

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Political Power of Place:

A Case Study of Political Identity in Prairie Literature

by

Noelle Chorney

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

CALGARY, ALBERTA

DECEMBER, 1997

© Noelle Chorney 1997



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services

Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file* *Votre référence*

*Our file* *Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-31282-8

**Canada**

I beckon, I call  
Come to me, love,  
I will love you with my sands,  
With my sunset,  
With my winter and its storms.  
My wind blows through you.  
All are extreme as my love for you is so.

I reach for you through your childhood.  
Upon me, your mother has spilled the blood of your birth.  
Being newly formed when I first knew you,  
Bathed in bliss, oh how I swelled and burned bright  
To fill your eyes.  
My mysteries remain hidden,  
Waiting for you to find  
My bliss in your discovery.

I am vast, but I yearn for you to fill me.  
For I need to be known.  
I shine through you as you breathe,  
For your words speak of me,  
Coloured by love.

I will never leave, I have always been.  
Though you take other lovers, and know other ecstasies,  
I am the lover who will never bring you tears.  
In your words I wish to live,  
For when you are gone, they shall remain  
A sweet reminder of our romance.

-Kelly Goyer

Little research and few interdisciplinary projects comparing Saskatchewan and Alberta have been conducted. This thesis combines theories in political science and literature in an effort to understand the differences between, and the similarities of, political identities in Saskatchewan and Alberta. A case study of authors from Saskatchewan and Alberta is used to derive political identity from the literature. Two early writers, Robert Stead and Howard O'Hagan, and three more contemporary authors: W.O. Mitchell, Guy Vanderhaeghe, and Aritha van Herk are examined. 'Distinct symbols and themes' representing provincial identity in literature are extracted from the texts. A study of the historical progression of themes in the literature from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present reveals certain dichotomies in prairie literature. These dichotomies seem to be divided between the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta, leading to the conclusion that prairie literature reflects the political differences evident in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

## Acknowledgments

I would never have made it this far if it had not been for the support of all of you that I love and respect. Since I am not sure where to start, I'll begin where I began, at home in Saskatchewan with my family. Without my mom and dad, I would not have acquired the resources necessary to get me where I am today (although I'm not even sure where that is). Their influence and their example contributed, without measure, to my survival this past year and a half: Mom, thank you for being so sticky with grammar since I learned to speak, and for your position as a role model who showed me it is possible to juggle more than a thousand responsibilities at once and still stay (debatably) sane; Dad, thank you for fixing my car (for the umpteenth time), and for letting me know how proud of me you are, even if you don't know what the hell I'm going to do when I graduate. In no particular order of importance, I would like to thank Nicolas, Chelsea, Goofy (oh, all right, *and* Tiny), and Little Banner, etc... for making my trips home everything I knew I was missing in Calgary. I miss you guys constantly.

In Calgary, I would like to thank those of you who put up with my homesickness last year, and who finally made this city a place I can grudgingly call home (for now). Thanks to Dr. Gibbins for sticking by me through my whiny phase, and for having faith in my unconventional research. To all the professors who supported me, financially and morally, over the past year, including Dr. Gibbins (again!), Dr. Morton, Dr. Cooper, and Dr. Flanagan, I appreciate it. My experience here was undoubtedly worthwhile, particularly since, in my colleagues, I have met friends for life. Carey Hill, Kevin Muxlow and Serina Rosenthal, Nancy

Blases, and all the other graduate students in the program, thank for for your advice, your opinions (whether I asked for them or not), and your friendship. I will not forget.

I would also like to extend great appreciation to Aritha van Herk and Guy Vanderhaeghe, the authors that I interviewed during my research. You have enhanced this thesis, and my knowledge, more than you know. Most importantly, you have taught me something that I am sure will be indispensable to my future as a writer: write what you know. There is so much to write about on the prairies; you will never run out of material. I would also like to take a moment to express to David Carpenter my gratitude for all you have done for me. Your involvement in my academic career has taught me to be extremely critical of my writing, but also to acknowledge a job well done. Your zest for life and love of the prairies has inspired me, in not only this work, but also my life's goals. I just thought you should know.

Kelly, I haven't forgotten you, nor will I ever. Thank you for your patience, and for reminding me again and again that I am capable of accomplishing great things. From now on, we can accomplish great things together!

Forgive me if I have forgotten anyone who deserves mention. I would include more people, but two pages of acknowledgements is already a bit much.

I want everyone to know that there is a little of all of you in this work. There is a little of all of you in me.

**To Pat,**  
**Our own Prairie Boy turned Mountain Man:**  
**May you find your Promised Land**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval Page.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Dedication.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
Epigraph.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY... 6	6
Introduction.....	6
Genre and Theory: The Specifications Begin.....	7
Political Approaches.....	10
Literary Theory.....	16
Before We Go Any Further.....	22
The Search for “Distinct Symbols and Themes”.....	24
Application.....	31
Summary.....	33
Conclusion.....	33
CHAPTER THREE: A COMPARISON OF EARLY WORKS.....	35
Introduction.....	35
Solitary Man on the Prairies and in the Foothills.....	36
Landscape: Conqueror or Conquered?.....	38
A Divergence of Literary Traditions.....	40
Conclusion.....	42
CHAPTER FOUR: W.O. MITCHELL.....	44
Introduction.....	44
Landscape and “Litmus Years”.....	45
Religious Duality.....	50
Laughing at Mortality?.....	58
Distinguishing “Prairie” from “Province”.....	61
Conclusion.....	65
CHAPTER FIVE: GUY VANDERHAEGHE AND ARITHA VAN HERK.....	66
Introduction.....	66
Literature, Landscape and Politics.....	69
Economy: Prosperity versus Survival.....	77
Realism and Romance.....	84
Conclusion.....	92



CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION.....	93
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	97

I may not know who I am, but I know where I am from.  
Wallace Stegner, Wolf Willow: A History, A Story, and A Memory of  
the Last Plains Frontier

## Chapter One Introduction

It was not until I left Saskatchewan that I realized what it had made me. I first noticed its effect when I moved to Alberta and saw what I was not. Calgary, while edging onto the foothills, is still a prairie city—I should have felt at home, but I felt alien. Having a background in academia, and being naturally curious, I wanted to know why. Perhaps it is my grounding in political science that made me suspect that the political differences were behind my feelings. The attitudes and ways of life that were strange to me seemed to stem from something that had grown out of the province of Alberta, that reflected its politics, or of which its politics was a reflection. I was aware of the political differences between the provinces, but politics was only the tip of the iceberg—this feeling went deeper.

Politics is not a sufficient explanation for a phenomenon that involves such a powerful emotional attachment to place. One important aspect that many Albertans I met and I had in common was the pride we took in our particular provinces. *There was passion.*<sup>1</sup> I became fiercely defensive of my home, while my Albertan friends could not understand why I would not want to stay in the best province in Canada—so much money, so much opportunity, so much hope! But it was not *home*. It was not my air, my sky, my space, or my people. I wanted to find a way to express that connection to my province that seemed linked to, but ran deeper than politics, and I found it in prairie

---

<sup>1</sup> I would argue that the passion that Aritha van Herk attributes to W.O. Mitchell's novels about the prairie is evident in almost all the prairie dwellers that I have met, although it is not so eloquently expressed. See p. 153 of Aritha van Herk's "Invented History: False Document, or Waiting for Saskatchewan" in *A Frozen Tongue* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1992).

writing. Aritha van Herk, an Alberta author, notes a powerful fascination that writers have with Saskatchewan:

There are hundreds of Canadian writers waiting/writing/wanting to elope with Saskatchewan. The reasons for this secret fascination with an invented space delineated only by surveyor's lines are not all pure. Some claim Saskatchewan is very rich and if you can just talk her into running off with you, you'll have it made. Some say she has a wonderful facility with the more corporeal aspects of existence and can show you things that those libertine poets in Toronto never even dreamed of. Some say her intellect's the thing; she's so smart she'll blow all the cobwebs out of your ears. And others claim she's the priestess of time, a spirit that can lead her companions back into the realms of the dead, back to the labyrinths of prairie wisdom. All of which are tempting, in their own way.

But Saskatchewan hangs around in the shadows of Canadian literature like a secret and seductive woman who refuses to reveal her face. She is wearing a *yashmak* with odd triangular openings that shift and fluctuate to reveal occasionally the corner of the chin, one eyebrow, or an earlobe, but never the whole face. She dresses in a variety of wonderful costumes: sometimes wheat sacking, sometimes a cerulean blue drifted with mare's tales, sometimes a tacky, unabashed technicolor sunset, and then, as if repenting her teasing, a drift-white robe. Her voice, when she actually talks, is huskily pleasant, without American twang or eastern slur, and she speaks most often in metaphor.<sup>2</sup>

Did writers hold the answer for which I was searching? As I began to read books set in or about the prairies, I realized I was not the only one who had been shaped by and permanently linked to the prairie, and for me it was not just any prairie, it was Saskatchewan's prairie. Aritha van Herk, despite her mention of Saskatchewan, feels the same for Alberta.<sup>3</sup> Wallace Stegner, who spent only his childhood in southwestern Saskatchewan, claimed to have been marked by it for the rest of his life.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Aritha van Herk, "Invented History: False Document, or Waiting for Saskatchewan" in *A Frozen Tongue* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1992), p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> Aritha van Herk, personal interview, November 3, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Referring to his childhood on the prairie, Wallace Stegner, writes, "Unless everything in a man's memory of childhood is misleading, there is a time somewhere between the ages of five and twelve which corresponds to the phase ethologists have isolated in the development of birds, when an impression lasting only a few seconds may be imprinted on the young bird for life." For more, read

Anyone who grows up on the prairie knows the power of the landscape. Experiencing its expanse forces a quick intake of air that is sometimes so sharp that it tears at your lungs, and other times is so sweet and clean and fresh that it wakens senses you did not even know you had. Stegner cites that amazing combination of land and air, and the effect that it has on an individual:

The drama of this landscape is in the sky, pouring with light and always moving. The earth is passive. And yet the beauty I am struck by, both as present fact and as revived memory, is a fusion: this sky would not be so spectacular without this earth to change and glow and darken under it. And whatever the sky may do, however the earth is shaken or darkened, the Euclidean perfection abides. The very scale, the hugeness of simple forms, emphasizes stability. It is not hills and mountains which we should call eternal. Nature abhors elevation as much as it abhors a vacuum: a hill is no sooner elevated than the forces of erosion begin tearing it down. These prairies are quiescent, close to static: looked at for any length of time, they begin to impose their awful perfection on the observer's mind. Eternity is a peneplain.<sup>5</sup>

It seems that the prairie's effect on the psyche lasts almost as long as the prairie itself: an eternity.

An outsider's response to prairie can be profoundly negative. It is flat, dry, windy, blisteringly hot in summer, icy cold in winter, and frighteningly empty. Its secrets are revealed to those who live in it. The prairie *can* be scary and forbidding, but Stegner dismisses any thought of condemning it:

Desolate? Forbidding? There was never a country that in its good moments was more beautiful. Even in drouth or dust storm or blizzard it is the reverse of monotonous, once you have submitted to it with all the senses. You don't get out of the wind, but learn to lean and squint against it. You don't escape sky and sun, but wear them in your eyeballs and on your back. You become acutely aware of yourself. The world is very large, the sky even larger, and you are very small. But also the world is flat, empty, nearly abstract, and in its flatness you are a

---

"History Is a Pontoon Bridge" in Wolf Willow: A History, A Story, and a Memory of the Last Plains Frontier (New York: The Viking Press, 1971) pp. 21-30.

<sup>5</sup> Stegner, Wolf Willow, p. 7.

challenging upright thing, as sudden as an exclamation mark, as enigmatic as a question mark.

It is a country to breed mystical people, egocentric people, perhaps poetic people. But not humble ones. At noon the total sun pours on your single head; at sunrise or sunset you throw a shadow a hundred yards long. It was not prairie dwellers who invented the indifferent universe or impotent man. Puny you may feel there, and vulnerable, but not unnoticed. This is a land to mark the sparrow's fall.<sup>6</sup>

The country that I come from has proved to harbour a mystical magnetic force that draws to it myself and others. Stegner says it creates poetic people. He was one of them, and others followed his example.

W.O. Mitchell states in one of his novels, "All fine writing is regional, whether the illusion happens on the not-so-devout road to Canterbury or floating down the Mississippi or the Congo or on a moor in Wessex or in a winter doorway in Copenhagen or the land of the Yahoos or a country churchyard or in the darkest heart of Bloomsbury."<sup>7</sup> Later, he notes his own prairie heritage and the relevance of Wallace Stegner's theory:

"The novelist and historian and teacher, Wallace Stegner—who was a prairie boy once in Eastend, Saskatchewan—has said in his book *Wolf Willow* that the prairie and the foothills West should create poets. I agree with him. It certainly teaches early that to be human means to be conscious of self and of being separate from all the rest of the living whole. Human therefore equals lonely. The cost of being aware of a unique inner self, which mirrors the outer remainder of the whole, has an outrageously high price in loneliness. It is impossible to rejoin the living whole to ease the human pain of loneliness except by dying. That does work. In the end."<sup>8</sup>

"The prairie and the foothills" have created poets, and novelists, and artists, and they have been aware of their "unique inner selves," and the mysticism that the prairie

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> W.O. Mitchell, *Since Daisy Creek* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1984), p. 71.

<sup>8</sup> Mitchell, *Ladybug, Ladybug...* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), p. 137.

creates. Yet this does not explain my discomfort in Alberta. Is it possible that the prairies create one kind of poet and the foothills create another?

You may be asking, what does this have to do with politics? As I have already mentioned, politics is an overt aspect of prairie identity. And politics in Saskatchewan and Alberta are quite varied. Is there a link between politics and prairie identity? Where does it come from? How deep does it go? Have the political differences in the provinces filtered down into society? Or have the differences in the provincial societies affected the political systems in Saskatchewan and Alberta?

There is academic value in the study at hand, but it is also a personal quest for understanding. Something in this prairie air has produced a powerful identification with the land, and with the provinces that govern that land. I feel it, both in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Writers have been driven to devote their art to their respective provinces, just as I am driven to devote my thesis to further understand my province and its neighbour. I want to reach, or at least to come closer to measuring, the depth of our attachment to this place—an attachment that governs the books we read, the topics we discuss, our personal philosophies, and our political behaviour.

## Chapter Two Towards a Conceptual Framework and a Methodology of Regional/Provincial Politics/Identity/Literature

### I. Introduction

The complications of an interdisciplinary undertaking seem never-ending. The scholar must ask, for whom am I writing? What bias should I take in favour of one discipline or another? Can I find middle ground? Will my findings enhance general scholarly achievements, or just gather dust? There is enough difficulty narrowing a topic within the confines of a single area of study. However, there is a method in the attempt to combine disciplines. Humanity does not live within a single domain. One cannot wholly understand human behaviour through, for example, political science. Humans are not solely political animals: they are much more. By combining different approaches to the study of humankind, a broader, and (tentatively) more realistic impression may be reached. Therefore, I have chosen to take on the daunting task of conducting a literary political study.

Obviously, both the literary and political domains are monstrous in themselves. The thought of combining them without a narrowing of some sort is unimaginable. A particularly focused approach somewhat lessens the pitfalls inherent in an interdisciplinary study. I will therefore focus on the literature of Saskatchewan and Alberta, questioning the relationship between that literature and the political identity of the respective provinces. As will be shown, there are works which can be applied to this study; however, much more needs to be done. This chapter will examine the possible approaches to an investigation into the realm of both politics and literature, in



an effort to extract from the existent literature a methodology which will facilitate a provincialist study of political identity through the medium of literature.

## II. Genre and Theory: The Specifications Begin

Before approaching the plethora of theoretical angles from which to begin, specifications must be made to define exactly what is meant by "literature." For both lack of time and space, but not for lack of interest, all forms of art cannot be studied here. Such media as painting and sculpture, fascinating subjects in themselves, must be excluded. There remains, however, a huge mixture of genres under the literary umbrella. Poetry, drama, fiction, non-fiction, autobiography, letters and papers of writers in Alberta and Saskatchewan are all legitimate candidates. In some ways, poetry and drama would be prime genres for studies in regionalism, since, as Frank Davey argues, "Canadian poetry is poorly and mostly regionally circulated, and read mainly by university-educated readers. Plays tend currently not only to be regionally disseminated but also to be performed only in a handful of major cities."<sup>1</sup> In his negative reasons for excluding these genres in his study, Davey to some extent communicates positive reasons for including them in a regional study. His reasons for not including them also apply. He continues: "Fiction, however, continues to be written for general Canadian audiences, to be widely read, and to be circulated both nationally and regionally."<sup>2</sup> While it may seem paradoxical to look for the universal in a regional study, this is exactly what this study must do. Drama and poetry express

---

<sup>1</sup> Frank Davey, Post-National Arguments: The Politics of the Anglophone-Canadian Novel since 1967 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 1993), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

their own political identities, and if time allowed, which it does not, would provide a fascinating study. Yet, I cannot rely on fiction alone, since the purpose of this study is to extract political identities from the regional authors themselves, which means delving into personal writing as well. Therefore, other published work must also play a role. Thus, the genre as defined in this study will be referred to as “prose”.

It has not yet been determined which works are to be examined in the undertaking. It would be a lifelong task to study all the works from each province since its inception; rather, some guidelines must be found. While a framework which begins at the institutional birth of the provinces would provide an excellent description of the provinces’ development over the past ninety years, some critics give good reason to focus on more contemporary writers. Laurence Ricou, in Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction, argues that early prairie writers had not yet created a distinctive prairie style: “For the earliest prairie writers, the emptiness did not exist, or if it existed, it was ignored. Some writers made of the emptiness a lush garden, a world of beauty and plenty where human relations ran according to a widely accepted, if simplistic moral pattern.”<sup>3</sup> It was not until the past few decades that the “literary imagination” has begun to expand.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, combined with time and space constraints, this study will focus on three well-known contemporary authors: W.O. Mitchell, Guy Vanderhaeghe, and Aritha van Herk. Unfortunately, a wider focus can not be afforded. Thus, I would like the reader to

---

<sup>3</sup> Laurence Ricou, Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. xi. It must also be noted that “the emptiness” is only one of the themes which prairie writers tackle in their works. These themes will be discussed at length later in the paper.

consider this a case study, one which uses the three authors to test a theory. If the test is successful, then more case studies could be conducted to further strengthen the theory. These authors do, however, sufficiently represent prairie writers, since they have lived on the prairie for a long period of time, and have chosen to remain on the prairie and devote at least part of their careers to writing about it.

Another important distinction must be made regarding this particular approach to literature. The writers themselves play a central role in determining the political identity in their works. It is not only the content of their texts that is important; their reasons for remaining in their respective provinces and for writing regionally or provincially are indispensable to defining their identities in their place of residence. Therefore, close attention must be paid to their direct opinions. Where possible, verification from the authors themselves will be provided.

Now begins the overwhelming task of sorting through the possible theoretical backdrops for this undertaking. While it may be difficult to choose a specific approach within a single discipline, when two disciplines are being bridged, the choice is increasingly muddled. What will be attempted here, then, is an examination of all possible approaches (simplified, of course), in an endeavour to create a conceptual framework that fits the specific topic of comparing regional and provincial identities through prose.

---

<sup>4</sup> See also: "Introduction" in Dick Harrison, Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977).

### III. Political Approaches

There are two specific theoretical approaches in political science that can be applied to this study. Both can be considered “socio-political”<sup>5</sup> in nature. First is the assumption that ideological formations

arise from specific material contexts, and reflect the circumstances and interests of the social group which generates them. The Prairie pattern of meaning in which Toronto signifies exploitive business practices has a material origin in the dependent economic relationship the agricultural economy of the Prairies has had with the financial and industrial sectors of Ontario.<sup>6</sup>

Here Frank Davey touches on a neo-Marxist approach to the creation of regional identities. He goes on to say that the Prairie pattern

is also...a pattern of meaning which is likely to persist and to influence meaning production long after this relationship has altered. Similarly, the Prairie pattern of meaning which perceives rural life as more rich and energetic than the urban...flourishes despite the increasing urbanization and industrialization of Prairie society.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly, a materialist approach to the creation of identity, particularly in an area so influenced by the difficulty of physical survival as the Prairies, is essential to the study of regional identity.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Alan C. Cairns and Edwin R. Black, “A Different Perspective on Canadian Federalism,” Canadian Public Administration 9, No. 1 (March 1966), p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> Davey, p. 21-22.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Barry Cooper, in his articles “Western Political Consciousness” in Political Thought in Canada and “The West: A Political Minority” in Minorities and the Canadian State, also notes the significance of economics on the prairies: “From the start, then, the West has felt the impact of the most advanced technology of the day.” (WPC, 220) and “The most comprehensive context for Western as well as Canadian politics, the context within which the fortunes of Canada, the political unit, as well as the imaginative realities of Canada and the West unfold, is given by technology” (TW:APM, 213). The material realities create the society. Edward A. McCourt also makes an important point about the connection between economics and the expression of identity through literature: “It is a common but largely fallacious theory that until a society achieves a substantial degree of economic security it cannot be expected to show much progress in the arts. ...The truth is that the prime interest of the people who constitute a frontier society is and always has been material gain: and that even after security, and perhaps modest wealth, have been attained,

The second approach, while still in the socio-political realm, is neo-institutional. This position is articulated most prominently by Alan Cairns, who began in the late 1960s, along with Edwin Black, to argue that societies do not create institutions; rather, institutions create societies. In this analysis lies a specific reference to the study of Saskatchewan and Alberta: "Mechanisms set in motion by the creation of political institutions permit provinces such as Saskatchewan and Alberta which possessed little sociological legitimacy at their birth to acquire it with the passage of time and creation of a unique provincial history."<sup>9</sup> Despite the fact that the two provinces have similar geographic characteristics<sup>10</sup>, twenty-five years after their institutionalization, they had diverged quite remarkably: "The prairie revolt of the '30's had subsided into agrarian reformism in Saskatchewan and conservative business administration in Alberta."<sup>11</sup> The institutions themselves must to some extent have been a 'creative influence' on the development of the prairie provinces, since the boundary arbitrarily drawn across seemingly indistinguishable prairie has created two distinct societies, and seems even to have affected the climate in each province.<sup>12</sup>

Cairns carries his theory further in his 1977 article "The Governments and Societies of Canadian Federalism". In discussing the relationship provincial

---

attention continues to focus for a long time on material acquisitions rather than on the arts." ("Prairie Literature and its Critics" in A Region of the Mind)

<sup>9</sup> Cairns and Black, p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> Black and Cairns state that "the provincial boundaries are still geographically meaningful except on the prairies"(39). This is disputed by Edward McCourt's introduction to The Canadian West in Fiction: "There are, of course, differences between provinces. Saskatchewan is flatter than Alberta and less wooded than Manitoba, and the wind seems to blow harder there than anywhere else in Canada." (v)

<sup>11</sup> Black and Cairns, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> Here, I am speaking from my own experience in crossing the Saskatchewan/Alberta border--the snow seems to get much deeper, and the wind blows harder the instant one crosses into Saskatchewan. While I speak from my own experience, Edward McCourt's observations in n. 8 substantiates it.

governments and provincial societies, he again foregrounds the importance of institutions in the study of society:

The significant question, after all, is the survival of provincial governments, not of provincial societies, and it is not self-evident that the existence and support of the latter is necessary to the functioning and aggrandizement of the former. Their sources of survival, renewal, and vitality may well lie within themselves and in their capacity to mould their environment in accordance with their own governmental purpose.<sup>13</sup>

To this point, the neo-institutional approach remains theoretical. While Black and Cairns briefly mention Saskatchewan and Alberta as examples, no direct or in-depth attention is paid to the actual institutional effects on the provinces' developments. David Smith, however, does take up the cause.

