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**Critiquing the Most Congenial of Lives:
The Rise of the Canadian Academic Novel**

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Critiquing the Most Congenial of Lives:
The Rise of the Canadian Academic Novel

Poonam Bajwa

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Abstract

Focusing on a selection of pioneering works, which include Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1969), Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian* (1973), Robertson Davies's *The Rebel Angels* (1981), and Carol Shields's *Swann* (1987), this dissertation traces the uncharted emergence and development of the Canadian academic novel and argues that it should be recognized alongside its already well-documented American and British counterparts as constituting a significant contribution to the sub-genre. The novels under consideration, published between 1969 and 1987, directly respond to the contemporaneous growth and expansion of the Canadian university as well as, in light of this expansion, its resultant growing pains: in this saturated academic climate, producing unique scholarship that would both secure the individual's professional status as well as contribute to the broader public in a discernable fashion became increasingly difficult. In response, these novelists, whose works are set primarily in English departments, target the scholar's tendency to prioritize professional self-interest above scholarly idealism rather than strike a productive balance between the two. Entering into an ongoing dialogue about the value of humanities (particularly literary) scholarship, they ultimately suggest that when alternative models of scholarly inquiry are adopted in place of standard paradigms and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge remains the foundational guiding principle, the resulting research has the potential to offer invaluable insights with broader cultural and social resonances.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic fiction has long been recognized as an established sub-genre in the American and British literary canons, with Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1952), Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954), and the works of David Lodge standing out as notable exemplars. Critics such as Mortimer R. Proctor, John O. Lyons, Ian Carter, Janice Rossen, Kenneth Womack, and Elaine Showalter have published valuable critical studies on these novels, which incorporate academic settings and characters and, in so doing, offer sustained (and most often satirical) examinations of academic values and practices. No studies, however, have been conducted on the emergence of *Canadian* academic fiction even though prominent Canadian novelists—namely, Margaret Atwood, Robert Kroetsch, Robertson Davies, and Carol Shields—have published novels that engage significantly with the questions and concerns that are central to the sub-genre.

Throughout this dissertation, I examine the valuable yet overlooked contributions these Canadian novelists have made to academic fiction by focusing on a selection of pioneering works: Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1969), Kroetsch's *Gone Indian* (1973), Davies's *The Rebel Angels* (1981), and Shields's *Swann* (1987). Although indebted to their American and British precursors, these works must be recognized as comprising a distinct Canadian tradition.¹ These novels, published between 1969 and 1987, directly respond to the contemporaneous growth and expansion of the Canadian university as well as to its resultant growing pains; more specifically, they target the scholar's tendency in

¹ My intention in this project is not to provide a comparative study of the American, British, and Canadian traditions. Although a certain degree of comparison is inevitable, my aim is to assert the presence of a Canadian tradition, examine the unique conditions that gave rise to its emergence, and analyze some of its key exemplars. From this foundation, future comparative studies can potentially emerge.

this increasingly competitive academic climate to prioritize professional self-interest above scholarly idealism, a tendency that results, they argue, in the production of research that advances the scholar's dossier more so than it advances knowledge generally. Indeed, literary scholars in particular (who figure prominently in Canadian academic novels) have the potential not only to function as stewards of culture but also to produce scholarship that pushes boundaries and challenges complacent viewpoints, thereby helping to shape public discourse and opinion; according to these novelists, though, the pressures of a scholarly milieu governed by commercial ideology undermine these more idealistic motivations. In response, each novelist highlights the compromised quality of contemporary scholarship and suggests ways to reinvest scholarly endeavours and research with broader cultural and social relevance. In so doing, they enter into an ongoing dialogue about the value of humanities scholarship, ultimately suggesting that when scholarly ambition is kept in perspective and alternative models of scholarly inquiry are adopted in place of standard paradigms, the resulting research has the potential to offer important insights with broader resonances. These novelists are thus less concerned with rehearsing common images of academe that appeal primarily to academic insiders and instead focus on articulating the capacity for humanities scholars to conduct research in such a way that facilitates an engagement with and accountability to the world outside of the university rather than a complete alienation from it. As such, through their interrogation of the value of humanities scholarship, they also engage with contemporary debate about the demarcations separating the scholar from the public intellectual; by promoting a model of scholarship that is responsive to the broader

community, they suggest the possibility of integrating these seemingly distinct roles into one unified figure.

Following the Second World War, the Canadian university began a process of restructuring and expansion in order to accommodate growing numbers of students. As Claude Bissell explains, “there was an influx of veterans into the universities” who “communicated a taste for higher education to their younger brothers and sisters and, later, to their large and flourishing families” (“Canada” 176). While in the preceding decade a university education was viewed as a prerequisite to a job and therefore appreciated as an economic necessity, by the 1960s attitudes shifted such that “[s]tudents were looking for utopias, and the universities, if reshaped, might qualify. To these students, the university was more and more a natural extension of secondary school; it was not so much a preparation for a job as a necessary stage in development” (177). The impact of this new mentality which held that the university was part of a rite of passage that all young adults must experience is reflected in the enrolment statistics of the period: “enrolment more than doubled between 1955 and 1962, and then doubled again by 1969” (Dunning 49). This substantial increase in the number of students meant that qualified professors were in demand; accordingly, the “academic job market was increasingly lively in the early 1960’s” (Horn 247). Professors were afforded more respect and status, and this was reflected in many structural changes that characterized the university at this time, including the introduction of a “revised governance structure” which allowed “for increased participation of faculty and students” (Jones 4). Furthermore, the field of literary scholarship in Canada became especially active beginning in this period as a result of, among other factors, “the formation of the institution of English-Canadian

literature, a university-based culture devoted to the study of the nation's literature” (Lecker, *Making* 3).

This period of rapid growth, which signaled the emergence of a distinctively Canadian system of higher education that was no longer as reliant upon British and American models, was accompanied by inevitable backlash.² The expansion of the university faculty, composed of professors who both taught and conducted research, meant that in this saturated academic climate, producing unique scholarship became increasingly difficult. Moreover, the costs of providing for a substantially larger student body as well as paying the salaries of the increased faculty and staff meant that funding became a renewed concern. Unlike American universities, a significant number of which are private institutions and are therefore funded at least in part by various private bodies and donors, Canadian universities depend primarily on government funding, meaning that they are under added pressure to cultivate public support in order to maintain steady funding. The universities must therefore demonstrate to the public that the work they do, both in terms of pedagogy and research, warrants this financing. Because the value and relevance of humanities scholarship may not be as immediately recognizable as is the value of other more practical or science-based disciplines, humanities departments in particular felt (and continue to feel) the pressure to justify the work they conduct.

In response to these various changes and resultant anxieties, prominent Canadian novelists began publishing novels that engage with these timely issues. The selection of novels under consideration appeared during a relatively brief yet fraught historical window; their publication dates span 1969 to 1987, a period that comprises the tail-end of

² The development of these three systems of higher education will be traced in the next chapter.

the university's massive expansion as well as, in light of this expansion, the introduction of various debates on the state and value of the academy. Completed in 1965 and published in 1969, Atwood's *The Edible Woman* signaled the emergence of this sub-genre in Canada.³ She was writing during a period when university development and public esteem were at their height, yet rather than revel in this positive climate, she focuses her attention on the plight of the individual scholar who must resort to questionable means to stay afloat in an increasingly saturated academic milieu—that is, she explores the pressure on the scholar to sacrifice scholarly idealism for competitive self-interest and self-preservation. Kroetsch's *Gone Indian* (1973) examines the scholar's growing alienation from his or her own work as a result of such incessant competition. Atwood and Kroetsch were writing in the midst of this period of unprecedented expansion and so their novels, while valuable for initiating an examination into enduring academic concerns, were unable to contextualize these concerns as effectively as were Davies and Shields. Indeed, as Elaine Showalter notes, academic novels (like all novels) are “always a belated form of social commentary” (34) because the benefit of hindsight is needed in order to appreciate the full resonance of major changes and transformations within the university. David Laidler asserts that the university's period of growth slowed down around 1973, but it was not until the following decade that both the university community and the community at large began to take stock of these various transformations in any substantial way (4). Thus, Davies

³ It can be argued that the sub-genre emerged earlier with such novels as Constance Beresford-Howe's *Of This Day's Journey* (1947), Davies's Salterton trilogy (published in the 1950s), Earle Birney's *Down the Long Table* (1955), Jane Rule's *The Desert of the Heart* (1964), and Marian Engel's *No Clouds of Glory* (1968) (subsequently published as *Sarah Bastard's Notebook* in 1974), but these novels incorporate academic settings and characters without engaging substantially with academic ideals and values. Even so, these novels are valuable precursors to the sub-genre, and as such, they will be addressed in some detail in the next chapter.

and Shields offer more focused analyses of academe than their precursors because they were writing when many of these changes had firmly taken shape and they were therefore in a position to reflect on their implications in a more sustained manner. Both *The Rebel Angels* (1981) and *Swann* (1987) extend the interrogations initiated by Atwood and Kroetsch while also focusing their attention more explicitly on how best to make humanities scholarship responsive and accountable to the broader non-academic community, thereby addressing what was at the time (and what continues to be) an enduring challenge for scholars who work in seemingly abstract disciplines that produce research without direct or quantifiable social relevance. Ultimately, though, all four of the core novelists considered in this study offer variations on a common theme: they are each concerned with how to recuperate the idealism in an increasingly competitive scholarly climate in which the “publish or perish” mentality threatens to undermine the quality and relevance of resultant scholarship.

The impetus for this study is twofold. It is firstly intended to fill in a surprising critical void.⁴ Although the Canadian contributions to the sub-genre do not even begin to approach the staggering number of publications that have emerged from Britain and the

⁴ In his article “The University as the Hidden Ground of Canadian Literature,” Bruce W. Powe explores the fact that many of our most prominent novelists are affiliated with the academic domain and argues “[t]hat this fact has remained unquestioned and unexamined is an alarming aspect of Canadian literary studies” (12) In his brief article, he does not analyze any specific works written by these novelists nor does he reflect in detail on the implications of this phenomenon other than to cast this connection between academe and Canadian literature in a negative light. He contends that these novelists write exclusively for an academic audience and that “[t]his unprecedented situation in literature has virtually deprived us of the power and urgency of great art, for art must break this mold [of the security of the university] if it is to *mean*—and mean *beyond* the self-referential atmosphere of systems and curricula, blackboards and chalk” (14) He does not acknowledge the fact that for many of these novelists, the university does not function as a self-enclosed sphere but rather it is the site and subject of important interrogations which speak to the values and concerns of the community both within and beyond the academy

United States,⁵ this is no reason to discount them entirely.⁶ Though comprising a significantly shorter list, Canadian academic novels make up for this brevity with the quality and depth of their response to endemic institutional issues within the Canadian university. Considered in this study are the progenitors of the sub-genre; this elite group consists of four of Canada's most prominent canonical novelists who have written popular and influential works that provide much-needed focused interrogations of the contemporary climate of humanities scholarship and they do so by employing engaging, dynamic approaches that appeal to a broad readership rather than to a limited sphere. These works, though comparatively few, emerged from an impressive list of precursors (which will be addressed in more detail in the next chapter) and comprise a sturdy foundation for the ensuing flourishing of the sub-genre as evinced by the publication of recent works by such novelists as David Adams Richards, Alan Cumyn, Mary Lawson, and Lynn Coady. As such, an acknowledgement and examination of the enduring contribution of these pioneering works of Canadian academic fiction is both warranted and long overdue.

In addition to addressing an area of critical neglect, this dissertation also aims to engage in what has become a timely and crucial dialogue for anyone involved in the arts and culture sector in Canada: the value and purpose of the arts in Canada, or, more specifically, the value and purpose of humanities scholarship in and for Canada. Prime

⁵ With respect to American academic novels, John E. Kramer's annotated bibliography *The American College Novel* (2004) notes 648 novels have been published between 1828 and 2002 (vi). An equivalent British bibliography has yet to be produced, but judging from the sheer volume of both American and British novels covered in existing critical studies, the number of British publications is likely in the same range.

⁶ Shields's *Swann* is frequently acknowledged as an academic novel in American and British critical studies (particularly Janice Rossen's *The University in Modern Fiction* [1993] and Elaine Showalter's *Faculty Towers* [2005]), but it is most often either presented as an anomaly in Canadian literature or else subsumed into the American tradition of academic fiction.

Minister Stephen Harper provoked an angered and indignant response from many Canadians when, in 2008, he proclaimed (in order to justify substantial funding cuts to the arts and culture sector) that “ordinary people” in Canada do not care about the arts.⁷ The Conservative government’s minimizing of the importance of the arts in general inevitably carries with it a targeted dismissal of the humanities in particular. As the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) reveals in its analysis of the 2009 federal budget, the government allotted \$87.5 million towards the expansion of the Graduate Scholarship Program but with a notable caveat: the “government will require that these scholarships awarded by SSHRC be focused on business-related degrees. An additional \$3.5 million over three years will be provide [sic] to the Industrial Research and Development Internship program that supports graduate students in science and business.” Despite the name of the granting council, none of these additional funds awarded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council was earmarked for humanities research. CAUT concludes, “it is disturbing that the government is again targeting funding toward specific research projects and priorities it has chosen. CAUT believes that funding decisions should be assessed on their merit by the research community.” Ideally, both the public and the research community should have their voices heard in such matters.

The federal government’s blatant disregard for the importance of humanities scholarship demonstrates that the novelists under consideration were addressing an issue of enduring resonance: how best to articulate the value of the humanities to a broader public that may not immediately recognize it. Although they were writing during a period when this issue was just beginning to come to the fore, little has changed with

⁷ Benzie, Robert, “Ordinary folks don’t care about arts: Harper,” *Toronto Star* (24 September 2008).

respect to public perception of the humanities. These novelists engage with this discussion by exploring the causes underlying this devaluing of the humanities as well as by reaffirming that the work undertaken by these scholars can indeed have broader resonances. These novelists, each of whom was an academic for a significant period of his or her professional life, encourage scholars to reconnect with an earlier mentality of scholarship which positions a sincere desire to advance knowledge above a more self-interested (though ultimately inevitable) desire to secure and advance one's professional standing. They argue that this restructuring of the aims of scholarship is the first step in making the humanities more responsive and accountable to society at large.

That these novelists are so concerned with promoting a sense of interconnection between the academic and public spheres suggests that central to their critique of academe is their belief in the need not only to make the scholarship more relevant, but also to make the scholar a more accessible figure. As Robert Lecker notes, "[t]he pursuit of specialization and special interests has prompted academics to turn inward, toward professional values and discursive models that are increasingly uncivic" (*Making* 12). Numerous critical studies have emerged in recent decades which examine what constitutes a public intellectual and how this figure differs from the academic scholar. Amitai Etzioni offers a general explanation of public intellectuals: they "opine on a wide array of issues, are generalists rather than specialists, concern themselves with matters of interest to the public at large, and do not keep their views to themselves" (1). According to prevailing belief, whereas the academic shares his or her ideas with a specialized academic audience, public intellectuals engage with the interests of the broader community. Helen Small points out that "many have debated whether the academic can

plausibly be an intellectual, especially when the institution providing him or her with financial support seeks in some measure to define the kinds of work undertaken” (2). Others have presented the debate along the following lines: “[a]ccording to some journalists and critics, the university is unable to facilitate or sustain publicly relevant work; thus, public intellectuals are primarily or exclusively to be found outside academe,” while on the other hand, “[m]any scholars are quick to debunk the idea that their university careers are antithetical to the life and goals of public intellectuals” (Brouwer and Squires 37). Arthur M. Melzer believes in a firm distinction between the two figures: “for all his love of ideas, he [the public intellectual] is not the scholar or academic because he has a vital concern for the practical application of ideas and the welfare of society” (4) whereas the scholar ostensibly does not. Most contemporary critics increasingly recognize the potential for overlap. Etzioni suggests that the public intellectual can be sub-divided into two types: “academic” intellectuals and “bohemian” intellectuals (10). The former derive from universities but are criticized by the public for being too academic and by their peers, dubbed “pure academics,” for being too superficial; the latter are educated individuals who are not affiliated with a particular academic institution and who are often criticized for being too popular (11). Drawing on the works of C. Wright Mills and Pierre Bourdieu, Ira Katznelson explores the possibility of a more unified intellectual figure:

Combining detachment with engagement and universal scientific and ethical legitimation with local interventions, scholars as intellectuals share commitments to autonomy, scholarly authority, and to the institutional requisites for rational thinking, but not as exclusive values. Their public aspirations also enmesh them

in the wider culture's institutions, values, and practices, where the judgments of nonscholars about what is important usually counts the most. (190)

This interconnection between the aims of the scholar and the public intellectual is necessary because otherwise, as Katznelson aptly notes, "the academy's organized disciplines risk solipsistic enclosure and public culture faces the jeopardy of debasement" (191).

