian culture "as a community of communities" (59) an "aggregate" in Frye's term, that ultimately remains undefined in his criticism. Frank Davey's *Canadian Literary Power* could be read as extending this line of argument.

² Kroetsch's emphasis, in reference to the postmodern, is on the resisting of meta-narratives and challenging the wholeness and stability of language. Davey argues in *Canadian Literary Power* that Kroetsch "writes as if postmodernism and poststructuralism shared common projects" (278). In fact, Davey argues convincingly, especially in reference to Kroetsch and Hutcheon, that postmodernism in Canadian criticism most often refers to the practice of poststructuralism.

³ Smaro Kamboureli argues in reference to Hutcheon's *Splitting Images* (1991), that when made a universal condition, "difference [...] becomes a banality, frustrating any attempt not only at revisiting history but also at recognizing the exigencies of the present" (*Scandalous Bodies* 172).

⁴ Kamboureli writes of the role of the "ex-centric" in Hutcheon's criticism: "History emerges as a single narrative – with a difference: it now includes its own nervous double[. ...] Thus the 'losers' and the 'unsung' are brought forward into the light; yet now, strangely enough, the 'losers' and the 'unsung' find themselves inscribed in this kind of history exactly as such: 'losers' and 'unsung' – namely 'ex-centric'. This 'simultaneous' existence of differences becomes the measure of [the Enlightenment project's] success" (173). In "Back to the Future: Plus or Minus Canadian?" Sylvia Söderlind argues, in reference to *The Canadian Postmodern*, that "Hutcheon's discussion begins [...] with the assumption that the post-colonial and 'ex-centric' status of Canadian writers is analogous to that of women and ethnic minorities. [...] What happens here is that the Canadian, as well as the female, + risks getting absorbed or reduced into a kind of universal marginality typical of (or should we say central to?) the post-modern condition. The presumed replacement of the simultaneously universal and exclusive sameness of 'Man' with a multiplicity of differences collapses into a new kind of sameness – a 'same difference'" (635). What I am arguing is that this "risk" Söderlind notes is, in fact, exactly the product of the new manifestation of nation-building.

as it reveals a search for a “new kind of sameness” based in difference. The universal marginality becomes the new national identity.

⁵ Aponiuk outlines three types of exclusion: language, ethno-cultural background, and experiential knowledge (4).

⁶ Kamboureli notes, first in “Canadian Ethnic Anthologies: Representations of Ethnicity” (October, 1994) and then in the revised version in *Scandalous Bodies*, that *Other Solitudes* “inaugurated a decisive shift in the articulation of ethnic difference in Canada, for – unlike the ethnically and/or racially singular first-wave ethnic anthologies – it brings together writers from various ethnic, racial, and national backgrounds. It is a multicultural anthology in the literal sense of the word” (*Scandalous Bodies*, 162; see also “Canadian Ethnic Anthologies” 44). Kamboureli argues of the volume’s editorial strategies: “they perform a double legitimating act: they endorse the sedative politics of the Canadian state’s appropriation of ethnicity, and they construct ethnicity as a normative identity” (162). Kamboureli’s own editorial strategies in *Making a Difference* can, to an extent, be read as a corrective response.

⁷ In this article, Loriggio points as an example to polysystem theory, exemplified in the work of Even-Zohar. However, in “History, Literary History, and Ethnic Literature” (1990) he is more critical of this theory.

⁸ Loriggio cites Michael Herzfeld, “Disemia,” in *Frontiers in Semiotics*, eds. John Deely, Brooke Williams and Felicia Kruse (Bloomington: Indiana UP 1986) 185-90.

Chapter Four

The Trace of a Nation: Ethnicity and Literary Power

Twenty years ago there was a national wave of Canadian writing which set itself up against American writing and the deluge of American culture in Canada. We [writers who are not white] are the new wave of Canadian writing. We will write about the internal contradictions.
 – Dionne Brand (1990, 277)

The story of an Irish family's migration to Canada in the mid-nineteenth century, Jane Urquhart's novel *Away* (1993) explores the problem of cultural identity as it comments on the imaginative production of migration. About to leave Ireland for the colony, Mary receives from her otherworld lover a vision of a context for understanding identity:

Then she saw the world's great leavetakings, invasions and migrations, landscapes torn from beneath the feet of tribes, the Danae pushed out by the Celts, the Celts eventually smothered by the English, warriors in the night depopulating villages, boatloads of groaning African slaves. Lost forests. The children of the mountain on the plain, the children of the plain adrift on the sea. And all the mourning for abandoned geographies. (128)

The pervasive knowledge of leavetakings establishes the challenge to understand identity through difference. Unlike the other novels examined in this study, *Away* responds to the challenge by privileging an investment in the cultural capital of the global post-modern, offering a celebrated knowledge of difference and fragmentation as the basis of identification. Its vision is offered as an alternative to a national identity grounded in the opposition of assimilation and traditionalism. It responds, thus, to the failure of an understanding of identity as rigid and stable to account for experiences of cultural mobility and difference. However, and I will return to this point at the end of this chapter, the nation actually reappears in the novel, characterized as this celebrated difference and satisfying the desire for a unifying voice of solidarity.

The authority of the novel's frame narrative secures the privileged context of globalization for the interpretation of the O'Malley story. In the frame narrative, the question of cultural identity takes on an urgency in opposition to the pressures of global industry. Eighty-two-year-old Esther O'Malley Robertson gives "shape to one hundred and forty years" (21) as the expansion of mining activity threatens the farm: "the men will work all night shifting the gears of their machines under artificial light. Esther too, will work all night whispering in the dark" (21). Her story follows the O'Malley family from the famine-ravaged coast of Ireland to the developing colony of Canada and begins when a ship carrying goods for sale in the colonies is wrecked off the small island of Rathlin. Teapots, cabbages, barrels of whiskey and a dying sailor wash ashore the morning after "a furious storm had reduced the circumference of the island" (4). The islanders interpret the event through local myth, believing that the "others" from the sea exchanged the goods for Mary, who is now "away." Esther's story ends with the continuing erosion of the land, this time as a result of the mining company: "The land itself fragments, moves away from piers in boats named after brief histories towards other waters, other shores" (356). In opposition to the continuing cultural and economic erosions of a global economy, from nineteenth-century imperialism to late twentieth-century industry, the novel offers an understanding of cultural identity that exploits experiences of cultural mobility and diversity.