In "A Comparison of Prairie Political Developments in Saskatchewan and Alberta," Smith makes two arguments that are fundamental to this study: first, that comparative studies of Saskatchewan and Alberta 'scarcely exist', and second, that the Canadian federal system created the necessary conditions for different political systems to develop in the respective provinces.<sup>14</sup> "...[I]n two neighbouring and remarkably similar provinces...the evolution of...[political] movements has been remarkably different."<sup>15</sup> Through an historical analysis of the development of Saskatchewan and Alberta in the early 20th century, Smith outlines the points of divergence in the two provinces which eventually led to their remarkably different party systems, showing how the federal system allowed and encouraged the divergence.

---

<sup>13</sup> Cairns, "The Government and Societies of Canadian Federalism," The Canadian Journal of Political Science 10, No. 3 (September 1977), p. 699.

<sup>14</sup> David Smith, "A Comparison of Prairie Political Developments in Saskatchewan and Alberta," Journal of Canadian Studies 4, No. 1 (February 1969), p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

Smith has two theories on how federalism could have affected the development of Saskatchewan and Alberta: "On the one hand it may be asserted that the federal system permitted, by its recognition of local institutions, the internal social and economic diversities of the provinces to reveal themselves in political diversities."<sup>16</sup> This argument, however, "ignores the provinces' common political heritage of non-partisanship before 1905 and continuing similarities of geography, history and economic development afterwards." His second theory is a modification of the first:

that the federal system demanded, for the sake of unity, the introduction of national partisan politics...into the new provinces, thereby repudiating the territorial tradition of non-partisanship. This explanation, while paradoxical, more adequately suggests why the two provinces have developed such different political patterns, since it takes into account the influence of partisan politics.<sup>17</sup>

These theories, however, are not the only institutional arguments in Smith's article. Several other institutional phenomena guided the governments of Alberta and Saskatchewan in different directions.

The development of the party systems in Saskatchewan and Alberta, argues Smith, were affected, first of all, by the Liberal party in each province. Farmer support was the principal goal in order to keep a majority government. At this the party was extremely successful, to the point of destroying any chance for a legitimate opposition party. While in Saskatchewan the Liberals managed to maintain a close and co-operative relationship with the farmers' organizations, in Alberta a scandal divided the Liberal party and "brought partisanship into disrepute without providing a practical

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

alternative.”<sup>18</sup> Once the Liberal party was voted out of the federal government in 1911, its position in the prairie provinces was further weakened.

Since there were no realistic existing alternatives to the Liberals in either province, the only option was the development of a third party. Again, institutions shaped the approach, since, as Smith asserts, “under the single-member-district simple-plurality vote electoral system this procedure would probably be unsuccessful unless the new party could attract a wide following among the organized farmers.”<sup>19</sup> While Saskatchewan’s Liberal party managed to survive the growing unrest, the party system in Alberta collapsed when the United Farmers of Alberta directly entered politics. The 1920s created the political systems in the two provinces that survive to the present: “In the former [Saskatchewan] the system is still composed of two parties, although it is closer to being a model two-party system than at any time in its past, and in the latter [Alberta] the system continues to be characterized by a dominant governing party faced by a weak and fragmented opposition.”<sup>20</sup>

The Depression placed extreme pressure on government, and led to the development of new parties in both Alberta and Saskatchewan. By this time, however, Smith argues that the creation of the “C.C.F. and Social Credit clearly reflect the political traditions and experience of their respective provinces.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, the federal system had already allowed specific identities, or “political traditions and experience,” to develop separately in Saskatchewan and Alberta:

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 22

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



The rise to power of the C.C.F. in Saskatchewan and Social Credit in Alberta is evidence of the breakdown of the original party structure of those provinces. This breakdown was made possible because the federal structure permitted new movements to seek power locally without concern for national success. It also permitted such different movements as the C.C.F. and Social Credit to exist and flourish side by side. Originally desired because it could accommodate Canada's cultural and linguistic duality, federalism eventually accommodated economic and social dissent.<sup>22</sup>

Following an institutional perspective, then, Smith has outlined specific elements of the federal system which shaped the political development of Saskatchewan and Alberta, as well as the "political traditions and experience of the respective provinces".

While Smith's article provides a more focused use of institutionalism than do Cairns and Black, it is not without flaws. It is difficult to accept Smith's conclusion that

[t]he absence of an alternate party in Alberta after 1921 did more to create an environment conducive to accepting Social Credit than any other influence in that society. Obversely the presence of the Liberal alternative to the Conservatives in Saskatchewan in 1934 forced the C.C.F., with the crushing defeat of the Conservatives, into the role of opposition and helped perpetuate Saskatchewan's two party system.<sup>23</sup>

Other influences on that society, social and economic for example, also had important effects. While the political environment was favourable for the developments, there exist varying theories. Nelson Wiseman, for example, places great weight on the settlement patterns in Saskatchewan and Alberta in his explanation of variant voting behaviour in the provinces.<sup>24</sup> Smith's brief acknowledgment of "political traditions and experiences" can be expanded to include settlement patterns and other societal

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Nelson Wiseman, "Patterns of Prairie Political Development" in The Prairie West: Historical Readings, (1984).

developments which likely had a stronger effect than he admits on the political outcome in the provinces. Nevertheless, as one of the few comparative studies of Saskatchewan and Alberta, Smith's work does clarify some of the institutional differences in the respective provinces. Paradoxically, those differences are both the result and the cause of provincial political identities. The actual effect of institutions on the expression of identity through literature remains to be examined.

#### **IV. Literary Theory**

There are several levels on which to begin analysis of literary theory. In this study, all of them are useful. General literary theory, such as Marxism or post-colonialism, provides a broad framework within which several avenues of exploration can be found. Within this expanse of theory lies literary criticism focused towards Canadian literature, maintaining most of the broader theories, yet particularizing them to the Canadian reality. Deducing further still, there exists regional and provincial literary criticism, the latter being much more rare than the former. Within each of these areas, important concepts are available to enhance this analysis.

Under the umbrella of general literary criticism, the area of post-colonialism refers directly to the Canadian experience, along with other colonized societies. Here, Canadian culture and literature are placed in the context of the world, and are portrayed as unified and universal. However, within this national/universal image lie the seeds for a development of regional literary criticism. In The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures, Ashcroft et al. discuss the impact of the Canadian identification with a 'mosaic' reality rather than the 'melting pot' of the

United States. The conflict between the purity of the colonizer and the 'hybridity' of the colonized are very clear in the Canadian case:

...the internal perception of a mosaic has not generated corresponding theories of literary hybridity to replace the nationalist approach. Canadian literature, perceived internally as a mosaic, remains generally monolithic in its assertion of Canadian difference from the canonical British or the more recently threatening neo-colonialism of American culture. Alternatively, it has striven for outside recognition by retreating from the dynamics of difference into the neo-universalist internationalist stance. Where its acute perception of cultural complexity might have generated a climate in which cross-national and cross-cultural comparative studies would be privileged, little work of this kind seems to have been done.<sup>25</sup>

While there exists enough subject matter to do cross-national studies, Canada, in its struggle to be recognized universally, has had to appear unified, despite the fact that its various cultures have made progress in regional literature. These texts, to use Ashcroft's words, "contain[] the seeds of 'community' which, as they germinate and grow in the mind of the reader, crack asunder the apparently inescapable dialectic of history"<sup>26</sup> By delving into Canada's complexities, a new historical approach to Canada, somewhat in line with Cairns' focus on the realities of federalism, emerges.

Once the theories begin to concentrate on Canada as an entity, new ideas take shape. In Northrop Frye's The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination, the concept of region is immediately injected into a discussion of Canadian identity: "the question of Canadian identity, so far as it affects the creative imagination, is not a 'Canadian' question at all, but a regional question." He uses examples from all areas of Canada, but we will focus on the prairie: "what can there be in common between an

---

<sup>25</sup> Bill Ashcroft, et al., The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

imagination nurtured on the prairies, where it is a centre of consciousness diffusing itself over a vast flat expanse stretching to the remote horizon, and one nurtured in British Columbia, where it is in the midst of gigantic trees and mountains leaping into the sky all around it, and obliterating the horizon everywhere?"<sup>27</sup> These assertions stem from Frye's belief that "[i]dentity 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."<sup>28</sup> Hence, it could be argued that there is no national literature; only 'Upper Canadian'<sup>29</sup> literature, northern Quebec literature, maritime literature, or *Prairie literature*.

Northrop Frye falls short, however, of carrying his theory through to its logical conclusion. As Barry Cooper points out, Frye eventually summarizes Canadian literature under the umbrella of the 'garrison mentality'. Therefore, Cooper argues, "Frye made a useful distinction between unity and identity, which he then surrendered with his evocation of a national identity expressed in a national literature that makes articulate the garrison mentality."<sup>30</sup> By applying post-colonialist theory to Cooper's work, we can see that he is taking the Canadian tradition and using that dialectic to create his own Western Canadian literary theory: "A sense of identity...is imaginative and is expressed in literature. Accordingly, Western regional identity, to the extent that it is distinct from 'Canadian' identity, refers to distinct experiences expressed by way

---

<sup>27</sup> Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Ltd., 1971), p. i-ii.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ii.

<sup>29</sup> In Dennis Duffy's *Gardens, Covenants, Exiles: Loyalism in the Literature of Upper Canada*, he defines "Canada" as a symbol of identity centered in the Loyalist heartland of upper Canada. It is distinct from even the Loyalist maritimes, and is the true representation of the 'garrison' mentality (from Cooper, "Western Political Consciousness", p. 215.)

of distinct symbols and themes."<sup>31</sup> The distinct symbols and themes which bind the prairie experience are mostly related to landscape<sup>32</sup>, as well as shared experiences such as (most obviously) the Depression.

From the extremely generalized theoretical domain of post-modernism, there again arises a specifically Canadian theory which supports the concept of region. The deconstructionist tradition of post-modernism created a specifically Canadian set of redefinitions. Rather than Northrop Frye's attempt to define a Canadian identity, post-modernists consider Canada to be a "history...of defining itself against centres."<sup>33</sup> In other words, they acknowledge "Canada" as a compilation of regions. Linda Hutcheon explains the effect of post-modernism on Canadian literature:

The postmodern...has translated the existing Canadian emphasis on regionalism in literature, for example, into a concern for the different, the local, the particular--in opposition to the uniform, the universal, the centralized. The emphasis is the same, but the terms of reference and context have changed. Northrop Frye, Robert Kroetsch, and many others have addressed the importance of both Canadian cultural disparity and local tradition. The particular and the occasional have always been important to Canadian literature's regionalist focus. ...Canadian novelists have refigured the *realist regional* into the *postmodern different*: the west of Aritha Van Herk; the Maritimes of David Adams Richards; the west coast of Jack Hodgins; the southern Ontario of Matt Cohen.<sup>34</sup>

In other words, post-modernism enhances and encourages regionalism as a redefinition of the centre, of 'Canada' as a whole.

---

<sup>30</sup> Cooper, "Western Political Consciousness" in Political Thought in Canada, Stephen Brooks, ed. (Toronto: Irwin Publishing Inc., 1984), p. 215.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218-219.

<sup>32</sup> An important reference to prairie man and landscape can be found in Laurence Ricou, Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction. This will be discussed at length in a later paper.

<sup>33</sup> Linda Hutcheon, The Canadian Post-Modern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19

Critics of Canadian literary criticism also follow a post-modern approach.

Frank Davey, author of Post-National Arguments: the Politics of the Anglophone-Canadian Novel Since 1967 (a perfect example of a post-modern approach to Canadian literature), attacks the so-called “thematic” approach to literary criticism in Canada. He addresses the subject from the position of

the writer for whom words constructed rather than ‘expressed’ meaning, of a British Columbian who was excluded from a Canada defined as Ontario, whose politics contained a deep suspicion of centralizing political theories that confer privilege narrowly and who sought to open cultural structures that could accommodate and recognize numerous competing interests.<sup>35</sup>

In Surviving the Paraphrase: Eleven Essays on Canadian Literature, Davey challenges the thematic approaches of such critics as Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood, arguing that they “seldom have enough confidence in the work of Canadian writers to do what the criticism of other national literatures has done: explain and illuminate the work on its own terms, without recourse to any cultural rationalizations or apologies.”<sup>36</sup> He insists that critics should “assume[], rather than argue[], a national identity’s existence and national literature’s significance.”<sup>37</sup> This allows the critic to focus on not only explicit meaning in the work, but also on “whatever content is implicit in its structure, language or imagery,”<sup>38</sup> He concludes with several suggestions to replace traditional thematic criticism.

---

<sup>35</sup> Frank Davey, Reading Canadian Reading: Essays by Frank Davey (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1988), p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Davey, Surviving the Paraphrase: Eleven Essays on Canadian Literature (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1983), p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7. Davey suggests, in Reading Canadian Reading that the ‘national identity’ which most thematic critics are trying to express is “a unitary view of Canada in which Ontario became privileged as normal ‘Canadian experience’,” denying the existence of regional identities or any differing views than that of central Canada.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

One category of criticism which Davey recommends, which is essential to the study at hand, is what he calls "phenomenological criticism". An example of the phenomenological approach is the study of regional consciousness in Canadian writing, since Davey argues that

...it is not unfair to say that the bulk of Canadian literature is regional before it is national--despite whatever claims Ontario or Toronto writers may make to represent a national vision. The regional consciousness may be characterized by specific attitudes to language and form, by specific kinds of imagery, or by language and imagery that in some ways correlate with the geographic features of the region.<sup>39</sup>

Here, tentatively, we have the crux of a study on identity in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

For several reasons implicit in the theory already discussed, this study must be considered only 'tentatively' phenomenological in approach. It would likely be both applauded and condemned by the post-moderns, particularly Frank Davey, for while the study departs from the tradition of national thematic literature by studying regional elements of literature, it is in effect a thematic study at a different level. However, the study is not exactly trying to "'explain' a work by its sources"<sup>40</sup> Rather, it is trying to explain the source by the works. In some ways, the sociological approach which Davey attacks is necessary to this endeavour: it cannot be denied that the goal is to find societal and political values in the literature. One important difference in this study, however, which would improve its legitimacy in Davey's eyes, is the fact that this is not a literary analysis, but a political one. Nevertheless, one important lesson must be learned from Davey, regardless of whether the analysis is literary or political: implicit

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 6. Davey quotes Gaston Bachelard as saying that "'to explain a work by its sources is tantamount to explaining 'the flower by the fertilizer'".

meaning is essential to the analysis, and can be discovered in form, imagery, and content. Such wisdom will shape all subsequent analysis.

## V. Before We Go Any Further...

There appears, so far, to be growing support for a literary discussion of political identity in Saskatchewan and Alberta. There are, however, those critics who do not support such an undertaking. While Frank Davey expresses opposition to thematic studies of literature, Eli Mandel specifically attacks any effort to derive Western identity from literature. He supports Davey's criticisms by arguing that "the literature of Western Canada has its own coherence, not in relation to place, society or history, but in its own developing forms."<sup>41</sup> In other words, the texts in themselves have their own merit, without requiring a sociological context. He specifies his argument by saying:

Claims to the contrary notwithstanding, it seems to me eminently sensible to remain sceptical about what has been added to our knowledge of the Canadian West by discussions or literary depictions of regional cultures. Like cultural nationalism, the fictional West contributes little, if anything, to discussion in this country of educational policy, constitutional arrangements, or political theory, and it proves nothing at all about the quality of provincial government or even prairie life.<sup>42</sup>

Not only does Mandel deny the existence of any sort of knowledge of a culture's identity by studying its literature; he also argues that "identity is fictional; it exists only

---

<sup>41</sup> Eli Mandel, "Romance and Realism in Western Canadian Fiction" in Prairie Perspectives 2: Selected Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference, 1970, 1971, A.W. Rasporich and H.C. Klassen, eds. (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1973), p. 210.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211



in stories, in dreams, in fantasy.”<sup>43</sup> It seems logical to argue, then, that if it exists in stories, where else to look for it but in fiction? Mandel remains ‘sceptical’ of this process:

Not to be implicated in history, of course, implies an incredible intellectual hubris. But to claim historical and social validity for the worlds of fiction may have even wider and more disturbing implications. What are the consequences of claiming a defining presence where there is none, an identity where (to use the term as George Grant uses it) there is only technique? And why, after all, should a wind-blown, dust-driven, rootless place, its people eager for the limitless power of productivity, be proclaimed that world, favoured among all others, where a long lost—if ever held—wholeness finally reveals itself?<sup>44</sup>

If Mandel is to be believed, then this project should be instantly abandoned. This will not happen for two reasons. First, Mandel’s antithesis to the proposed thesis promises a healthy dialogue, from which the scholarly community may derive a synthesis that is essential to the study of Western Canada. Second, Mandel is in the minority. Other critics, when they look closely at prairie literature, find an identity worth examining in that ‘wind-blown, dust-driven, rootless place’. In the discussion of the myths and symbols in prairie literature, a more definitive measure of prairie identity will be demonstrated.

Mandel expresses another opposing theory which must be addressed. His approach to culture and literature is directly opposed to Cairns’ theory of institutions shaping society. Instead, the environment can be seen as a creation of literature. He states: “In brief, if there is a distinctive regional prairie literature, it would have to be...mythic; and (as by now you will suspect) I am prepared to argue that we do find

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

our best writers precisely in such a mythicized world."<sup>45</sup> However, his arguments for this approach are considerably weaker than Edward McCourt's response that "the nature of art is profoundly affected by, and in part the product of, a communal mind and outlook which in their turn are shaped by many factors including race heritage, family and community conditioning, and the physical environment in which they function."<sup>46</sup> If one were to include political institutions as part of 'community conditioning', McCourt's assertions would fit easily with Cairns'.

Thus far, some general statements regarding politics, literature and regionalism have been entertained. The next step is to examine the literature that focuses primarily on prairie and provincial literature. From such an inquiry, specific 'symbols and themes' essential to a methodology of prairie identity can be derived.

## **VI. The Search for "Distinct Symbols and Themes", or The Paradox of Prairie Identity**

Northrop Frye has defined literature as "conscious mythology: it creates an autonomous world that gives us an imaginative perspective on the actual one."<sup>47</sup> Are there myths in literature which help to define a society? If there are, do they help to explain the political culture or values of a society? What are the myths? Where are they created, and when? Do they begin the second a new land is discovered, or do they lie dormant until there is a society on the land sophisticated enough to give them life?

---

<sup>45</sup> Eli Mandel, "Images of Prairie Man" in A Region of the Mind: Interpreting the Western Canadian Plains, Richard Allen, ed. (Regina: Canadian Plains Study Centre, 1973), p. 204.

<sup>46</sup> Edward McCourt, "Prairie Literature and its Critics" in A Region of the Mind, p. 161.

<sup>47</sup> Northrop Frye, The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Ltd., 1971), p. 235.

These questions need to be addressed if there is to be any insight into Alberta and Saskatchewan identities.

Since it has earlier been decided that implicit content must be studied in order to gain a complete awareness of prairie identity, we must develop a methodology of "distinct symbols and themes."<sup>48</sup> To do so, a continued reliance on theory is necessary. Generally, in the literature on prairie identity, a dichotomous list of characteristics exists. Many are derived from the landscape, as well as the incredibly extreme conditions which prairie dwellers experience. What this study will try to illuminate, then, is whether this dichotomy of characteristics, the seeming paradox in prairie identity, is congruent with the political boundary dividing Saskatchewan and Alberta. Is the "prairie" identity more unified when it is divided into the "Saskatchewan" identity and the "Alberta" identity? Is there a "conscious mythology" which defines Saskatchewan away from Alberta and *vice versa*?