All of the novelists under consideration echo Katznelson's belief that contemporary academics need to become public scholars who are capable of producing work that promotes the ideals of the university while also contributing to society in a discernable fashion. This shared concern with the public resonance of scholarship is especially appropriate in light of the shifts in Canadian literary criticism over the course of the twentieth century. Prior to 1950, the Canadian literary critic was, relatively speaking, more of a public academic because the material was more likely to be presented and geared, at least in part, towards public audiences. Heather Murray notes that "early critical work was eclectic and most often intended for public consumption" (75) while Lecker somewhat dismissively describes it as "public cheerleading discourse aligned with patriotism" (*Making* 73). Both argue that with the Massey Report recommendations of 1951, the establishment of the National Library in 1953, the introduction of both the New Canadian Library series and the Canada Council in 1957, and the emergence of such scholarly journals as *Canadian Literature* in 1959, the infrastructure was in place for the institutionalization of Canadian literature and an accompanying industry of literary criticism. These factors, as well as the incorporation of European poststructuralist theory in the 1960s and 1970s, produced an increasingly

professionalized and specialized literary discourse which was also private in the sense that it was becoming less accessible to a general public (both physically since publications are often not in publicly accessible locations as well as in terms of content and style). I do not mean to suggest that literary criticism from the early twentieth century is somehow substandard compared to more recent criticism (or vice versa); rather, I simply want to highlight the emergence of a progressively specialized discourse which increasingly alienates the broader public. In response, many academics began voicing their concern over this shift. Notably, in his editorial preface for the first issue of *Canadian Literature* in 1959, George Woodcock attempts to minimize this gap between public and private. He writes that the journal will not

restrict itself to the exclusiveness of the “little clan.” *Canadian Literature* seeks to establish no clan, little or large. It will not adopt a narrowly academic approach, nor will it try to restrict its pages to any school of criticism or any class of writers. It is published by a university, but many of its present and future contributors live and work outside academic circles, and long may they continue to do so, for the independent men and women of letters are the solid core of any mature literature. Good writing, writing that says something fresh and valuable on literature in Canada is what we seek, no matter where it originates. (4)

It is debatable, to say the least, how closely *Canadian Literature* has followed this initial all-inclusive mandate (particularly in light of the increasing prominence of specialized theory in literary criticism in the subsequent decades), but this preface reinforces an enduring desire to make literary scholarship more broadly relevant and resonant. In recent decades, an anxiety within the academic community regarding this shift from

public to private scholarly discourse continues and many academics (including Lecker, Shirley Neuman, and Len Findlay) have begun issuing a call to their peers to become more politicized and public and to translate their interpretive skills from inside of the academy to the broader community and to the realm of public policy.

The fact that the novelists included in this study examine this public/private divide in their fiction, often through novels which depart from strictly academic settings and characters, is thus relevant in light of the trajectory of literary criticism in Canada throughout the twentieth century and this almost doubling back to a desire to engage and include the public in what have become increasingly private scholarly endeavours.

Organization and Methodology

The main trajectory of this dissertation begins with a context chapter, which provides necessary critical and historical background information for the ensuing discussion. This chapter also incorporates an overview of various precursors to the Canadian academic novel in order to demonstrate that this sub-genre, though seemingly late to emerge,⁸ is based in a tradition of works that examine academe to varying degrees. Following this chapter, the study is divided into four core chapters, each of which focuses on the work of one of the key novelists under consideration, and it ends with a conclusion that examines

⁸ Although the first fully developed American and British academic novels were published beginning in the nineteenth century, as the next chapter will demonstrate, the sub-genre did not adopt the format it currently takes nor did it achieve the vast number of publications it currently enjoys until the mid-twentieth century. As such, the emergence of the Canadian tradition is not as late as it may initially appear.

the future directions of the sub-genre by looking briefly at works by Richards, Cumyn, Lawson, and Coady.

I have chosen to concentrate on a select number of novels by Atwood, Kroetsch, Davies, and Shields, and I acknowledge that my study by no means examines an exhaustive list of Canadian academic novels. In addition to John Metcalf's *General Ludd* (1980) and Susan Charlotte Haley's *A Nest of Singing Birds* (1984), both of which I discuss briefly in the next chapter, other notable works include Gail Bowen's *Burying Ariel* (2000) and, to a lesser extent, Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993). For the purposes and scope of this study, however, rather than provide a broad survey of all Canadian novels that have treated academe in some form, I have opted to provide a detailed analysis of a selection of prominent novelists whose works have helped to define the parameters of the academic novel as well as popularize it and position it within the Canadian literary imagination as a reputable sub-genre. Furthermore, it is worth noting that several influential Canadian writers, including Atwood and Shields as well as others such as Alice Munro, have composed short stories that examine academic characters and themes.⁹ Although these contributions are valuable and speak to the prominence of academic concerns in Canadian writing, I have limited this study to an examination of novels, which, owing to their formal properties, are able to provide more sustained commentary on academic values.

Chapters Two through Five, which focus on Atwood, Kroetsch, Davies, and Shields, respectively, begin with biographical context, which demonstrates the degree to

⁹ Consider, for example, Atwood's "The Other Place" from *Moral Disorder* (2006); Munro's "Material" (from *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* [1974]), "The Beggar Maid" (from *Who Do You Think You Are?* [1979]), and "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" (from *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* [2001]); and Shields's "Ilk," "Our Men and Women," and "The Next Best Kiss" (from *Dressing Up for the Carnival* [2000]).

which the author in question has firsthand experience of the academic world he or she critiques and which therefore emphasizes that each of these authors has a vested interest in the academic reforms (or at least the increased self-awareness within the scholarly community) he or she promotes.¹⁰ I also provide a cursory overview of each novelist's oeuvre in order to highlight the fact that even though they each have one definitive academic novel, academic concerns have informed many of their other works (albeit to a lesser degree), thereby emphasizing the enduring engagement of these novelists with relevant themes. Following this introductory context, each chapter develops around a central argument pertaining to the representative novel(s) that form the focus of the chapter. Although each chapter contains a distinct argument, these arguments are interconnected and ultimately coalesce into a unified statement about the current state of and possible future directions for humanities scholarship: all of the novelists criticize an adherence to conventional paradigms of scholarly research and the prioritizing of careerist concerns over uninhibited investigation, prompting them each to promote innovative methods of scholarly inquiry that reconnect the scholar to the fundamental purpose of his or her work—the advancement of knowledge for its own sake.¹¹

¹⁰ It is worth highlighting the fact that although these novelists have all worked within the academic sphere, they have different relationships to and investments in academe. Kroetsch is perhaps the most “academic” of the novelists in the sense that he is the only one who holds a Ph.D.; moreover, he was a tenured professor with a prolific publication record who not only contributed to the field of Canadian literary criticism but also helped shape it through his promotion of postmodern and poststructuralist theory (facilitated in large part through his work as editor and co-founder of *boundary 2*). Although Atwood has also helped to shape Canadian literary criticism (most notably through the publication of *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* [1972]), she is in many ways the most critical of and distanced from academe while also the most indebted to it (since her success as a novelist has depended in large part on the role the academy has played in both teaching and studying her works). Furthermore, although Atwood, Davies, and Shields lack a Ph.D., they have all published prolifically (especially Atwood and Davies) and taught extensively (especially Davies and Shields) and are therefore well-suited to launch the critiques offered in their fiction. Their specific relationships to the academic world will be examined more thoroughly in the subsequent chapters.

¹¹ I acknowledge that this fundamental ideal is more complicated and contentious than it may initially appear, and as such, I offer a deeper interrogation in the following chapter.

The dissertation concludes by considering the ways in which the sub-genre has continued to evolve following the contributions of these four influential novelists. Focusing on Richards's *Hope in the Desperate Hour* (1996), Cumyn's *Losing It* (2001), Lawson's *Crow Lake* (2002), and Coady's *Mean Boy* (2006), I discuss how the sub-genre has shifted slightly from an interrogation into the nature of scholarly research to an exploration of the construction of an academic identity. These recent novels are primarily concerned with how academic characters unsuccessfully attempt to negotiate their personal dysfunctions and professional anxieties. Whereas the earlier novelists critique scholarly methods that are out of touch with the concerns of society, these later novelists address scholars who are disconnected from life outside of the university; ultimately, though, all of these works comment on the need to forge a closer, more interconnected relationship between the university and the surrounding community so that the scholarship is more responsive to the needs of a broader public and the scholar is well suited to communicate these resonances both within and outside of the university. Despite the slight divergence in subject matter and focus, these recent novels are testimony to the enduring growth and evolution of this dynamic Canadian sub-genre.

CHAPTER ONE

Critical and Historical Contexts

The Academic Novel Defined¹

Although “academic novel” may seem a somewhat self-evident category, it is worth beginning this study with an explication of the sub-genre. It includes any novel set primarily within an academic setting, whether on a university or college campus. In some cases, particularly with the Canadian offerings, the core action may unfold in an alternate setting, but the main characters still have clear affiliations that root them to particular institutions. These settings and affiliations are not simply incidental but rather give rise to examinations of academic values and practices; as such, novels that employ an academic setting as a general background that has little or no connection with the work’s core action and thematic concerns are discounted. Prior to the Second World War, these novels revolved around the lives of undergraduates whereas after this point, they focus mainly on faculty, especially those from humanities departments. Quite often, as is the case with most of the novels considered in this study, the focus is narrowed even further to the English department in particular. Written predominantly by academics, these novels, especially those published in the latter half of the twentieth century, focus on the minutiae of academic life (departmental politics, awkward social interactions with colleagues, the stresses of teaching, and the pressures to publish), the qualities of

¹ The sub-genre is referred to by a variety of labels—university fiction, academic fiction, campus novel, college novel, just to name a few. I have opted primarily to use “academic novel” (and occasionally, in order to facilitate ease of phrasing, “academic fiction”) for two key reasons: to limit my discussion to novels to the exclusion of other genres such as short stories and to focus on works which examine academic values and practices rather than comment on specific types of institutions (i.e., universities or colleges).

academic culture as a whole (either the conservative Oxbridge² mentality or an overly competitive, ambitious American one), or some sort of combination of the two extremes. Many of these novels, especially those written by Canadian novelists, focus in particular on the climate of academic competition which often compels scholars to lose sight of the ideal that should inform their research—the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Moreover, according to these novelists, this research most often circulates exclusively within the academic community, thus disconnecting these scholars from the world they are ostensibly examining and from alternate, perhaps more suitable, modes of approaching and examining their subjects of study. In response to this perceived corruption of scholarly ideals and culture of elitism that permeates the academy, novelists who are part of the academic sphere began producing fictional treatments in which they either gently satirize or overtly criticize these characteristics and weaknesses. The works considered in the present study, though often humorous and light-hearted, offer sustained interrogations of the current state of humanities (particularly literary) scholarship in Canada while also gesturing towards alternate, more inclusive modes of approaching scholarly inquiry as well as the broader non-academic community.

The parameters of the sub-genre are debatable. Although some limit their investigation only to those novels that focus exclusively on academic settings and themes, most critics acknowledge that the sub-genre is more complex and consists of novels that engage with academe to varying degrees. This precedent has been set by two of the most influential critics of academic fiction—Mortimer R. Proctor and John O. Lyons. As Proctor states of these novels which focus only in part on academe, “[t]hey

² This portmanteau will be used throughout the chapter in reference to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

are a part of university fiction in that they either pronounce significantly upon university education, or serve to fill out the pattern of development of the university theme in fiction, or actually influence ... the growth of the genre itself" (3). Lyons agrees, arguing that many of these novels "are by important authors or are significant because they attempt to draw the difference between the college world and the world outside" (xviii). All of the novels in this study, though ultimately grounded in an exploration of academic characters and themes, interweave academic and non-academic elements: although they are set *primarily* within the academic world, they are not limited to dealing *exclusively* with this world. Indeed, it is the incorporation of non-academic characters that fuels the criticisms these novels put forth. The intuitive, spiritual, and subjective forms of knowledge and experience these characters bring to the novels demonstrate by contrast the limits of the academy's over-reliance on rational approaches and the questionable nature of its claims to objectivity; the opposite relationship also holds true, with academic rationality highlighting the gaps in purely intuitive approaches. Moreover, not only do these novels "draw the difference" (Lyons xviii) between the university and the world outside, but they also suggest ways to forge a more productive, interconnected relationship such that the work conducted within the university has applications outside of it.

Where Proctor's and Lyons's definitions of the sub-genre falter is in their dismissal of the importance of humour in these novels. Proctor's introductory summation of the trajectory of academic fiction captures his distaste for the inclusion of humour: "the fictional representation of English university life was developed from an initial stage of crudeness and vulgarity, through a middle period in which humor and the doctrines of

university reform were strangely mingled, *to the final achievement of a serious and mature statement* of the very nature of university education” (vii; emphasis added).

Lyons similarly considers “a novel of academic life one in which higher education is treated with seriousness” (xvii). Recent critics take a different perspective. In his introduction to *The Academic Novel: New and Classic Essays* (2007), Merritt Moseley bemoans the fact that “[d]iscussions of the academic novel are, by and large, too humorless. *Most academic novels are comic*. This does not, or need not, make them satiric; and the non-satiric comic novel is not necessarily less worthy than the satiric novel or the so-called ‘serious’ novel” (18; emphasis in original). He concludes, “[a]nalysis of humor is of course nearly impossible and trying to persuade one person to laugh at what another finds funny is vain; but I take it as evident that humor adds to the pleasure of readers” (19).

Although Moseley is correct that humour is present in academic novels in various forms and that an analysis of it can be futile and misguided, the brand of humour that most often characterizes the sub-genre, contrary to what he asserts, is satire, the target of which is worth exploring.³ Indeed, Mark Bosco and Kimberly Rae Connor’s collection of essays as well as Kenneth Womack’s monograph both highlight satire as being the central mode of humour employed in these novels. As Womack argues, the satirical treatment of academe is necessary in order to highlight by contrast a more ethical system of higher education, one that is more responsive and accountable to the broader society.

³ This is not to say that all of the humour contained in academic novels is satiric and geared towards critiquing academe. I acknowledge and appreciate that often academic novelists are poking fun at certain aspects of academe for the sake of it and not necessarily in order to provoke serious reform. The novelists considered in this study, however, offer such sustained, focused critiques that although their works contain instances of lighthearted humour, there is also an underlying level of critique and satire aimed, I argue, at motivating reform or at least a heightened self-awareness within the scholarly community.