Evaluated within the authority of the frame narrative, the national identity, specifically the opposition between assimilation and traditionalism, is displaced as an inadequate context for the imaginative production of migration. A child when he arrives from Ireland with his parents at the time of Confederation, Liam O'Malley figures the

nation, coming of age as a young man in a journey from backwoods to busy port town, “eager to join the world” (233). Following the death of their father, Liam and Eileen, with the cow Genesis, travel to town and, after being rejected at both the British and American hotels, find space at “an establishment sometimes known as the Seaman’s Inn and sometimes as Canada House” (241), the white house that marked Liam’s “point of entry” (139) into the new land. After moving into the white house, Liam “would never again refer to the structure as ‘The Seaman’s’” (368) while for Eileen the house “would remain [...] powerfully lit by the energy of Aiden Lanighan’s dancing” (268). Life in “Canada House” is dominated, thus, by the unresolved opposition between assimilation and traditionalism. In the siblings, the search for identity figures the struggle to define the national identity. Liam’s self-construction enacts a process of assimilation:

About the departure, and the misery that preceded and followed it, he remembered nothing at all. His first real souvenir was the act of arrival – immigration – and a white house[. ...] His father’s stories [...] had left his centre untouched. (207)

He understands culture as something that can be chosen, like the new clothes he buys for himself upon arrival in Port Hope. Liam secures economic success in the new nation through his rejection of history and his willingness to assimilate. In contrast, Eileen’s self-construction is based in her identification with traditional roots: “She who was born into a raw, bright new world would always look back towards lost landscapes and inward towards inherited souvenirs” (207-08). Each understands identity as rigid and stable. The irony of their respective births points to the novel’s critique of these understandings of identity as unable to account for experiences of cultural diversity.

Doomed from the beginning by the “curse of the mines,” the story of Liam and Eileen is rejected as a model for understanding identity. Despite the farm’s economic

success, suggesting the maturation of the national dream, the story's narrative significance is limited by the larger global context. Like the "boats named after brief histories" (365), boats named the *Sir John A. Macdonald* and *The New Dominion* (352), "Canada House" floats into place as the home for Liam and Eileen. Urquhart returns to the moment of Confederation to reject this opposition between assimilation and traditionalism, the informing assumptions of a multicultural Canada. The culmination of the national coming-of-age story leaves unresolved the challenges and pressures of globalization, which continues its ongoing erosion. The novel posits, instead, the need for a new understanding of identity more responsive to the experiences of diversity, to be positioned in opposition to the pressures of global industry.

A crow sits outside the window as Esther tells her story, both muse and audience, marking the privileged understanding of identity to emerge from her narrative. This identity is linked to the traces that structure the novel, and is developed in the constructions of Mary's otherworld lover and Exodus Crow. The otherworld lover – [h]e is "the illusive light, the drop of water, even now disappearing from the blade of grass" (99) – illustrates identity as difference:

All was fragmentation – notes of birdsong scattering through the atmosphere, the way the foliage dispersed rays of sun until the voices of birds were the voices of a million moving shadows. (99-100)

Identity is understood as trace – elusive and known only in its disappearance. Mary's own search for self-consciousness, figured in her relationship with her lover, is characterized by indeterminacy. Her past and her cultural roots will simultaneously define her in the new place and be lost to her: "this is what you take with you and what you leave behind" (126). This understanding of identity emerges as a product of

experiences of cultural and economic exploitation, figured as ecological destruction. The otherworld lover used to live in the forest, he tells Mary, but when it was logged, “[s]himmering light was thrown from all surfaces and rested nowhere” (99). Urquhart figures the displacement of migration as the movement into the knowledge of dislocation, privileging fragmentation and the impossibility of unity as the constitutive bases of a new understanding of identity.

In the recurring image of “[l]ost forests” the novel establishes its link between Irish and Aboriginal experiences. The otherworld lover and Exodus Crow are connected in a suggestion of mythic and spiritual affinity, based in histories of cultural and economic exploitation. Exodus Crow tells Liam: “[Mary] embraced me and said that the same trouble stayed in the hearts of both our peoples” (185). The new shared understanding of identity as difference, linked with ecological concern, takes shape from the conditions of struggle with various forms of cultural and economic exploitation. Osbert’s disruption and destruction of the environment in the tidepools to satisfy his curiosity figures the English brothers’ fascination with Irish culture while living off its economic exploitation. The “curse of the mines” that follows the O’Malley family connects a history of industrial development and economic success with the reluctance to rethink and renegotiate the hierarchical relations and patterns of exploitation that led to the exploitation of Aboriginals. Liam perceives, rightly, that economic success comes with his ability to adopt the role of landlord, ascending the social and economic scale through assimilation.

Patricia Smart’s interpretation of the novel in “Weighing the Claims of Memory: the Poetry and Politics of the Irish-Canadian Experience in Jane Urquhart’s *Away*”

celebrates its investment in the difference of the global post-modern, arguing that the novel, while “firmly grounded in the realities and often conflicting claims of various ethnic, racial, gender and class identities, [...] explodes those categories” (70) in a “post-modern fusing of identities” (63). The novel “challenges the competing voices of the Canadian literary mosaic” to offer a vision that “transcends” such categories by “asserting the universality of the experiences of exile and the displacement of peoples (a reality dramatically visible in the late twentieth century)” (64-65). Smart’s language reveals a certain unease concerning her own argument. She notes that the novel’s alignment of Irish and Aboriginal myth and history in a shared identity is “stunning” and “surprising” and suggests that it may appear “politically naïve” (65;68;69). She justifies it, arguing that “the author demonstrates that the brutalities committed in the quest for power and ownership of land and capital institute a class hierarchy that supersedes cultural difference” (69). Smart’s reading of the novel rewards its exploitation of particular experiences, the voices of the literary mosaic, as a source of difference, becoming significant only in the production of a coherent voice of solidarity. This vision leaves no imaginative space for the productive energy of the “competing” voices or, in Brand’s terms, the “internal contradictions.” It privileges only the conditions of exploitation and exile as the basis of a shared identity.

The consequences of Urquhart’s vision of identity as difference are revealed in the novel’s construction of Aboriginal identity. The rhetorical silencing of the “internal contradictions” within and between Irish and Aboriginal contexts limits the development of new understandings of identity that could act as a position of resistance to global industry. Further, the novel’s production of a unifying vision disassociates experiences

of exploitation from their particular historical contexts as identity becomes figurative, generally accessible. The vision draws on a concern with historical experiences of cultural and economic exploitation as a source of difference but ultimately exploits such contexts to produce a figurative identity. Aboriginal identity signifies in the narrative only as it indicates this figurative condition of exploitation and oppression. Exodus Crow introduces into the narrative a history of Aboriginal exploitation. After his visit with the O'Malley family, he disappears, transformed into a bird. The crow returns through the narrative, to both Eileen and Esther, as a marker of a now generic experience of exploitation and difference. Represented by Exodus Crow, Aboriginal identity exists in the novel only as identity characterized by difference and disunity. This construction lacks the complexity of the novel's multiple constructions of Irishness.