Henry Kriesel said, "All discussion of the literature produced in the Canadian west must of necessity begin with the impact of the landscape upon the mind."<sup>49</sup> Laurence Ricou turned that idea into a book. In Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction, he examines themes which he considers predominant in all prairie literature. He begins with the unifying aspects of prairie literature: "Man on the prairie, as portrayed in Canadian fiction, is defined especially by two things: exposure, and an awareness of the surrounding emptiness. The basic image of a single human figure amidst the vast flatness of the landscape serves to unify

---

<sup>48</sup> Barry Cooper, "Western Political Consciousness" in Political Thought in Canada, Stephen Brooks, ed. (Toronto: Irwin Publishing Inc., 1984), p. 219.

and describe Canadian prairie fiction.”<sup>50</sup> His idea is also backed by Northrop Frye, who has said, more sweepingly, “There would be nothing distinctive in Canadian culture at all if there were not some feeling for the immense searching distance, with the lines of communication extended to the absolute limit, which is a primary geographical fact about Canada and has no real counterpart elsewhere.”<sup>51</sup> The conclusion, then, is more broadly unifying than prairie literature: Ricou asks, “How thoroughly, and in what fashion...did this vast, level landscape enter into the psychology and the literature of our prairie west? This is the regional form of a question legitimately asked of all Canadian literature.”<sup>52</sup> These statements and the final question place the effect of landscape on prairie imagination and identity in the broader spectrum of a national myth<sup>53</sup>. However, a closer look at the actual effects of the landscape on prairie man reveals the paradox.

The first contradiction in the prairie identity is echoed by several prairie theorists. Ricou states that “The myth of the land is imaginatively valid, by virtue of its being shared, often almost intuitively, by a people trying to express their sense of themselves in time and place. The reflection of the collective consciousness, or subconsciousness, in the repeated references to the land in prairie fiction is constant,

---

<sup>49</sup> Henry Kriesel, “The Prairie: A State of Mind” in Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada Volume VI, Series IV (June 1968), p. 173.

<sup>50</sup> Laurence Ricou, Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. ix.

<sup>51</sup> Frye, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> Ricou, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> The universal nature of this phenomenon is further explained in a disclaimer or apology of sorts from Ricou, p. xi: “Obviously, setting, in itself, does not fundamentally alter the theme of fiction. Man’s consideration of his own nature in the universe and his formulation of a personal philosophy to deal with the emptiness—emotional, cultural, intellectual—that is so much a part of his world is, of course, a universal theme. What is noteworthy about Canadian prairie fiction is that the imagination so often starts with the same basic image to explore these questions. The landscape, and man’s relation to it, is the

and convincing.”<sup>54</sup> However, Ricou also observes that “Vertical man in a horizontal world is necessarily a solitary figure: the fiction of the Canadian prairies is the record of man conquering his geographical solitude, and, by extension, his other solitudes, not so much physically as through imaginative understanding.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, we have the initial paradox: the conflict between man as a solitary figure against the land, and as part of a collective consciousness.

Ricou is not the only theorist to outline this incongruity. The concept of a ‘collective consciousness’ is picked up by Henry Kriesel as well, with political consequences:

...a measure of egocentricity, though more often found in a less virulent form, is perhaps necessary if the huge task of taming a continent is to be successfully accomplished. At the same time the necessity of survival dictates cooperative undertakings. So it is not surprising that the prairie has produced the most right-wing as well as the most left-wing provincial governments in Canada.<sup>56</sup>

The comparisons do not end here. There exists in the limited critical works on prairie literature a tangled web of similarities and overlapping agreements.

When faced with the “sheer physical fact of the prairie”, two more opposing images are evident: “Man, the giant conqueror, and man, the insignificant dwarf always threatened by defeat.”<sup>57</sup> Edward McCourt’s version of this image depicts the Saskatchewan prairie as a world which “persuades [man] to accept his own curious duality—that he is at once nothing and everything, at once the dust of the earth and the

---

concrete situation with which the prairie artist initiates his re-creation of the human experience. Even those writers who do not use this image explicitly can be seen to be utilizing it tangentially.”

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Kriesel, p. 177.

<sup>57</sup> Kriesel, p. 173.

God that made it.”<sup>58</sup> The result of this polarity encourages McCourt to assert, “It is also a matter of common observation that the man who survives the prairie weather for any length of time is likely to develop, in addition to chronic irritability, an alarming measure of self-confidence. By the very fact of surviving he has proved himself a man fit to whip his weight in wildcats.”<sup>59</sup> McCourt, while primarily focused on Saskatchewan, has political observations which also substantiate Kreisel’s observations about the radicalism on the prairies:

The typical westerner, whatever his racial origin or the social status of his forebears, is a man toughened by climate, inside and out, to the texture of old cowhide. He is proud of his strength, confident of his cunning, and drunk on the air all the year round. Is it conceivable that such a man will be content to tag along meekly in the wake of a traditional political machine controlled from afar? In good years he will tolerate the machine’s existence, make no overt move to throw a monkey-wrench into the works. But let the chill winds of winter blow just a little colder, let the sun scorch the earth a little browner, and the heavens are filled with denunciations, the meeting-houses with trigger-happy Jacqueries, and a new political party is born. Grass-roots movements always flourish when the grass stops growing.<sup>60</sup>

The land does not stop at egos or politics when affecting the growth and myth-making of a society. It moves into society’s general philosophy of existence.

Optimism on the prairies is again paradoxical. Ricou notes that the open spaces allow for a sense of freedom and limitless possibility. He quotes Joseph Addison:

“The mind of man naturally hates every thing that looks like a restraint upon it, and is apt to fancy itself under a sort of confinement, when the sight is pent up in a narrow compass and shortened on every side by the neighbourhood of walls or mountains. On the contrary, a spacious horizon is an image of liberty, where the eye has room to range abroad, to expatiate at large on the immensity of its views.”<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Edward McCourt, *Saskatchewan* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1968), p. 224.

<sup>59</sup> McCourt, p. 9.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10-11.

<sup>61</sup> Ricou, pp. 6-7.

The difficulty with this apparent freedom within endless space is that “Such freedom as is represented in this manner is, of course, quite illusory. The absence of other men, and of laws and social custom, is a temporary state, lasting only as long as it takes to settle a district. But in prairie fiction the sense of freedom usually persists to be countered more strongly by the dictates of the land itself.”<sup>62</sup> The space itself is more confining to the spirit and the imagination than walls or mountains.

The “imprisoned spirit” trapped in endless space is a theme which Henry Kriesel also notes. He links it to “prairie puritanism”, “one result of the conquest of the land, part of the price exacted from the conquest.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, the paradox is linked with religion as well, and there exists again competing characteristics of religion on the prairies. Ricou mentions fundamentalism as a natural outgrowth of prairie society<sup>64</sup>, while Edward McCourt notes that in Saskatchewan, the Depression created another kind of faith: “No one could survive nine years of hell without courage. Nor without faith—not in a benevolent god but in one’s own capacity to endure.”<sup>65</sup> Again, McCourt mixes these characteristics with politics:

Saskatchewan teems with...[m]en who, lapped in an enervating cloak of eastern smog or rendered soft and pliable by the eternal West Coast rain, would pass through life in meek unquestioning obedience to those placed in authority over them, develop, after a brief spell of prairie living, affinities with the Mau Mau or the I.R.A. Scorched by sun and battered by wind three months of the year and confined in a deep freeze for six, the prairie dweller is soon afflicted by a kind of nervous irritability which impels him to flail out in all directions. Being, as a rule, a religious man—intimate associations with nature at its most awesome inclines to make him so—he hesitates to blame the Almighty

---

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> Kriesel, p. 179.

<sup>64</sup> Ricou, p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> McCourt, p. 7.

for his miseries. The next authority--human, fallible, vulnerable--is the government. And something, by God, has got to be done about it!<sup>66</sup>

McCourt is not the only critic to note the paradoxically religious nature of people on the prairies; David Carpenter does the same. However, there is much more to Carpenter's research which is fundamental to this study.

"Alberta in Fiction" is the only specific comparison of Saskatchewan and Alberta literature to date. David Carpenter uses fiction "to demonstrate that a provincial consciousness announces its own individuality through the voices of its artists"<sup>67</sup> Using the concept of myth-making, Carpenter argues that "a provincial myth is emerging in Alberta" which can be contrasted with the provincial myth in Saskatchewan.<sup>68</sup> In brief, his definition of the myths prevalent in Alberta and Saskatchewan are the "Promised Land" and a "survival mythology" respectively.<sup>69</sup> "Survival is a key word in Saskatchewan fiction. In Alberta it is escape, or romance, or prosperity: nothing so pragmatic as survival."<sup>70</sup> Alberta, on the other hand, has managed to denote the 'promised land' in apocalyptic or fundamentalist terms, to fit its societal realities.<sup>71</sup> Carpenter summarizes:

...it should be emphasized that some (perhaps even all) provincial kingdoms announce themselves in authentic regional utterances. Saskatchewan voices speak about grim realities with an admirable acceptance and toughness not characteristic of their neighbours to the west. Their lives have been framed by limited expectations. They rarely preach any more, and when they do, it is the pragmatic religion of co-operation. Alberta voices still speak of romantic nonrealities and great

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>67</sup> David Carpenter, "Alberta in fiction: the emergence of a provincial consciousness." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 10, No. 4 (November 1975), p. 12.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 22.



expectations haunted by the conflict between natural and civilized values which inevitably arises in a region which elicits two incompatible dreams: espousal of the rural or wilderness virtues (as often championed by fundamentalist leaders); and the progressive ambition to build an urbanized, prosperous provincial kingdom.<sup>72</sup>

For the first time, the fundamental differences of Saskatchewan and Alberta have been outlined. The use of such words as “pragmatic”, “fundamentalist”, and the measures of the provinces’ respective expectations can all be related back to the forms of government in each province. However, Carpenter does not examine *why* the differences exist.

Carpenter mentions that “no natural barrier divides Alberta from the North, from the U.S.A., or from Saskatchewan, and thus it is less likely that a region can come into existence because of arbitrary straight lines on a map.”<sup>73</sup> Yet he insists that Albertans have a provincial identity. Here again, Alan Cairns’ theory rears its head. The ‘arbitrary straight lines on a map’ denote more than simple lines; they are *political* boundaries which create different political institutions. Thus, distinguishing between ‘prairie’ identity and ‘provincial’ identity must involve a study of the effects that those political boundaries have had on the shaping of the provinces. That single boundary has created two different societies, despite similarities in landscape, economics and ethnicities.

## VII. Application

So far, paradoxes regarding prairie identity in general have been propounded. The question to address now is, how does this explain Saskatchewan and Alberta

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

identities? I would like to suggest that many of these paradoxes already mentioned may divide between the two provinces. By reinstating the political boundary between Saskatchewan and Alberta onto the "prairies", and by assuming that the boundary indicates some difference in identity, we may discover that the contradictions caused by the effect of the landscape on prairie identity are actually contradictions between Saskatchewan and Alberta. The questions to be asked, then, when analyzing prairie literature, is if one element of any of the paradoxes is evident, while the other is not. If there is any congruence in characteristics in Saskatchewan literature or Alberta literature, then "prairie" literature will have been separated into Saskatchewan and Alberta literature. If the congruence crosses political boundaries, then "prairie" literature will have proved its right to definition.

From the theorists which have been studied, a hypothetical division of characteristics into Saskatchewanian and Albertan can be attempted. Out of the dichotomies listed above, Saskatchewan identity is more likely to expound cooperation over the solitary figure; its egotism is linked to the very fact of survival, rather than limitless opportunities; the 'wide-open spaces' are more confining than liberating, and do not evoke optimism<sup>74</sup>. Politics, in general, are closer to the surface of the Saskatchewan identity than the Alberta identity. In turn, Albertan identity is more likely to express the solitary figure, and to link it to hope as part of its reliance on fundamentalism, which focuses on the individual. Alberta's egotism comes from the belief in limitless opportunities, the belief in 'the promised land'. Politicization is

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

more subdued, since it is not as vital to survival as it has been in Saskatchewan. We have now reached the point where these generalizations need to be factually substantiated. For that, a methodology will be useful.

### VIII. Summary

To summarize, then, we must recount the traits in prairie literature for which we are looking. By compiling a list of questions which include those traits, a concrete methodology will be created. First, are there any explicit references to politics or political values and beliefs? Are there any explicit references to landscape and its sociological, psychological, or political effects? Is there any imagery depicting 'solitary man' or the cooperative spirit? An egocentrism based on survival or on the perception of opportunity? A derivation from the open spaces a feeling of freedom or of confinement? A puritan approach to society or the literature based on fundamentalism and apocalyptic visions or on faith in endurance and cooperation? Are those characteristics unique to either Saskatchewan or Alberta literature? If so, the hypothesis will have passed a test of legitimacy, and Saskatchewan and Alberta identities will have been more clearly defined.

### IX. Conclusions

Saskatchewan and Alberta, possibly more than any other provinces in Canada, have been shaped politically. Their differences were ultimately indistinguishable until

---

<sup>74</sup> Edward McCourt notes this characteristic as well. The Saskatchewan man "tends to take a less optimistic view of life than do his neighbours, particularly those who live in Alberta." (The Canadian West in Fiction, p. 8)

1905 when the 'arbitrary straight lines on a map' divided and created them. It is therefore clear that any study of their provincial identities and cultures must in some way be related to their political realities. Whether regional imagination and mythology influences institutions or institutions influence regional imagination and mythology, they cannot be separated.<sup>75</sup> In the case of Saskatchewan and Alberta, the latter is most likely to be the case. Thus, the inclusion of both literary and political theory, and the discussion of political identity through provincial prose, promises to expand the body of knowledge of provincial societies.

---

<sup>75</sup> In direct opposition to Mandel's arguments in "Romance and Realism".

## Chapter Three A Comparison of Early Works

### I. Introduction

Before approaching the three contemporary authors in this study, a look at an early text from each province will provide a methodological testing ground. Each text can be considered one of the first major works published by prairie writers from Saskatchewan and Alberta; each suggests the genesis of a provincial literary tradition<sup>1</sup>. Thus, using them as a backdrop for more recent works will prove to have two advantages: first, it is encouraging, since their slightly more rudimentary styles allow a clear view of themes which fit the proposed methodology; and second, it is enlightening, since they place Mitchell, Vanderhaeghe and van Herk in the context of a regional, if not provincial, literary history. Robert Stead's Grain from Saskatchewan and Howard O'Hagan's Tay John from Alberta offer insight into both the regional and provincial cultures of pre-Depression literature on the prairies. While both novels relate the struggle of man against nature in a new and harsh land, their overlying themes can be construed as representations of provincial culture. More subtle variations in their portrayal of landscape and in religious overtones also fit the provincial traits which have been discussed.

---

<sup>1</sup> In his Afterword to Tay John, Michael Ondaatje asserts the opinion that O'Hagan's text "was one of the first novels to chart important motifs that have become crucial to the work of later western writers like Robert Kroetsch and Rudy Wiebe." Howard O'Hagan, Tay John (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989), p. 265; Gerald Friesen writes of Stead: "...in Grain, Stead moved beyond both the romantic formulae and the rhetorical certainty of Connor and confronted the ambiguities in man's relationships with his environment and his society; in place of the idyllic pastoral, he tried to create a genuine pastoral myth. In the process he aided in the creation of a new west." The new west, Friesen asserts, is the tradition in which W.O. Mitchell, Frederick Philip Grove, and Martha Ostenso wrote. (Gerald Friesen, "Three Generations of Fiction: An Introduction to Prairie Cultural History" in Eastern and Western Perspectives: Papers from the Joint Atlantic Canada/Western Canadian Studies Conference, David Jay Bercuson and Phillip A. Buckner, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 187-189.

## II. Solitary Man on the Prairies and in the Foothills

The phrases which best define Grain and Tay John are "limited expectations" and "limitless possibility" respectively. While the general themes offer an obvious example, there are specific references available within each text to support this. The main character in Grain is a farm boy who expects nothing from life except to derive a living from the earth. He attends school only as long as he is forced, and is content only when he is working on his father's farm. He is irrevocably tied to the landscape:

On afternoons when he was not needed about the farm he went skating on the lake, his thin figure a pathetic suggestion of loneliness, thinner than ever in its contrast with the great expanse of ice and hills sprinkled white with snow and hoar frost which shouldered up from the lake to the prairies beyond. Yet Gander was not lonely; never in all his days on the farm and the prairie did Gander know the pang of loneliness. This was his native environment; he was no more lonely on this prairie than is the coyote or the badger.<sup>2</sup>

Already Laurence Ricou's description of the "solitary man" is evident. Gander's solitude is not only represented in imagery; while there is a love interest, Gander does not succeed in winning her. After his pride prevents them from marrying, he is content to help her and her sick husband to keep their farm. Unrealistic dreams or expectations were never to be found in Gander: "The spiritualism of childhood, never strong in Gander, had been obliterated in the stark realism of life as he now saw it through eyes that he believed to be mature."<sup>3</sup> In the end, instead of compromising his honour by getting involved with a married woman, he moves to the city to make his living as a mechanic. Again, he is alone.

---

<sup>2</sup> Robert Stead, Grain (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926), p. 64. Such imagery is reminiscent of Laurence Ricou's examples in Vertical Man/Horizontal World.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Howard O'Hagan takes an entirely different approach to the era and the area in which he wrote. Tay John is set in the foothills and mountains of northern Alberta in the late 1800s. It centers on "Tay John", a half-breed with blond hair (nicknamed "Tete Jaune", or Yellowhead) who is prophesied to become a great leader to the Shuswap people. Fathered by a mountain man who, after a vision, believed it was his fate to convert the Indians to his fundamentalist interpretation of Christianity, and magically borne out of his mother's grave, Tay John is a sort of Peace River Superman, meant to lead his people to the promised land. At the same time, his people are competing with settlement and a railroad being built in the area—the settlers also seek a promised land. While Tay John has similar characteristics to Gander, he is portrayed much more romantically:

Still there was something, it is hard to say, something of the abstract about him—as though he were a symbol of some sort or other. He seemed to stand for something. He stood there with his feet planted apart on the ground, as though he owned it, as though he grasped it with them. When he moved I would not have been surprised to have seen clumps of earth adhere to the soles of his moccasins and the long shadows of his muscles across his body—they weren't strength in the usual sense of being able to lift weights and that kind of thing. They represented strength in the abstract. Endurance, solitude—qualities men search for. It was in his face, too, long and keen as though shaped by the wind...<sup>4</sup>

Solitude is again an overt reference. However, a difference remains. Tay John's solitude is pure; he is never a part of anything but himself and the earth. Gander's solitude, on the other hand, is overshadowed by a co-operative ethic. There is direct political reference to the plight of the farmers when dealing singly with grain buyers<sup>5</sup>,

---

<sup>4</sup> Howard O'Hagan, Tay John (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989), p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> Gander's frustration when trying to sell his grain suggests his awareness of the need for cooperative enterprise: "The three buyers laughed as though Gander had perpetrated a great joke. But Gander wasn't laughing. His gorge was boiling within him. He had the farmer's deep-rooted sense of injustice over the fact that whenever he bought he had to pay the seller's price, but whenever he sold, the buyer dictated the figure. His gorge boiled none the cooler for the helplessness of his position." (Stead, 159)

as well as an implicit awareness throughout the text of the needs of and the need for others<sup>6</sup>.

### III. Landscape: Conqueror or Conquered?

So far, it seems that there are broad similarities in the texts, but when one looks more closely, subtle differences emerge. This is also the case in O'Hagan's and Stead's landscape imagery. While both texts portray man as struggling against the landscape and the elements, they do so with different agendas. During a storm, Gander stands against nature, but he does so not as a competitor, but with stubborn will, despite knowing that he is bound to fail:

The girl and the boy drew up again together, and Gander's jaw was grim and set. There was something fearful and majestic about him as he gazed defiantly at the empty sky; defiantly, perhaps, at God.

The girl watched him for a moment as he sat launching his soul against the inevitable. She, too, was rooted in the soil, and knew something of the mocking tragedy of rain that threatens but does not come. It was as though the heavens flirted with the earth, arousing her hope and passion, only to draw away in cold and beautiful disdain.<sup>7</sup>

Gander accepts, with frustration, that he is no match for Nature; for O'Hagan and his characters, however, it is a competition, and man must conquer. After Tay John wins a wrestling match with a grizzly bear, O'Hagan's narrator crows:

Like birth itself it was a struggle against the powers of darkness, and Man had won. Like birth, too, it was a cry and a protest—his lips parted as though a cry, unheard by me, came from them. Death, now that is silence—an acceptance—but across this creek from me was life again. Man had won against the wilderness, the unknown, the strength that is not so much beyond our strength as it is capable of a fury and single passion beyond our understanding. He had won. *We had won.*<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Despite his unrequited feelings for Jo Burge, Gander does not shirk his duty to help her husband keep his farm, and to provide a place for him to recover from tuberculosis. (pp. 261-281)

<sup>7</sup> Stead, p. 98.

<sup>8</sup> O'Hagan, p. 88.