More specifically, satire functions as a tool of resistance, enabling these novelists to challenge conventional methods of conducting scholarly research and posit more innovative, productive ones in their place. These novelists were all academics for a significant period of their careers, meaning they have firsthand experience of the academic world they critique and have a vested interest in its reform. The novels considered in this study all contain characters (Atwood's Fischer and Trevor, Kroetsch's Madham, Davies's McVarish, and Shields's various Swann scholars) who appear increasingly foolish as a result of their unrelenting adherence to standard scholarly approaches and their misguided prioritizing of self-interest and scholarly reputation above the ideal of advancing knowledge for its own sake. The novelists satirize these characters in order to promote, often through a marginalized and misunderstood protagonist, a contrasting standard in academe—rather than be constrained by a finite number of acceptable approaches and subjects of study, scholars need to innovate, embracing a wider range of subjects and incorporating such unconventional sources of knowledge as stories, folk beliefs, and spirituality. As characters such as Atwood's Duncan, Kroetsch's Jeremy, Davies's Parlabane, and Shields's Sarah demonstrate, these alternative subjects and methods should be allowed to speak for themselves rather than be manipulated by preconceived scholarly agendas and shaped into conformity with preexisting scholarly trends.

The challenges that these novelists pose are valuable because, as Michel Foucault observes, “[w]here there is power, there is resistance” (*History* 95)—resistance is needed to prevent the stasis and atrophying of powerful social institutions, such as the university. That these academics-cum-novelists challenge a world of which they are a part aligns

their work with the aims of resistance literature, which shows “varying degrees of complicity with systems of oppression even when [it seems] to show the most obvious resistance” (Helms 9). Although in *Resistance Literature* Barbara Harlow argues that this literature is produced by oppressed peoples in the third world, its fundamental characteristics suggest a wider applicability: it is “immediately and directly involved in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production” (29). These novelists challenge dominant modes of producing and disseminating scholarly research, which is integral in defining our ideological and cultural climate, in order to reinvigorate the academic world in which they are so invested. Womack highlights a broad sweep for this project of resistance: “the very publication of these works of academic fiction can be read as a form of social protest, as a means for their authors to document the institutional dilemmas and professional insecurities that problematize postsecondary education” (19). Although Canadian novelists address and critique a range of institutional issues in their novels, their focus tends to be on the nature of scholarly research—specifically, how and why to undertake it. And it is largely through satire that these novelists divest current academic trends and standards of their authority in order to make room for the construction of a new, more inclusive model of scholarly activity.

An Overview of Existing Critical Studies⁴

The absence of criticism on the Canadian academic novel necessitates an overview of the existing British and American studies in order to trace the key concerns of the sub-genre. Proctor's *The English University Novel* (1957), the first major study of the sub-genre, offers a chronological survey of many novels and thus adheres to one of the more common strategies employed by critics of the academic novel. Although he detects signs of growth and complexity emerging in the works over time, he proclaims that "it is possible to construct a composite plot which would, either in part or in its entirety, provide a synopsis for the majority of university novels" (1). This "composite plot" consists of an undergraduate student entering university, becoming distracted by romance and socializing, and ultimately returning his focus to academic endeavours; the novels generally conclude with the protagonist successfully completing his studies and thus being free to direct his attentions once again to romantic and social pursuits. In his study *The College Novel in America* (1962), Lyons also notes the lack of variation in these works: "[t]hose novelists who have succeeded in making the student something other than a callow youth and the professor other than a wicked or a bumbling bore are few indeed" (186). Although Proctor focuses on British writers and Lyons on American, both conclude that while academic fiction succeeds in exploring the function of the university and highlighting contemporary academic concerns, the sub-genre, largely derivative, offers few fresh treatments of and responses to these concerns. Neither seems impressed

⁴ In this section I focus primarily on book-length studies of the development of the sub-genre as a whole rather than on the numerous articles and collections of essays that examine particular academic novels.

by the aesthetic qualities of these novels and instead they both view them primarily as sociological documents that offer insight into academic life.

A more recent study, Ian Carter's *Ancient Cultures of Conceit: British University Fiction in the Post-War Years* (1990) extends the survey of British academic fiction initiated by Proctor into the post-Second World War era and ultimately echoes Proctor's and Lyons's sentiments regarding the redundant quality that characterizes these works. He further criticizes these novels for being part of a discourse that presents a limited view of academe by suggesting that Oxford and Cambridge are the only worthwhile institutions in the landscape of British higher education. That Carter is a sociologist by profession means that he is even more interested than his precursors in the ways in which these novels reflect academic life; indeed, he ultimately argues that not only do these novels reflect the academy but the often critical portrayals they put forth help to shape public perception and policy regarding the university. As he notes, these novels, and particularly the various television adaptations of them that aired throughout the 1980s, "did little to ease the generally hostile contemporary political and public attitudes to British universities: attitudes partly formed and consistently fostered by British university fiction's dominant discourse" (14).

Janice Rossen's contribution to the critical study of the academic novel marks a shift from those of earlier critics. In *The University in Modern Fiction* (1993), rather than provide a chronological survey of a variety of academic novels, Rossen, focusing primarily on British novels (with some American examples included as well), uses a thematic framework to structure her analysis. She isolates three key thematic threads which unify the various works she discusses as well as reveal more complicated

undercurrents that, she argues, earlier studies have missed. Her thematic framework consists of the following factors: “the influence of the power structure within academe and in relation to the outside world, the constant dialectic between competitiveness and idealism ... and the implications for the creative process of the novelist’s choice of such a potentially limiting and problematic subject” (3). Rossen’s otherwise effective study is weakened by her peculiar emphasis on the fact that “[n]ovelists are apt to feel that in writing about literary scholars they are attacking the enemy” (6). She does not adequately allow for the fact that the academic novelists often *are* this enemy—they are academics writing about and critiquing a world of which they are a part. Although she acknowledges that many of these novelists are academics, she assumes they take “university teaching posts in order to support their writing” (6); while this may be true in part, such an assessment minimizes the substantial investment many of these novelists have made in their academic professions and assumes (perhaps erroneously) that they identify as novelists more than they do as academics.

Like Rossen, Womack also applies thematic structure to his study *Postwar Academic Fiction: Satire, Ethics, Community* (2002) in which he examines a selection of British and American academic novels under the rubric of ethical criticism. Womack argues that this often misunderstood and dismissed critical context is valuable for functioning as “a self-reflexive means for critics to explain the contradictory emotions and problematic moral stances that often mask complex and fully realized literary characters” and for enabling critics “to posit socially relevant interpretations” (8). In relation to academic fiction, he argues that ethical criticism “possesses the propensity for producing meaningful critiques of those fictions that confront the moral challenges

inherent in contemporary academic life” (20). Indeed, the competition, elitism, and commercial interests that increasingly govern academe provide fertile ground for broader moral and ethical reflection, particularly in relation to the nature and value of art, culture, and knowledge. Womack argues that such reflection emerges from the novelists’ adherence to a “pejorative poetics” (1)—a particular brand of satire that he argues characterizes the sub-genre. It is “through the deliberately broad strokes of their satirical prose” that these novelists explore “the ethical and philosophical questions endemic to their genre” (2).

The most recent book-length study of the academic novel is Elaine Showalter’s *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and its Discontents* (2005). She is careful to emphasize the subjective nature of her project: “[i]t’s a personal take, and my selection reflects my preoccupations ... as well as my occupation” (13). Despite the personal bias, this useful study, which focuses primarily on the American academic novel, traces how, from the 1950s to the twenty-first century, the sub-genre has become increasingly bitter. Although she concedes that “the current bitterness of academic fiction may be exaggerated” (124), she highlights “an increasingly bureaucratic and soulless institutionalization” (99) that has transformed academe from an idyllic world to a hypocritical and hostile one, a transformation she argues is reflected in the fiction.

What these studies have in common is that most—particularly Proctor’s and Carter’s works—gesture towards a key function of the academic novel: to examine the purpose of the university. All of the critics echo Showalter’s observation about the documentary characteristic of the sub-genre, which “has offered a full social history of the university, as well as a spiritual, political, and psychological guide to the profession”

(118). Proctor takes this point a step further, arguing that by the Second World War, the academic novel “did ultimately become more than a documentary. It did, in fact, come to terms with the old and ever-new question, What are the ends of a university education? Or even more broadly, What is a university?” (190). Although Proctor poses valuable questions, the survey quality of his study prevents him from delving into the potential answers in much detail. Carter offers a more concrete response to these questions. At the beginning of his study, he posits, “[t]he British university as metaphor. But for what?” (20). Drawing on the writings of Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis, Carter ultimately concludes that for academic novelists as well as for society generally the university represents culture—by protecting and promoting the university, we protect and promote the culture that is studied within its walls.

These questions about the purpose of the university are central to the Canadian offerings to this sub-genre, and they were first articulated in a non-fiction work, *Canada's Crisis in Higher Education: Proceedings of the Conference Held by the National Conference of Canadian Universities* (1956). These proceedings, edited by Claude Bissell, consist of a variety of essays by university administrators and professors, including E.W.R. Steacie's contribution in which he asserts, “there is wide disagreement regarding the purpose for which a university exists. Is the university merely a glorified high school, or is it a community of scholars? Is its primary purpose to help raise the gross national product, or is there something a little more subtle with which the university should concern itself?” (42). Beginning in the 1960s with Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, Canadian novelists began examining these questions by demonstrating the degree to which academics have lost sight of the fundamental ideal of scholarship, and by

extension, the fundamental purpose of the university—the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Although this may seem a naïve and oversimplified distillation of the university’s core purpose, for what other reason were the earliest universities established if not to contribute to an ever-expanding store of knowledge and understanding?

Whether through teaching or research, the primary aim of scholars was to disseminate and advance knowledge. Professional advancement and financial gain are but by-products of this foundational principle, yet, especially in recent decades, they have almost completely eclipsed it. Although the professionalization of scholarship has played a crucial role in its perpetuation over the last several centuries, somewhere along the way, scholars have mistaken the tangible rewards for their research (such as publications, job offers, and career stability) for the end goal of their research. In response, Atwood highlights an increasing commercialization of academic endeavours that detracts from this core ideal and purpose while Kroetsch, Davies, and Shields suggest that in order to resist this commercial takeover and recover a more idealistic set of scholarly values and practices that are grounded in the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, scholars need to become risk-takers, breaking free from academic convention and exploring alternate avenues of conducting scholarly research.

There is some debate, however, as to how tenable this fundamental ideal is. John Henry Newman, a nineteenth-century Roman Catholic priest and cardinal whose influential works and teachings helped to shape the intellectual climate of Ireland, famously endorsed this ideal in his writings:

Now, when I say that knowledge is, not merely a means to something beyond it, or the preliminary of certain arts into which it naturally resolves, but an end

sufficient to rest in and to pursue for its own sake, surely I am uttering no paradox, for I am stating what is both intelligible in itself, and has ever been the common judgment of philosophers and the ordinary feeling of mankind. (97)

Recent critics such as Bill Readings argue that this ideal no longer applies to the modern university. In *The University in Ruins* (1996), he argues that the pursuit of knowledge has been supplanted by the “Pursuit of Excellence,” wherein

Excellence is clearly a purely internal unit of value that effectively brackets all questions of reference or function, thus creating an internal market. Henceforth, the question of the University is only the question of relative value-for-money, the question posed to a student who is situated entirely as a *consumer*, rather than as someone who wants to think. (27)

In other words, Readings argues that modern universities are geared towards ill-defined standards of excellence and performance similar to those which govern corporations and therefore they are no longer, and never again will be, bastions of knowledge and culture. He asserts that a neoliberal ethic pervades the university. Although Readings outlines a compelling shift in the university’s central mission (a shift which I will explore throughout this dissertation), the novelists considered in this study are not convinced that the disinterested pursuit of knowledge is an entirely outdated, obsolete governing ideal. Although the contemporary university has become abstracted from this ideal, its value and viability are no less pronounced. Contrary to what Readings asserts, these novelists argue that scholars can and must reconnect with an earlier mentality of unfettered scholarly enterprise and adventure in order to recapture and reaffirm the central purpose

of the university.⁵

Because all of these novelists have their background in literary scholarship, the English department becomes the primary locus through which these broader questions about the university are explored. Davies's *The Rebel Angels*, which examines the humanities more broadly, is a notable exception, yet even so, he engages with many of the same concerns as his fellow novelists. This almost exclusive focus on the English department narrows down the debate surrounding the purpose of the university to a much more specific question: what is the value and purpose of the humanities and of literary scholarship in particular? Although the novelists focus primarily on presenting satirical or critical academic portraits, underlying these depictions is a clear sense of the potential value in literary scholarship and the humanities; indeed, it is this recognition of underlying value that motivates these novelists to write these works. In order to appreciate more fully the resonance of their fictional depictions, it is worth outlining briefly at this point the productive potential that these novelists recognize in the work of literary scholars. By virtue of teaching and studying various literary works, these scholars do a great service to society by keeping these works firmly positioned in our literary and cultural imagination. For that alone, regardless of the directions their specific studies may branch into, they are invaluable for their role as stewards of national and

⁵ By evoking an earlier, more idealistic model of scholarship, I do not mean to suggest that there is such a thing as a "Golden Age" of the university. Indeed, as Heather Murray observes of the discipline of English literature in particular, "there is no harmonious and unproblematic past in English studies to which our own age is a messy and troublesome successor" (3). Nor is there a harmonious and unproblematic university from a bygone golden era. In terms of English studies in particular and the university in general, there have always been conflicts and tensions and every generation of the university has its own set of issues. Even so, centuries ago when the field of knowledge was much more open and competition among scholars was significantly less pronounced than it is today, there inevitably existed an attitude towards scholarship that was governed at least somewhat more by the desire to contribute to the field of knowledge than by the pressure to establish and maintain professional reputations. Although the latter pressure is inevitable today, the novelists in this study suggest that it has been given so much prominence that the more idealistic motivations underlying scholarship have become almost completely forgotten.

literary culture. Moreover, they have developed the critical frame of mind that enables them to articulate the nuances and resonances that the everyday reader may not be able to discern; literary scholars thus not only call attention to works of literature that may otherwise go unnoticed or become forgotten, but they also highlight important characteristics unique to the individual works as well as related cultural, historical, and social contexts that position these works in a broader pattern of influence. These scholars are thus cultural workers who communicate the significances of literary works not only to their scholarly peers but ideally to a broader public that may be unable to discern such resonances on its own. Len Findlay highlights a series of more concrete skills that the study of literature offers: “[b]eing able to research a topic, to read and interpret difficult texts, to remain unintimidated by the intractability of the big questions, and to communicate with elegance and precision and considerable suasive force” (301). Findlay discusses the relative absence of many of these skills outside of the academy, thereby emphasizing the need and potential for literary scholars to exercise these abilities both within and outside of the university in a variety of capacities. Reflecting on the humanities more generally, Davies celebrates the potential of scholars to be risk-takers, pushing boundaries and challenging conventions through their unrelenting, uninhibited search for truth.

The novelists under consideration warn that when scholars become increasingly obscure and specialized in their approaches, they alienate non-academic audiences and therefore no longer facilitate these broader social and cultural functions. Instead, they contribute to a sense of “solipsistic enclosure” (Katznelson 191) that firmly removes

humanities scholarship from a larger sphere of influence and value.⁶ When a belief in the disinterested pursuit of knowledge remains paramount, however, this ideal ensures that the ensuing research does not veer too far into the realm of the esoteric and obscure; instead, it remains predicated on a sincere desire to advance knowledge and to communicate these discoveries outward both to the academic and non-academic communities.