II

Urquhart's vision of identity as trace, characterized as difference, is significant as a basis of solidarity in opposition to the pressures of globalization. It depends on attention to particular narratives of exploitation, based in ethnic and racial difference, but takes form only as such particularity is rendered insignificant. A similar assertion occurs, in the interests of nation-building, in polemical arguments concerning the conditions of literary production. In this chapter I investigate, illustrated in writing by Michael Thorpe, Neil Bissoondath and Janice Kulyk Keefer, critical attention to issues of representation and access to cultural production, based in ethnic and racial identification. The critical profile of such issues within literary studies marks the pressures of globalization and the imperative to address questions of cultural diversity. Such issues point to a potential site for examination into Hall's notion of a "local" politics. In varying ways, however, the

agents' attention to these issues limits their significance to the concerns of nation-building. Often based in experiences of exclusion and exploitation, concern with these issues becomes significant to the interpretation of cultural production in as much as it generates the objective quality of difference, which becomes the substantive basis of a new national consciousness. Specifically, the agents call for the transcendence of particular racial and ethnic divisiveness on the basis of a shared generic knowledge of difference. In the process, ethnic and racial particularities are significant only as they generate a figurative identity, generally applicable within the national imaginary. Such issues, thus, signify only to produce the nation as the difference of the global post-modern, occluding the potential they represent for the development of an understanding of identity thought through difference.

These arguments are responsive to debate between the values of solidarity and differentiation in determining the legitimate function of cultural production. A commitment to cultural production as a centripetal force of solidarity, which assumes an understanding of identity as unified and stable, is central to literary nation-building. As a function of globalization, cultural production is increasingly legitimated through the expectations of differentiation. The critical profile of a series of controversies concerning issues of representation and the terms of access to cultural production is a function of this new force of differentiation. Based in ethnic and racial identification, such concerns and debates, called by Cornel West the "new cultural politics of difference" (30), are a function of the pressures of globalization. Citing West and Stuart Hall, Xiaoping Li emphasizes the connection of these issues to the implications of decolonization in the 1950s and 60s and the "breakdown of European domination" (136). Their authority

illustrates the increasing cultural capital of differentiation in literary studies in response to the increasing pressure to address the realities of cultural diversity. These conflicts include but are not limited to: the “fractious debates” (Davey *CLP* 22) leading into the 1989 PEN international conference about panel representation by “writers of colour;”¹ the controversy surrounding the Royal Ontario Museum’s “Into the Heart of Africa” exhibit (1989-90);² ongoing debates about the appropriation of voice, including the 1991 symposium entitled “Whose Voice is it, anyway?” published in *Books in Canada*; ³ and, finally, and perhaps most explosively, the controversy surrounding “Writing Thru Race: A Conference for First Nations Writers and Writers of Colour,” originating within the Writer’s Union of Canada, July, 1994⁴. Each has been subject to extensive critical analysis, representing a range of approaches and arguments. My concern in this chapter is to examine how these particular controversies, specifically as they foreground issues of representation and access based in racial and ethnic identification, become significant in a struggle to recoup the authority of national solidarity as the legitimate function of cultural production.

The model of diversity sanctioned in the notion of Canadian multiculturalism, illustrated by the idea of the hyphenated identity, negotiates the tension between solidarity and differentiation in a language of tolerance. Based in the understanding of identity as unified, this model of diversity can sustain solidarity in the name of the nation. As Kamboureli notes, “[m]ulticulturalism is accepted only insofar as it promises to enhance the cultural capital of the mainstream” (*Scandalous Bodies* 92). The new diversity and pressure of differentiation are characterized by the cultural capital of difference and disunity and represent a challenge to the very possibility of a coherent

national cultural identity. As Myrna Kostash has argued, increasingly the politics of difference “have overtaken the politics of solidarity” leaving no “ideological ground” for the latter (“Culture of nationalism” 14):

Minority communities everywhere are telling us that they have no faith in calls for unity, solidarity or camaraderie, that they have to find their own solutions from within their own particularisms of race and ethnicity and sexuality. More and more this has expressed itself as a concern with identity and representation and a privileging of the language of difference over all other political discourse. (“Ethnic adventures” 125)

While Kostash maintains that “we have to reinvent the sources of solidarity,” Dionne Brand’s assertion that the “new wave” will write about the “internal contradictions” articulates the alternative implied in the emphasis on differentiation. Cultural production may gain a new authority distinct from the expectations of literary nation-building. Brand offers this opportunity in opposition to the earlier nationalist movement. Each argument points to this new force of differentiation as the increasingly legitimate function of cultural production. As Andrew Cardoza writes, “the worry for many critics is that multiculturalism has moved beyond being a non-threatening song-and-dance policy to one that is actually redistributing power” (31). This redistribution, I argue, shaped by the imperatives of globalization and the realities of cultural mobility and multiplicity, is based in the challenge of a new understanding of identity and so threatens the legitimacy of nation-building as a basis of literary consecration.

Despite Kamboureli’s argument “that the absence of a cohesive new paradigm is inevitable, for comprehending, and dealing with, diversity is a continuous process of mediating and negotiating contingencies” (*Scandalous Bodies* 93), an interest in national solidarity persists. A *Globe and Mail* article by Michael Valpy, written in 1994 in response to the ‘Writing Thru Race’ conference, reveals the perceived threat to literary

nation-building. Valpy condemns what he understands as the excessiveness of a concern with ethnic and racial identification:

What the Writers' Union has embraced is multiculturalism turned cancerous – a cancer taking root in our schools and universities, taking root in our government bureaucracies, and threatening, at a time of globalization of culture, the continued existence of a Canadian cultural identity. (“A nasty serving of cultural apartheid” A2)

Valpy understands ethnic and racial identity as a constitutive but impudent force within the national body. The pressures of differentiation are figured as an inner weakness or failing, the national body turning on itself, rather than as a new form of cultural capital, ironically a function of that globalization. In this way, he disavows the challenge such diversity represents to the very idea of a unified national cultural identity. He rejects the increasing reality of cultural multiplicity and the need for an understanding of identity thought through difference.

Echoing Valpy's concern with excessive diversity, in 1997 Gina Mallet asks in a *Globe and Mail* article: “Has diversity gone too far?” (D1).

The worst thing about multiculturalism is that it works against a united Canada. [...] Although the drive to honour diversity [...] was originally undertaken in order to promote tolerance, it is accomplishing the opposite. By setting Canadians against one another and emphasizing our differences rather than the many things we have in common, diversity has, in fact, gone too far. (D2)

Diversity is again an errant force within a unified Canada consciousness. As Kamboureli argues, Mallet's “notion of ‘Canadianness’ implies transcendence of ethnic difference, a homogenous identity” (*Scandalous Bodies* 86) that depends on her “disavowal of a politics of difference” (84)⁵. For both Valpy and Mallet, the line between healthy and excessive diversity is the authority of a unified national identity as the legitimate product of cultural production. They reject diversity at the point that it reveals itself to be a

challenge to the assumptions of nation-building, the context for their own authority in the cultural field. Their arguments reveal an anxiety about multiculturalism and diversity that is based not in the fact of that diversity but in the idea that its practice, in the form of cultural production, might not lead to the production of a unified national identity.

For Valpy, cultural activity such as the ‘Writing Thru Race’ conference ought to produce the national identity not “deconstruct [it ...] into solitary islands” (A2).