Gander considers success weathering a storm; Tay John wants to *win*. Gander's goal is to *settle*; Tay John's is to *conquer*. The men in O'Hagan's novel are "ready to do war against the mountains."<sup>9</sup>

While differences between the texts are evident, they are not absolute. O'Hagan takes a much more aggressive approach to the landscape than does Stead: however, he does admit an awareness of Nature's power and infinity compared to Man's weakness and mortality:

Storms might come, but they would pass away. Winter would come, but it would bring its spring. Men would die, but children would come after them, lifting up white faces to the light. Man's voice, sustained by its own echoes, rolled on in murmurs, in shouts, in laughter, in weeping, in exhortation and prayer, in whispers, hoping somehow to be heard, pausing now for an answer—rising again to drown dismay when no answer came, drifting across the vasts he walked. Man was alone. The future was the blind across his eyes. He held hands before him, to feel. He listened to the seconds, ticking, measuring his mortality, theirs the only sound in all eternity where suns flamed and stars wheeled and constellations fell apart.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, O'Hagan recognizes that while man can conquer nature, his ephemerality renders Nature the final victor. Despite Tay John's conquering of the grizzly bear, he is eventually swallowed by the earth that spawned him.<sup>11</sup> There is, then, to a limited extent, a sort of comradeship in the relationship between man and nature as portrayed in Grain and Tay John.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>11</sup> This happens both figuratively and literally: "Blackie stared at the tracks in front of him, very faint now, a slight trough in the snow, no more. Always deeper and deeper into the snow. He turned back then. There was nothing more he could do. He had the feeling, he said, looking down at the tracks, that Tay John hadn't gone over the pass at all. He had just walked down, the toboggan behind him, under the snow and into the ground." (p. 263-264)

#### IV. A Divergence of Religious Traditions

There is no comparison in Grain to Tay John's exaltation of the Promised Land. That, in itself, is significant. O'Hagan's entire text is focused on new land, new country, finding out what is over the next hill, while Stead fails to suggest that there is anything beyond the home section except a job in the 'big city', to which Gander turns with reluctance. Under the auspices of 'we of the West', O'Hagan asserts:

... we cry, we of the West, we Westerners, we who have come here to sit below the mountains—for your Westerner is not only the man born here, blind, unknowing, dropped by his mother upon the ground, but also one who came with his eyes open, passing other lands upon the way—Give us new earth, we cry; new places, that we may see our shadows shaped in forms that man has never seen before. Let us travel on so quickly, let us go so far that our shadows, like ourselves, grow lean with our journeys. Let to-morrow become yesterday, now, this instant, while we speak. Let us go on so quickly that we see the future as the past. Let us look into the new land, beyond the wall that fronts our eyes, over the pass, beyond the source of the river. Let us look into the country beyond the mountains.<sup>12</sup>

David Carpenter himself could not ask for a better example of his assertion that Alberta fiction contains images of the Promised Land. Despite the fact that O'Hagan uses a blanket term for those seeking 'the country beyond the mountains', Stead's lack of any such imagery in his Saskatchewan novel suggests that the "West" begins at the Saskatchewan/Alberta border.

'The West', it has already been mentioned, is also divided on religious ground. Grain and Tay John portray very different religious interpretations that correspond to the theories propounded regarding Saskatchewanian puritanism and Albertan fundamentalism. Gander's family is not particularly religious: they have, however, maintained puritanistic morals:

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

There had been no great show of religious teaching among the Stakes; yet religion, and with it a code of strict moral ethics, was the unwritten background of their existence. Just as they hid their sentiment from each other, and held it a weakness to show any sign of family affection, so also they concealed their religious life, still and deep, behind a mask of matter-of-factness. Yet they knew good from evil, and no Stake had ever called evil good.<sup>13</sup>

When this statement is combined with the aforementioned focus on endurance and limited expectations, Stead's novel represents an almost perfectly stereotypical example of the prairie puritanism that Carpenter suggests is typical of Saskatchewan. Tav John grows out of another tradition.

O'Hagan begins his text with Red Rorty, a gold miner, being converted to fundamentalist Christianity. He is then told to go back to the mountains to preach the Word.<sup>14</sup> From that moment on in the text, it seems that every event had apocalyptic overtones: Red Rorty is burned at the stake by the Indians that he tries to convert; the Indians, at the same time, are awaiting the fulfilment of a vision, a man with yellow hair who will lead them to better hunting grounds; meanwhile, "men of vision"<sup>15</sup> are building a railroad to the West, to the Promised Land; and Father Rorty, Red Rorty's brother, dies tied to a cross on top of a mountain, struggling for "victory over temptation", where "salvation lies".<sup>16</sup> The Indians, as well as the European men, are

---

<sup>13</sup> Stead, p. 75. Another example is: "...Gander, whatever his faults, was a believer in the truth. Generations of Puritan ancestry had woven a fibre into his character that held taut on most of the fundamentals." (p. 210)

<sup>14</sup> O'Hagan, p. 15-17: "Through the early summer he read the Bible till he knew it well, and could stand with the Book closed and recite chapters to the trees. Of all the words that he read he was most impressed by those that told of Saul of Tarsus, afterwards called Paul, who had left one path of life for another, who went out into the world, among strange people, and preached The Way, and became a great man whose words were remembered."(17-18)

<sup>15</sup> O'Hagan, p. 225: "Men of vision have made this country of the west. Only men of vision, of vision, mind you, can see that what is already done is but a beginning."

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

searching for a saviour, and whether the saviour lies in a man, or discovering the “country beyond the mountains”, apocalyptic visions in Tay John are rampant.

## V. Conclusion

The two early texts being studied here have illuminated several points that are indispensable to the work at hand. They suggest the existence of paradox in prairie literature—a simultaneous convergence and divergence. They show that prairie literature has an undeniable coherence about it; there is in both texts an awareness of humanity’s insignificance in the context of a harsh landscape, man as alone or solitary in the landscape, and a reliance on “Puritan ancestry” as an approach to dealing with one’s insignificance and solitude. However, it can be asserted that Saskatchewan and Alberta literature, represented in Grain and Tay John, can be both compared and contrasted: while their similarities can be cited, they are not anywhere near identical. Where Gander’s expectations are grounded in reality, Tay John’s world is supernatural and mythical; Gander grudgingly accepts Nature’s power over him, while Tay John sets out as a conqueror; Gander’s puritanism is practical and moral, while everywhere in Tay John, there is a suggestion that “...the Son of Man is coming, and that no man knows when he is coming, or where[]”<sup>17</sup>, but that we should expect him at any moment. While this paradox was evident in prairie literature as early as the mid-1920s, it is just as, and possibly more evident in contemporary works.

The next test to the theory, then, is to find the same themes and paradoxes in more contemporary literature. If such theorists such as Ricou and McCourt believe that literary identity takes time and affluence in order to develop, then it should become

more pronounced in newer texts. W.O. Mitchell, a name that is synonymous with prairie literature, will be analyzed in the following chapter.

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

## Chapter Four W.O. Mitchell

### I. Introduction

W.O. Mitchell is in a class by himself. It is necessary for two reasons to look at his works as a whole before approaching Aritha van Herk and Guy Vanderhaeghe. First, Mitchell's generation preceded the more contemporary authors, and thus provides another phase on the prairie literary timeline. He has made an immeasurable contribution to the prairie literary tradition. Second, while van Herk and Vanderhaeghe write exclusively from one province, Mitchell writes about and has lived in both Saskatchewan and Alberta. He can, in fact, be considered to write about a 'micro-region', which spans provincial boundaries. His stories cover the southern prairies, whether in Crocus, Saskatchewan or Shelby, Alberta. Thus, it would seem easy to consider Mitchell a regional writer, and difficult to illustrate that he differentiates between the two provinces. A close study of his works will decide whether there can be any provincial distinctions derived from them, or whether they must be placed under the umbrella of 'prairie literature.'

'Distinct symbols and themes' are evident in Mitchell's works. His characters often have similar opinions on region and landscape, religion and humour. It would be difficult to argue, then, that Mitchell's own views are not being propagated through his characters; a consistent philosophical thread runs throughout his novels. In short, his philosophy seems to suggest that the prairie is a harsh place that has dire effects on humans, as well as anything made by humans. Prairie dwellers have a choice on how to react to their landscape and living conditions: they can either laugh or go mad.

Whichever road they choose, an awareness of solitude, religious belief, and humour are closely linked to the decision.

## II. Landscape and “Litmus Years”

One of Mitchell’s most prevalent characteristics is the measure of importance he places on his “litmus years”. He believes, and is backed by earlier prairie writers such as Wallace Stegner, that where one lives during childhood profoundly affects one’s approach to life from then on: “Now and as a child I walked out here to ultimate emptiness, and gazed to no sight destination at all. Here was the melodramatic part of the earth’s skin that had stained me during my litmus years, fixing my inner and outer perspective, dictating the terms of the fragile identity contract that I would have with my self for the rest of my life.”<sup>1</sup> Clearly, landscape had a profound effect on the development of Mitchell’s identity during his childhood. The effect of the prairie on a young boy’s development is also a prevalent theme in Who Has Seen the Wind and Jake and the Kid.

Brian, in Who Has Seen the Wind, derives two fundamental realizations from the prairie. First, he is aware of how small and alone he is in relation to the land:

Lying there he looked up to the dark face of the sky pricked out with stars. He was filled now with a feeling of nakedness and vulnerability that terrified him. As the wind mounted in intensity, so too the feeling of defenselessness rose in him. It was as though he listened to the drearing wind and in the spread darkness of prairie night was being drained of his very self. He was trying to hold together something within himself, that the wind demanded and was relentlessly leaching from him. His fingers

---

<sup>1</sup> W.O. Mitchell. How I Spent My Summer Holidays (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1981), p. 10. Mentioned in later works also, such as Ladybug, Ladybug..., (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), p. 13.

were aching with the cold; he slid his hands between his thighs for warmth.<sup>2</sup>

As a child, Brian is faced with a power that leaves him with the feeling that his very self is being drained away. To succeed against such an obstacle, it seems that he would be forced to develop an identity too solid for the prairie to erode. Thus, as an adult, Brian may very well have become one of McCourt's characters who develops 'alarming measure of self-confidence' in response to the constant assault on his existence. And Brian's lesson is a harsh one. After his father's death, Brian sees the prairie's eternal power in a context that affects him much more personally:

People were forever born; people forever died, and never were again. Fathers died and sons were born; the prairie was forever, with its wind whispering through the long, dead grasses, through the long and endless silence. Winter came and spring and fall, then summer and winter again; the sun rose and set again, and everything that was once—was again—forever and forever. But for man, the prairie whispered—never—never. For Brian's father—never.<sup>3</sup>

Both of these issues are raised again, almost in parallel, in Jake and the Kid.

In a philosophical discussion with a sociology professor, Jake and the kid again note the hugeness of the landscape:

"The smallness of man—the prairies bring it to one with—such impact—it—is almost the catharsis of tragedy."

A jack rabbit started up to the left of the road, went over the prairie in a sailing bounce. "Huh!" Jake said.

"Catharsis—cleansing—as in Greek tragedy—cathartic."

"Oh," Jake said, "that. Thuh alkali water sure is fear..."

"Oh, no," Mr. Godfrey said. "I mean that it—has a..."

"Prairie's scary," I said.

"Yes." He looked down at me. "That's it—exactly it."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> W.O. Mitchell, Who Has Seen the Wind (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1947), p. 236.

<sup>3</sup> Who Has Seen the Wind, pp. 246-247.

<sup>4</sup> Mitchell, Jake and the Kid (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1961), p. 100.



The ‘smallness of man’ combined with his vulnerability is again propounded when Mitchell uses Mr. Godfrey to point out another one of his theories<sup>5</sup>:

“This is a hard country, I don’t have to tell you that. There are—  
drouth, blizzards, loneliness. A man is a pretty small thing out on all this  
prairie. He is at the mercy of the elements. He’s a lot like—like a—”  
“Fly on a platter,” I said.<sup>6</sup>

During their ‘litmus years,’ Brian and the kid realize more than simply their smallness and aloneness on the prairie; like the earlier texts, they also show an awareness of their own mortality when faced with the overwhelming landscape. It is not only people that suffer from the prairie’s eternal battering; anything made by humans is subject too.

The kid notes:

I commenced to think how a farm can get old just the way a human being does, just like Old Mac with his grey hair and his mustaches like a couple of grey oat bundles either side of his mouth. All Mac’s buildings had got grey, real grey. She’s sure awful what the prairie can do to a yard that won’t fight back; choke her with weeds; pile her with dust; there isn’t any fence can stand up to prairie long.<sup>7</sup>

The prairie, however, is not just “scary.” Brian’s second realization suggests that there is more to a young boy’s prairie experience than simply an inferiority complex fuelled by fear of the elements. It contains spirituality as well.

Mitchell suggests that Brian’s spiritual link to the prairie is eventually eroded by a loss of childhood innocence. This is another continuing pattern in Mitchell’s works, expanded upon in How I Spent My Summer Holidays. I would like to argue that these early experiences with spirituality are the precursors to the unique religious beliefs in his adult characters. Brian’s first experience with his spiritual link to the prairies is

---

<sup>5</sup> Mitchell refers to men feeling like ‘flies on a platter’ more than once in his works. Another example is in Roses Are Difficult Here (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990), p. 323.

<sup>6</sup> Jake and the Kid, p. 100.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 61-62.

described as “holy—a holy feeling that had come and broken like a bubble.”<sup>8</sup> On seeing a drop of dew on a leaf, Brian is accosted by a strange new feeling:

Within him something was opening, releasing shyly as the petals of a flower open, with such gradualness that he was hardly aware of it. But it was happening: an alchemy imperceptible as the morning wind, a growing elation of such fleeting delicacy and poignancy that he dared not turn his mind to it for fear that he might spoil it, that it might be carried away as lightly as one strand of spider web on a sigh of a wind. He was filled with breathlessness and expectancy, as though he were going to be given something, as though he were about to find something.<sup>9</sup>

As Bryan grows older, however, the feeling comes less and less often. When he realizes this, “he was suddenly sad, his throat aching, his heart filled with unbearably sweet and saddening melancholy.”<sup>10</sup> In How I Spent My Summer Holidays, Mitchell makes a direct comment on what Brian has lost.

In reminiscing about his childhood, Hugh, the narrator of How I Spent My Summer Holidays, remembers how adults interfered with a child’s freedom of conscience. He uses the example of his friend Musgrave, a boy tainted by an adult’s view of the zero-sum game of good and evil:

According to Musgrave, God kept a meticulous ledger up there. He liked good and bad things to balance out evenly. Musgrave’s favorite expression was: ‘We’ll have to pay for it,’ or more often, ‘You’ll have to pay for it.’ If you drowned out a lot of gophers. If you had a beautifully kind Indian summer. If you broke free of the dogpaddle. If you found a dime. You would eventually have to pay for it. Not only would you have to pay back ultimately with something bad happening to you; it would be worse than the good thing was good. After Christmas, Musgrave must have had to truly brace himself. Given his usurious God, the odds were stacked against his ever getting out of debt, even through public confession and total immersion. At least the Catholics

---

<sup>8</sup> Who Has Seen the Wind, pp. 111-112.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 107-108.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

could make time payments and had some hope of becoming morally solvent.<sup>11</sup>

We have here a perfect example of the puritanical view of existence, instilled as early as twelve years old. Mitchell blames the adults, the Musgraves in the world, for destroying childhood innocence and replacing it with puritanical guilt and fear:

‘I will level with you. Satan rules one half of the world—more likely nine-tenths—and there is only one way to redemption from your anguish and torment: total immersion. Soap for all orifices—mouth, ears, nose, rectum, vagina. No remissions otherwise. In your case I cannot be optimistic. Prognosis: Hell. So—same time next week. I will walk with you and I will talk with you and I will enter to bring help to you. Just tell Ursula on your way out. And don’t forget to do your umbilicus and your foreskin.’

I had thought that Austin was the only victim. All of us were. We simply hadn’t noticed the adult footprints in our child caves, but they were there all the time, left by guardian trespassers. They entered uninvited because they loved us and they feared for us. Often they entered only to tidy up for us, or simply out of curiosity to find out what we might be doing in there. They wanted only to make it safe for their vulnerable young, to clear it of danger. They did not know, nor did we, that they could be carriers, unintentionally leaving serpents behind, coiled in a dark corner, later to bite and poison and destroy.

Poor Austin [Musgrave]!<sup>12</sup>

While it is true that childhood innocence is curbed by adults, and the onslaught of adulthood, the prairie does its share. These adults were raised under the hot sun, freezing winters, and relentless wind, realized their insignificance, and responded accordingly. It is not simply adulthood that takes away these boys’ innocence; it is realizing the vastness of their surroundings, and struggling to find a significant place within it.

What Mitchell shows in his representation of the effect of the prairie on a boy’s development is that seeing such immensity and feeling so miniscule at such a young

---

<sup>11</sup> How I Spent My Summer Holidays, p. 152.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

age must force some kind of reaction as an adult. His adult characters represent this in their decisions to 'laugh or go mad', while remaining indisputably tied to their childhood experiences. The link is suggested in Roses Are Difficult Here when Ruth reflects on her past:

She supposed that people whose formative years were spent in the isolation of the foothills had more than their share of mysticism. If that were so, then hers must be a most generous allotment, raised as she had been since the age of six, and the death of her mother, by her father, Clem Derrigan, and Chan. Her time away at St. Catherine's boarding-school had always seemed like exile made bearable only by Easter and Christmas and summer vacation.<sup>13</sup>

While childhood innocence has been lost, the effect of the prairie on the human psyche and the prairie dwellers' belief in the everlasting remains. Mysticism, combined with an awareness of one's vulnerability equals prairie puritanism in its two extreme forms.

### **III. Religious Duality**

The two types of puritanism that have been assigned to the prairies are cooperative and pragmatic in Saskatchewan and fundamentalist and apocalyptic in Alberta. Both versions are evident in Mitchell's works, and a parallel can be drawn between his representation of religion, and his character's decisions to laugh or to go mad. Often, but not exclusively, characters that maintain some semblance of sanity through a sense of humour have a pragmatic, measured level of puritanism. Those who go mad often rant and rave about hell and damnation, with apocalyptic overtones. There is an overlap between the two in some cases. However, there does exist a pattern that will be further outlined in this section.

---

<sup>13</sup> Roses Are Difficult, p. 107.

Two characters in particular contain fundamentalist elements; both are certifiably insane. The first, a graduate student named Charles Slaughter, justifies his cruel and bizarre behaviour through apocalyptic visions which can be linked back to a guilt-ridden, fundamentalist childhood. The second, Saint Sammy, lost too much too often in his battle to survive on the prairies, and eventually had a vision in which the Lord told him to live in a piano box on the prairies where the Lord could look after him.<sup>14</sup> While Saint Sammy lives in southern Saskatchewan and Slaughter lives in an Alberta city, it is not clear whether one can represent a provincial version of fundamentalism. They do, however, have extreme views that support the dual nature of religion on the prairies.

Slaughter's madness is real and dangerous. To get revenge on all those in the world that he feels have slighted him, he kidnaps a five year old girl and sacrifices her doll, responding according to his apocalyptic visions brought on by extreme headaches:

"All night long the pleasing odour of the burnt offering has ascended to My Nostrils and it is now forgiven. Quench the embers, that no smoke may betray thee to them. No longer do they seek beneath the river waters, for it is thou they now pursue, as thou canst see them doing there below. Fear them not, for I shall protect thee. Fear not the hounds of Hell they have unleashed against thee, for I shall protect thee for now and evermore. Even as I did in Noah's time, shall I open up My Heavens, that the rain may wash away all trace and smell of footprint spoor, and they shall be confounded."<sup>15</sup>

The voice that speaks to him (presumably God) eventually tells him to commit suicide:

"I am the only One Who loves thee, Charles. Come home to Me!"<sup>16</sup> Slaughter is an extreme example of fundamentalist madness, and it is possible that his religious beliefs cannot be attributed to the region in which he grew up. Other variables may account

---

<sup>14</sup> See *Who Has Seen the Wind*, p. 191.

<sup>15</sup> *Ladybug, Ladybug...*, p. 242.

for it. Place is unmistakable nonetheless; Slaughter's father was an oil man who most definitely lived in Alberta.<sup>17</sup> There is, though, no absolute link between religion and region. In Saint Sammy's case, however, the regional effect on his religious affliction is indisputable.

Not only does Saint Sammy represent the fundamentalist nature of religion on the prairies, particularly in Alberta; he is also an example of mysticism noted by Mitchell in Roses Are Difficult Here. At first, Sammy appears utterly insane:

Sammy's blue eyes stared at them. "He give them a few days an' accordin' to the Image an' His eyes on their hearts. Their eyes ain't seen the majesty of His glory ner yet the greatnessa His work, but their ways is before Him an' cannot be hid." Sammy's arm with its hand clawed, lifted, and pointed out the town low on the horizon. "Fer they have played the harlot an' the fornicator in the sighta the Lord!" His old voice trembled, thinned, and clutched at a higher pitch. "An' there is sorra an' sighin' over the facea the prairie—herb an' the seed thereoff thirsteth after the water which don't cometh! The cutworm cutteth—the rust rusteth an' the 'hopper hoppeth! Sadness hath come to pass an' they put no more little, red labels on the underwear—no more but the yella an' the white!" He shook his fists at the buildings dwarfed on the horizon. "He shall rain ontuh them fire an' brimstone—down on the bare-ass adulteresses—" His voice broke off and went ringing on in the boys' ears.<sup>18</sup>

Whether or not he is truly insane, however, is put into question when he predicts "fire an' brimstone" to befall Bent Candy, who is threatening to kick him off his land. At the end of the week that Bent Candy gives Saint Sammy to "git off" his land, a huge storm breaks which destroys Candy's new barn. Bent Candy's belief in Saint Sammy's position as "Jehovah's Hired Man"<sup>19</sup> is cemented.