Throughout this dissertation, alongside this promotion of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, I highlight the novelists' contention that humanities scholarship must be relevant and resonant to a broader non-academic public. To varying degrees, these novelists suggest that scholars need to be public intellectuals who are capable of communicating their research both within and outside of the university. This is potentially problematic since the disinterested pursuit of knowledge and the production of socially relevant scholarship are not necessarily interconnected ideals; when scholars strive to make their research speak to a broader public's interests, they are no longer pursuing knowledge for its own sake—instead, the pursuit has a specific end, namely, to contribute to society. In “Do Intellectuals Have a Special Public Responsibility?” Bob Brecher posits that this ideal is misleading in that there is almost always some end in sight beyond a completely uncontained immersion in knowledge. He suggests that the ideal functions as a contrast to overly specialized, self-interested investigations—that is, the disinterested pursuit of knowledge usually entails some sort of general end, such as

⁶ Although specialization is an unavoidable and necessary aspect of scholarship across the disciplines, in the humanities excessive specialization can be detrimental. In the sciences, reaching definitive answers is often the ultimate goal of research, accordingly, specialization is desired because it facilitates the move towards specific, concrete answers. In the humanities, however, the ultimate goal is not always a definite answer. In literary scholarship in particular, scholars produce research that allows for an ongoing debate and dialogue on literary works. Overly specialized studies undermine this collaborative model. Instead, as John Ely Burchard observes of the hyper-specialized humanities scholar, “[t]he risk is that he is learning to bore so small a hole that no one can really find it exciting or important to follow him in” (56).

uncovering knowledge that benefits society, whereas in the absence of this ideal, scholars often conduct their research in the name of more obscure, uncivic ends (32). In “Learning for its Own Sake: The German University as Nineteenth-Century Model,” Lenore O’Boyle examines the implications of this ideal across German, British, and American systems of higher education. She concludes that for American universities, this ideal translates, as Brecher also argues, into the belief that knowledge should be pursued and disseminated in service to society at large (23). This explication of the ideal thus unifies the promotion of the disinterested pursuit of knowledge with the production of socially relevant scholarship and is therefore a fitting interpretation in relation to the present study.

All of the novelists under consideration encourage the scholar to study his or her subject in such a way that produces broader resonances rather than overly specialized, esoteric readings. In advocating the production of more accessible and relevant scholarship, these novelists are not suggesting that scholars must undermine their work through the imposition of pragmatic or utilitarian aims and approaches; instead, they encourage scholars to study literature (or whatever their subject may be) in a more inclusive fashion which connects their undertakings to the interests of a broader public.⁷ Literary studies that promote and provoke continued analysis and critical discussion of literature (as opposed to excessively specialized studies that close down critical dialogue) serve the public in the sense that they keep these works firmly positioned in the academic consciousness to be sure, but ideally—depending on how the research is disseminated—

⁷ Although some may argue that this is overstating the importance of public opinion in scholarly endeavours, as long as scholars conduct their work in public institutions, they must remain at least somewhat accountable to the people who help fund their work. More importantly, though, aligning one’s scholarly pursuits with a sense of social responsibility helps prevent the descent into obscurantism.

in the public consciousness as well. In other words, I do not mean to suggest (nor do I believe the novelists in this study mean to suggest) that every individual scholarly publication must serve an immediate and concrete social function; rather, by contributing to and fostering ongoing debate and dialogue, literary scholarship, when ultimately more disinterested than self-interested, serves the public through the continued promotion and protection of literature—an important aspect of national culture—and the assertion of its enduring vitality. Moreover, this ongoing dialogue ensures the continued presence and activity of literary scholars, whose interpretive and critical skills as exercised within the academy have the potential to create and foster an informed and empathetic citizenry outside of it.

Historical Development: Britain, United States, and Canada

The development of the academic novel is interconnected with the development of higher education—that is, the state of and changes within the academy produce resultant fictional portrayals, whether nostalgic reminiscences or critical commentaries. To that end, in this section I document the development of British, American, and Canadian systems of higher education in order to trace the corresponding emergence of the sub-genre. In order to appreciate the Canadian contribution to this sub-genre, it is first necessary to trace the British and American traditions from which it emerged; moreover, because Canada's system of higher education was essentially an amalgamation of the British and American systems for a significant period of its development, I provide a

relatively detailed overview of the latter two systems in order to sufficiently contextualize and historicize the emergence of the Canadian academic novel.

Since both America and Canada have been British colonies at one point in their respective national histories, it is no surprise that academic fiction finds its roots in the British literary tradition. Indeed, when we think of universities, perhaps the most prestigious exemplar that comes to mind is the University of Oxford, which dates back to the late twelfth century (ca. 1167); a close second is the University of Cambridge, which was founded in 1209. Taken together, these schools embody the idyllic notion of a “community of scholars,” living and working together for the preservation and advancement of knowledge (although whether or not these Oxbridge scholars did their fair share in *advancing* knowledge is a topic to be explored later). Several critics point to Geoffrey Chaucer as producing the first portrait of academic life in the character of the Oxford clerk in “The Miller’s Tale” from *The Canterbury Tales*, but it is not until the early nineteenth century that, according to Proctor’s seminal study *The English University Novel*, the academic novel begins to take shape. In order to account for this gap of several centuries between the founding of the first universities⁸ and the emergence of the academic novel, one needs to consider the purpose and scope of university and college education during this earlier medieval period.

In their earliest stages, Oxford and Cambridge were characterized by “a buoyance [sic] and zestfulness” because “the whole world of knowledge as it was then was to be explored” (Ross, *The University* 9, 7). This initial spirit of scholarly excitement and enterprise that characterized these medieval universities did not last but it gave rise to the

⁸ I am not suggesting that Oxford and Cambridge are *the* first two universities. They are predated by at least two others—the University of Bologna, founded in 1088, and the University of Paris, founded in approximately 1150.

idealized image of these institutions which persists into the present day. By the fourteenth century, these universities shifted from a scholarly to vocational bent; their mission was “to provide leaders for the state and the church and practitioners in law and medicine” (7). Male middle-class students, who composed the majority of the student population, entered the university primarily in preparation for these roles. By the late sixteenth century, however, there was an increase in the number of upper-class students vying for a broad liberal arts education, which would provide them with the degree of “social and cultural polish” befitting a gentleman (Anderson 7). As a result, the liberal arts education supplanted the earlier professional, vocational focus; this shift endured and continued to characterize the British university for centuries. The university became less democratic, discouraging recruitment from the lower classes, and therefore saw a marked decline in enrollment. Proctor notes that “character writers of the seventeenth century [began] to exploit for the first time the startling and humorous incongruities that were now to be found in the academic scene” (24), with the upper-class students increasingly outnumbering their lower-class peers. Although full-length academic novels were not yet being composed, writers were beginning to incorporate academic concerns into their writing, albeit briefly.

Oxford and Cambridge were designated national institutions by the Crown in the fourteenth century and were subject to royal interference and intervention from this point on (Ross 11). Beginning in the eighteenth century, this overt participation began to subside: “[b]etween 1715 and 1850, the state interfered less with the English universities than at any time before or after, satisfied with their loyalty and their social usefulness. Was it a coincidence that this was also the longest period of intellectual stagnation in

their history?” (Anderson 15). The university had internalized state intervention and interests to such a degree that even without its direct control and supervision, Oxford and Cambridge continued to suppress their own development in favour of promoting state interests and functioning as “a servant of the status quo” (Ross 18). Intellectual stagnancy during this period in particular was especially damaging considering the various thinkers who were advancing groundbreaking ideas at the time, from Isaac Newton to Jean Jacques Rousseau to Voltaire to Immanuel Kant, to mention only a few. As Murray G. Ross notes, had the universities been more enterprising during this period, they could have been aligned with these intellectuals and together been “working on the frontiers of knowledge” (15).

Although it sprang from a spirit of scholarly adventure, the British university was not a site of scholarly investigation and research for much of its development; instead, it functioned primarily as a vocational institution before shifting into a liberal arts institution, all the while becoming increasingly governed by the state. Beginning around 1850, however, as a result of royal commissions inquiring into the state of both Oxford and Cambridge, several reforms were initiated, including a shift towards the democratization of the universities, the return to professional programs, and an emphasis on integrating scholarly research alongside teaching (Anderson 35-36, 44). These reforms did not immediately take effect and indeed the public outcry to make Oxbridge recruitment more democratic continues; nonetheless, this is a significant period in the development of British higher education since valuable reforms were at least initiated if not fully realized. Although the university failed to benefit from the climate of intellectual enterprise that characterized much of the eighteenth century, this period of

reform during the mid-nineteenth century was well-timed to coincide with the emergence of a new wave of influential thinkers, including Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud. The seminal works produced by these intellectuals “provided a congenial environment for a reawakening of the university” (Ross 35).

It is appropriate that the British academic novel began to emerge at a time when the university was undergoing needed reformation, albeit slowly. Although Proctor acknowledges that brief satirical sketches on academic life appeared in earlier centuries, it was not until the nineteenth century that full-length novels began to appear, likely because the university was now more than ever in the public consciousness thanks to well-publicized reform campaigns. Proctor highlights John Gibson Lockhart’s *Reginald Dalton: A Story of English University Life* (1823) as the first official academic novel,⁹ but Thomas Hughes’s *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861) as the most influential and popular: “*Tom Brown at Oxford* is not a great novel, but it is without doubt one of the best university novels and one of the best known. In the history of the genre it is notable for uniting all the elements of those which had preceded it and establishing the character of most of those which were to follow” (112). With the university reform movement at its height, academic fiction was progressing from the fragmentary accounts produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as well as from the occasional (and usually anonymously authored) slanderous treatments put forth in the eighteenth century to more serious, probing novels in the nineteenth century which, though often humorous, gestured towards serious reform.

⁹ Proctor also mentions the anonymously authored *The Adventures of Oxymel Classic, Esq.: Once an Oxford Scholar* (1768), but he dismisses it as little more than slander.

In spite of the introduction of productive reforms during the nineteenth century, one of the factors most detrimental to the development of British higher education was its almost exclusive concentration in the two institutions discussed thus far—Oxford and Cambridge. This real-world focus on Oxford and Cambridge was reflected in the fiction—almost all British academic novels are about one of these two universities, most often Oxford: “[h]istorically speaking, the university novel has been the Oxford novel” (Proctor 4). The University of London opened in 1828 and Durham University opened in 1837, but neither of these institutions achieved significant status until later in the century. Although various civic universities (or university colleges), which were more practical and vocational than Oxbridge, began emerging in the 1870s and 1880s, novelists continued to focus primarily on Oxbridge, which persisted in catering to the upper classes and providing a broad liberal arts education as opposed to being more inclusive in its admission policy and diversified in its course offerings. Accordingly, British academic novels were providing only one part of the picture, thereby minimizing what was becoming a much more varied academic landscape.

Oxbridge’s initial resistance to German ideals of higher education hindered its progression from a training ground for future leaders of society to a fully developed research institution.¹⁰ German universities, which flourished in the early nineteenth century, were predicated upon two defining principles: *lernfreiheit*, which refers to the freedom of students to choose their own program of study, and *lehrfreiheit*, which refers to the freedom of professors to pursue and teach subjects they choose without external (or

¹⁰ The University of London, opened in 1828, was more progressive than Oxbridge and incorporated German influences, but it continued to be overshadowed by Oxbridge and its more conservative, traditional approach (Anderson 27).

state) interference (Ross 27; Westmeyer xii). These principles inform Wilhelm von Humboldt's model of higher education, embraced by German universities:

Professors should be both teachers and original scholars, and teaching itself should not be simply the transmission of facts, but a creative process in which the student learnt through discovery and was trained in the techniques of original research. Teacher and student were thus part of a "community of scholars," allies in that search for truth which was the university's mission. (Anderson 29)

Although on the surface Oxbridge appears to promote a "community of scholars" by encouraging professors and students to live and work together within the campus, this "community" did not extend significantly beyond this residential aspect. Oxbridge's mission was not to produce scholarly researchers; instead, it continued to train and prepare future leaders for public positions. Because this German scholarly ideal was not a pronounced part of Oxbridge culture, it did not find its way into the British academic fiction of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Thus, rather than focus on the scholarship produced in institutions of higher education, the novels of this period focus primarily on the experience of the undergraduate: initially, novelists provide "portrayals of undergraduate life deliberately labeled as revelations of the truth and adjurations for reform" (Proctor 88), but towards the close of this century and the onset of the twentieth century, academic novels became "material for light romances and melodramatic tales" (118). In the years immediately surrounding the First World War, novelists treat the university with heightened affection, and it was during this period that, according to Proctor, "the best of all university novels" (154) was published: Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street* (1913-1914). Further into the

post-war period, however, “no longer does one find novels extolling the beneficent effects of existence among the dreaming spires” (180); instead, a degree of disillusionment was allowed to creep into the authors’ portrayals of university life. Although the British academic novel underwent various transformations, Proctor’s detailed study demonstrates that at least up until the Second World War, these novels did not engage with the concept of scholarly research, largely because it was not a visible part of Oxbridge at this time.

Carter’s *Ancient Cultures of Conceit: British University Fiction in the Post-war Years* continues where Proctor’s study leaves off, examining a more recent group of novels which to some degree address institutions other than Oxford and Cambridge, labeled by Carter as “not-Oxbridge universities.” In the early twentieth century, several “redbrick” universities, smaller civic universities so named because of their distinctive red bricks, received charters. Chief among these were the universities of Birmingham, Liverpool, and Leeds. These universities were more innovative and receptive to international influences, namely to the approaches adopted by German and North American universities, yet even so, Oxbridge’s dominance persisted (Ross 37). In the post-Second World War era, particularly in the 1960s, several “greenfield” universities emerged; these institutions tended to be located on the edges of towns rather than in urban centres and adopted more accessible, democratic enrollment practices. By this point in the history of British higher education, the presence and influence of these not-Oxbridge institutions were undeniable, but according to Carter, academic novelists continued to minimize this pronounced presence and influence through the construction and deployment of a particular discourse which characterizes the British academic novel.

This discourse functions as “a machine that controls what we see by generating rules for including some things and excluding others” (5)—namely, it creates a separation between Oxbridge and not-Oxbridge, prioritizing the former above the latter such that Oxbridge represents an idealized space whereas not-Oxbridge consistently fails to measure up. C.P. Snow’s *The Masters* (1951) and Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (1954), two of the most prominent British exemplars of the sub-genre, both exemplify this trend.

Drawing from Arnold and Leavis, Carter posits that in academic novels, “the university is treated as culture’s citadel, besieged by four barbarian hordes: proletarians, women, scientists, and foreigners” (215). His focus on how the academic novelist negotiates the imposition of these various “outsider” groups onto the university, specifically the English department,¹¹ is apt for the way it captures the increasing democratization of British higher education. As R.D. Anderson notes, “the foundation of new ‘greenfield’ universities [in the 1960s] and the Robbins Report of 1963¹² marked the beginnings of the transition from elite to mass higher education” (113). No longer an elitist haven for white upper-class males, Oxbridge, feeling the pressure of the more inclusive not-Oxbridge institutions, gradually began to admit a more diverse student population and the academic fiction of the time reflects the strained period of adjustment

¹¹ Arnold aligns the preservation of culture with a study of the classics whereas Leavis aligns it with English literature, the study of which he believes will “produce a mind that will approach the problems of modern civilization with an understanding of their origins, a maturity of outlook, and, not a nostalgic addiction to the past, but a sense of human possibilities” (qtd. in Carter 221). That British universities have increasingly prioritized the study of English literature over the classics coupled with the fact that academic novels are almost always set within an English department suggest a general embrace of a more Leavisite perspective.