Likewise, referring to that conference as well as to the ROM’s “Into the Heart of Africa” exhibit and the PEN Canada dispute with June Callwood, Mallet argues they

make Canada seem like the proverbial Spanish shawl – one big fringe. Increasingly Canadians are hyphenating themselves and putting up walls around their separate cultures[.] (D2)

Both are stunned that public funds would be used to support a threat to challenge national solidarity. Mallet’s image of a nation lost to “fringe” and Valpy’s of islands with no national mainland are, of course, ironically rooted in a concern with the cultural authority of a particular differentiated cultural identity. With little regard for historical hierarchies, as Kamboureli notes, Mallet bemoans the lack of space on the fringe for claims in the interests of British culture. Likewise, Valpy complains that the cancerous diversity treats anglophone Canada as “a blank page on which any new scribbling is acceptable without reference to the past” (A2). The traditional centrality of British culture is under pressure. Their arguments for national solidarity represent a defensive reaction to the increasing realities of cultural multiplicity which challenge this historical privilege.

Valpy and Mallet both reject the pressures of differentiation to consolidate the argument that national solidarity is the legitimate function of cultural production. They leave themselves only the anachronistic expectations of a unified national identity as the

basis of a claim for authority. The agents I will examine in the following share this privileging of national solidarity; however, their visions of the national identity conflate the goals of differentiation and solidarity, paradoxically producing a unified national identity as the knowledge of otherness and difference. In this way they exploit the cultural capital of differentiation, as a function of global imperatives, while occluding, rather than disavowing, the challenge it represents to nation-building. Critical attention to race and ethnicity facilitates this strategy. Writers' expressions of opposition and differentiation, based in racial and ethnic identification, constitute the national voice only as they signify as a generic knowledge of difference. The agents, in varying ways, exploit the very excessiveness condemned by Valpy and Mallet, the idea of diversity gone "too far," as the definitive quality of the national identity. Solidarity is figured in the very absence of unity, the fact of difference, produced through the evidence of this excessive diversity. In the process, the significance of particular differences, the constitutive pieces of Mallet's "fringe" and Valpy's "islands," is limited to the expectations of nation-building. This production of the nation as difference is positioned as a basis of resistance to both global mass culture and pervasive racism.

Thorpe and Bissoondath accomplish this production of the nation in an apparent rejection of arguments based in attention to racial and ethnic identification, only to exploit such attention as a paradoxical expression of individualism. Kulyk Keefer overtly celebrates differentiation based in ethnic and racial identity, while limiting its significance to nation-building. In each case, ethnic and racial identification signifies as a generic quality, the figurative basis of a newly imagined national consciousness. The agents' own projects then emerge as illustrations of this national consciousness. In this

case, the national identity is produced as a direct function of their particular experiences. Ironically, this particularity is denied to the writers and arguments that provide the initial cultural capital of difference. The effect facilitates the attempt within the arguments to negotiate an authoritative access to the cultural capital of difference. The context of polemical writing foregrounds a writer's quest to secure authority within the literary field. All three agents invest their authority in this linking of nation-building and the cultural capital of otherness and opposition, based in ethnic and racial difference.

III

In his article "Making Waves Against the Mainstream" (1996), Michael Thorpe imagines a national identity characterized by the "alienated, confrontational" spirit (139) of Dionne Brand's "new wave." His argument works to legitimate the expectation that cultural production, even out of a context of diversity, will contribute to, in the words of Cyril Dabydeen, "the oneness of the evolving Canadian consciousness" (qtd. in Thorpe 150). While he is overtly critical of writing that argues for differentiation on the basis of ethnic and racial identification, his argument in fact depends on the pressures of differentiation as the basis of his vision of national solidarity. Attention to ethnic and racial identification signifies in his argument specifically and only as a general quality of difference in the production of the unified national consciousness.

Thorpe's argument turns on his attempt to manage the significance of the "new wave:"

Yet these new writers "of colour" – the most widely used term of convenience here, which not all who might qualify approve or accept – are themselves divided by their own "internal contradictions": there are not one but many waves, and they dash against each other. (140)

He limits the multiplicity and diversity of interests and projects that threaten to fracture his vision of a unified national literary voice, constructing all contradiction as significant to a relationship to nation-building. He identifies within this contradiction the “instructive examples” (140) of Neil Bissoondath, Rohinton Mistry and M.G. Vassanji. These writers supply the cultural capital of difference in their exploration into issues and experiences of cultural mobility and intermingling. They become “representative voices” of the new national consciousness only as this exploration is produced as a generic theme. Thorpe celebrates what he considers to be the writers’ concerns with the individual, writing of Vassanji’s *No New Land*:

in episodes reflecting white condescension, discrimination, and violence, Vassanji concentrates upon the inner strains of adjustment. [...] Vassanji establishes human, not merely racial, dimensions for his characters and situations, though without excluding harsh racial issues. (146)

Thorpe is critical of what he calls the “polarization of interests on racial lines” (149). His alternative attention to general themes, however, relies on an investment in the cultural capital of that polarization and the pressures of differentiation paradoxically to reassert the legitimacy of a coherent national identity. These writers represent instructive contributions to the national literature for their apparent rejection of a racialized view; yet, Thorpe’s analysis of their focus on general issues depends on their thematic preoccupation with cultural multiplicity and interaction. Based in a context of immigration and experiences of discrimination, these concerns are produced as evidence of generic themes in the national literature (141; 145). These writers signify as national in as much as they produce a general identity, characterized by knowledge of difference. Thorpe paradoxically figures individualism as difference, conflating the cultural capital of differentiation and of solidarity in his linking of the contradictory understandings of

identity underlying the two systems. Ultimately, the assumption of a unified and stable identity remains intact. Thorpe, thus, exploits the cultural capital of a concern with differentiation based in ethnic and racial identity while occluding the threat it represents to the assumptions of literary nation-building.

Thorpe addresses the “alienated” component of the “new wave” in an apparent rejection of the legitimacy of racial and ethnic-based arguments and claims of discrimination. He condemns the protest against the “Into the Heart of Africa” exhibit as leaving “no scope [...] for reasoned argument” (148) and argues, in the context of the ‘Writing Thru Race’ conference, that differentiation based in ethnic and racial identity leads to racism:

Writers who think they have to erect barriers behind which they can share their discontent and, so they claim, speak freely, are exacerbating differences and division, insisting on race and colour as determinants, and so themselves contributing to the worst features of this – or any – society. (80)

He is critical of publications that critique and “vilif[y]” the national funding sources that support them. In evaluating such opposition, Thorpe questions the substance of claims of discrimination in cultural production, arguing that either the work is unworthy, illustrated by his evaluation of Himani Bannerji’s story as “heavily didactic” (147), or that the claims are disingenuous:

These writers are in demand as lecturers and writers-in-residence. While one may wonder if much of real value is suppressed today by racial prejudice, *perceived* discrimination is easily credited when the issue is power-sharing rather than literary value. (149)

After dismissing bad writing and unreasonable, potentially racist, arguments, Thorpe leaves only a much demanded, institutionally sanctioned, voice of alienation. Further, in his various evaluations, he occludes the possibility that institutional sanction and success

may occur concomitant with legitimate arguments about discrimination and the need for differentiation based in ethnic and racial identity. The claim of alienation and discrimination emerges as much coveted capital, despite Thorpe's claim to dismiss its legitimacy. These writers, in their alienation, become reluctant agents of the national consciousness, sanctioned by its supporting institutions.