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>18</sup> Who Has Seen the Wind, pp. 196–197.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

“The Lord hath blew! He hath blew down the new an’ shinin’ barn of the fundamental Baptist that hath sinned in his sight! Like He said, “Sorra an’ sighin’ hath cometh to Bent Candy!””

Candy turned to Saint Sammy; he looked into the old man’s eyes, water-blue, mildly wild with a fey look which said that he was either childlike, senile, or gently insane. He looked at the squeezed intensity of Sammy’s face, and he thought of the spreading fields of flax he had planted, even now thirsting for moisture; he thought of the years of drouth and rust and hail and the many wheat plagues which had touched him only lightly. He said:--

“You kin stay.”

Brian watched Saint Sammy lift his arms wide.

“I looked an’ I beheld! The Heavens was opened up, an’ there was a whirlwind a-comin’ outa the East, liftin’ like a trumpet a-spinnin’ on her end, an’ there was fire insidea her, an’ light like a sunset was all around about her! Plumb outa the midsta her come the voicea the Lord, sayin’, ‘Sammy, Sammy, git up from offa thy knees fer I am gonna speak ontuh you! The prairie shall be glad, an’ she shall blossom like the rose! Yay, an’ the earsa the deaf shall hear! The lame is gonna leap like the jack rabbit, an’ the water shall spout ontuh the prairie, an’ the sloughs shall be full—plumb full!””

Saint Sammy’s arms came down.

“Amen,” said Mr. Candy.<sup>20</sup>

In the beginning, Sammy’s insanity seems to be a given. However, once his predictions come true, men such as Bent Candy, “who *was* a religious man, and years of prairie farming had deepened in him a faith in a fate as effective as that of Greek drama,<sup>21</sup> could not help but place faith in his visions.

Faith in mysticism, combined with the religious dualism of the prairies is also evident in The Vanishing Point. Members of the Stony Indian Reserve try to save one of their elders from tuberculosis by bringing him to an evangelist who claims to have healing powers. Elsewhere in the novel, there is reference to the Methodist training of the native minister, as well as the Puritan background of Carlyle Sinclair, the resident teacher on the reserve. The evangelist’s healing powers are ineffective; however,

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 272-273.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 268.

Ezra's Methodist ministry and Sinclair's religious beliefs offer examples of prairie puritanism among those who have not (yet) gone mad. Like Saint Sammy, Ezra has embraced his religion, but his life experiences have tainted the original messages: "today he'd make Wesley turn over in his grave—and the old missionaries—over the years he's thrown in a pinch of Weesackashack here—Wendigo there—it's hard to tell where Methodism leaves off and Ezra begins. The amalgam's damn effective too."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Mitchell, The Vanishing Point (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1973), p. 128. From pp. 156-160 is an example of Ezra's sermons. A portion of it is provided here:

"The Gospel accordin' to Saint Mark—Chapter Five—verses one to an' concludin' fourteen." He opened the Bible at the place his thumb held, lowered his head.

"And they came over onto the other side of the sea." He looked up. "That's the Sea Galilee." He looked down. "Into the country of the Gadarenes. And when He was some out of the ship, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains."

Again Ezra looked out over his congregation. "He was crazy and he was camped in a graveyard." Back to his text. "Because that he had often been bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces; neither could any man tame him. And always night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying and cutting himself with stones."

"This man had entered into him the Wendigo inside him—so people was afraid of him and they knew the next thing he'd be eatin' them to feed that Wendigo inside there so they tried to picket him only he pulled it up out and away he went with the peg draggin' and he broke their picket chain too. Can't tie up the Wendigo.

"And when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped Him. And cried with a loud voice and said, "What have I done with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of the Most High God. I adjure Thee by God, that Thou torment me not." For he said unto him, "Come out of the man thou unclean spirit." And He asked him, "What is thy name?" And he answered, saying, "My name is Legion; for we are many."

"That was the Wendigo talkin', and worried too after he heard Jesus tell him to get out of there. He been pretty comfortable in that warm belly there—don't wanted to be spooked out of there. So here's what Wendigo said next out of this crazy man: "And he besought Him much, that he would not send them away out of the country. Now there was there, nigh unto the mountains, a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils—great bunch of Wendigos this man had inside him there—and all the devils besought Him, saying, "Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them."

"Well, Jesus did that.

"And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine; and the herd ran violently down a steep place (they were about two thousand) and were choked in the sea."

"Two thousand—maybe all the Jerusalem wendigos when Jesus come ridin' by. Jesus knew it. Jesus He climbed down and them two thousand Wendigos He said, "Up outa there—get outa that! I got My apostles with Me today an' we're herdin' Wendigos outa this man's soul. HAH-RAH-HOOGH-YOU! Apostle drags an' apostle swings an' Me for the lead—WHAH-HAAAAAH-HOO-NOW! We got our long lasso ropes with knots in their ends—out you get—move fast now, for We don't mind devil shrink an' this man's got the cross an' crown—not the fork on his flank! HAH-AAAW—HAH-AAAW—HAH-HIPEEEEEEE!"

"Out they come, leatherin' both sides an' belly to the ground an' their tails was high—cow devils an' calf devils—bull Wendigos an' steer Wendigos with their eyes blazin' an' their noses breathin' white fire like lightnin' round the mountain top! Some of them started back inside that crazy man, but



Sinclair's puritanism is more covert; his personality, his actions, and his musings all reflect his religious elements.

Sinclair, while living in Alberta, is a perfect example of the limited expectations which are part of prairie culture. Mitchell also ties these expectations to puritanism:

There goes Sinclair—thirty-six-year-old adolescent, the Paradise Valley hermit, starved for the thrust from self to the centre of a loved one. But there was no loved one at all—just another spring. Latins didn't make the best lovers—cold-climate ascetics—puritans—the shy and lonely ones were the champions. Live your life in carefully low key and a few sad shooting stars apologetically proffered by a little Grade One could unhorse you—or a trip to the city—or lunch with Victoria! Sinclair's Law of Diminishing Emotional Returns; this spring was his cup of water on the desert.<sup>23</sup>

Sinclair's beliefs have also been adapted to his surroundings, as have Saint Sammy's and Ezra's. He has adjusted himself to life on the Stony Reserve until his thoughts and actions are in harmony with those around him, until he realizes he cannot belong anywhere else. This adaptation, as is evident, is prevalent throughout the prairies.

Another important adjustment that prairie dwellers have made is mentioned by David Carpenter, that particularly in Saskatchewan, "they rarely preach anymore, and when

---

Mark an' Luke an' Matthew was there on their cuttin' horses, lassos flyin', heelin' them calf devils by both feet. And into the swine on the full run, steers an' bulls an' cows—two- an' three-year-olds—some of them crowdin' four—five—into the same pig at the same time then gettin' shoved out an' each findin' a pig of his own for himself!

"Then—like the Bible says—that herd pigs stampeded—`way they went in a cloud dust through buck brush an' jack-pine—down the draws and over the side hills with Jesus an' His apostles hard after them till they come to this cut bank at the edge the Sea Galilee. Hundred-foot drop right down into that sea. Over sent the lead pig and into the water below—CHUH-MUCK! And after him come the next one—CHUH-MUCK!"

Carlyle felt a thrill of appreciation course through him.

"CHUH-MUCK!"

How right! What a satisfying sound of completion—for demented Gadarene swine—for a rock—for undercut earth with grass, bush, roots and all reluctantly leaving the parent bank to drop with a gulp into the river below!

"CHUH-MUCK—CHUH-MUCK—CHUH-MUCK!"

My God, he wasn't going to do the whole two thousand of them!

"CHUM-MUCK—pause—CHUH-MUCK—pause—CHUH-MUCK!"

Carlyle began to count. Ezra stayed with it for fifty chuh-mucking pigs, then called for the next hymn. (157-159)

they do, it is the pragmatic religion of co-operation.<sup>24</sup> Particularly in Mitchell's earlier novels that are based in Saskatchewan, such preaching is evident.

Jake is one example of a man who embraces co-operation. When a fellow farmer has been ill and has not had time to plant his crops, Jake moves in to prevent a land baron from taking over his land. He not only shows his own devotion to co-operative efforts, but brings out the quality in his neighbours:

I heard a cranking sound and I looked up; Jake was on the phone. He phoned for two hours, nearly 30 calls. He didn't say much, just said Old Mac needed grain for seed. On an old letter he marked down the ones that had grain to spare. When he'd made the last call, he turned to me. The way he looked, Sam Botten was beat this time for sure.

"A hundred fifty-five bushels. Johnny Lammery and Pete Springer, that didn't have none left, is donatin' their teams and wagons to gather her up."<sup>25</sup>

A concentrated effort in the name of helping someone who cannot help themselves seems to be prairie residents' way of rooting for the underdog. Jake's efforts are a success. Brian's uncle Sean is less fortunate.

Uncle Sean is a man whose only religion is a devotion to co-operation. Judging by his coarse language<sup>26</sup>, one can assume that he is sure that co-operation is the only road to salvation. He spends much of his time trying to convince other farmers in the area to collaborate on irrigation projects during the Depression, to no avail:

Like most others in the district, Sean's crop was a failure, and each time he looked at his wheat patched with brown and burnt along the edges, the acid of his anger ate deeper into his soul. His flourishing garden that summer no longer soothed him. He had met with little success in his attempts to interest other farmers in an irrigation scheme that would dam the river. There had been a final bid for aid from Bent Candy, the

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> See Chapter 2, note 72.

<sup>25</sup> *Jake and the Kid*, p. 71.

<sup>26</sup> See *Who Has Seen the Wind*, p. 115.

caterpillar man, deacon of the district's Baptist church and profaner of almost a township of flat loam.

"Tain't no use in goin' to the bank," Sean had told him. "I figger if I was to get enough folks together was interested—enough machinery—we could put up a earth dam 'bout a mile westa Magnus Petersen's. She'd take time—a hell of a long time, but once a main ditch was dug—"

A red-faced man with beautifully white hair, Mr. Candy picked at his nose reflectively. "Ain't int'rested."

"But—man!" said Sean. "You gotta be! We all gotta be! Just because you bin lucky, you ain't always gonna be! Look at the garden I had—that wasn't luck—irrigation did it! An' if we got the whole district—if we did something—all of us—to help ourselves, mebbe we could *git* help! Irrigate fer wheat an' oats an' barley—irrigate the whole goddam works! The Gover'ment—the C.P.R.—"

"Ain't int'rested."

"Git 'em all goin' on garden irrigation an'—an' strip farmin'—leavin' the sod across the prevailin' winds to keep her from driftin'—"

"Ain't int'rested."

"No, you ain't!" Sean's voice had the wild fervency of the wind. "Goddam rights you ain't!" he cried, with his pale red mustaches quivering in indignation. "All ye're in'trested in is the ten bushels to the acre that'll show ye a profit! Profit—profit—an' ye call yerself a religious man. Christian! Oh—I can show ye more religion up a gosh-hawk's—"

"Ain't int'rested."

"Black is yer soul, Bent Candy, blacker than all the dust yer heathen tractors raise! Goddam yer black soul—"

"Blaspheemy ain't gonna help you—"

"Goddam the hot bitch Goddessa profit ye worship whilst ye ride yer jigglin' little black tractor over the land, jigglin' yer little, black soul for the rest of yer graspin' little black days, ye—"

"Git offa here!" cried Candy. "You ain't talkin' that way on my place! Git offa here with yer cursin' an' swearin'!"

"I'm gittin'," said Sean, "an' I'll be seein' you in hell when that time comes."

He climbed into his old Ford.

"We'll both be there!" cried Sean as he started his car. "Ye will be there, bumpin' an' bouncin' an' jigglin' fer all eternity with a red-hot tractor seat to shrivel yer hide to everlastin'! We'll both be there!"<sup>27</sup>

To Sean, the worst sin a man can commit is to refuse to co-operate in order to improve production. While he does not take the most diplomatic approach to the issue, he

<sup>27</sup> Who Has Seen the Wind, p. 211-212.

certainly maintains a religious devotion to doing what needs to be done—not to prosper, but to *survive*.

The lines dividing madness and sanity, pragmatism and fundamentalism, Alberta and Saskatchewan, are at this point admittedly fuzzy. Sean borders on both insanity and fundamentalism in his efforts to encourage co-operation; an outsider may not find any logic at all in Ezra's sermons; it cannot be determined exactly whether Saint Sammy is a madman or a prophet; and, pragmatic puritanism and apocalyptic fundamentalism do not seem to be hindered by provincial boundaries as such. Nevertheless, all of the elements of prairie identity, resplendent in their paradoxicality, are present in Mitchell's writing. His last important theme, prairie humour, continues to lack a provincial distinction.

#### **IV. Laughing at Mortality?**

Throughout Mitchell's works, he cites humour as one of the most fundamental tools of survival on the prairies. As already mentioned, those who cannot laugh at their situation often cannot salvage their sanity. Regardless of whether one lives in Saskatchewan or Alberta, sardonic, rueful humour, combined with tall tales, is a lifeline. Jake is the king of tall tales and big bets, and it is Jake and his kind that Mitchell first examines, through a sociology professor who is studying prairie humour. In a conversation with the kid, Mr. Godfrey explains:

“That's right,” Mr. Godfrey said. “These men lie about the things that hurt them most. Their yarns are about the winters and how cold they are the summers and how dry they are. In this country you get the deepest snow, the worst dust storms, the biggest hailstones.”

...

“Rust and dust and hail and sawfly and cutworm and drouth are terrible things, but not half as frightening if they look ridiculous. If a man can laugh at them he’s won half the battle. When he exaggerates things he isn’t lying really; it’s a defence, the defence of exaggeration. He can either do that or squeal.”<sup>28</sup>

Mitchell’s characters often use humour as a means of coping, or surviving the odds.

After Professor Dobbs is hospitalized by a grizzly attack that leaves him nearly dead, he passes his time by torturing his too-serious doctor:

Arrowsmith was as literal-minded as a born-again Christian. Therefore dangerous. No. Not true. Not true at all, for neural surgeons and other practised performers, high-wire or trapeze, could not handicap themselves with distracting humour; devout concentration was essential to the next step, the next swing-and-catch, the next nerve thread, or they would miss! No life net! And in Arrowsmith’s act it was always the patient that fell to earth.

Once he had discovered that Arrowsmith was not only incapable of appreciating humour, but was in fact annoyed by it, the urge to abrade him became irresistible. He punished the doctor with slapstick, then with vulgar, with black, with dry, with ironic and sardonic, only to achieve the final corruption of raw sarcasm.<sup>29</sup>

While Dobbs is not a farmer or a rancher trying to laugh off the effects of drought or hail or winter, he clutches at humour in the same manner. He needs it in order to cope with his awful situation.<sup>30</sup> While Mitchell’s concepts are consistent throughout his works, his most indepth discussion of humour can be found in Roses Are Difficult Here. It seems that the entire text was designed as a defence of prairie humour and prairie life, and as a criticism of quantitative analysis.

Views on prairie life in Roses Are Difficult Here are polarized between June Melquist, a PhD in Sociology who is studying life in the small town of Shelby, Alberta, and its residents, whose voices are heard through Matt Stanley, the editor of the Shelby

<sup>28</sup> Jake and the Kid, p. 100-101.

<sup>29</sup> Mitchell, Since Daisy Creek (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1984), p. 34.

Chinook, the town newspaper. In her study, Dr. Melquist states that the people of Shelby “were earnestly dull, their humour a primitive and mordant one erecting its amusement always upon a foundation of exaggeration and sarcasm.”<sup>31</sup> Stanley rushes to the defence of his townspeople in an editorial where he examines and explains what humour means to prairie people:

Those who were hit [by the hailstorm] threshed nothing. They had lost a whole year’s income. Had they lived in a city, it would have been as though the family’s wage earner had been laid off for the entire year. No money for groceries, for birthday presents, for a son or daughter’s year at university, for a new tractor, for Christmas, a new stove, wallpaper for the living-room. And they simply said that it was *their* turn this year. That now—in August—they had ice to make a freezer of ice cream. They joked about it. They laughed at it. Ruefully. What might be called a dry joke or a dry laugh. They can be sardonic. We think you missed that in many of us, Dr. Melquist.

In the matter of our wit—we are quite sure that humour cannot be measured or calibrated or correlated. But we do recognize that much of ours is exaggeration. We live in a country of exaggerations, of drought and hail and blizzard and, often, loneliness. We have so much horizon and so much sky that a man sometimes feels a little like a fly on a platter. He knows his vulnerability, and perhaps his humour has become utilitarian in that he laughs at things that can hurt him most. At winters and how cold they are—at summers and how hot they are. We truly have the world’s deepest snow, Dr. Melquist, the worst dust storms, the biggest hailstones, the most agile grasshoppers. Rust and dust and smut and hail and sawfly and cutworm are terrible things, but not half so frightening if they are made ridiculous. If we can laugh at them, we have won half the battle. Perhaps our humour is a defence. Perhaps. You also find it mordant. All right. Any man who laughs at death, laughs at his own mortality, and that is not so much evidence of wit as it is of magnificent bravery.<sup>32</sup>

Humour is indeed a mechanism of survival on the prairie. Feeling like a ‘fly on a platter’ is not a sentiment that differentiates between Saskatchewan or Alberta prairies.

---

<sup>30</sup> I was a party to this form of humour after my bike accident this summer. I could not stop cracking jokes—I think it was my way of telling myself that I was still alive, that I had survived.

<sup>31</sup> Roses Are Difficult Here, p. 309.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 323.

And these feelings can “never be captured in a coarse net”<sup>33</sup> as Dr. Melquist tried to accomplish. Stanley’s defence of humour is not the only point that is applicable to this study; his attack on quantitative analysis is also useful.

Stanley realizes that Dr. Melquist has ignored the “living balance” that exists in Shelby. Through her reliance on “trend and generality,” “statistic, scale and modality,” that balance was destroyed: “It stood. It was held upon its point. Dead.”<sup>34</sup> This study, like Dr. Melquist’s, is searching for ‘trends’ to facilitate generalizations on provincial and regional identity. Something is missing in this study, perhaps something organic that a literary study, and possibly no kind of study could decipher. Thus far, the symbols and themes in Mitchell’s works have not differentiated between province—only region. Yet, several times in his works, he specifically points out the differences between the two provinces. It seems that Mitchell is aware of something outside of the framework in this study that distinguishes region from province.

## V. Distinguishing “Prairie” from “Province”

Just when the reader decides that Mitchell does not distinguish between Saskatchewan and Alberta, he slips in a comment that separates the two. In Jake and the Kid, when the townspeople are preparing for the royal visit, they discover that the royal procession is not making a stop in Saskatchewan at all: “Take the Saskatchewan prairies faster’n a greased gopher through a thirty-six-inch thrashin’ machine. Eager to catch their first glimpse of the soft swellin’ beauty of the Alberta foothills.”<sup>35</sup> While not exactly a positive distinction, it is a distinction between Saskatchewan and Alberta

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 319.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

nonetheless. In other texts, he differentiates between prairie and “foothills expression[s].”<sup>36</sup> In Roses Are Difficult Here, the residents of Shelby separate the “farmers” (to the east) and the “ranchers” (to the west):

Only to the east, he told June, lay wheat farms; west of Shelby the ranches sprawled through the foothills to the forest reserve in the mountains beyond. Shelby was a cow town really, the Senator insisted. On festive Saturday nights, men in tight denim pants with copper rivets, a brilliant kerchief knotted in the hollow of the neck, teetered as they walked into Arlington Arms Beer Parlour, the Cameo Theatre, or Willie MacCrimmon’s Shoe and Harness Shop. They had weathered faces like farmers’, but they were riding, not choring, men. They belonged to the softly swelling foothills under the Rockies, withdrawn and cool and abiding, not the billiard table to the east.<sup>37</sup>

When Dr. Melquist does her analysis of the town, she also mentions the division, much more critically:

... in part the community has a divided aspect so that there is a double contingency in the process of interaction. This in spite of a symbolic system shared by the ranching patterns to the west and those of the farming totality to the east. While the cultural dichotomy may not seem great, it does engender a day-to-day communication problem of long standing, in the normality aspect of expectations, the “Hobbesian” problem of order.<sup>38</sup>

This ‘day-to-day communication problem’ seems, from her analysis, to begin at the provincial border.

These overt distinctions between ‘prairie’ and ‘foothills’ and ‘farmers’ and ‘ranchers’ indirectly suggest political content. First, they represent economic differences. Second, they represent differences in lifestyle that can be politically inferred. Farming is a settled, cooperative enterprise; ranching is much more

---

<sup>35</sup> Jake and the Kid, p. 165.

<sup>36</sup> Ladybug, Ladybug..., p. 138.

<sup>37</sup> Roses Are Difficult Here, p. 49-50

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 198.



individualistic and nomadic.<sup>39</sup> Such movement coincides with O'Hagan's suggestion of westerners' searching for new land, which, it has already been noted, seems to be unique to Alberta. Another issue that Mitchell raises again is significant for its existence in writing on Alberta, and its absence in writing on Saskatchewan. A parallel can be drawn between O'Hagan's touting of the Promised Land, and Stead's absolute lack of anything comparable. Mitchell, in his later novels that focus on university life in an Alberta city, draws several parodies of oil tycoons. These characters do not exist at all in his novels on Saskatchewan.