¹² Anderson highlights several of the reforms put forth in this influential report, including what has been named the “Robbins principle,” which states that higher education should be provided for “all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so” (qtd. in Anderson 131).

to this change. For example, Tom Sharpe's *Porterhouse Blue* (1974)¹³ satirically examines the reformation of a fictional Cambridge college when a newly appointed Master initiates a series of changes which undermine centuries of established tradition. Of David Lodge's *Nice Work* (1986), in which Cambridge English student Robyn Penrose job shadows a factory worker, Showalter notes that Robyn eventually "sees that higher education should not have to defend or justify itself in utilitarian terms, but should be more democratic and open to everyone" (85).

Carter also delineates the effects on British higher education of Margaret Thatcher's¹⁴ Conservative government, which took office in 1979. As he notes, "[t]he most savage round of state funding cuts in British university history was announced in 1981, and implemented over the next three years. ... A second round of real cuts followed in 1985" (246). Under the Thatcher government, universities were run more like private companies resulting in what Carter terms a "Thatcherite enterprise culture" (252), which permeated the academic landscape. No institutions, not even Oxbridge, were immune to this state intervention. Prominent novelists such as Lodge responded directly to the impact on the academy of the Thatcher government. In *Nice Work*, Robyn is forced to consider her career options in light of the lack of job security and options offered by the university: "the previously unthinkable prospect of a non-academic career now began to be thought—with fear, dismay, and bewilderment on Robyn's part" (29).

In this climate of funding cuts and increasing commercialization, debates surrounding value (in all its connotations) inevitably came to the fore. Proctor has argued

¹³ Sharpe's novel was adapted into a television screenplay by another prominent academic novelist, Malcolm Bradbury. *Porterhouse Blue* aired as a television miniseries in 1987.

¹⁴ Displeased by Thatcher's handling of funding in the higher education sector, Oxford University's Congregation voted against offering the Oxford-educated Prime Minister an honorary degree, "thus breaking a tradition that stretched back through the aeons of time to 1946" (Carter 10).

that from the beginnings of the sub-genre, and indeed from the beginnings of the university itself, questions about the purpose of the university and of higher education have been central. In the 1980s, however, this line of questioning was renewed in the face of debates surrounding how government funding should be allocated and has constituted, as Richard Sheppard posits, “a continuing matter of public concern: the place, nature and value of higher education” (29). Accordingly, British novelists of the past few decades have turned to these issues with heightened urgency.

American higher education has its origins in its British colonial heritage and is generally traced back to the founding of Harvard in 1636. Harvard and the other colonial colleges, including William and Mary, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, Brown, Dartmouth, Rutgers, and Pennsylvania, possessed a certain “distinction and success” that “was associated with their having transplanted the Oxford-Cambridge ideal to America” (Thelin 7)—that is, these schools transplanted the Oxbridge “collegiate” ideal of students and teachers living and working together. Considering that “[a]pproximately a hundred Cambridge men and a third as many Oxford men emigrated to New England before 1646” (Rudolph 4) and that this group included the founders of Harvard, it is no surprise that elements of these two British universities constituted the foundation of the first American colleges. Although the residential aspect of the Oxbridge model was appealing to the founders of the colonial colleges, “they detested the sloth and autonomy of the Oxford scholars. They therefore looked to the Scottish universities’ reliance on an external board—rather than faculty control—to give legal definition to the college as an incorporated institution” (Thelin 11). The colonial colleges also looked to Scotland for guidance in terms of shaping scholarship and pedagogy: Scottish universities were

comparatively progressive and much more open to secular learning (Rudolph 30). The colonial colleges did reflect Oxbridge in that they too focused on educating the sons of upper-class families for leadership positions: “[t]he colonial college was an insurance policy guaranteeing that these favored young men would acquire not only literacy but also a sense of leadership and service by about their twentieth birthday” (Thelin 26).

Numerous reforms to higher education were introduced following American independence, particularly in the period spanning 1785 to 1860: the curriculum was expanded from a strictly liberal arts base to include such fields as medicine, law, engineering, military science, commerce, theology, and agriculture, and in the first half of the nineteenth century, marginalized groups such as women and African Americans were being included in the student population (Thelin 42). Laurence R. Veysey describes the American university prior to the 1860s as being “archaic indeed” and notes that between 1865 and 1890 in particular, it began to formulate the model that to this day outlines the core purposes of the university: service, research, and the promotion of culture (12). In this period of educational reform and the construction of a national identity, academic fiction was beginning to emerge. Although the only novel written during this period associated with the sub-genre is Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Fanshawe* (1828), which engages only superficially with academic life, in this century “there were a number of informal histories of the colleges and many personal reminiscences of college pranks” (Lyons xvi). Just as the British academic novel developed out of brief, fragmentary sketches, so too did the American tradition, but whereas the British tradition was fully developed by the nineteenth century, the American one took slightly longer to take shape.

Although the academic novel did not emerge in any substantial way in the United States until the early twentieth century (and not in the numbers to which we are currently accustomed until after 1925), additional developments in higher education from 1860 to 1890 helped to lay the groundwork for the ensuing flourishing of the sub-genre. During this period, many of the reforms already introduced continued to develop—namely, additional opportunities opened up for women and the curriculum expanded even more (Thelin 75). State universities with agriculture, science, and engineering programs flourished as a result of the Morrill Act of 1862, according to which the federal government would grant individual states land to develop or sell in order to raise money for institutions that specialized in these programs (Ross 45). Of particular interest is the fact that American scholars who had studied abroad were increasingly supportive of a German model of advanced scholarship, the adoption of which they argued “was essential for national development” (Thelin 87) and for elevating “the inconsistent, uneven system of collegiate education into something more demanding and academically selective” (89). Moreover, the German influence resuscitated the ideal of pursuing scholarly endeavours for their own sake rather than for some external gain or for appeasing an external body (Veysey 124).¹⁵ The problem, however, was that there was a lack of appropriately qualified students for such a selective, demanding academic degree—American secondary schools of the period were poorly developed, producing a mass of students ill-equipped to cope with a demanding university education. Founded in

¹⁵ Veysey further argues, “Since the eighteenth century a kind of homegrown tradition of research had existed in America, evolved from the philosophy of the Enlightenment. But the men who had such an interest were often men of wealth and position, and scientific investigation long remained only a precarious and fitful hobby. No convenient avenue of career beckoned the would-be researcher, since the colleges were largely closed to him and the federal government offered few sinecures” (125). The influence of the German ideal, however, made American intellectuals and universities increasingly cognizant of the value of “‘pure’ learning, largely unaffected by utilitarian demands” (127). Universities gradually began facilitating scholarship that did not have an overt practical application or definitive function.

1876, Johns Hopkins University was the first American institution to transplant the German model; it was not until the twentieth century that other schools followed suit.

In addition, many new universities emerged towards the end of the century because of “industry—the discretionary wealth generated by American corporations and enterprises” (Thelin 112). Not only did the university receive additional funding, but it also began to mimic the organizational structure of corporations. This corporate ethos led to the creation of an academic professoriate as “[t]he gradations of rank and promotion—instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor—became conventional” (128). In addition, professors were accorded more respect and authority, recognized as specialists in a field. This concept of specialization extended to the students—curriculum was revised so as to encourage specialization at the undergraduate level through the selection of a “major,” and at the graduate level, students were expected to become, like their professors, specialists in a particular field (130). At this time, graduate schools consisted primarily of Master’s students as the Ph.D. was still a marginalized program.

Lyons argues that the rise of industrial capitalism led to the critical portraits that were being produced by academic novelists at the time because it contributed to “the popular suspicion of the academy” (4), particularly of the humanities—it was the mechanical sciences that made such industrial advances possible so the relevance and utility of disciplines such as English literature were not readily apparent, making them seem dispensable. Whereas a liberal arts education was the cornerstone of the university in its early stages, it was now losing its firm position. Indeed, the curriculum of the nineteenth century had little to do with the contemporary reality of students, prompting

them to question the utility and value of a university education. As Lyons notes, “it was especially easy for them to believe that their true education had to come from the romantic groves beyond the campus” (5). He argues that this attitude is reflected in the fiction that was beginning to emerge at the time and, as Proctor does in his survey of British academic fiction, he highlights Hughes’s *Tom Brown at Oxford* as the model for subsequent American academic novels, most of which replace Oxford with Harvard as the central academic setting.

At the turn of the century, university access was reserved primarily for middle- and upper-class white males since admission was generally too expensive for the lower classes. Between the world wars, enrollment surged and the composition of the student body began to diversify, in part because of the development and expansion of secondary schools during this period (Thelin 205). Several reform initiatives were introduced in this period of growth “to bring both standards and standardization to American higher education” (238). At the same time that these various changes were taking shape, the American academic novel was beginning to come into its own. Whereas only 44 novels were published before 1925, this number soared between 1925 and 1960 to 171 novels (Lyons 180) and, as recent surveys such as Showalter’s indicate, this steady increase has continued over the last few decades. Indeed, according to John E. Kramer’s annotated bibliography *The American College Novel* (2004), an overwhelming 648 American academic novels have been published between 1828 and 2002 (vi) with the majority dating from the early-to-mid twentieth century onward. No longer were American novelists limited by attempting to emulate their British peers; instead, the American academic novel was emerging as its own unique entity, and by the 1930s, “American

naturalism had become so thoroughly naturalized that the college novels spoke a native literary idiom” (Lyons 47). Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House* (1925), “[o]ne of the most distinguished American novels of academic life” (108), helped usher in this new phase.

American higher education experienced several gains following the Second World War: enrollment continued to increase (due in large part to the 1944 GI Bill, which provided incentives for returning veterans to go to college), making mass education more of a reality; the curriculum developed at all levels, from undergraduate through to graduate and professional programs; and “the so-called research university emerged as a powerful new entity that earned international respect for American scholarship” (Thelin 260). Faculty also gained in income, power, and prestige. The academic novel continued to develop during this period. In the 1950s, the focus tended to be on “large communal units, the college, the faculty, the university, rather than a single department. The professor’s loyalty is to this large institution” (Showalter 14). Showalter highlights Mary McCarthy’s *The Groves of Academe* (1952), Randall Jarrell’s *Pictures from an Institution* (1954), and Carlos Baker’s *A Friend in Power* (1958) as representative of American academic fiction during this decade. Because this was generally a positive period of growth for the American university, focused commentaries and criticisms of isolated departments and departmental politics did not emerge until the subsequent decade.

Indeed, in the 1960s, “the university structure ... creaked and groaned” (Thelin 314). Students became disenchanted with various aspects of the university experience, leading to the rise of public rallies and demonstrations. Furthermore, federal funding agencies gradually shifted towards funding independent institutions rather than

universities. As Showalter notes of the academic novels produced during this turbulent period, “there’s a shift of focus from the university ... to the American English department, which begins to be the place where protest is voiced” (34). By 1970, the university was faced with several problems: it struggled to cope with the withdrawal of government funding; enrollment rates went down as a result of several demographic factors, including a declining birth rate and the end of the military draft; and the curriculum lacked an overall sense of coherence (Thelin 318-322). And although professors enjoyed increased power and prestige during the 1950s and 1960s, by the early 1970s the hiring boom had come to a close, leaving professors “with reduced mobility and little leverage in their power to influence institutional decisions” (332). The 1980s saw the rise of literary theory, which “was the ticket to intellectual and professional legitimacy” (Showalter 68). Universities competed to hire these elite practitioners of literary theory, “while anonymous exploited masses taught literature and composition” (68). This climate of competition and disillusionment with professional prospects led to increasingly bitter fictional portraits. Showalter notes that this negative tone continues to characterize American academic novels: “the lottery of hiring, political correctness, the culture wars, and the tragedies of tenure had become familiar topics in academic fiction, wearing away the last vestiges of idealism” (87).

In both Canada and the United States, higher education emerged at approximately the same time—in Canada, the first college was established by the Jesuits in 1635 in Quebec (Harris 14).¹⁶ From their beginnings until 1860, English-Canadian universities

¹⁶ Extensive historical surveys of Canadian higher education are few to non-existent. The majority of works focus on specific decades (primarily the 1960s onward) or isolated concerns (i.e., the factors related to making the university accessible to women, or, more recently, the commercialization of the university). Robin S. Harris’s *A History of Higher Education in Canada: 1663-1960* is a definitive work that offers a

and colleges, like their British and American counterparts at this time, served two key functions: “the training of clergy and the general education of the future leaders of society” (27). Indeed, during its first two centuries of development, the Canadian system of higher education was modeled almost entirely on the British system.¹⁷ Ross offers an unflattering assessment of the early period of Canadian higher education: “the dominant picture was of a small, rigid, poorly equipped, religion-controlled college whose teachers were clergymen and whose curriculum was based on a study of Latin and the classics” (21). As a result of debates surrounding the relevance of a classics-oriented curriculum, beginning in the late 1850s and early 1860s course offerings diversified, yet even so, in Canadian universities and colleges throughout the nineteenth century, these offerings remained relatively limited and under-developed as a result of numerous factors—in particular, in the years immediately following Confederation, Canada’s “population was small and spread thinly throughout the country, and there was little capital to stimulate economic development” and to fund the expansion of educational institutions (Ross 38). Furthermore, the absence of secondary schools for much of this century hindered the development of a dynamic undergraduate curriculum. By 1860 gradual progress was being made and higher education in Canada was emerging for the first time as a distinct entity from American and British systems of higher education. Additional fields such as agriculture, engineering, and commerce were added and a distinctively Canadian arts and science curriculum began to take shape (Harris 37).

far-reaching historical overview of the development of higher education in Canada and will therefore form the foundation of the observations made in the early part of this section.

¹⁷ In this section, and indeed throughout my dissertation, when I evoke “Canada,” I mean “English Canada.” Because my focus is on the English-Canadian academic novel, I trace the development of the English-Canadian university in this section and do not devote attention to the French-Canadian system.

Considering how central English departments are to academic fiction, a notable development in Canadian higher education in the nineteenth century is the development of English literature departments. Up until 1860, the focus in English departments, in keeping with the British model, was language rather than literature. By 1890, however, a uniquely Canadian approach to the teaching and study of English literature emerged—rather than treat language and literature as separate subjects (with the former most often prioritized over the latter), Canadian English departments integrated literature and composition into a unified field (Harris 138). Moreover, by the 1880s, English chairs were appointed in the major Canadian universities and English studies became more organized and professionalized; instruction in the discipline was no longer “discontinuous and unspecialized” nor did it focus exclusively on rhetoric and literary history “with no firsthand classroom exposure to texts” (Murray 22). In Canada, the discipline thus developed “some thirty years before the Oxbridge rise of English studies” (17). Indeed, in both Britain and the United States, it was not until the First World War that “English became seen as the foundation of national study” (91), likely out of a renewed desire to highlight and promote a national identity as embodied in the literature.

Even with the minor gains that had been made by the late nineteenth century in formulating a Canadian curriculum, there was still a need for greater expansion in the areas of graduate studies and professional programs but a lack of funding and adequately trained professors were major obstacles. A third impediment was “the long arm of tradition” (Harris 59)—in Britain at this time, undergraduate education was the main focus and so Canadian institutions felt the pressure to follow suit. Master’s degrees were offered, but in keeping with the British model, course work was not always required, and

even when it was (at Queen's and Victoria, for example), the courses were at the undergraduate level so that it was not an especially rigorous degree. Ph.D. programs had been introduced by 1890, but none had been awarded yet. Because graduate schools were not yet fully developed, students often had to look elsewhere for advanced study: "the ambitious young Canadian academic was more likely to go to the United States for graduate study ... and this raised for the first time the problem of brain-drain to the south" (Harris 190). Indeed, the few Ph.D. programs that did exist in Canada at this time followed the American model, embodied by Johns Hopkins University. In fact, even as late as 1940, the two Canadian universities offering fully developed Ph.D. programs—University of Toronto and McGill University—conformed to the model recognized by the Association of American Universities, of which both universities were members (Harris 431). Although Canada was beginning to assert its unique stamp through the development of a distinctively Canadian curriculum, higher education in this country was still primarily dependent upon British and American models. That Canada had not yet found its distinct voice in the academic landscape perhaps explains why Canadian academic novels had not yet begun to emerge¹⁸—in terms of the development of both the real-world university and the fictional campus, Canada relied on Britain and the United States to set the pace.