Thorpe establishes his own writing as illustration of the new national consciousness. In the presentation of his own writing, he invests in the cultural capital of difference and discrimination, working to differentiate the particularity of his own racialized voice. The argument reveals its assumption of an underlying threat not of the fact of ethnic and racial difference, but of the potential loss of the authority to determine the legitimate context for interpreting cultural production. Thorpe claims the cultural capital of difference on the basis of his own particular experiences. In contrast to his discussion of the earlier writers, Thorpe now accepts the legitimacy of differentiation without rendering it a generic quality. He describes in detail the rejection of his article, "'Writing Thru Race' – An Alternate View," by *Rungh*, suggesting it marked a lack of interest in "genuine debate" (149). When finally published in *The Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad*, the article contained a postscript commenting on barriers based in ethnic and racial identity: "the writer of this article suggests that he encountered such a barrier when initially offering it [...] to *Rungh*" (80). In contrast to the *perceived* discrimination against him, Thorpe values the "fostering [of] an interracial dialogue, which may be defined as one where the white writer is not bound to align himself uncritically with those 'of colour'" (149-50). Thorpe claims for himself the differentiated and alienated voice that he has just denied to writers within the "new wave." As a result,

the argument denies all dissidence except his own. Further, his argument secures the substantive role of whiteness in debate. The positions open for the white writer are undefined and unlimited, while, simultaneously, the options for those “of colour” are limited; they signify as a homogeneous group. He gains access to that alienated voice based on his particular, individual experiences and the legitimacy of his claim of discrimination – two conditions denied to the “writers of colour” in the production of the national consciousness. He invests in the cultural capital of difference and differentiation in his attention to Mistry, Bissoondath and Vassanji. As the source of this capital, these writers simultaneously signify as a generic voice of difference. Based on its production as a generic quality, Thorpe can then invest in difference for himself, emphasizing the particularity of his own experiences.

Neil Bissoondath’s polemic *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada* (1994) was widely reviewed at the time of its publication, both in the media and in critical journals. Critics emphasize the work’s “shoddy research” (Cardoza 29), arguing it is “excrably written and poorly argued” (Nourbese Philip, “Signifying Nothing” 5) and based in “unstructured, superficial” (Klein “‘Inside Critic’” H3) arguments. Yet, as Naomi Klein puts it, the book “sparked [...] instant currency” (H3). Bissoondath has been variously condemned as a “sell-out” (Nourbese Philip 5) and celebrated, mostly in the media, as uncovering the truth of multiculturalism and its fragmentation of national solidarity. One way to contextualize Bissoondath’s arguments is to investigate them as his attempt to position himself as a cultural producer. Bissoondath professes to reject the significance of ethnicity and race to the understanding of identity, condemning as divisive and narrow a perception of life “through the colour of

one's skin" (163). Yet, when it comes to his own self-construction, that rejection fails spectacularly. Andrew Cardoza notes that the "irony" of Bissoondath's position is that "the more he struggles publicly to dissociate himself from his ethnicity and his colour, the more the label becomes his defining quality" (32). Klein labels Bissoondath an example of an "inside critic," her label for writers who "resent being singled out as members of disadvantaged groups: women, people of colour. But they use this very status to hold themselves up as the exception who needs no special treatment" (H3). Ann Bains makes a similar point in her article "Negative I.D.," arguing that books like Bissoondath's "are giving the [political] right's xenophobic agenda an ethnic-sounding name" (42)⁶. The foregrounding of racial and ethnic identity produced by his argument represents, I argue, more than a simple irony. Calling for unified Canadian values, Bissoondath's argument is more invested in the cultural capital of differentiation, including identification based in ethnicity and race, than he openly admits. Despite the rhetoric of rejection, which establishes his commitment to nation-building, Bissoondath does in fact make a concern with ethnic and racial identity significant to cultural production, but only as it signifies to produce a unified national identity, characterized by the difference of the global post-modern.

Bissoondath's book is a call for renewed loyalty to coherent national values as a response to the increasing realities of cultural diversity. "The traditional notions of Canada, then, representing the centre of the nation's being, are being challenged, even effaced by the need for transition" as the society moves from one "of almost uniform colour to one that is multi-hued" (45). Unlike Valpy and Mallet, Bissoondath does not disavow the realities of cultural diversity. He identifies the challenge not as a

retrenchment of traditional values but as a need to reimagine them. “Barring mass deportations,” he argues, “there is no going back” (77). However, while Bissoondath maps the familiar terrain of the imperatives of globalization, his response is characterized by a reluctance to consider how such imperatives represent a need to rethink the understanding of identity. His argument exploits the cultural capital of ethnic and racial diversity but occludes its central challenges to the legitimacy of nation-building. Given the “fading” and “battered” status of the “old centre,” he posits the need for a new centre, secured in the assertion of a “unity or oneness of vision” (43), asking: “how far do we go as a country in encouraging and promoting cultural difference? How far is far enough, how far too far?” (43). His response asserts the authority of nation-building. Like Thorpe, Bissoondath is overtly critical of pressures of differentiation that threaten national solidarity as the product of cultural production. He condemns protests of the “Into the Heart of Africa” exhibit and support for the ‘Writing Thru Race’ conference as detrimental to national solidarity and disavows claims of discrimination based on racial and ethnic identification (165). However, when he comes to construct a new vision of the national consciousness, he invests in the very pressures of differentiation he is at pains to discredit.

Bissoondath’s evaluation of the new imaginative landscape reveals the paradoxical basis of his argument:

[T]he historical centre and the sense of national self it offered are, for all intents and purposes, no more. A void remains, a lack of a new and definable centre. Multiculturalism, an agent of that change and the policy designed to be the face of the new Canada, has failed to acquire shape and shows no sign of doing so. Without a change in focus and practice, it is unlikely ever to coalesce into the centre – distinct and firm and recognizably Canadian – we so desperately need. (77)

In his use of the term multiculturalism, here and through the book, Bissoondath brings together two distinct forces. The first is the historical “fact” (77) of increasing cultural diversity, the imperatives of which are the motive and justification behind his argument and function as a significant source of cultural capital. The second, the primary target of his polemic, is a set of assumptions about ethnic and racial identity often associated with Canadian multiculturalism. Specifically, he criticizes the assumption of rigid and stable categories of identity:

If the questions of degree of race and ethnicity, and of that troublesome hyphen, unsettle me, it is because they strike close to home – as they strike close to home for the growing number of Canadians whose personal relationships entail a commingling of ethnicities. (118)

The expectations of a hyphenated identity and the role of cultural informant depend on fixed and stable categories of identity. Bissoondath’s critique is based in his argument that such categories fail “to recognize the complexity of ethnicity” (107) and so increasingly cannot account for the reality of lived experience. While Bissoondath claims to reject the very idea of identification on the basis of race and ethnicity, he in reality argues against the limiting assumptions of the one concept with the cultural capital of the other. However, he simultaneously limits the significance of the cultural capital of an attention to the “complexity of ethnicity” to a language of individualism, thus ensuring that this complexity figures as a shared objective quality:

The individuals who form a group, the “ethnics” who create a community, are frequently people of vastly varying composition. Shared ethnicity does not entail unanimity of vision. If the individual is not to be betrayed, a larger humanity must prevail over the narrowness of ethnicity. (107)

The “complexity of ethnicity” becomes the definitive objective quality of the “larger humanity,” occluding the underlying conflict between the two informing understandings

of identity, one based in unity and one in difference. Bissoondath's search for a new unifying national vision is based in the assumptions of coherence and unity, but invests in the cultural capital of difference paradoxically to achieve that coherence.