Before Mitchell begins his parodies, however, he comments on the 'progress' being made by the oil companies. Carlyle Sinclair is furious at the oil companies' trespassing of the Stony reserve:

A flutter of orange caught his eye and he felt his guts tighten against irritation. Gay and decorative they lifted out from the fence-post tips, snapping free in the chinook. They'd be spaced down the road all the way out of the valley—yellow—pink—blue—red. No right; they had not right to be here at all! These were not ribbons streaming from trees in a sacred burial grove; they did not signify noble doom at all! Oil-company markers tied on by last year's seismic crews during their season of sub-terranean hiccuping!<sup>40</sup>

Another example of frustration with oil company development is evident in The Kite. Daddy Sherry, the oldest man in Shelby, is offered one hundred thousand dollars for his land in the Paradise Valley. When he discovers that they are going to tear it up in their search for oil, he adamantly refuses: “ ‘Soakin’ down through the top soil! Oh—no you don’t! Git outa here an’ leave Paradise alone! She’s mine—she’s mine an’ she’s Ramrod’s. Ramrod’s layin’ there under the sweet wolf willah an’ you ain’t gonna

---

<sup>39</sup> This idea is pursued further in Aritha Van Herk's text, Places Far From Ellesmere. See the next chapter.

<sup>40</sup> The Vanishing Point, p. 14.

vomit your black oil all over him....”<sup>41</sup> Mitchell’s dismay with the ‘progress’ of oil companies is again evident in his representation of oil tycoons.

The chancellor of Livingstone University in Ladybug, Ladybug... is “noovo-reesh,”<sup>42</sup> thanks to the oil in Alberta. Mitchell mocks the fact that this man, for his successful oil exploits, has been made chancellor of the “university” who, in a speech to the alumni, “congradulated” those who were receiving honorary degrees.<sup>43</sup> He is an American immigrant, who married a Mormon girl from Utah, and made his fortune in oil. Mitchell’s portrayal of his exploits are compatible with those of Sinclair’s and Daddy Sherry’s:

That doodle bug for finding oil clear down to the Devonian was no bullshit, though. Hadn’t been for Willy, Harley Alcock might have gone the rest of his life as a landman with long sessions in hotel rooms, steeping ranchers and farmers in scotch, rye, rum, bourbon, gin, whatever it took, softening them up till they signed their mineral rights over to Brown Oil. Thank’s to Rachel’s persuasion, Jake Card staked him to the ten thousand Willy wanted, and what a royal flush they’d been dealt after the doodle bug smelled sour gas way over to the east of Paradise Valley in the Honker Hills everybody had ignored! Kept it quiet until the blow-out so they could nail down rights on a territory the size of Wales. Had to bring old Red and his fire crew in asbestos overalls up from Texas to snuff the blowtorch and cap the well. Made millionaire before his twenty-ninth birthday. Professor Plucker ginned himself to death in Amsterdam ten years later. You were alive today, Willy boy, this here chancellor of Livingstone University would confer on you a *genuine* doctorate, honoris causa!<sup>44</sup>

While Mitchell portrays Harley Alcock in perspective opposite from Sinclair and Daddy Sherry, he still manages to communicate his disdain for the oil barons. And like the search for the Promised Land, it is only the texts that focus on Alberta which contain reference to the oil culture.

---

<sup>41</sup> Mitchell, The Kite (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1962), p. 122.

<sup>42</sup> Ladybug, Ladybug..., p. 124.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

## VI. Conclusion

Again, it can be argued that there is evidence for both a regional identity and provincial identities. While a duality remains in prairie dwellers' reaction to the landscape, and in religion, in their senses of humour or lack thereof, the duality cannot be provincially separated. It is clear that the prairie profoundly affects them; regional causes of behaviour and belief are indisputable. Yet overlying the similarities are important characteristics in one province that cannot be found in the other: Uncle Sean's co-operation crusade is a solely Saskatchewan trait; the oil barons are not to be found outside Alberta. Again the paradox of common and separate characteristics, existing in conjunction, is evident. The next step is to compare two solely provincial authors, to derive from them regional or provincial identities.

---

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

## Chapter Five

### Aritha van Herk and Guy Vanderhaeghe

#### I. Introduction

The true test of the theory being put forth is in a comparison of authors from Saskatchewan and Alberta. To control for as many external factors as possible, the authors that have been chosen are of the same generation and similar ethnic background. Both of these factors, had they differed, may have caused differences which could otherwise have been attributed to differing provinces of residence and provincial/regional identities. One other difference cannot be ignored: gender has *not* been controlled for. Gender is, for Aritha van Herk, an important factor in her identity; as I will go on to explain, she believes that feminism is a part of her region.<sup>1</sup> The challenge here, then, is to determine if there are differences or similarities between van Herk and Vanderhaeghe, and whether the causal factor is region or gender.

In the theory that has already been discussed, there is a suggestion that writing becomes less geographically oriented as the literary tradition in a place matures.<sup>2</sup> In interviews with both van Herk and Vanderhaeghe, this topic was broached. If, as a region's literary tradition matures, the tendency is to move away from more localized issues such as landscape and the importance of place, then it would follow that more contemporary writers' work is less likely to express the region's identity. In interviews with both van Herk and Vanderhaeghe, opinions on this theory were expressed. Both authors agreed that the region's literary tradition has evolved. On the other hand, Aritha van Herk asserts that identification of setting is important in the West, and will

---

<sup>1</sup> Aritha van Herk, personal interview, Monday, November 3, 1997, 3:00 PM.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 2, Note 4.

always remain so.<sup>3</sup> Guy Vanderhaeghe differentiates between early and contemporary writers on this point: he believes that, as part of a necessary process, early writers such as W.O. Mitchell had to assert that their place was worth writing about. Thus, much of their writing was devoted to ‘documentary’ accounts of their place. As the literary tradition evolves, however, more issues and themes are understood in the literature, and therefore do not need to be foregrounded. Now that the preoccupation with place is declining, there is more opportunity to achieve what he calls “a truer balance between the elements of fiction.” He concludes, though, that every writer’s work is intimately connected with setting and place.<sup>4</sup> “Home” is something that always seeps into the writer’s creation.

Both authors are at ‘home’ in their respective provinces. Aritha van Herk’s identity is undoubtedly tied to the West. Her reasons for remaining in Alberta are most eloquently expressed in her autobiographical text, Places Far From Ellesmere: “Why go away when everything is here? Incremental: Canada, the west, prairie, Alberta, the south, Calgary: a house northwest, room, chair within the room, the molecules of breath (an address).”<sup>5</sup> While she claims she feels as much at home in Saskatchewan in Alberta<sup>6</sup>, she can feel subtle differences between them. She makes a notable distinction in her definition of “the West”: “Saskatchewan isn’t quite all the way West, but it is all the way prairie.”<sup>7</sup> In so saying, it seems that she is, as has been noted before in O’Hagan’s writing, substituting the *West* for *Alberta*. Vanderhaeghe is more aware of the differences between the western provinces: “I am a Western Canadian, but I am a

---

<sup>3</sup> Interview with van Herk.

<sup>4</sup> Guy Vanderhaeghe, personal interview, Thursday, November 6, 1997, 1:00 PM.

<sup>5</sup> Van Herk, Places Far From Ellesmere (Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 1990), p. 57.

particular Western Canadian, from Saskatchewan.”<sup>8</sup> He believes that comments such as Aritha’s are partly caused by Alberta’s position on the western periphery of the prairies. Saskatchewan, on the other hand, is more aware of the different aspects of the “West” because of its position between its neighbouring prairie provinces.<sup>9</sup> He describes Saskatchewan as a sort of fuzzy area where the west begins and the eastern influence diminishes. He has chosen to remain in Saskatchewan for several reasons: first, it is the root and source of what he writes; second, he believes that what one writes about is conditioned by childhood,<sup>10</sup> and to avoid being frozen into writing only about his childhood, he chose to stay in Saskatchewan in order to absorb the changes in society, and to expand his subject base; third, he found larger centres and their writing communities too distracting; and most importantly, Saskatchewan is “home”—Vanderhaeghe has an intimate connection to the landscape, the society, and its people.<sup>11</sup>

The interviews provided more than insight into the authors’ reasons for remaining on the prairies; they also revealed van Herk’s and Vanderhaeghe’s personal politics, which are again tied to their province/region. Aritha van Herk includes several defining elements in what she considers her politics: feminism, regionalism (“the West as a different space”), ethnicity, culture, and class. While Vanderhaeghe links government and the writing community in Saskatchewan, van Herk identifies more with her writing community than with the Alberta government and Alberta’s political

---

<sup>6</sup> As opposed to eastern cities and regions. Van Herk claims to be particularly “anti-Toronto”. From interview, November 3.

<sup>7</sup> Van Herk, interview.

<sup>8</sup> Vanderhaeghe, interview.

<sup>9</sup> Vanderhaeghe uses Russel, Manitoba as an example. Despite its position on the border between Saskatchewan and Alberta, very near to where Guy Vanderhaeghe grew up, he claims that “Russel seemed very eastern, an Ontario town.” Vanderhaeghe, interview.

<sup>10</sup> A sentiment seconded by van Herk. She claims that in order to have your identity attached to the prairie, “you need the rural space set in you very deeply when you are very young.” Van Herk, interview.

history.<sup>12</sup> Both van Herk and Vanderhaeghe agree on specific identifying differences between Saskatchewan and Alberta such as the co-operative ethic versus a more individualistic, entrepreneurial spirit respectively. Vanderhaeghe has suggested that the political differences between Saskatchewan and Alberta “bleed over into the writing community.” Such differences are evident in van Herk’s decision to oppose her government not by moving, but by ‘standing and fighting’ (as an individual).<sup>13</sup> Vanderhaeghe, in contrast, insists that even Saskatchewan’s writing organizations reflect Saskatchewan’s co-operative tradition.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the authors’ varied personalities and interests, their views on region and province seem consistent. While van Herk voices her identity through the ‘West’, her West is limited to her own experience, a.k.a. Alberta. Vanderhaeghe is more open with his provincial orientations, although he does not deny his western Canadianness. Both are “adamant regionalists”<sup>15</sup>, and both agree on the characteristics inherent in Saskatchewan and Alberta. Hence, the paradox of the prairie provinces being similar, yet not the same, continues. From here, we must determine how the politics of Aritha van Herk and Guy Vanderhaeghe are expressed through their writing.

## II. Literature, Landscape and Politics

The importance of the landscape in prairie literature is said to be in decline. While its significance is waning compared to what it was during the first half of the

---

<sup>11</sup> Vanderhaeghe, interview.

<sup>12</sup> Van Herk, interview.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Vanderhaeghe claims that from his point of view, Saskatchewan’s writing community is much more supportive and internally harmonious (‘co-operative’) than those in other provinces. He admits that his opinion is merely an observation. Vanderhaeghe, interview.

<sup>15</sup> Van Herk, interview.

century, it has not disappeared completely. Guy Vanderhaeghe has tried to remove excessive landscape imagery from his writing, yet he admits that the landscape in Saskatchewan has shaped him psychologically, that it gives him a sense of freedom, as opposed to the claustrophobic feeling sometimes associated with urban or alpine settings.<sup>16</sup> Since the landscape has had such a strong impact on Vanderhaeghe's development, it follows that despite his efforts to avoid it in his writing, its legacy remains. This struggle is evident in The Englishman's Boy.

One of the strongest themes in Vanderhaeghe's latest novel is that of *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age.<sup>17</sup> In a novel that Vanderhaeghe himself describes as cinematic, and thus more focused on landscape than his other works<sup>18</sup>, his explanation of *Zeitgeist* supports his belief that the landscape has a powerful effect on his psychological development. It is part of the 'historical forces' that create the man he is:

The more I meditated upon my father's life the more I came to understand that every man is the servant of historical forces—that no man can deny the spirit of his age, any more than a fish can renounce the water for the land. But the fishes which know the currents, the pools, and the eddies of the stream they inhabit, these are the fishes who increase their chances of survival. And so do the men who familiarize themselves with the currents of the age to which they are confined. That I was determined to do.<sup>19</sup>

Part of surviving in rural Saskatchewan is learning to find a place for yourself on and in the land. Denying one's place of origin is similar to denying the spirit of her/his age, since one's place carries with it a 'spirit', as does the age. In the novel, Harry Vincent has familiarized himself with the currents of his age, but he tries to deny the spirit of his

---

<sup>16</sup> Vanderhaeghe, interview.

<sup>17</sup> Guy Vanderhaeghe, The Englishman's Boy (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1996), p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> Vanderhaeghe, interview.

<sup>19</sup> Vanderhaeghe, Englishman's Boy, p. 103.



region. This leads to the literary expression of Vanderhaeghe's struggle with landscape.

As a Canadian (from Saskatoon) who escapes to Hollywood, Vincent tries to ignore his place, his "home," which is tied to the land. When he is asked why he believes that he, a Canadian, can "teach Americans how to be American" through the all-American film, he retorts:

Because I chose this place. And I'm not the only one in Hollywood. America's Sweetheart, Mary Pickford, was born in Toronto; Louis B. Mayer came from Saint John, New Brunswick; Mack Sennett was raised in Quebec. Canada isn't a country at all, it's simply geography. There's no emotion there, not the kind that Chance is talking about. There are no Whitmans, no Twains, no Cranes. Half the English Canadians wish they were *really* English, and the other half wish they were Americans. If you're going to be anything, you have to choose. Even Catholics don't regard Limbo as something permanent. I remember when the ice used to break up on the South Saskatchewan. We'd be woken up in our beds in the middle of the night by a noise like an artillery barrage, you could hear it all over the city, a great crashing and roaring as the ice broke apart and began to move downriver. At first light, everybody would rush out to watch. Hundreds of people gathered on the riverbanks on a cold spring morning, the whole river fracturing, the water smoking up through the cracks, great plates of ice grinding and rubbing against the piles of the bridge with a desperate moan. It always excited me as a kid. I shook with excitement, shook with the ecstasy of movement. We all cheered. What we were cheering nobody knew. But now, here, when I listen to Chance, maybe I understand that my memory is the truest picture of my country, bystanders huddled on a riverbank, cheering as the world sweeps by. In our hearts we preferred the riverbank, preferred to be spectators, preferred to live our little moment of excitement and then forget it. Chance doesn't want Americans to forget to keep moving. I don't think that's ignoble.<sup>20</sup>

What Vincent does not realize at first is that he cannot choose his place any more than he can choose the age in which he lives, and that both have irreversible effects on who he becomes. To use his own analogy, he cannot choose his identification with a place any more than a fish can choose land over water. By the end of the novel, he has

changed his opinion. He moves “home”, and sees the river again with a new appreciation:

Living beside the river has taught me something about change. Paved white with snow and ice in winter, slack and brown in summer, the river is never the same. As a boy, I had rushed down to it only in its moments of crisis, when it ripped apart and roared, shattered while I stood on the bank, shaking with excitement. The apocalypse has its attractions.<sup>21</sup>

He has accepted his place as a part of him, and in doing so, has made some important contributions to the study of Saskatchewan and Alberta identities. While he admits that he is drawn to the idea of the “apocalypse,” he realizes there is more to his existence than waiting for the occasional cataclysm; the quiet moments, just living, is what he appreciates. We can stretch this conclusion to suggest that it is linked to his ingrained Saskatchewan identity, which is too pragmatic to follow the apocalypse, despite its attractions.

The Englishman’s Boy expresses a struggle against the importance of landscape and a final acceptance of it. Elsewhere in Vanderhaeghe’s works is other more typical imagery involving landscape. Some of his earlier images are stark and forbidding, following the traditional theme of man against the harsh elements. The first scene in Homesick is an old man’s dream set in a freezing and threatening winter landscape on a prairie lake:

When the sun finally rises, so does the wind, bitter and cutting. On the lake there is no place to escape it, no trees, no sheds, no bluffs to hunker down and hide behind. On the lake there is only flatness, a rushing space that squeezes the eyes into a squint.

There it is now, the first long drawn-out sigh of breath tumbling over the hills, the faint breeze setting snow snakes writhing out over the ice and hard-packed drifts to meet them. By fits and starts the wind gathers force, the skirts of coats billow and snap, its fierce touch

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 181-182.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 325.

penetrates every layer of clothing, drives nails of cold through coveralls, trousers, woollen combinations. It raises gooseflesh and tears the manes of the horses into ragged, whipping flags. It pounds the drumskins of tightly drawn parka hoods.<sup>22</sup>

While focused on the lake rather than the land itself, the images of flatness, so common in prairie literature, are paramount. There is little romance in this representation of the landscape, except for his admission of its power over man.

Any positive representations of the land are linked to agriculture. On close examination, these passages are not romantic, but realistic—the people on the prairies rely on the land for survival, so they are irrevocably tied to it despite its harshness. Vanderhaeghe points out the attachment which members of the rural community feel for the land in “Home Place”: “What Gil never confided to his wife was that he felt more present in the land than he did in his own flesh, his own body. Apart from it he had no real existence. When he looked in a mirror he stood at a great distance from what he regarded, but with the land it was different. All that he had emptied of himself into it, he recognized.”<sup>23</sup> The land’s power is portrayed through a different perspective in “The Expatriates’ Party.” In it, a teacher in rural Saskatchewan during the Depression discovers the ‘country folk’s’ need for productive landscape imagery:

It was an accident his giving them what country folk wanted: a vision of water, of fecundity, of transparent plenty. He would never have planned it; he would have considered the idea cruel.

How still they had gone when he read:

On either side the river lie,  
Long fields of barley and rye,  
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;  
And thro’ the field the road runs by  
To many-towered Camelot.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Vanderhaeghe, *Homesick* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1989), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Guy Vanderhaeghe, “Home Place” in *Things As They Are?* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1992), p. 173.

<sup>24</sup> Vanderhaeghe, “The Expatriates’ Party” in *Man Descending* (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co. Limited, 1982), p. 154–155.

In a time when the inhabitants of rural Saskatchewan were watching their land thirst for water, they were just as thirsty for images of water, of rich soil and healthy crops.

Vanderhaeghe's romanticization of the landscape seems to go only as far as implying hope.

Aritha van Herk takes a different approach to the landscape—one that is tied to both her identity as an Albertan and as a woman. In her interview, she denies the traditional view of the prairie as flat and barren. The landscape to van Herk is not a negative image at all, but a very rich one. In "Prairie as Flat as...", an essay challenging the typical approach to prairie landscape, van Herk argues:

... that one would see the Canadian prairie as flat reveals a terribly myopic view of the secret and undulating world around us. I do not believe in the flatness of the prairie but in its hidden and sinuating folds; and perhaps I am able to believe and write it as un/flat only because of the established archetypes, the images that literature has worked through on its journey to what has now become an upthrust and earthquake prairie.<sup>25</sup>

Van Herk carries her argument past challenging the archetypal view of the prairie as flat: she suggests that this is an image created by men who, in creating a male literary tradition, have ignored the feminine aspects of prairie:

In the real west, men are men, and life a stern test of man's real attributes. The fabric of this living breathing landscape has been masculinized in art, descriptive passages of a land instinctively female perceived by a jaundiced male eye. Description, description, and more description, an overlooking. Prudence, caution. They are afraid to enter the landscape. They describe it instead. To get inside a landscape, one needs to give up vantage, give up the advantage of scene and vision and enter it. To know prairie, one has to stop looking at prairie and dive.

The prairie might have been indifferent to human passage but it had an undeniable impact. Grove's essential conflicts between human desire and the stubborn resistance of nature centred on it. So did the patriarchal view of the prairie as "a clean naked land where a man might

---

<sup>25</sup> Aritha van Herk, "Prairie as Flat as..." in *A Frozen Tongue* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1992), p. 127.

make his own way in his own way, rear his family, worship his gods, cherish the customs of his fathers while evading their oppressions, and live in peace with his fellow men.’ Man, man, man. The land was blameless but man dragged his baggage with him. The prairie, in bondage to an image, remained indifferent.

Collins, Connor, Grove, Stead, Ross. Ross tried, in *As For Me and My House* tried to enter a woman as a means of entering the prairie, but she is impossibly male and her dilemma is artificially solved, by another woman dying in childbirth. Death seemed the only entrance. After them came the spiritually ambitious. Mitchell: a boy and his dog and death on the prairie. The prairie, indifferent. And Rudy Wiebe: ‘To touch this land with words requires an architectural structure; to break into the space of the reader’s mind with the space of this western landscape and the people in it you must build a structure of fiction like an engineer builds a bridge or a skyscraper over and into space.... You must lay great black steel lines of fiction, break up that space with huge design’. He begins well, his idea initially right, but the metaphor is male, impossibly male, without entrance. This landscape has been garrisoned by the art that represents it. Man and his straight line—steel, yet—horizontal world cannot contain or even predicate the female curve of the prairie, let alone enter it.<sup>26</sup>

Van Herk’s essays are more direct versions of concepts that have found their way into her fiction.

In *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey*, the heroine travels around Alberta selling women’s underwear. Such a setting provides ample opportunity for the intrusion of van Herk’s views on Alberta’s landscape. Arachne’s first glimpse of the prairie leaves her awestruck:

Field, Lake Louise, Banff, Canmore. As the mountains drop behind them and they level down, the sky fills with prairie, the immutable shape of the plain spread out like an embodied mirage. There is nothing Arachne can say, she is caught between her surprise and a sudden wrench to be part of this undulating plate of land.

“Prairie. I’ve never seen prairie before.” She turns to him, hears herself with cautious horror. “Is Calgary like this?”

“Yes.”

---

<sup>26</sup> Van Herk, “Women Writers and the Prairie: Spies in an Indifferent Landscape” in *A Frozen Tongue*, p. 141-142.