Furthermore, owing to a lack of resources, time, and a research community, scholarly output in Canada was limited throughout most of the nineteenth century,

¹⁸ By the beginning of the twentieth century, Canadian novels which dealt with higher education were being published, including Robert Barr's *The Measure of the Rule* (1907) and L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908). These novels deal with the university superficially, however, and comment on it primarily as a training ground for specific professions, namely teaching. They do briefly suggest that the university can be a place for attaining an education for its own sake and therefore are valuable for anticipating the more sustained fictional treatments of academe that were to emerge in subsequent decades.

especially in the humanities. It was not until the establishment of The Royal Society of Canada in 1882 that Canadian contributions to humanities scholarship became noticed and promoted: “[t]he Royal Society’s chief instrument in co-ordinating the scientific and literary efforts of Canadians and in establishing Canada as a force in the world-wide pursuit of knowledge was the publication and distribution of its *Proceedings and Transactions*” (Harris 97). As a result of insufficient funds and heavy teaching loads, however, professors had difficulty devoting substantial time and energy to research endeavours.¹⁹ With the establishment of such organizations as the Humanities Research Council (1943) and the Canada Council (1957) (which came into being as a result of recommendations put forth in the 1951 report submitted by the Massey Commission), scholarship in the humanities was increasingly encouraged, and by the 1960s, several factors contributed to its development and vitality: “increased financial support ... a proliferation of learned and professional societies and journals; the creation on many campuses of research centres and institutes; much increased activity at the University of Toronto Press ... and the launching ... of a national library” (Harris 563).

During the First World War, universities around the world were negatively impacted as money was directed towards the war effort and faculty and students left academe to fight for their country. Those who remained behind differed in their willingness to voice their opinions. Canadian academics were far less likely than their American counterparts to speak out actively against the war or to articulate any opinions that might run counter to those of their government (Horn 173). In the post-war years, this silencing continued, as academics were discouraged from entering into electoral

¹⁹ Any academic will stress that this is a persistent problem today, but it was especially pronounced and problematic when advanced scholarship was struggling to get off the ground.

politics, fearing that unpalatable political views might discourage much needed donations and provincial grants. As it was, the public was largely against government funding of the university since it was not yet seen as an area warranting significant support. As the Depression set in, professors were even less likely to upset the lay boards by exercising their public voice since this was a period during which the university obviously underwent a great financial strain—budget cuts and faculty dismissals were common. Indeed, between 1920 and 1940, Canadian universities were increasingly dependent upon American philanthropic bodies such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York for financial support, which exceeded \$6 million during this period (Harris 343). During the Second World War, this climate of instability heightened. Academics were pressured to conceal research findings that ran counter to the war effort, and humanities and social sciences departments came to be seen as expendable since they were making no visible contribution (Horn 174). In the post-Second World War era, American academics continued to be more vocal about their political views and alliances, and as such, several sought refuge from persecution in Canadian universities; this was a temporary arrangement, however. As the 1950s dawned, a reverse move set in—Canadian academics began seeking employment in the United States, where they were afforded superior research opportunities and salaries (218).

Thus, from the onset of the First World War to the end of the Second World War, the public voice of the Canadian academic was severely constrained. Although the American academic novel flourished in the inter-war period, Canadian academics were far more reticent to speak out in a climate of uncertainty in which job security was so tenuous. One notable exception during this period was Stephen Leacock's *Arcadian*

Adventures with the Idle Rich (1914),²⁰ which provides a compelling satire of the contemporary university and anticipates many of the critiques put forth in the major novels considered in this study. Through his depiction of Plutoria University, an institution whose name and indulgent, larger-than-life University President embody its growing capitalist orientation, Leacock is in many ways ahead of his time in acknowledging and examining the increased presence of commercial concerns within the university; although many subsequent novelists began addressing these same issues, none did so this early in the century. University President Boomer's persistent attempts to secure funding from a benefactor (attempts which include bribing the potential benefactor with an honorary degree) in order to develop and modernize the university are telling in light of the narrator's observation that the newer additions to the university resemble a factory while the "older part of the university stands so quietly and modestly at the top end of the elm avenue, so hidden by the leaves of it, that no one could mistake it for a factory" (45). By aligning the modern university with a factory and casting the traditional university in such an idealistic light, Leacock suggests that the capitalist drive towards making the university bigger and better ultimately compromises the quality of the institution.

In addition to *Arcadian Adventures*, Leacock also wrote two critical works on the contemporary education system. In *The Pursuit of Knowledge* (1934), he proposes two principles that shape education: compulsion and spontaneity. Compulsion refers to what we have to learn, and spontaneity to what we want to learn. He argues that the balance between these two principles needs to be restructured so that education is undertaken not

²⁰ Davies was a great admirer of Leacock and was inspired by him in many ways. In "The Funny Professor," a tribute to Leacock, Davies remarks, "[l]earning, he said, was not supposed to be of any material or commercial benefit to anybody; its use was in saving the soul and enlarging the mind" (41).

only as a form of training for a specific profession, but also for its own sake. A few years later, in *Too Much College, or Education Eating Up Life with Kindred Essays in Education and Humour* (1939), he reiterates this necessity of reducing the compulsory aspect of education so that the spontaneous element can endure, he is careful, however, to caution against moving too far into the realm of spontaneity. In particular, he warns against teaching the “pretentious nonsense” and “the unteachable” that he argues often enter into liberal arts curricula (137-38)

Although Leacock’s non-fiction contributions²¹ cannot be considered academic novels, they are important precursors to the emergence of this sub-genre in Canada. Not only was he setting the stage for subsequent Canadian academics to critique the academy through their writing, but he was also subtly extolling the benefits of a German model of teaching and scholarship, thereby signaling a break with the Oxbridge model of higher education that never quite embraced the German emphasis on giving professors “[t]he essential freedom to discover new information, to do research, known as *lehrfreiheit*,” and promoting “the counterpart for students . . . *lernfreiheit*, the freedom to learn what one desired” (Westmeyer xi). This German ideal of the disinterested pursuit and advancement of knowledge is central to the key academic novels that emerge in subsequent decades.

Aside from Leacock’s contributions, the inter-war period was markedly silent in terms of the development of Canadian academic fiction. Novels that addressed this period were published in subsequent decades and therefore reflected on it retrospectively.

²¹ *Too Much College* also includes some fiction. Leacock concludes this volume with a series of short stories that gently satirize the academic without veering into harsh, overt criticism. In stories such as “When Men Retire,” “Nothing Missing,” and “Are Professors Absent-Minded?”, he presents academic characters as being endearingly naive.

Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House* (1941) and Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952) briefly explore the limits that the Depression, among other factors, had on people's access to higher education: the protagonist in the former novel believes that entering the ministry is his only opportunity to receive a postsecondary education and the protagonist in the latter recognizes early on that obtaining a university education is an impossibility for him and that studying college texts on his own is the best he can do. Max Braithwaite's *Why Shoot the Teacher* (1965), set in the 1930s, follows the struggles of a young unnamed teacher from Saskatoon as he teaches his first class in the rural Saskatchewan prairie. As the teacher bemoans early in the novel, the Depression "made it impossible for me to attend University" (5). The teacher is unfulfilled and stifled during his tenure at this school, and the novel concludes with him leaving his job and the town. Margaret Laurence also retrospectively explores the difficulties of attaining a university education during this period in *A Bird in the House* (1970).

Published in 1955, Earle Birney's *Down the Long Table* examines more thoroughly some of the issues and controversies plaguing the Canadian university in the 1930s. Though set primarily in the 1930s, the narrative is framed by a hearing taking place in the 1950s in which protagonist Gordon Saunders, a Canadian-born medieval literature professor who is currently teaching in the United States, is accused of having been a communist and of projecting this ideology onto his students. The narrative then flashes back to 1932, when Gordon was at the University of Toronto for a one-year fellowship, and details his increasing immersion in various communist factions. Although the novel is concerned primarily with interrogating the political and ideological climate of Canada in the inter-war period, Birney nonetheless raises some timely

questions about the role of the university in this contentious atmosphere. During the hearing at the beginning of the novel, Gordon is asked, “what is your idea of the function of a university teacher?” to which he replies, “[t]o help students think” (2). His embrace of communist teachings and political activism during the 1930s, however, was predicated upon a search for a deeper purpose. One of the main reasons that he was so drawn to these underground rebel groups was that they seemed to be doing something of more value than simply teaching “Tennyson or somebody to little bourgeois snots just—just so that they can do the same—when the whole future of—of the universe is at stake!” (124). Towards the end of his year in Toronto, he reflects, “I kidded myself I wanted to do great deeds, be a prophet and pioneer, a destroyer of sin” (283). Indeed, Gordon is ultimately unable “to sustain his Marxist idealism in the face of petty, political factionalism” (Bök 17), and so he ultimately distances himself from his youthful foray into political activism and comes to embrace the relatively simple, yet noble guiding principle of “help[ing] students think.”

Another mid-century precursor to the academic novel, Constance Beresford-Howe’s *Of This Day’s Journey* (1947) focuses primarily on the doomed romantic relationship between young English literature professor Cam and married university president Andrew. For the most part, the fact that this novel is set in a university environment seems almost incidental with the exception of one oddly inconsistent section near the end of the novel during which one of the professors beseeches Andrew to allow students from Germany “with anti-Nazi inclinations” (185) to enroll in their university. Andrew endorses this plan, believing “[t]hese young people would bring much to Blake; they would bear the marks of experience ... and broaden our horizons by what they knew

of a different world and a different way of life” (187). Although the novel at times comments on the value of the intellectual climate offered by the university, it is ultimately too focused on the melodramatic (and tediously protracted) love affair between Cam and Andrew to offer a fully developed treatment of academe.

According to Ross, “[t]he first half of the twentieth century in Canadian universities is the story ... of the gradual erosion of the concept of a ‘good university’ in British terms to a gradual acceptance of the advantages of the American university, and a desperate search for something distinctively Canadian” (42-43). Keeping this trajectory in mind, it is fitting that the 1960s was a decade of great transformation and restructuring in the Canadian university; by this point, this elusive Canadian character was taking shape. Whereas since the mid-nineteenth century, academic freedom was hampered by a governance structure in which administrative lay boards had the final say on all university matters, beginning in the 1960s faculty and students were allowed more involvement (Jones 4). In the wake of “postwar prosperity,” the general population became more cognizant of the value of a university education (Horn 246). This growing public esteem in the university led to a boom in student registration. The university also shifted in this period from a British hierarchical system, which was more elitist in its enrollment practices, to a more egalitarian American one, which promoted equal access to education (Dunning 49). As Harris notes of the National Conference of Canadian Universities (NCCU)²² meetings of the 1950s (and especially the special conference of 1961), many of the delegates urged the expansion of and increased funding for graduate

²² The NCCU, at which delegates from various Canadian universities and colleges met to discuss problems related to national higher education, first convened in 1911, shortly before the onset of the First World War. The conference was held again in 1915, and as of 1920, it convened every two years for twenty years. The NCCU functioned “as the recognized spokesman for the universities of Canada at home and abroad” (Harris 210).

programs, which, accordingly, began to develop significantly throughout the 1960s (557)²³ Scholarship, most notably in the humanities, was beginning to flourish as a result of various factors already discussed, including increased funding and the proliferation of scholarly journals and associations. Furthermore, because a significant number of academics had migrated to the United States the previous decade, Canadian academics were in need to accommodate the growing number of students. As a result, academics were more valued and enjoyed much more freedom than they had in the past, with the 1960s becoming a “golden age” in the history of Canadian higher education.

During the 1960s and 1970s, various novels, including Margaret Laurence’s *A Jest of God* (1966) and John Metcalf’s *Going Down Slow* (1972), capture the growing public esteem in the value of a university education. In many of Laurence’s works, including *A Bird in the House* (1970) and *The Diviners* (1974), the protagonists enroll in university in order to make something of themselves and to escape the confines of small-town Manawaka life. In *A Jest of God*, however, the protagonist is unable to make this escape, Rachel Cameron is plagued by various insecurities and regrets, including her lack of a university degree. She compares herself unfavourably to Nick, with whom she has a brief relationship, because he has a degree. In *Going Down Slow*, David, a high school teacher, tries to convince Susan, the student with whom he is having an affair, that a university degree is a necessity “[w]hat sort of job can you get without a degree?” (77).

In addition to these novels that only tangentially address academic concerns, the 1960s also saw the publication of works that feature academics as their protagonists.

²³ Harris acknowledges that alongside this expansion of graduate programs in the early 1960s, several problems persisted (which were raised at the NCCU conference of 1961), in particular, delegates discussed the need to restructure these programs, which a significant number of students were having difficulty completing as a result of too much course work and overly ambitious dissertation requirements.

Although they do not offer focused interrogations of academic endeavours, Jane Rule's *The Desert of the Heart* (1964) and Marian Engel's *No Clouds of Glory* (1968), which was subsequently published as *Sarah Bastard's Notebook* (1974), both have as their protagonists female English literature professors and therefore offer some degree of engagement with relevant themes. Rule's novel focuses primarily on the demise of protagonist Evelyn's marriage and the beginning of her attraction to women, particularly to a significantly younger woman named Ann. Evelyn's role as an academic is not examined significantly beyond the fact that it contributes to her image as a serious, mature woman and this image is consistently contrasted against Ann's relative youth and carefree attitude. Ann often feels the need to denigrate the university in order to make herself feel better and more deserving of Evelyn's affection; accordingly, at one point she compares her job at a casino to Evelyn's profession, arguing that the university creates an "illusion of value" whereas the casino unapologetically recognizes its lack of purpose and is therefore the more "pure" of the two institutions (210). In *No Clouds of Glory*, Engel repeatedly expresses protagonist Sarah's disillusionment with academe and her dissatisfaction with her profession as a literature professor through subtle variations on the following sentiment: "[t]hey say I can teach, they say I know my field. Both these are only partially true. I can stand at a lectern and be my grandfather in the pulpit, bring my passions and my aspirations for the congregation on the text. My field, a small one, is easy to know. But the material is so appallingly (to me) boring that I forget more easily every year what there is in it to know" (161). Although Engel also effectively captures the sexism that characterized the university at this time, with Sarah constantly feeling out of place as a result of her gender, she ultimately focuses more on exploring her

protagonist's experiences in Europe, her desire to become a writer, and her attempts to find a general sense of fulfillment and belonging than on a sustained treatment of academe comparable to what Atwood achieves in *The Edible Woman*, published the following year. Even so, both novels are valuable for including scholarly protagonists and therefore anticipating the more focused examinations of academic characters that were to emerge subsequently.

Although the 1960s signaled productive gains for the Canadian university, this massive, unprecedented expansion prompted an ill-equipped university system to struggle to adapt quickly (Bissell, "Canada" 178). Furthermore, although the professoriate enjoyed a newfound sense of status and freedom, this increase in academic freedom was not entirely positive, as the difficulty of producing unique scholarly research in an increasingly saturated academic milieu led to "a professorial culture that became more professional and competitive, and somewhat less friendly" (Stortz and Panayotidis 10). In the decades that followed, some academics began questioning whether academic standards would remain high in the face of the increasing bureaucratization of the academy (Horn 309). "By the 1980s, the hey-day of post-secondary expansion" that the Canadian university had experienced in the preceding two decades had subsided; the university now concerned itself with how to cope in the face of major cuts in government funding (Dunning 50).