Bissoondath privileges the need for a new defining centre, occluding the implications of the challenge of increasing diversity. However, the fact of that diversity becomes substantive to his definition of the new centre. His argument to fill the national "void" is defined by the imperative to acknowledge the "complexity" of ethnic and racial identity:

Both the old Canada and the new, then, pose the same question: What is a Canadian? The answer, elusive for so long, lies in the answer to another, perhaps more pointed, question: What values do Canadians hold dear? [...] The soul of the country seems to be up for grabs. [...] A place to start would be in accepting that Canadians, *because they are of so many colours*, are essentially colourless, in the best sense of the word. (73, italics added)

The paradoxical nature of the argument is a function of Bissoondath's insistence in assuming that the old and new cultural moments ask the same questions. His argument is based in a reluctance to acknowledge the challenge to the understanding of identity as unified and stable, as it threatens the legitimacy of nation-building and, thus, the authority of those agents who would define it. Bissoondath exploits an attention to ethnic and racial identity, investing the cultural capital of difference, in his vision of the new national "soul." Ethnic and racial difference is at once crucial to the vision and neutralized as the difference that does not make a difference, "in the best sense." The reality of the diversity that threatens nation-building becomes the substantive basis of the national consciousness, but only as a generic quality. The argument denies the possibility that cultural production can signify other than in the national interest; "internal contradictions" are limited to illustrating the colourlessness of the national voice.

Bissoondath's vision of Canada resonates with corporate constructions of the world as global village. In IBM's "solutions for a small planet" campaign, which highlighted IBM users around the world, or in the "united colours of Benetton" slogan, difference is crucial to the vision but only in as much as the marketing aims to prove such difference does not matter.

Bissoondath offers his own writing as illustration of the new national vision. In opposition to the "divisiveness" of multiculturalism, he argues, "[a] kind of courage is required" (185):

Writing is for me [...] first and foremost, an act of discovery. I seek, through literary exploration, to understand lives very different from my own, pursuing what I would call the demystification of the Other. (182)

Bissoondath's self-construction places him at the centre of the challenges of globalization and the imperative to address cultural difference. As an illustration of literary nation-building, Bissoondath's writing is overtly concerned with ethnic and racial difference, trading in the currency of a concern with the 'Other.' Bissoondath simultaneously emphasizes a language of individualism in describing his project: "I will continue to tell the stories of the men and women who present themselves to my imagination, regardless of race[. . .] I will continue to pursue [...] the demystification of the Other" (185). He again conflates two competing forms of cultural capital, that of differentiation and that of individualism, producing a unified subject characterized by a knowledge of difference. Bissoondath's argument challenges the rigid categories of identity that fail to account for the complexity of experiences. However, the subsequent construction of a unified national identity in the qualities of the global post-modern recognizes such complexity only as an objective quality.

In contrast to Thorpe and Bissoondath, Kulyk Keefer, in “Coming Across Bones’: Historiographic Ethnofiction” (1996), openly embraces the new pressures of differentiation, as she gives shape to a distinctly national cultural identity:

However much we may fret about our lack of a unified, stable, national identity and mythos, we recognize that our postcolonial, post-Anglocentric code of Canadianness is fractured, multiple, shifting. After all, our national motto is not *E Pluribus Unum* (One out of many) but *A Mari Usque Ad Mare* (From sea to sea), suggesting a spread of differences that can only be contained within geographical, not contractual or conceptual frames: two formless, constantly moving seas. And our tradition of literary ethnicity is one that stresses the intermediary nature of those seas, that fact that they join “here” with “there” and can be travelled in both directions. (92-93)

The national identity emerges as the indeterminacy of being always implicated in and removed from both “here” and “there.” Kulyk Keefer constructs the nation in the characteristics of the new global experiences of migration and cultural multiplicity, paradoxically investing in the cultural capital of the qualities of difference and disunity. The nation emerges as the difference of this inbetweenness. The multiplicity of experiences in Canada, presumed to form a coherent tradition of literary ethnicity, functions as a source of this new cultural capital but become significant only as they produce the national literary identity, consistent with the national motto. Further, Kulyk Keefer links the experiences of difference and disunity as a product of migration to the defining quality of the national landscape, fractured and shifting. In this second more figurative way, the article constructs the nation in the privileged qualities of the global context. In opposition to American unity and stability, Kulyk Keefer posits a distinctly Canadian “subjectivity” characterized by difference and disunity; the argument draws on the cultural capital of such qualities but obscures the challenge they represent to the assumptions of literary nation-building. Kulyk Keefer offers her own experience as

illustration of this national subjectivity, expressing frustration at “living in two worlds” and experiencing the “disassociative edge of ethnicity” (86): “I was a split subject [...] always crossing borders” (86).

Kulyk Keefer’s vision of the national identity takes its authority from the fact of particular experiences of multiplicity and difference, as they emerge from a history of migration. However, the defining quality of indeterminacy becomes, in her argument, a figurative generally accessible feature of the national imaginary. She argues that this particular “subjectivity” is not experienced by immigrants only, indicating *Away*, “which shows [Urquhart] to be obsessed with narratives of Irish and Irish Canadian experiences as I have been with my mother’s stories of her life in Poland and [...] Toronto” (92). Further, much as Urquhart does in *Away*, Kulyk Keefer constructs Aboriginal identity as the idealized representation of an identity characterized by difference and indeterminacy:

[I]n terms of the construction of the country ‘Canada,’ a country in which the rights and claims of Native peoples have been so ruthlessly eroded or crushed, it can be argued that First Nations peoples have been saddled with the role of permanent immigrants. (103; footnote 9)

The particularity of experiences and the differences, however contradictory and debated, between them, become insignificant in the construction of a shared national “subjectivity,” characterized as difference. The production of Aboriginal identity as a figurative indicator of immigration exposes the assumption of a generic identity that erases particular history in the interests of a vision of solidarity.