"I can live there."<sup>27</sup>

Other images in the text are incredibly rich. Even in the most barren of months, Arachne is amazed at the richness and sensuality of the landscape:

It is the end of November, a fall tortured by its own brilliance, the great plain unrolling itself in an orgy of gold. The sky's bowl, the diagrammed fields, even the Rockies shimmer gold. Arachne is dizzy with it, the sun that should have been chilled by November swamping her with warmth, a steady drone of combines undertoning the days with the sweet dust of grain chaff hanging over all, a smell so extravagantly heavy it seems dispersed by another deity, drifted down from an era when bare-legged women toss baskets of wheat against the sky to winnow grain from chaff. The busied combines, heat and heaviness swarm the car; it seems to take forever to reach Nanton.<sup>28</sup>

Again, following the theory she set forth in her essays, van Herk carries it one step further, asserting the 'feminine curves' of the prairie in a new, feminine, prairie archetype: the Wild Woman:

And there they find the Wild Woman, her stone outline spread to infinite sky, to a prairie grassland's suggestion of paradise, a woman open-armed on the highest hill in that world. They trace her outline: arms, amulet, hair, teeth, skirt, breasts, feet. Arachne stands between her legs. Her face speaks, the welcome gesture of arms, the amulet's adornment, the breasts soft curves, immensely eloquent. Arachne's small shadow falls within the woman's shape, the stone-shaped woman. She stretches out inside the woman, lies within the stones on her back beneath that wheeling sky, arms outflung like the woman's, her head circled in a cushion of breast.<sup>29</sup>

Aritha van Herk's feminist identity creates a feminine archetype atypical of the male literary tradition to express her own reading of the prairie; however, her provincial identity creates an impression of lushness and richness, full of smells and colours and brightness which are atypical of the Saskatchewan literary tradition.

---

<sup>27</sup> Van Herk. No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Limited, 1986), p. 102.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

Setting aside gender differences, Vanderhaeghe and van Herk display characteristics in their identities which are provincial in nature, particularly in their views on prairie landscape. Vanderhaeghe's view, which fits van Herk's description of a male perspective on the prairie, is also pragmatic and realistic, a characteristic of his provincial identity. Van Herk's, on the other hand, romanticizes the landscape, and feminizes it so that she has a place in it and its traditions. In David Carpenter's essay comparing Saskatchewan and Alberta fiction, he includes escape and prosperity along with romance, compared to pragmatism and survival in Saskatchewan. These elements are also evident in van Herk's writing, and comparable to Vanderhaeghe's.

### **III. Economy: Prosperity versus Survival**

Both van Herk and Vanderhaeghe show awareness of the economy of their respective provinces. Van Herk's images are almost invariably ones of money and prosperity, while Guy Vanderhaeghe's are less material, and concerned merely with survival. Both embrace working class situations—Arachne grew up in a blue collar family in eastside of Vancouver; and Guy Vanderhaeghe's short stories are often about labourers and farmers in Saskatchewan. However, Arachne escapes her life, while Vanderhaeghe's characters seemed destined at worst for failure, and at best, to continue their meagre existence with merely a shadow of hope.

Places far from Ellesmere is a text that comments on Calgary's economic history. Its history, and its present cannot be disentangled from the importance of money:

The declensions of Calgary insist on money, although money rejects declension (banking itself, receivable).

Abattoirs and railway yards, oil offices (of course). Not derricks and pipelines but the bureaus, departments of and sections and divisions glued together in a scraper of intention, the crooked teeth of tilted buildings harbouring ambition, short-sightedness (Frac/tions). And money's occupations live their own short-lived lives.

Abattoirs have become Meatpackers and their offshoot markets, although Slaughter Houses are delicately mentioned and renamed. Beef Packers always specialists now generalized, but the stockyards, their high leathery smell all through the southeast (Burns Avenue, the first millionaire). Effaced into the Stock Exchange, small as it is. Still, despite unlisting, the stock yards retain their labyrinth, sprawl over their own railway mesh bawling and dusty, a swarm of Hereford backs on weekdays, buyers and auctioneers (many, many, as always) converging on the high-slatted trucks that roll in from the south and the east and the west.

Shoe leather. Tanneries have given way to tanning salons (despite 2207 hours of shine per year) and the hides of all the slaughtered animals are shipped away, east. Their bones ground into fertilizer. A different coming to the garden, underground. Ho, although undertakers have become funeral directors (and a good many too), embalmers lost between elocution and embassies (not one). Shall we presume that there are none, that there is no money in the business (of death)?

But ah, blacksmiths there were (many) now only three, specializing in jackhammer points, then in horses. Horse Dealers then too (many) and still a few, but without the personality, the checked jacket and rakish cap, the trick with a foreleg and a burr. Who hung around the shooting gallery (one), now obscured behind some other muffled sound, distant boom still hangs in quiet evenings, despite the range, despite the earphones and the cardboard men. And Gun Shops thrive, their wares behind flyblown windows (All Stories End).

Galleries are otherwise, under art, the two artists proudly listed in 1910 are commercial and designer now, and follow artificial limbs. Scenic artists vanished utterly, scenes too. And those cynical suspect a loss of purity, how barbers have become hair stylists and boot blacks shoe shine agencies, haberdashers lost themselves in department stores and hat reblockers (many) become the one hat renovator, who presumably rebuilds from the skull up.

Dressmakers have altered themselves to designers, clothiers, tailors and fashion consultants. And somehow you are certain this is no longer the safe occupation of mildewing maidens who stitch behind the safely drawn curtains waiting for spinsterhood to pass. Although gloves and mittens are the same. So much for everyday.

So much for everyday. Money talks.

What about the coffee roasters (machines instead of persons), the fire escape makers (completely lonely), Bible depots (proselytized), the



mince meat manufacturers, the oyster dealers (prairie and pacific), piano polishers (with soft cloth and a gleaming eye), Turkish baths, milk dealers? Dealers in—an interrupted need, the needing service changed. Who can say which comes first, money or the source. There will, it seems, always be a call for billiards and dentists and collection agencies. For interpreters and translators (although the one German translator in 1910 could hardly have credited the tongues unleashed now, would have opened an agency—gone crazy with delight in one word's inability to understand another).

There's money to be made. The new languages of the world call and laundries do their best to keep you clean; nurses keep you well; wedding cakes persist. Annas tread their passions.

The quarries (two, of sandstone, long used up and closed) of money continue; and the once six surveyors have expanded all categories: Aerial, Alberta, Construction, Inertial, Marine, Offshore, Seismic. Surveyors and purveyors, a measuring and a counting, a weighing out.

As for pleasure, beyond the lost Turkish baths, the restaurants have always been Chinese; the theatres (the Dreamland, the Empire, the Lyric, the Orpheum, the Princess, the Starland) amalgamated filmic frames; the Orchestras and Bands (the Calgary Coloured Quartet) play on. Pleasure domes increase.

The boarding houses have all closed.

In this iconography of money, you are sharply divided. There are those who collect and those who will not, those who scorn to stoop for the quarter on the sidewalk and those who hoard, stuff mattresses (remember winter). There are seasons of money, houses bought and sold and never lived in, land surveyed into inches, buildings flooring themselves into Babel. Even when the cranes are abandoned and the vacant lots blow dust, the hoarding gaping and permanent, there is a season on money, that season when the secret hand writes a well-concealed cheque buying speculation and aspiration, banking on ugly phrases: real estate market, retail space, oil and gas futures, the property of mercy for lease.

Like death, money leaves, pretends it never lived here, and the rusty cranes and empty buildings fold and whisper on themselves, in the rustling silence of Calgary's own seduction and abandonment. What's to be expected whoring after strange futures? Still, beautiful enough for the next one to be caught, to hesitate and wager this or that against the lure of profit. Despite the office owners camped out on their unrented carpets, the bath shops-sold out of gold-plated faucets.

The declension of money is measurement. How much/how long/how old/how big? Your love of money is a frisson of pleasure to large-numbered years. The celebration of invented anniversaries. Economic intentions signed, sealed, delivered. Struck a deal. All those

Americans. Peter Prince and the Eau Claire and Bow River Lumber Company (1886). American Hill.

Obsessed with profession and ambition and not enough low-brow back-sliding pleasure-taking pleasure. Longing for Golden Fridays and the complimentary car, an in-car phone, a pull-out couch. Eternal happy hours.

Grit-blown monoliths bounce measured hours of sunlight from their golden glass and stand for death, another Stonehenge in haphazard phalanx between Bow River and CPR tracks, (compressed) between two insoluble immovable configurations. Hanging there, in their moments of aspiration, the cranes wait for another boom to announce itself, another graveyard to rear headstones.<sup>30</sup>

Material goods and material gain have been the basis of Calgary's development. Even art is considered a commodity—only valuable if it can be assigned a price. In the interview with van Herk, she supports this opinion in a comparison between Saskatchewan and Alberta: she claims that there is a boosterism, an entrepreneurial spirit that is innate in Alberta but does not exist in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan, in contrast, is less material, more generous.<sup>31</sup> Guy Vanderhaeghe's work offers examples of Saskatchewan residents' economic approaches.

Money, of course, is an important factor in the quality of life, and what one finds important. Vanderhaeghe shows his awareness of the changes in Saskatchewan's society during more affluent years. In "The Expatriates' Party", the teacher who gives students visions of water during the Depression notices a shift when the economy and the weather improve:

And gradually, with each of the succeeding thirty-odd years of small towns and stifling classrooms, these visions of refreshment sustained him, although the poetry stopped working for the students. He came to the conclusion that they no longer needed it or wanted it. With prosperity, their dreams became more elaborate, more opulent, less

---

<sup>30</sup> Van Herk, *Places Far From Ellesmere* (Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 1990), p. 62-66.

<sup>31</sup> Van Herk, interview and Vanderhaeghe, interview.

dictated by peculiar circumstances. Their desires were the conventional lusts of a consumer society.<sup>32</sup>

Even in the most prosperous of times in Saskatchewan, however, there remains a difference between its inhabitants' view of the importance of money and that of Albertans'.

In Homesick, one of Vanderhaeghe's characters is Alec Monkman, an ageing owner of several businesses in a small Saskatchewan town. While he is considered one of the wealthier people in town, his view of business is not a particularly ambitious one:

The books and taxes he left to Cooper the accountant. But the garden was different. Perhaps it was experience teaching him, teaching the man who had embarked on a new career late in life and out of despair, that there was more challenge to keeping life in cabbages and onions than in keeping it in a movie theatre or hardware store. Over the years he had learned that in a small place like Connaught it was hard to go badly wrong in business. Because if it had been easy, he would have been finished long ago. No, all that was necessary was to see that the roots of an enterprise were firmly set. That done, in the absence of any real competition it could hardly fail to survive. Maybe not flourish, none of his businesses had really flourished, but they had all survived and that was enough for him. Unlike a plant, a shop or store needed no strong encouragement to live; once established it took a fool or act of God to kill it. But gardens he had found were a different matter. A man had to breathe some of his own life into a garden. A garden knew no other aid or kindness in this hard place of shattering hail and scorching heat, uprooting wind and early killing frost, except that which a man could offer.<sup>33</sup>

The important things that require effort in Monkman's world are living things that grow from his own effort, and are derived from the land. His behaviour in the town also does nothing to suggest that his economic success is one of his top priorities. Several times throughout the novel, Monkman's daughter Vera gets angry with him for spending Christmas feeding all the poor men and the vagabonds that show up on his doorstep,

---

<sup>32</sup> Vanderhaeghe, "The Expatriates' Party" in Man Descending.

<sup>33</sup> Vanderhaeghe, Homesick, p. 35.

taking full advantage of Monkman's generosity. As long as he has enough to get by, Monkman has no qualms about sharing his wealth.

Vanderhaeghe harbours another economic concern that is essential to the study of prairie identity: the shift in economic focus from rural to urban. Both van Herk and Vanderhaeghe, in their interviews, noted the effect of the rural community on the development of identities. Prairie identity, which has already been shown to be closely linked to landscape, is attached to the "rural space"<sup>34</sup> that contains the landscape. Vanderhaeghe suggests in his interview that as people begin to move to the city, the unique prairie experience may be muted, since urban life is more generic throughout western societies. However, he also notes that the political and social culture has already been developed within that rural space, and residues remain from the prairie's historically rural experience.<sup>35</sup> These remnants are evident in another of Vanderhaeghe's short stories:

Joseph knows the difficulty of unlearning the things you were taught as a kid—he's been trying to do it for nearly twenty years. Still he backslides, caught in the current of his father's assumptions like a rudderless boat. Take the question of toughness, grit, physical courage. Joseph Kelsey's colleagues condescend to any such notions as the last refuge of the pitifully stupid and primitive, the resort of macho Neanderthals with brains the size of peas and exaggerated testosterone levels—football players or men like Oliver North and Gordon Liddy. They prefer moral courage, the variety of bravery on which intellectuals have a corner of the market.

Joseph has to concede that physical courage *is* inferior to moral courage. Nevertheless he often feels the need to play the devil's advocate, the devil prompting this reaction being his rooster-tough old man. Joseph wants to argue: But isn't physical courage sometimes a precondition of moral courage? Was moral courage in Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia possible without physical courage, without the guts to face the piano wire, the fist in the face, the boot in the groin, worse? When smug self-congratulation is in full spate in the faculty club lounge

---

<sup>34</sup> Van Herk, interview.

<sup>35</sup> Vanderhaeghe, interview.

he is tempted to say, "Let's remember that it wasn't Heidegger who tried to blow up Adolf Hitler, it was army officers."<sup>36</sup>

This respect for physical courage, for staying tough is a trait which both Vanderhaeghe and Van Herk translate into prairie identity in the form of pride, self-reliance, and the ability to endure. Van Herk cites her own stubbornness as a prairie trait that encourages her to stand and fight rather than leave her province in the face of political adversity. In Judith, van Herk portrays the increase in personal strength that Judith gains by moving from the city back to the country: "And there, in the middle of that farmer's town, she felt a sudden surge of self-reliance, a small spurt of self-respect that gave her an instant and brilliant hope. So that she could afford to ignore them, the people around her; she had herself and that was enough."<sup>37</sup> Several of Vanderhaeghe's characters show similar characteristics.

Vera Miller is a character which has internalized the archetype of prairie pride and stubbornness. She has avoided her father, Alec Monkman, for nineteen years, and only manages to swallow her pride when she believes that her son needs to move out of the city to grow up properly:

Daniel, Daniel, after all those years holding out, you make me beg for help. The pickle you got yourself into, behaving like that. I swore I'd never do it. I swore I'd never go back to Connaught. I swore I'd never ask the old man for a nickel or a blessing. There's not many people keep a promise they made at nineteen as long as I did. And I'd still be keeping it if you hadn't gone off the rails on me.

I'm not like some people; I'm not good at swallowing my pride. It sticks in my throat. Funny how some people have no notion of pride.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Vanderhaeghe, "Man on Horseback" in Things As They Are?, p. 45-46.

<sup>37</sup> Van Herk, Judith (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Limited, 1978), p. 50-51.

<sup>38</sup> Vanderhaeghe, Homesick, p. 16.

Vera links the necessity of pride to survival. She believes that without it, she could never have supported herself and her son doing menial jobs for as long as she did:

Vera Miller is pride. That's what I am, pure and simple. Because without pride and hope, how did I ever make it this far? How else did I drudge at all those shitty jobs all those years—chambermaid, practical nurse, checkout girl—without letting myself think I was nothing but those things—chambermaid, practical nurse, checkout girl? One thing, I never surrendered my dignity. I did my job but you never caught me kissing the boss's ass, or pretending to his face that I was eternally grateful for the big favour of being allowed to work for him.<sup>39</sup>

Such a reliance on stubborn will is a trait which seems linked to the prairie experience and prairie identity. After growing up in such a harsh place, there are certain traits an individual needs in order to be sure that she/he can rely on her/himself to survive almost anything.

'Stubbornness and grit' are two characteristics on which both Vanderhaeghe and Van Herk agree. While their characters' concepts of money vary in accordance to their provincial identifications of economics and wealth, the people are similar in many aspects. These similarities are derived from the values that living in such a great rural space has impressed on them. There is, however, a difference in those people's expectations that corresponds in many respects to economic differences. Some of these varied expectations are evident in the duality between romance and realism, survival and prosperity, which are also evident in Vanderhaeghe's and van Herk's novels.

#### **IV. Realism and Romance**

The "Promised Land" has been a continuing theme throughout this study, whether focussing on religious imagery, or simply escape. Aritha van Herk and Guy

Vanderhaeghe address both these issues in their texts. Again, a separation occurs between their works. Vanderhaeghe embraces realism, and his characters are almost invariably confronted with and forced to accept a stark reality. In one of Vanderhaeghe's short stories, he notes, "The oldest story is the story of flight, the search for greener pastures. But the pastures we flee, no matter how brown and blighted—these travel with us; they can't be escaped."<sup>39</sup> Van Herk's characters, on the other hand, are continually offered and continually accept escape. They leave their stark realities behind and take a better offer.<sup>41</sup> Religion plays a role in the theme of escape as well. Apocalyptic and fundamentalist interpretations of the Bible suggest an escape while more pragmatic readings do not. Thus, from less direct religious themes to more overt themes of escape or survival, van Herk and Vanderhaeghe again suggest provincial variations in their work.

Guy Vanderhaeghe suggests that like the effect of the landscape, religion is declining in importance. In his interview he claims that his interest in religion is purely curious in nature, since he was not raised in a religious household. He uses religion in his texts in a way that questions the fundamental values often tied to it. Such a secular approach to the Bible and religion supports David Carpenter's division of Saskatchewan and Alberta into the 'pragmatic religion of co-operation' and 'romantic non-realities and great expectations'. Vanderhaeghe uses born-again Christians and fundamentalists as characters, but only to examine them, and to question their beliefs. One disturbing example of this is in "How the Story Ends". An old man who is a born-again Christian befriends his great-nephew, and teaches him the story of Abraham and

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> Vanderhaeghe, "What I Learned from Caesar" in *Man Descending*, p. 69.

Isaac. The little boy is terribly disturbed by the story, wondering why Isaac's father would consent to sacrifice him:

"And because Abraham loved God," said Tollefson, "he would do anything God asked. No matter how hard."

"Would you?"

"I'd try very hard. We must always try our hardest to please God. You must too, Paul, because He loves you."

"Did he love Isaac?"

"Of course. He loves all his children."

"I didn't like the story."

"Oh, you didn't *at first*," said Tollefson, "because you didn't wait for the end. But everything came out all right in the end, didn't it? That's the point."

It didn't seem the point to Little Paul. It seemed to him that God, being who he was, could have as easily ended the story the other way. *That*, to Little Paul, seemed the point.<sup>42</sup>

When Little Paul's reaction to the story is mixed with the realities of living on a farm in Saskatchewan, the result is frightening. Little Paul and Tollefson are raising the pigs on the farm, and the boy has made pets of them. When faced with the day of slaughter, Little Paul's fears get the best of him:

"You talk to him," said the boy, speaking very quickly, his face a strained mask. "You two got secrets from me. I talk and talk but he doesn't answer me what you got planned for me. I asked and asked and asked. But it's a secret. Why don't he tell me!"

"Who?" said Tollefson, reaching for the boy, alarmed by the fear which had lain in the shallows of the child's eyes all those months, but which he recognized only then, for the first time.

"Is he hungry?" implored Little Paul. "Is he hungry? Please, is that how the story ends?"<sup>43</sup>

Having taken the story of Isaac and Abraham literally, and knowing what happens to the pigs that get slaughtered, Little Paul concludes that God wants the same thing of little boys such as Isaac, or Little Paul. Through the story, it seems that Vanderhaeghe

---

<sup>41</sup> When this reading of van Herk's texts was put forth in her interview, she readily agreed.

<sup>42</sup> Vanderhaeghe, "How the Story Ends" in *Man Descending*, p. 64.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.



points out the dangers of close, literal readings of the Bible, and shows the damage that such a reading can cause.

Vanderhaeghe takes a similar approach in My Present Age. The main character is discussing how one of his old college buddies, whom his ex-wife believes is crazy, has converted to a fundamentalist religion. Ed muses:

“... The point is Sadler’s fundamental nature. What you fail to understand is that he’s the ultimate simplifier. The very antithesis of your bet-hedging, quibbling complicator. Sadler wants Truth with a capital T. He always did. And when he signed on with the Independent Pre-Millennial Church of God’s First Chosen, or whatever they call themselves, he didn’t go making his membership contingent on a bunch of mental reservations. No sir. He understood that being one of God’s First Chosen isn’t easy. He swallowed it whole. I kind of admire that.”<sup>44</sup>

Just as in The Englishman’s Boy, Vanderhaeghe’s character acknowledges the attraction of the apocalypse and fundamentalism, while understanding that it is not a truly viable option.

Aritha van Herk is aware of a different energy in religion. In Places Far From Ellesmere, she notes the fundamentalist influences in her hometown, the Mennonites:

“[a]n anabaptist influx tugging Edberg in another direction, thundering up the dusty road toward a place lost to its intent, another religion to compete with the Lutherans and the Baptists and the long-lost heathen. They built a church just past the railway tracks at the corner, two miles south of town: edged onto the village a new gesture.”<sup>45</sup>

This is merely a passing phrase regarding fundamentalism. More important references refer not necessarily to religion, but to the Apocalypse. In her essay “A Gentle

<sup>44</sup> Vanderhaeghe, My Present Age (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1986), p. 32.

<sup>45</sup> Van Herk, Places Far From Ellesmere, p. 27.

Circumcision”, she writes of the representation in prairie literature of the male virgin, with Biblical references:

I come from the west, kingdom of the male virgin. I live and write in the kingdom of the male virgin. To be female and not-virgin, making stories in the kingdom of the male virgin, is dangerous. You think this kingdom is imaginary? Try being a writer there. Try being a woman there.