Although not addressed in the main trajectory of this dissertation, Beresford-Howe's *A Population of One* (1977), Metcalf's *General Ludd* (1980), and Susan Charlotte Haley's *A Nest of Singing Birds* (1984) warrant some attention at this point in order to highlight their direct engagement with many of the anxieties that plagued the

Canadian university approaching and during the 1980s. Beresford-Howe's novel, similar to her earlier publication *Of This Day's Journey* (1947), has academic themes and characters in the background, but the main focus is on the romantic entanglements of the female protagonist, a young woman named Willy who had "in fact two objectives. One, of course, is to get the job: I've always wanted to teach. The other is to marry somebody as promptly as possible—or at the very least to have an affair" (1). Nonetheless, she also briefly addresses the increasing scarcity of university teaching appointments as well as the growing discontent among the student body as a result of its perceived lack of power ("We're partners in the learning process. We've got to be partners in administration too" [33]). The latter issue leads to various public demonstrations and faculty dismissals. In response to Willy's question "[s]ince when have college affairs been so political?," her colleague Bill replies, "[t]hese days, ducky, education *is* politics" (35).

The title of Metcalf's novel sums up quite effectively his main concern in *General Ludd*: the growing detachment in humanities departments from an earlier, more idealistic mentality of scholarship and pedagogy. An idealistic luddite vision predicated upon the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and the immersion of the scholar in a vast store of learning is increasingly marginalized by key characters in the novel in order to make room for the construction of a more technologically advanced and efficient brand of arts education, the relevance of which is more overtly discernable and therefore more fundable. As one character notes, "[w]hat are the 'high' arts ... what are literature, theatre, opera, painting, orchestras, ballet—what are they but vestigial traces of another world? Rituals still performed whose significance has long been forgotten. There is a gulf between us and that world, and a gulf between that world and what we *shall* become,

a gulf as wide as that which now separates us from prehistoric man” (126). In response to his estimation of the irrelevance of such archaic, outmoded subjects, Cosimo O’Gorman, an ambitious professor who gradually takes over control from the incumbent university president, takes decisive action: “the first thing he did was ax nearly all the Classics Department. Not contemporary, right? Not relevant. ... So he sets out to build something that *is* contemporary and he builds this whoring great department called the Communication Arts Complex” (13). Cosimo believes that such alterations will appeal directly to the student-consumer who helps fund the university, and indeed numerous concessions are made to appeal to these students since, as one professor informs protagonist Jim Wells, “[t]he customer, old buddy, is always right” (15).

Haley’s *A Nest of Singing Birds* repeatedly contrasts the 1980s with “the age of university prosperity” (7), which began in the 1960s, in order to demonstrate how increasingly competitive the job market has become, with the pressure to publish and participate in conferences looming over the heads of all untenured faculty. With a tenuous contract position in the philosophy department and a tentative affair with an English professor, protagonist Anna seeks stability and permanence in both her professional and personal lives throughout the novel. The novel suggests that other than those who were “hired in the years of university prosperity” and who are therefore “happily blind to the situation” (108), university faculty will constantly struggle for an elusive sense of job security and stability. Haley also addresses the issue of university administration and governance; although in the 1960s university departments gained greater autonomy from the intrusions of external administrative bodies, Haley’s inclusion of various external review committees, the presence of which the professors in the novel

attribute to the administration's desire to reduce departmental funding and downsize faculty, suggests such intrusions and threats to departmental autonomy persist.

These financial cuts and concerns that characterized the 1980s became increasingly pronounced in the 1990s and have become an especially pressing concern today. Indeed, according to CAUT's *Statement Regarding the 2010 Federal Budget*, "[p]ublic funding of universities and colleges has dropped sharply over the past two decades. In 1990, government operating grants made up 80% of total university operating revenues. By 2007, that had fallen to less than 58%." As a recent study of Canadian higher education states,

[h]igher education has been under strain for a number of years in Canada and has reached the point where the system is fraying. Years of underfunding have threatened the quality of university education and research. Large increases in student tuition levels have threatened access to a university education in Canada and dramatically increased student debt levels upon graduation. And there is a looming shortage of new faculty to sustain the system as large numbers of faculty retire over the next ten years. (Beach, Broadway, and McInnis 1)

Whether or not this passage overstates the problem, it is representative of numerous books published in recent years that explore a "crisis" in Canadian higher education. These books date back to the 1956 publication of *Canada's Crisis in Higher Education*, which focuses primarily on how Canadian universities coped with drastically increasing enrollment rates following the Second World War. These non-fiction critical responses to perceived crises and threats within the academy have flourished into an extensive sub-genre, which speaks to the enduring relevance of a corresponding sub-genre of academic

fiction, through which novelists can explore similar concerns within an alternative format, one that is capable of both reframing these persistent questions in a more dynamic context and, in so doing, reaching a broader audience.

By the 1960s, the Canadian university had come into its own; it had finally shed its dependence on Britain and the United States. Canadian novelists were now ready to assert their unique voice and articulate a distinctly Canadian response to the expansion of the university in general and of scholarship in particular as well as to the added pressures and complications brought about by the perpetual strain of funding cuts and bureaucratization. Spanning the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, the novelists under consideration wrote their novels during a pivotal yet fraught time for the Canadian university, a period characterized by positive and much-needed growth as well as inevitable strain. Although public sentiment in the university was at an all time high in the 1960s, thereby securing its public funding, in subsequent decades, as the economy weakened and unemployment rates increased, the public was not as supportive of the university and its claim to government aid (Dunning 50). Humanities departments in particular felt the added pressure to demonstrate their relevance in order to justify external support. In response, out of the foundation of a strong history of novels that address and comment on the Canadian university to varying degrees, a Canadian tradition of academic fiction emerged not to extol the glories of university expansion, but to engage with the inevitably rocky periods of transition that accompany such major change. Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1969) and Kroetsch's *Gone Indian* (1973) were published at just the right time to engage with the implications of these significant changes as they were happening while Davies's *The Rebel Angels* (1981) and Shields's *Swann* (1987)

were appropriately timed to reflect on these transformations from a greater remove which enabled them to explore more substantially the enduring resonances of this pivotal period in the history of the Canadian university.

CHAPTER TWO

“The human mind was the last thing to be commercialized”:

Margaret Atwood’s *The Edible Woman*

Margaret Atwood’s *The Edible Woman* (written in 1965, but not published until 1969)¹ may seem an odd work with which to begin a study on the development of the Canadian academic novel. Indeed, its academic elements are not immediately discernable. It is most often viewed as a novel that critiques consumer society in general and, in so doing, examines the life of one consumer, Marian MacAlpin, in particular. What is neglected in the existing criticism is another of Atwood’s central concerns in this novel: the current state of literary scholarship. The novel offers an important examination of the increasing commercialization of academic endeavours and the resultant corruption of scholarly values—that is, through the character of Duncan, a jaded English graduate student, Atwood explores the shift among literary scholars from the idealistic pursuit of knowledge for its own sake in favour of the self-interested pursuit of individual rewards, reputation, and career advancement.² As one study of Canadian higher education puts it, scholars are “the purveyors of knowledge for knowledge’s sake, but especially in the latter half of the twentieth-century, tangible results of research are most prized” (Stortz

¹ In the Introduction to the 1980 Virago Modern Classics edition of *The Edible Woman*, Atwood explains the delay in publication: “I finished *The Edible Woman* in November of 1965 and sent it to a publisher who’d displayed some interest in my previous book. After an initial positive letter, I heard nothing. I was too busy worrying about my Ph.D. Orals to follow up at that point, but after a year and a half I began probing and discovered that the publisher [McClelland and Stewart] had lost the manuscript” (not paginated). After Atwood had begun to make a name for herself through her poetry, Jack McClelland took her out to lunch and promised to publish the book.

² A review of the titles of recent non-fiction publications reveals how pronounced and potentially damaging this intersection of commercial and academic interests has become: *The University in Ruins* (Readings 1996), *The Corporate Campus: Commercialization and the Dangers to Canada’s Colleges and Universities* (Turk 2000), and *The Exchange University: Corporatization of Academic Culture* (Chan and Fisher 2008).

and Panayotidis 14). This alignment of academe with commercial interests is the basis of an ongoing debate: Jean-François Lyotard, Deborah L. Rhode, George Ritzer, and Theodore Roszak are a few of the many scholars who have examined the increasing commodification of academic research while others such as Warren Hagstrom and Lewis Hyde argue that the aims and intents of academe are antithetical to those of a market-driven capitalist economy. Atwood's debut novel, with a focus on literary scholarship, employs the alternate medium of fiction through which to offer valuable contributions to this dialogue—she engages with the same questions that were arising in the non-fiction analyses published at the time while also anticipating the issues interrogated in recent studies.

Although I concede not every occurrence in this novel is overtly academic, Atwood nonetheless advances a critique of literary scholarship throughout and she does so in a more sustained fashion than many other novelists whose works are more concretely rooted in the academic milieu; thus the novel's inclusion in the sub-genre is more than justified. Indeed, as both Mortimer R. Proctor and John O. Lyons acknowledge in their studies, the parameters of the academic novel should be recognized as being fluid so that valuable critiques such as Atwood's are accommodated within rather than excluded from the sub-genre. In classifying this work as an academic novel, I do not mean to minimize or dismiss the other characters and thematic concerns that the novel addresses apart from its academic focus. Marian is unquestionably the protagonist of this novel and her conflicted relationship with Peter and with her own sense of self is undeniably a central element, yet Duncan is also an important character and his interconnected critique of consumer and academic culture warrants acknowledgement

and analysis.³ Moreover, although I will demonstrate throughout this chapter that *The Edible Woman* is certainly an academic novel, this does not mean that it is *solely* an academic novel. Atwood is a dynamic novelist who defies categorization, and this novel is a dynamic work that transcends definitive generic classification. Previous studies have already addressed its other elements, so a focused examination of its heretofore neglected academic critique is overdue.

A consideration of the date of composition and publication lends further support to my contention that Atwood intended this work to engage with what was at the time an emerging dialogue on the value and purpose of humanities (especially literary) scholarship. Nathalie Cooke notes that Atwood based the novel on her experiences working at Canadian Facts Marketing, a market research firm similar to the one at which protagonist Marian MacAlpin works in the novel. She worked at this firm from the summer of 1963 until the spring of 1964 (111-12). Cooke also remarks in passing that Atwood wrote the draft of this novel on spare examination booklets while teaching English at the University of British Columbia during the 1964-65 school year. This fact warrants more than passing comment. Atwood was teaching at UBC during her break

³ Although Atwood primarily develops her critique of the academy through Duncan, she also expresses subtle commentaries through many of the other characters, including Marian and Ainsley, each of whom recently obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree (in English and Psychology respectively). For example, when asked by Duncan why she has such a “crummy job,” Marian replies, “what else can you do with a B.A. these days?” (55). This is also the standard response Ainsley employs when people ask why she works as a tester of defective electric toothbrushes (17). This reply not only emphasizes the perceived lack of practical value in a B.A., but it also highlights the fact that by this time (the mid-1960s), a university degree was no longer as rare; with enrollment rates significantly increasing since the mid-1950s, by the time period of Atwood’s novel almost anyone was able to attain a degree (as evinced by the fact that almost all of her characters in this novel have a degree). Furthermore, the various characters, the majority of whom are recent university graduates, demonstrate the way in which the university has failed them—although the university is supposed to be an institution that provides its graduates with a sense of stability and direction, Atwood’s cast of characters is bereft of any real sense of purpose. Atwood thus offers a rather negative criticism of the university by shifting her focus outside of it; indeed, she upholds Mortimer R. Proctor’s assertion that the academic novel must “pronounce significantly upon university education” (3) by examining the aftermath of this education rather than adhering to the usual method of analyzing characters within the university.

from her graduate studies at Harvard University⁴ (to which she did not return and she therefore did not complete her dissertation). She was disillusioned with the atmosphere of heightened competition that pervaded the university. Although Cooke is correct in asserting that Atwood's experiences at a market research firm directly influenced aspects of the novel, so too did her growing alienation from the university world. Furthermore, the 1960s was a pivotal decade in the history of higher education in North America—whereas the American academic system was experiencing various strains, the Canadian system was finally coming into its own as a result of various reform movements, increased funding, and growing public esteem. Although consumerism was a major issue in the public consciousness and therefore a timely concern for Atwood to address in her novel, so too was the growth and transformation of the university and the scholarship produced within its walls. Considering Atwood had direct experience with both American and Canadian universities during this period, she was ideally positioned to interrogate what was at the time a rapidly evolving academic climate. That this climate was increasingly dictated by commercial demands (namely, the desire to secure public financial support as well as individual career advancement) makes the intersection between consumer and academic culture that characterizes *The Edible Woman* especially appropriate.

⁴ Atwood's experience as a student in the United States inspired her interest in examining and comparing American and Canadian national identities. "It wasn't until I went as a graduate student to the United States that I started thinking much about Canada at all. Before, it was just an unexamined condition, like air; one lived in it but paid no attention to it. Suddenly, though, America was proving to be not what I had thought. It wasn't full of Supermen, drum majorettes or even kindly F D R 's, and I and the other Canadians that soon gathered in tiny exiled groups found ourselves engaged in an unhappy scramble for our own identities" (Atwood, "Nationalism" 86). Not only did this experience initiate her interest in broader questions of national identity, but it also prompted her to confront and interrogate the distinct academic climates offered by these two nations.

Atwood is a fitting figure to author the first Canadian academic novel.⁵ She has had a lifelong exposure to the academic world. Her father, Carl Atwood, was a professor of zoology whose research on tree-eating insects uprooted the family to the northern Quebec bush for several months of the year throughout Atwood's childhood, beginning when she was only six months old, so that she did not obtain formal schooling until she was eleven years old (Cooke 221). Her father's influence made her realize that intellectual pursuits need not be restrictive and conservative; instead, by observing her father and his friends, Atwood realized "the life of the mind was not academic. Knowledge was a passion to be applied experientially" (Sullivan, *Red Shoes* 50). Moreover, her father's immersion in both the humanities and the sciences taught her that knowledge is fluid and does not need to be contained in strict categories. Atwood enjoyed this open and idealized approach to learning and knowledge during her tenure at the University of Toronto's Victoria College, which she attended in pursuit of her Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature. Her experience at Victoria College was "nurturing" and almost completely devoid "of the intellectual one-upmanship that usually characterizes university life" (78). The environment at Harvard, however, was the polar opposite. During her years as a graduate student at this institution, where she obtained her Master's degree but left before completing her Ph.D., she experienced a great deal of sexism and described the overall atmosphere as being a "hell-hole of fierce competition;

⁵ Judging by their marketing tactics, the editors at McClelland and Stewart either did not recognize or did not care to promote the academic dimension of *The Edible Woman*. In a copy of "Editor's Notes" dated May 15, 1968, the market for the novel is described as comprising "All the usual trade outlets, with particular emphasis on the campus crowd, and the younger generation generally" (*Atwood Papers* box 95, folder 7). In addition, the early jacket copy reads: "In this off-beat and diverting novel, Margaret Atwood has taken a long cool look at the articulate, inwardly bewildered members of the generation freshly hatched from university" (box 95, folder 8). The references to "campus crowd" and "university" likely have everything to do with appealing to the young generation and little or nothing to do with highlighting Atwood's critique of academic values and practices.

there were always a few suicides, people throwing themselves into the Charles River every spring off the bell tower” (qtd. in Sullivan, *Red Shoes* 124). Although Atwood may not have had the most fulfilling experience at Harvard, she continued to cultivate an academic identity even after leaving the Ph.D. program with an only partially completed dissertation.⁶ She was an English instructor at several institutions, including the University of British Columbia (1964-65), Sir George Williams University (1967-68), the University of Alberta (1969-70), and York University (1971-72). In spite of her incomplete doctoral dissertation, she garnered several honorary doctorates throughout her career, beginning with a Litt.D. from Trent University in 1973 (Cooke 221). Furthermore, she has made a significant contribution to Canadian literary scholarship through the publication of numerous articles, essays, and reviews and, most notably, her seminal work *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972).