Ethnicity is significant in Kulyk Keefer’s argument in as much as it produces the national identity in the qualities of a global experience of cultural multiplicity and difference. Kulyk Keefer reinforces the legitimacy of literary nation-building by defining a distinctly Canadian “literary ethnicity” (92) in opposition to “American multicultural

discourse” (90). In contrast to what she defines as the American binary opposition of “people of colour” and the “white monolith” (91), Kulyk Keefer points to the Canadian example of *Other Solitudes* that “refuses to Americanize” (91) multiculturalism, presenting race and ethnicity “as equal partners in the dance of difference” (91). Difference emerges as the privileged quality as the argument guarantees equal and unfettered access to it as the definitive national experience. The American model, Kulyk Keefer argues, “elides” differences within the category “people of colour” and “homogen[izes] differences between white ethnic groups” (91). The Canadian model is based in a commitment to the pressures of differentiation while simultaneously securing Kulyk Keefer’s own position as a differentiated ethnic writer.

Kulyk Keefer’s identification of a distinct Canadian literary ethnicity enables the foregrounding of the particularity of white ethnic experiences as a constitutive feature of the national identity, characterized by indeterminacy and difference. At the same time, Kulyk Keefer positions the differentiation of white ethnic experience as constitutive of the struggle against racism. In the end, her own “writing ethnicity” becomes the site linking the definition of a coherent national identity with the struggle against racism. Kulyk Keefer’s argument is a response to the pressures of differentiation, what Kostash identifies as “the articulation of a whole new point of view in the discussions around culture and identity: the articulation of race and colour” (“Ethnic adventures” 124). Like Kostash, Kulyk Keefer seeks a new basis of solidarity that is responsive to this new cultural capital:

I want to make a plea for recognition of the important differences between those who identify themselves as “ethnic subjects,” regardless of colour, and for the necessity of connection as well: connection that is possible through recognizing not ironing out differences. (99-100)

She avoids the elision and homogenization of differences. However, Kulyk Keefer does posit a coherent shared knowledge of difference in opposition to those who consider themselves “outside ethnicity altogether” (100). The significance of differentiation, a crucial source of cultural capital, is limited to constituting a new basis of solidarity.

Kulyk Keefer further legitimates this call for solidarity in the context of a struggle against racism:

I want there to be points of connection between us all the same; I want to be able to say to a black Canadian, ‘because your ancestors were enslaved and mine enserfed, because your ancestral homeland was under imperial domination, as was mine, your historical experience speaks to me, as mine can speak to you.’ Moreover, our joint task to work against racism of any kind is one I can only meaningfully undertake not as some designated bearer of white privilege but as my particularized, differentiated, historically situated self. (99)

The practice of differentiation and the recognition of difference form the basis of solidarity. The argument shifts concern away from the examination of racism to the importance of the shared potential to examine it, and this shared potential becomes the definitive feature of the “work against racism.” Designed to produce evidence of the mere fact of difference, the argument leaves no space for exploration into particular experiences of difference, nor into the implications and consequences of the “internal contradictions.” The occlusion of such exploration is balanced by the larger draw of the shared potential to combat racism, which, in the end, becomes a function not of the examination into the realities of particular ethnic and racial experiences but of the knowledge that there is a shared connection in difference. Finally, Kulyk Keefer conflates, at the site of her own project, this “connection” based in ethnic and racial differentiation, with the “connection” of national solidarity:

And I was able to articulate to myself, at last, what had driven me to begin *The Green Library*: the emergence of a need to explore and redefine my long repressed ethnicity. Significantly, this articulation occurred [...] because of where I was headed: back home, to a Canada that defined itself as multicultural, a haven for hyphens, and yet that in so many ways was falling into the rhetoric and practice of separatism rather than connection. (98)

Her own “writing ethnicity,” grounded in the cultural capital of differentiation, becomes illustrative of a unifying national literature.

IV

Jane Urquhart’s *Away* privileges the imperatives of globalization in its critique of the opposition between assimilation and traditionalism as a basis of identification. The national context is displaced as the novel establishes a new opposition between global industry and experiences of cultural multiplicity and exploitation. Urquhart, however, recoups the nation as a privileged space of solidarity in opposition to global industry. The nation, figured as the difference of the global post-modern, reemerges as a fourth trace. In the link between *Exodus Crow* and D’Arcy McGee, Urquhart returns to the historical context of the founding of the nation to privilege, in the production of a unified national identity, the imperatives of globalization and the cultural capital of difference and heterogeneity. McGee’s speech offers a vision of the country secure in solidarity, free from “factions” and “old grievances;” it would be “[a] sweeping territory, free of wounds, belonging to all, owned by no one” (338). McGee’s vision of the national identity coincides with narrative echoes of *Exodus Crow*:

[McGee] was addressing them, he said, not as the representative of any race, any province, but as the forerunner of a generation that would inherit wholeness, a generation released from fragmentation. (338)

Yet, the release from fragmentation is accomplished in the identification as fragmentation, suggesting the objective difference of the global post-modern. Loss and

disunity based in experiences of global migration and cultural exploitation signify to produce this image of the nation as difference. The threatened authority of a call for national “wholeness” is addressed in this vision of solidarity; national coherence is based in the knowledge of difference and fragmentation. The nation emerges as the “lost world that encompass[es] all losses” (107).

The nation reappears in *Away* as that mythic space of solidarity sought after by Kostash and others, legitimated in the hope that it will provide some kind of opposition to the “Coca-Colonization” (Kostash “Ethnic Adventures” 124) of global mass culture and industry. Agents representing positions of literary nation-building strive to figure the nation as this privileged and much needed space of opposition. However, the particular production of the national identity as difference and fragmentation, a vision dependent upon the naturalization of conditions of exclusion and exploitation, functions ironically to enable the “peculiar homogenization” of global culture and industry. Because of a reluctance to rethink the understanding of identity as unified and stable, concerns based in ethnic and racial identification signify only to produce the nation as difference. *Away*, like the criticism examined in this chapter, paradoxically invests in the logic of the global post-modern, celebrating identity as difference. In the end, the novel does not imagine the enactment of opposition to the ceaseless movements of industry. Esther’s story cannot outlast its adversary:

No lamps at all are lit tonight in the empty house of Loughbreeze Beach. [...] Under the glare of the artificial light the fossilized narratives of ancient migrations are crushed into powder. The scream of the machinery intensifies. (356)

While its vision exploits attention to historical narratives of cultural and economic exploitation, it offers as opposition only a mythic identity grounded in the characteristics of that exploitation.

¹ See Davey, *Canadian Literary Power*, 22; Kamboureli, *Scandalous Bodies*, 88.

² See Hutcheon's analysis of the controversy in "The End(s) of Irony: The Politics of Appropriateness," *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism*. See also Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions*, 157-58.

³ See Davey's analysis of appropriation of voice as "fraud." He also provides some historical background to the debate in *Canadian Literary Power*, 28-31. Joseph Pivato investigates this issue in "Representation of Ethnicity as Problem: Essence or Construction," 48-58. See also Dionne Brand's essay in *Bread out of Stone*, 145-68; Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions*, 167; and the individual contributions by the writers in the "Whose Voice is it anyway?" symposium, 11-17.