This west is a kingdom of discontent. This, the promised land, still regrets Eden, and in that regret edges toward Apocalypse, denying the pastoral fiction that has been imposed upon it from outside. The west is a fiction disintegrating: a kingdom of male virgins who have never forgiven Eve for seducing them.<sup>46</sup>

In this feminized reading of the Promised Land, van Herk again portrays a combination of feminist and regional identity. She continues the mix in her texts, which, while not containing any overt references to religion, carry on the tradition of the Promised Land.

In each of van Herk’s texts, there is a theme of movement, an escape. In Places Far From Ellesmere, she ties this need to move to Alberta’s traditions: “Transient: the nomadic legacy of the ranchers, east of the north/south route of prehistoric man, balloons drift overhead. Denizen: to live here you must move, although the stones command stillness, and the grass demands its own growing. Home is a movement, a quick tug at itself and it packs up.”<sup>47</sup> Her characters are forever moving, packing up. Judith escapes her secretarial job in the city and an affair with her boss to begin a pig

---

<sup>46</sup> Van Herk, “A Gentle Circumcision” in A Frozen Tongue, p. 90. One of her examples from Robert Kroetsch’s novel, *The Words of My Roaring*, is of particular note on this topic. It covers several of the issues mentioned so far in this study, and I believe it further suggests that, had this study been expanded to include more authors, such as Kroetsch, that the findings would only be more positive:

Christ, you have to dream out here. You’ve got to be half goofy—just to stay sane.

I’m a great one for paradox. My reading of the Bible, I suppose; dying to be born and all that. But really, it isn’t an easy place to live. Like when the wind blows black, when it’s dry, you have to drive all day with your lights on. Great electioneering weather. The fish lose their gills in this country. The gophers come up for a bite to eat, and they crawl right into the air. (90)

From p. 53 in *Words*. (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1966). It contains elements of prairie humour, as well as W.O. Mitchell’s themes of choosing to laugh or go mad, paradox, and apocalypse.

<sup>47</sup> Van Herk, Places Far From Ellesmere, p. 69.

farm in rural Alberta; in The Tent Peg, J.L. escapes her academic career and the men who go with it to become a camp cook in the Yukon; Arachne, in No Fixed Address, first escapes Vancouver and comes to Calgary, then escapes Calgary and drives north to a sort of Promised Land. Within the texts lie several clues in mapping the link between the search for the Promised Land and Alberta's identity.

Arachne is aware of her need to keep moving: "That is why she wants to be a bus driver, driving seems to be the only sensible way to deal with the world. She'd made a list: cab driver, truck driver, bus driver. She is infatuated not with machines but with motion, the illusion that she is going somewhere, getting away."<sup>48</sup> Her ultimate career is as a travelling salesperson, another form of continual movement. The novel ends with Arachne on the run from the police. She disappears up a road in the Yukon that appears to have no end. The novel ends with someone searching for Arachne finding only a trail of ladies' underwear on the road:

*A few miles up the road a flash of color makes you slam on your brakes. You slide out and step into the ditch, bend to retrieve it. The panties are gray with dust but their scarlet invitation has not faded. Ladies' Comfort. Another few miles and you find a peach pair, then a turquoise, then sunshine yellow. Each time you stop, shake the dust from their silky surface and toss them on the seat beside you. There will be no end to the panties; there will be no end to this road.*<sup>49</sup>

There is more significance in Arachne's going north than is suggested in this passage.

In her interview, Aritha van Herk agreed with the concept of Albertans' need to escape, to find the Promised Land. She added that now that there is no 'land beyond the mountains' that has not been discovered, that the North has become the 'new west',

---

<sup>48</sup> Van Herk, No Fixed Address, p. 68.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

the Promised Land that is still unknown.<sup>50</sup> Her imagery in The Tent Peg supports this theory. It takes up the theme of woman against the elements, which, due to the decline of landscape in more contemporary prairie literature, has been neglected in the more settled and urban areas of Alberta. J.L. is impressed with the ruggedness of the Yukon: “I am mesmerized, frozen here looking down. Two hours we have flown transfixed by that fatal design. For it is dangerous. Skull teeth gleam through an invitation; the tundra can both restore and maim. No man lives to presume its power.”<sup>51</sup> Mackenzie, a geologist in the camp, is also attracted to the vastness of the tundra, and his position in relation to it: “I am sitting in my hotel room, as close to the window as possible so I can get some light to fall across these maps. Nothing but tundra and lakes, lakes and tundra. Once you’re out there, in amongst the moss and the occasional outcrop, you melt right down into the barrens. Not a dot of anyone anywhere. And I like it that way.”<sup>52</sup> It seems, and van Herk concurs, that no matter how much is discovered and how settled Albertans are, they will always look for an escape, for something better—for the Promised Land.

The only concept that is comparable to the search for the Promised Land in Guy Vanderhaeghe’s works is that of raised hopes and disappointment. Any time any romantic notions are entertained, they are soon dashed by a harsh dose of reality. One humorous example is in his short story “Loneliness Has Its Claims”. Charlie Bradley is a boy who is sent to spend the summer on his grandmother’s farm:

Driven to distraction, I’d hoist my bag and stagger forward, telling myself that just around the turn in the road waited a cooling beverage, shade, and if I was lucky, maybe even an electric fan.

---

<sup>50</sup> Van Herk, interview.

<sup>51</sup> Van Herk, The Tent Peg (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart-Bantam Limited, 1981), p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

This was the best I could expect up the road. The year before, my father had been able to whip up my enthusiasms, con me with his blather about how I was going to a “real farm.” Back then, when I was eleven, innocent and naïve, the words “real farm” had conjured up visions of a dog gambolling loyally at my heels, a fishing hole, maybe a pony to ride. Best of all, a gun to shoot and wildlife to massacre. What I discovered on arriving was a dust-bowl-Okie nightmare, junked machinery, unpainted out-buildings patched with flattened tin cans and defunct licence plates, ziggurats of rotten manure, the only farm livestock idiot chickens living an outlaw life, gobbling bugs and flamboyantly strutting about the property. In charge of this god-forsaken spot was the most frightening adult I had ever encountered: Matilda Bradley, six feet and 180 pounds of chain-smoking, out-of-the-bottle-auburn-hair, seventy-year-old, hard-ass grandmother.<sup>53</sup>

The lesson seems to be that there is no escape, and no point in expecting the situation to be anything romantic in the least. To do so will only lead to disappointment. As in Vanderhaeghe’s landscape imagery, hoping is the most you can do, and even that does not result in much.

It seems then, that the tendency is for Albertans to be more likely to expect an escape, or a romanticized happy ending, while Saskatchewanites can only hope the situation does not worsen. This theory is expressed perfectly in a quote that Vanderhaeghe uses from Kirkegaard in one of his short stories:

“There is nothing everyone is so afraid of as being told how vastly much he is capable of. You are capable of—do you want to know?—you are capable of living in poverty; you are capable of standing almost any kind of maltreatment, abuse, etc. But you do not wish to know about it, isn’t that so, and only call that person who bolsters you in saying: ‘No, this I cannot bear, this is beyond my strength, etc.’”<sup>54</sup>

Vanderhaeghe has already stated that there is no point in flight, since your past follows you wherever you go. For van Herk, flight is understood, and the search for greener pastures is a never-ending quest, both for her and her characters.

<sup>53</sup> Vanderhaeghe, “Loneliness Has Its Claims” in *Things As They Are?*, p. 185–186.

<sup>54</sup> Vanderhaeghe, “Sam, Soren and Ed” in *Man Descending*, p. 226.

## V. Conclusion

This chapter deals with several elements at once. First it compares an author from both Saskatchewan and Alberta. Second, these authors are male and female, accounting for fundamental differences outside their regional identities. Third, each author has written several texts with several varying themes. Several dimensions had to be addressed at once, including changes in prairie writing over time, in gender differences, and from province to province. We have, however, from this tangled and multi-dimensional web, managed to derive regional and provincial themes from the texts. While van Herk is concerned with several issues of identity, including region, feminism, culture and class, and Vanderhaeghe is focused on perfecting the balance between the elements of fiction, they both personally admit a provincially-based identity, and express it in their texts. They are in agreement on issues such as the effect that rural space has on those who spend their childhood on the prairie, and on the stubborn pride and fierce self-reliance that prairie dwellers possess. They differ in their representation of landscape, economics and philosophies of place. These differences, while augmented by gender, would, I would argue, exist whether the authors were both male or both female. While some foci of the literature have changed over time, the themes are still as evident in Vanderhaeghe's and van Herk's writing as they are in Stead's, O'Hagan's, and Mitchell's. Time may have made the themes subtler, but they remain consistent.

## Chapter Six Conclusion

The dimensions of this study are many and varied. It is interdisciplinary, crossing the boundaries of literature and politics. Within those disciplines, it focuses on region and province. In its literary approach, it compares the agendas of Saskatchewan and Alberta writers of both sexes. All of these elements are studied in the context of historical progression, from the early twentieth century to the present. Yet, despite all the angles that have been investigated, only a tiny section of prairie literature and political identity have been covered. One might ask, what is the relevance of such a narrow approach to the study of identity? The reader should be reminded that to cover all of the approaches and angles in the research within the space and time allowed, a small cross-section had to be selected. Keeping this in mind, the undertaking is most obviously relevant because so few contributions have been made, in either political science or English, to the comparative study of Saskatchewan and Alberta. Its result is also relevant: there is evidence that politics and literature in the prairie provinces are linked.

To recount what has been studied, the early, more rudimentary texts provide a literary tradition in which to place the later works. Their themes and imagery, summarized as "limited expectations" and "limitless possibility," support the conceptual framework of images for Saskatchewan and Alberta. From there, the micro-region of W.O. Mitchell was examined. While the same dichotomies existed, it was difficult to separate them provincially. Nevertheless, Mitchell did distinguish between Saskatchewan and Alberta in his comments on economics and in his portrayal of

characters from one province or the other. Aritha van Herk focused not only on her region but also on other issues such as feminism and culture. Her texts offer a powerful example that themes of romance and escape to the promised land in Alberta literature have survived the evolution of the literary tradition. Guy Vanderhaeghe too represents a conscious effort to modernize his province's literary tradition while working within it. He, like earlier Saskatchewan authors, writes of limited expectations and often focuses on survival. But what do these conclusions suggest in the realm of politics?

Edward McCourt said that art is the "product of a communal mind and outlook." Part of that 'communal mind and outlook,' and the physical environment in which the art develops, stems from political institutions. I would argue that the communal mind of the artists studied here is to some extent separated by the provincial boundaries that divide the territory into the jurisdictions of provincial governments. This is by no means entirely the case. It can be easily argued that there is a collective consciousness that corresponds with the prairies, and that it has nothing to do with the provinces. Yet the subtle differences between Saskatchewan and Alberta writers' imagery and philosophy reflect an identification with their home province, and differentiate them from the other.

Perhaps the best way to illuminate this study is to discuss what it is not. This project does not pretend to be objective. Its nature demands an interpretive approach to the subject matter. Thus, the reader may ask, if someone else were to read the texts presented here, would the same conclusions be reached? My initial response to this question would be that the only way to test that question is to assign someone else to read the texts and find what they discover. It is more important, however, that the



ethics of post-modernism be embraced, and that every interpretation be considered valid if it can be theoretically supported. I would also like to point out that I did not enter the research with the intention of proving my hypothesis. I approached it with the simple goal of acquiring a greater understanding of the subject, whether the hypothesis be proved or disproved. What I found supported my hypothesis, and I did not discover any passages that, to my knowledge, were antithetical to my work. Other researchers may have documented different results, or even have discarded my approach as a waste of time. Eli Mandel, for example, would adamantly disagree with my method and my findings: to him I would reply, where would academia be without discourse?

In the same vein, this research is not the definitive work on prairie culture, politics, or literature. Other approaches, such as a study of immigration patterns or an economic study of Saskatchewan and Alberta, further aid an understanding of the differences and similarities in the provinces. Those factors contributed to the development of the political systems that are reflected in the literature. This particular study tentatively puts forth an alternative way of approaching political identity: by erasing the boundaries between disciplines. This approach challenges the assumptions that political culture is evident only in overtly political acts, such as voting behaviour, party systems and the like. Writing is a political act, and whether that act affects the political reality or is affected by the political reality, it is inarguably linked to politics. The authors that were interviewed suggest that their writing is affected by the political reality. The political system was in place before they wrote, and their writing reflects that system. The few authors that have been studied, however, do not prove that this approach is valid. They do suggest that there is logic in pursuing it further. W.O.

Mitchell, Aritha van Herk and Guy Vanderhaeghe provide the pilot case study for a new approach that pulls politics and literature together in an effort to improve the understanding of prairie society.

There is one important factor that has affected the political systems and the writing in Saskatchewan and Alberta: landscape. The land has shaped the literature, and it has shaped the politics of the prairie provinces. From the symbols and themes evident in prairie writing, it seems that prairie literature and prairie politics diverge along similar lines. The party systems in Saskatchewan and Alberta grew out of rural-based, grass roots movements in response to the Depression, yet they moved in opposite ideological directions. The literature grew out of a rural-based society, imprinted by the harsh landscape, yet Saskatchewan and Alberta writers interpret their world through different-coloured glasses—one tinted with reality and co-operation, and the other with romance and individualism.

If political identity is expressed even in the literature, then that identity is a strong and permanent fixture in society. As Guy Vanderhaeghe stated in his interview, prairie society is becoming more urban, less affected by the rural experience, the weather, the landscape. Yet these conditions shaped the political realities and the societies in Saskatchewan and Alberta. Even if technology and urbanization ever manage to render ineffective the extreme weather and the endless space, their legacies will remain, in both political culture and the art that reflects it.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ashcroft, Bill, et al. The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Cairns, Alan. "The Government and Societies of Canadian Federalism." The Canadian Journal of Political Science 10, No. 3 (September 1977): 695-725.
- Cairns, Alan C. and Edwin R. Black. "A Different Perspective on Canadian Federalism." Canadian Public Administration 9, No. 1 (March 1966): 25-41.
- Carpenter, David. "Alberta in fiction: the emergence of a provincial consciousness." Journal of Canadian Studies 10, No. 4 (November 1975): 12-23.
- Cooper, Barry. "The West: A Political Minority" in Minorities and the Canadian State. Neil Nevitte and Allan Kornberg, eds. Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1985: 203-220.
- "Western Political Consciousness" in Political Thought in Canada. Stephen Brooks, ed. Toronto: Irwin Publishing Inc., 1984: 213-238.
- Davey, Frank. Post-National Arguments: The Politics of the Anglophone-Canadian Novel since 1967. Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 1993.
- Reading Canadian Reading: Essays by Frank Davey. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1988.
- Surviving the Paraphrase: Eleven Essays on Canadian Literature. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1983.
- Friesen, Gerald. "Three Generations of Fiction: An Introduction to Prairie Cultural History" in Eastern and Western Perspectives: Papers from the Joint Atlantic Canada/Western Canadian Studies Conference. David Jay Bercuson and Phillip A. Buckner, eds. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981: 183-196.
- Frye, Northrop. The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination. Toronto: House of Anansi Press Ltd., 1971.
- Hutcheon, Linda. The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English Canadian Fiction. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Kriesel, Henry. "The Prairie: A State of Mind." Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada Volume VI, Series IV (June 1968): 171-180.

Mandel, Eli. "Images of Prairie Man" in A Region of the Mind: Interpreting the Western Canadian Plains. Richard Allen, ed. Regina: Canadian Plains Study Centre, 1973: 201-209.

----- . "Romance and Realism in Western Canadian Fiction" in Prairie Perspectives 2: Selected Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference, 1970, 1971. A.W. Rasporich and H.C. Klassen, eds. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1973: 197-211.

McCourt, Edward. The Canadian West in Fiction. Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1949.

----- . "Prairie Literature and its Critics" in A Region of the Mind: Interpreting the Western Canadian Plains. Richard Allen, ed. Regina: Canadian Plains Study Centre, 1973: 153-162.

----- . Saskatchewan. Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1968.

Mitchell, W.O. How I Spent My Summer Holidays. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1981.

----- . Jake and the Kid. Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1961.

----- . The Kite. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1962.

----- . Ladybug, Ladybug.... Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988.

----- . Roses Are Difficult Here. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990.

----- . Since Daisy Creek. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1984.

----- . The Vanishing Point. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1973.

----- . Who Has Seen the Wind. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1947.

O'Hagan, Howard. Tav John Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989.

Ricou, Laurence. Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973.

Smith, David E. "A Comparison of Prairie Political Developments in Saskatchewan and Alberta." Journal of Canadian Studies 4 No. 1 (February 1969): 17-26.

Stead, Robert. Grain. New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926.

Stegner, Wallace. Wolf Willow: A History, A Story, and A Memory of the Last Plains Frontier. New York: The Viking Press, 1971.

Van Herk, Aritha. A Frozen Tongue. Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1992.

----- . Judith. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Limited, 1978.

----- . No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Limited, 1986

----- . Personal Interview. Monday, November 3, 1997, 3:00 PM.

----- . Places Far From Ellesmere. Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 1990.

----- . The Tent Peg. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1981.

Vanderhaeghe, Guy. The Englishman's Boy. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1996.

----- . Homesick. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1989.

----- . Man Descending. Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co. Limited, 1982.

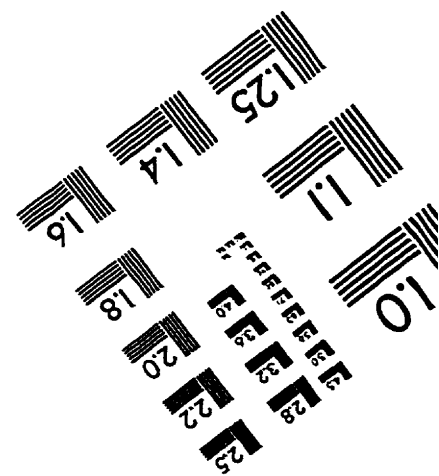
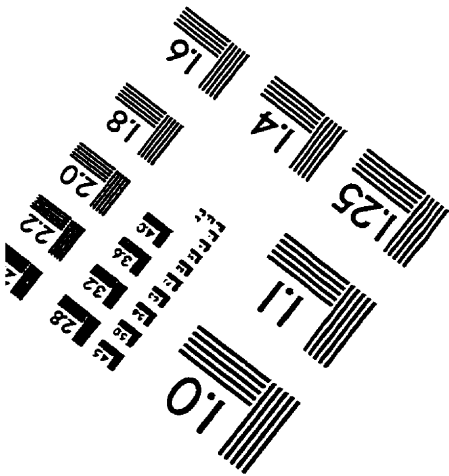
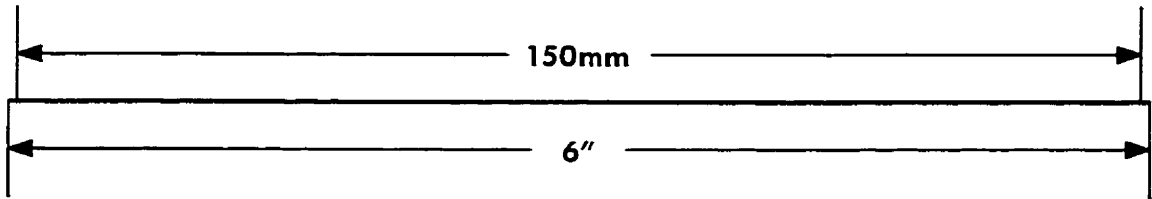
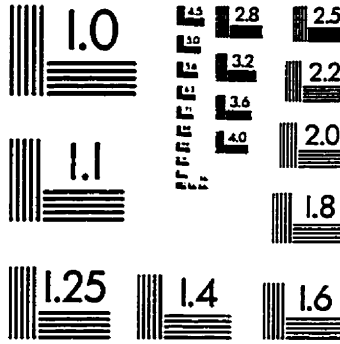
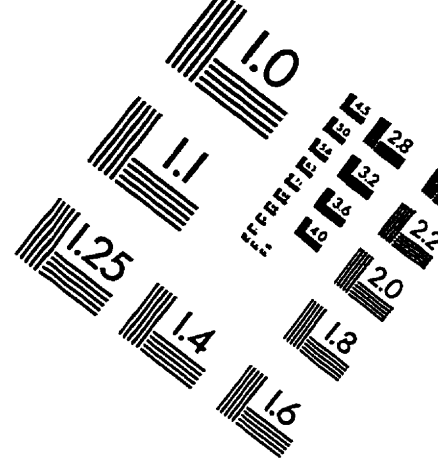
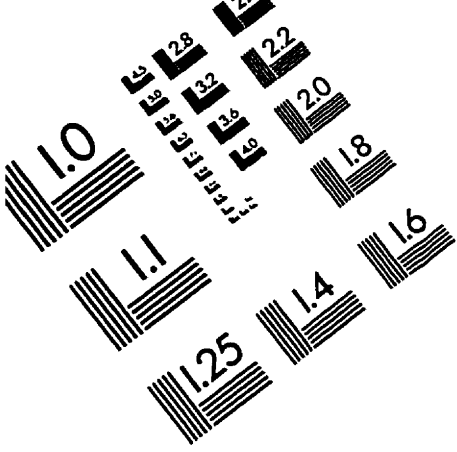
----- . My Present Age. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1986.

----- . Personal Interview. Thursday, November 6, 1997, 1:00 PM.

----- . Things As They Are? Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1992.

Wiseman, Nelson. "Patterns of Prairie Politics" in The Prairie West: Historical Readings, 2nd ed. R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer, eds. Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1984.

# TEST TARGET (QA-3)



APPLIED IMAGE, Inc  
1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, NY 14609 USA  
Phone: 716/482-0300  
Fax: 716/288-5989

© 1993, Applied Image, Inc., All Rights Reserved