⁴ Coverage of the conference has been extensive, both in media and literary journals. See Kamboureli for an analysis of responses to the conference and her notes for further reading, *Scandalous Bodies*, 90-92, and Dionne Brand's "Notes for Writing Thru Race" in *Bread out of Stone*. Other commentary includes Angela Hryniuk, "'Writing Thru Race' and the Mainstream Backlash" and Chelva Kanaganayakam, "Writing beyond Race: The politics of Otherness;" Roy Miki, "From Exclusion to Inclusion;" Thorpe, "'Writing Thru Race': An alternative view;" and Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions*, 159-67.

⁵ See Kamboureli's detailed analysis of Mallet's article in *Scandalous Bodies*. Kamboureli argues that Mallet's disavowal of a politics of difference depends on her assumption that "there are no epistemologically privileged subjects in Canada" (84-85). Mallet's deployment of this argument through the opposition of Us and Them "belies" this claim. Kamboureli examines how British values, coded as Canadian, are privileged in the article.

⁶ Bains' larger argument is to call for the left to examine what "is true about these critiques" (42) so that productive functional alternatives can be developed.

Conclusion:
Living with Difference

And nothing better conceals the objective collusion which is the matrix of specifically artistic value than the conflicts through which it operates.

– Pierre Bourdieu (80)

Pico Iyer has recently suggested that immigrant writers in Toronto are using the novel “to advance a new sense of community” (46), highlighting, I would argue, how fiction is embracing the urgent need to learn to live with difference and, in the process, “creat[ing] a new kind of self-definition” (46). Literary texts are demonstrating new forms of knowledge that are attuned to the pressures of globalization, including the realities of increasing cultural diversity. The works by Choy, Mistry, Ondaatje and Urquhart investigate, in various ways, the nature of cultural identity in the context of social, political and economic change. While writing this dissertation, I encountered many novels published in the 1990s that confirmed for me the pervasiveness of this investigation. Works by Dionne Brand, Catherine Bush, Ann Michaels, Nino Ricci, Shyam Selvadurai, and M.J. Vassanji, to name only a few, explore new understandings of identity and community, and not only through the experiences of migrancy and exile. Such exploration, shaped by the imperative to live with difference, represents an opportunity to interpret and react to the forces of global industry and mass commercial culture.

In this study I have deliberately worked with multiple genres to point to the various forms of knowledge operating within literary studies. The literary texts reveal a certain comfort with exploration into new understandings of community and identity that is not present in the context of their consecration as Canadian literature. The literary nation-building examined in this study has been quick to exploit a vision of Canada as a

“world without borders” (Iyer 46), but this vision has not included a substantive rethinking of identity. Rather, in the context of the implicit threat of the pressures of global industry and commercialized culture, a coherent and unified national identity, as the legitimate basis of consecration, is frequently offered as a guarantee for ecological health, social and political order, and a thriving culture industry. The consecration of literary activity in Canada is unproductively limited by the expectation that it produce a vision of the national psyche. Literary activity does not necessarily have to be understood as producing some construction of the national consciousness even in all its diversity. Further, the weakening or even disappearance of the nation as consecrational basis does not necessarily imply the dissolution of social, political or moral disorder. The implied crisis is one of literary authority rather than social stability. My aim, in interpreting the new form of nation-building in terms of a struggle for authority within the literary field, has been to denaturalize the link between literary nation-building and social well-being.

Contemporary cultural theories illustrate the constructedness of models of cultural unity and coherence. Yet, my readings demonstrate that the expectations of cultural unity and coherence persist in the Canadian context, and, more surprisingly, they persist in the midst of theoretical and cultural perspectives that should, as it were, know better. A new imperative to live with difference has been co-opted into the expectations of nation-building because the latter have represented an established form of knowledge within the literary field. Long-standing anxiety about the national identity has facilitated this co-option. It has seemed natural to produce the eroding value of the very idea of literary nation-building as yet another, albeit paradoxical, manifestation of the errant national

consciousness. As well, issues of cultural, regional and linguistic diversity have been overtly and consistently relevant in the institutionalization of a national literature in Canada. This legacy has further naturalized the embrace of the new imperatives of difference within the national expectations, as “unity in diversity” is transformed into “unity as diversity.”

However, in the paradoxical construction of the nation, literary nation-building in Canada exposes its own limits. It appears increasingly unable to account for experiences of culture in the new global context, indicating a problem of cultural literacy. Nation-building has been a secure source of knowledge and, thus, prestige in the literary field. The paradoxical reliance on it suggests an uncertainty about how to engage the new ethical imperative to live with difference. The challenge of cultural literacy is not unique to the literary field and is arguably more openly acknowledged in other contexts. The accelerated rate at which knowledge changes in today’s culture raises doubt and anxiety about the ability to stay in the game. In a world that changes so quickly, constantly reshaping itself by technological developments and the migrations of people and culture, the challenge may not be simply to have the right knowledge, but to have the skills to acquire continually new knowledge. A general social acknowledgment of this problem of cultural literacy is revealed in the open discussion of anxiety about rapid technological change. Likewise, in other more specialized fields like medicine, for example, it is becoming increasingly clear that existing ethical and moral models of understanding are inadequate to deal with the realities of technological and scientific developments.

In literary studies, engagement with the challenge of cultural literacy will facilitate continuing exploration into new forms of knowledge that will better account for

the diversity and complexity of cultural experience. Ironically, for the same reasons that it is able to co-opt the new imperative of difference in the national interest, the Canadian context probably represents a unique opportunity for rethinking nation-building and, thus, envisioning new roles for literary activity. The notoriously unstable nature of nation-building in Canada suggests that it may be easier here, than in more established national literary fields, to imagine the conditions under which it may not function as the authoritative basis of literary consecration. New works of criticism published while I was completing this study, notably Smaro Kamboureli's *Scandalous Bodies* and the essays collected in *Literary Pluralities*, edited by Christl Verduyn, prove that the discussion of the relationship between ethnicity and the nation continues. While the institution of literary studies in Canada has yet to learn to live with difference, it may be that it has an advanced awareness of the need to learn to do so. To achieve this goal, literary texts are revealing themselves as a form of knowledge from which criticism and other writing and activity in the field can take their cue.

Coming to the end of this study, I'm convinced of the need to read for particular differences and the contradictions between them, as it is here, where systems of knowledge are combined and recombined in on-going processes of identification, that I think crucial re-workings of issues of identity and community are revealed. The actual practice of this way of reading will mark my own struggle with cultural literacy and will necessarily extend to multiple roles, including teaching. It may be that in the classroom, where the expectation is arguably the authoritative synthesis of material, meeting the challenge to learn to read, and so live, with difference will be more difficult than in written forms of literary consecration. In each case, however, the challenge will demand

the ability to work with always provisional forms of knowledge and continually shifting models of identity and community.

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