Her enduring involvement in the academic world imbues her fictional accounts of academe with a level of detail and nuance that would otherwise be missing. Her relatively negative experiences at Harvard helped to inspire her critical attitude towards academe that surfaces in many of her works, particularly in *The Edible Woman* and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), which will be examined at the end of the chapter; the idealistic attitude towards knowledge that her father instilled in her combined with her nurturing experience at the University of Toronto is what motivates Atwood to paint these critical portraits—she knows academe has the potential to be better. Commenting on the task of

⁶ In an interview with Karla Hammond, Atwood explains the reasons behind not completing her dissertation: “I’ve done everything except about a quarter of the thesis. Somehow things came along that I had to write and I did that instead. Also since teaching isn’t my life’s work, what would be the value of my finishing my thesis? It wouldn’t have any monetary or practical value. I will, however, eventually finish it because I like finishing things. But I’d never turn down the chance to write a novel for the chance to finish my thesis. I’ll do it sometime in a moment of emptiness or despair” (101).

the fiction writer, Atwood writes, “what kind of world shall you describe for your readers? The one you can see around you, or the better one you can imagine? If only the latter, you’ll be unrealistic; if only the former, despairing. But it is by the better world we can imagine that we judge the world we have. If we cease to judge this world, we may find ourselves, very quickly, in one which is infinitely worse” (“Witches” 6). Although she by no means offers an idealized portrait of academe in this novel, neither does she paint an entirely negative one. Through Duncan, she voices her concern with the increasing encroachment of commercial ideology on scholarly endeavours. In so doing, she prompts an examination into the purpose and value of literary scholarship in the hopes that an increased self-awareness within the academic community will prevent an already compromised set of scholarly values from degrading into something “infinitely worse.”

Atwood often minimizes her connection to the academy: “I wanted to be a writer, but writers, as far as I could see, made even less than Lecturers, so I decided to go to graduate school. If I had had any burning academic ambitions, they would have taken a turn for the venomous when I was asked by one of my professors whether I really wanted to go to graduate school ... wouldn’t I rather get married?” (“The Curse” 215). Although she downplays her investment in academe, her enduring fascination with it, as evinced by her numerous fictional treatments of academic characters and themes, suggests that her experiences as a graduate student and instructor helped inspire a lasting trend in her writing. *The Edible Woman* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*, both of which will be examined in this chapter, offer her most developed critiques of academic endeavours, but most of Atwood’s novels contain academic characters and therefore comment on this milieu at

least peripherally, most often emphasizing how alienating and out of touch the scholar can become. For example, in *Lady Oracle* (1976), Joan's husband Arthur is a political science professor whose "friends and the books he read, which always had footnotes, and the causes he took up made [her] feel deficient and somehow absurd, a sort of intellectual village idiot" (34). In *Life Before Man* (1979), paleontologist Lesje is presented as being almost completely defined by her research interests; she describes most of her personal experiences in paleontological terms and seems at a loss as to how to conduct herself outside of her workplace. Commenting on her research, the narrator states, "[t]his is her knowledge, her field they call it. And it is like a field, you can walk through it and around it and say: These are the boundaries" (157). She takes comfort in the structure provided by her intellectual pursuits while she is consistently troubled by her personal life, namely her affair with Nate, her co-worker Elizabeth's husband. Although *The Robber Bride* (1993) is primarily about Zenia's ruthless efforts to exploit three of her friends, the focus on one of these friends, Tony, a military historian, enables Atwood to explore academic pursuits. Tony is viewed by her colleagues as an oddity for her scholarly interest in war: "[m]ale historians think she's invading their territory. ... Female historians ... think she ought to be studying birth; not death, and certainly not battle plans" (25). Like Lesje, Tony is a character defined by her academic career. She perceives her work environment as an extension of her research interest; the university becomes a battleground full of manipulations, "whisperings, gangings-up, petty treacheries, snits, and umbrage" (23). She becomes so consumed by her research that she sees evidence of war not only in the university, but everywhere, from the streets to her home. She is so defined by her identity as an academic that Zenia's key means of

manipulating her is by threatening her academic integrity. *Alias Grace* (1996) engages with ideas to be explored in relation to Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian* (1973) in the following chapter—namely, through Dr. Simon Jordan's progressive realization that Grace Marks's story cannot be reduced to supporting scholarly data for his broader research interests, Atwood foregrounds the complexity of narrative and its ability to illuminate vital questions rather than function merely as evidence. In *The Blind Assassin* (2000), Iris's letters in reply to scholars seeking archival material and other assorted information in relation to her novel (thought to have been written by her sister Laura) offer rather biting criticisms of literary scholarship: "Dear Ms. X., I acknowledge your letter concerning your proposed thesis, though I can't say its title makes a great deal of sense to me. Doubtless it does to you or you would not have come up with it. I cannot give you any help. Also you do not deserve any. 'Deconstruction' implies the wrecking ball, and 'problematize' is not a verb" (286-87).

Cat's Eye (1988) and *Oryx and Crake* (2003) are both more explicitly related to concerns explored in *The Edible Woman*. In *Cat's Eye*, a novel which shares several autobiographical parallels with Atwood's life, protagonist Elaine's father is an entomologist and professor in the zoology department at the University of Toronto while her brother Stephen eventually becomes an astrophysicist. Elaine goes against family expectations and pursues an art (rather than biology) degree, but she makes sure to complement her painting classes with the more pragmatic "Advertising Art," a course which attracts students who are "cleaner and more earnest, and they want paying jobs when they graduate" (328). In a more recent novel, *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood once again turns to this question of the value of art degrees and of art more generally. Whereas

Crake attends the highly respected Watson-Crick Institute, the site of valuable scientific research initiatives that ostensibly benefit society as a whole, Jimmy's relatively lackluster high-school transcript leaves him with few options, and so he accepts an offer of admission to the Martha Graham Academy, a poorly funded and poorly maintained arts and humanities college. The curriculum is described as being "pleasant to contemplate in its way, but no longer central to anything" (187). In an effort to demonstrate some practicality and therefore to attract external funding, the college institutes programs with "utilitarian aims"; these consist primarily of courses related to advertising such as "Applied Rhetoric" and "Applied Semantics" (188). Although Jimmy initially undermines the college's attempts to promote a sense of utility in its curriculum by pursuing "the superfluous as an end in itself" and intentionally seeking out and reading "obsolete" books (195), he ultimately capitulates to his college's mentality by accepting a job writing advertising copy for self-improvement products. Taken together, *Cat's Eye* and especially *Oryx and Crake* thus extend the interrogation into the value of the arts and humanities and the intersection of these disciplines with commercial interests that Atwood initiates in *The Edible Woman*.

Although the idea that academe and scholarly research are increasingly commercialized is not new by today's standards, it was only just becoming a documented concern during the time Atwood was writing *The Edible Woman*.⁷ In *The Dissenting Academy* (1968), Theodore Roszak presents a series of essays in which this

⁷ Critical works examining the state, value, and purpose of literary scholarship emerged much earlier. Consider for example Norman Foerster et al.'s *Literary Scholarship: Its Aims and Methods* (1941) in which the authors respond to the prevailing belief that contemporary scholarship, "while not unsound, has been too limited in its scope and too vague in its ultimate aims" (v). It was not until the 1960s, however, that these types of critical examinations began interrogating more explicitly the potentially corrupting influence of self-interest and careerist, commercial concerns.

commercialization of academic culture is acknowledged and interrogated. Roszak argues that the academy is increasingly characterized by the “anxiety of careerist competition” (4) and “a condition of entrenched social irrelevance” (12). He criticizes the scholar’s disconnection from the mentality of the *philosophes*, a group of idealistic French intellectuals from the Enlightenment period: “[a]t one and the same time, the *philosophes* were keener minds, better servants of their society, and more effective educators than our contemporary academics manage to be. They held the balance that gracefully blended what has since been surrendered in our universities into mindless collaboration on the one hand and irrelevant research on the other” (29). In our contemporary academic climate, Roszak thus argues for a stronger, more explicit connection between scholarly research and social relevance. Writing in the same volume, Louis Kampf relates Roszak’s critique to the specific discipline of English literature: even though literary scholars “pretend...that their duties carry some social weight” (44), “[a]ny prospective academic knows that literature is of interest only as it offers an opportunity for personal display, only as it becomes the means to a career” (48). The value of scholarly research, according to Kampf, has less to do with contributing to and shaping our cultural, moral, and social climate and more to do with self-interest; research is a commodity that is exchanged for career security and advancement in the form of either additional funding or job offers.

Most recent critics focus on the way in which “the university is evolving into the contemporary entrepreneurial university” (Etzkowitz et al. 1) and how this is problematic considering “[s]cholarship and entrepreneurship are two different cultures, two different kinds of life: the life of the mind as opposed to the life of the bottom line” (Graham 27).

In particular, they examine the student-professor dynamic as a concrete manifestation of this entrepreneurial, business-oriented impulse. The university produces a commodity—knowledge—that is marketed and packaged in such a way as to appeal to the targeted consumer—the student. Writing in a similar vein, Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), explores the state of the university in the post-industrial age:

The relationship of the suppliers and users of knowledge to the knowledge they supply and use is now tending, and will increasingly tend, to assume the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and consume—that is, the form of value. Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production. (4)

Although critics such as George Ritzer align the producer of knowledge with the professor and the consumer with the student, Lyotard's assessment of the commodification of knowledge applies not only to the pedagogical side of academe, but also to the dynamic between the ostensible producers of this knowledge—that is, between the scholars who both produce and consume academic research. Lyotard acknowledges the “saleable” aspect of scholarship—on one level, it can be sold to students, but on another more entrenched level, it is exchanged and “sold” between scholars for career advancement. As Rhode observes, this “pursuit of prestige and profit ... has too often hijacked the pursuit of knowledge” (3), ultimately compromising the quality and relevance of the resultant scholarship.

Not everyone agrees that academe has been corrupted by commercialization, however; indeed, some critics, perhaps Lewis Hyde more so than others, believe that there is a fundamental opposition between academic and capitalist values and practices. In *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (1983), Hyde distinguishes between gift and market economies, arguing that the gift economy thrives on sharing and community whereas the market economy is predicated upon acquisition and profit. Drawing on the work of sociologist Warren Hagstrom, Hyde asserts that scholarly research falls under the purview of the gift economy because rather than receive money, “scientists who give their ideas to the community receive recognition and status in return” (77). Since scientists, and scholars more generally, receive status for their work, status that only has any value within the scholarly community, their compensation for their work is the reputation needed to continue doing their work, to continue sharing knowledge with and fostering the ideals of their community.

Although Hyde’s points are valid, he ultimately paints a portrait of an *ideal* scholarly community, one that does not necessarily match up to the reality. To be fair, he acknowledges that “when people work with no goal other than that of attracting a better job, or getting tenure or higher rank ... one finds specious and trivial research, not contributions to knowledge.” He concludes, however, that it is only after a community of scholars, producing research and pursuing knowledge for its own sake, has firmly taken shape may we “speak of dissent, segmentation, differentiation, dispute, and all the other nuances of intellectual life” (83). He overlooks the fact that these “other nuances” have already taken hold of our academic culture and therefore warrant more attention. By locating scholarly research in the gift economy, he suggests that all of the careerist,

competitive impulses that run counter to the ethic of sharing and community are not pronounced enough to pose a real danger.

Situating Atwood within this dialogue is somewhat problematic. On the one hand, her treatment of academe in *The Edible Woman* aligns her with the numerous critics who comment on its commercialization. In this novel, she demonstrates that the gap between the ideal community of scholars Hyde champions and the realities of academe is wider than he admits. Duncan's active resistance of the artificial categories upon which consumer culture is predicated speaks to his, and by extension Atwood's, critique of a corresponding set of potentially limiting categories, patterns, and trends that shape literary scholarship. Furthermore, her descriptions of Fischer's research and Duncan's disillusionment with such research demonstrate the compulsion of academics to prioritize fundable, marketable research projects above genuinely worthwhile, valuable ones. Atwood's comments during an interview with Rudolf Bader, however, provide a different perspective. She praises Hyde's book and echoes his position:

One theory about the university is that it provides a sort of haven, or protected enclave, in which activities can go on that don't have any obvious commercial application. Academic work therefore affirms that there are human values apart from the making of money. ... For more on the subject, see Lewis Hyde's book, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*—a book I'm in the habit of recommending to young writers. (188-89)

Atwood outlines Hyde's position without challenging it, suggesting that she endorses his belief that "[a]cademic work and artistic pursuits exist in the realm of the gift, and have value, or fail to have it, according to those laws" (189). One way to reconcile this

apparent contradiction is to view these comments in the interview as constituting Atwood's perspective of how scholarly research *should* function and her treatment in *The Edible Woman* as warning of the direction scholarly endeavours and values are heading as a result of a growing disconnection between the scholar and the ideal that should inform his or her work—the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. Scholarly research should thus ideally be situated within the realm of the gift, but Atwood's novel demonstrates how an increasingly self-interested scholarly approach has eroded this relationship.

*The Edible Woman*⁸ draws on Atwood's extensive academic background as well as on her brief experience working for Canadian Facts Marketing. Atwood thus has firsthand experience of the two worlds—academe and consumer culture—that this novel interweaves. The novel centres on Marian, a young woman in her twenties who has recently graduated from college and is currently employed by a market research firm, Seymour Surveys. Marian seems to have a comfortable life, but her balanced state of mind soon begins to deteriorate as she experiences the pull from various forces and figures around her: her employer urges her to sign up for the company retirement plan, her fiancé Peter begins taking up more of her time and identity, and all around her she is bombarded by advertisements and products that impose particular lifestyles upon her. Marian begins to feel consumed. In an effort to cope, she attempts to opt out of consumer society by opting out of consumption altogether—she progressively eats less food as a misguided means of retaining her sense of self in this oppressive modern

⁸ *The Edible Woman* is based on an earlier unpublished short story entitled "The Woman Who Washes," which was written in 1963. In this story, one of Marian's friends tells her about a woman who stopped bathing for months and then, one day, burns her clothes, bathes, and returns to normal (*Atwood Papers* box 79, folder 11).

society. With the aid of her mysterious friend Duncan, an English graduate student who creatively attempts to evade the imposition of structure and roles by both consumer society and academe, Marian gradually reclaims both her identity and her ability to consume.

Since its publication in 1969, *The Edible Woman* has garnered a significant, though not particularly diverse, sampling of criticism. T.D. MacLulich, who offers one of the more unique readings of the novel by suggesting that an application of Claude Levi-Strauss's structural model of mythology can illuminate Marian's "dream-like hallucinations" (111) and her "'inner' or 'mythic' narrative" (112), bemoans the limited nature of the critical response to this novel: "[m]ost critics describe the book as primarily a novel of social commentary, an up-to-date comedy of manners. If we add the notion that *The Edible Woman* may be seen as a feminist polemic, depicting the narrow range of opportunities society offers to women, we have summarized the usual range of viewpoints" (112). Even though his article was published in 1978, it offers a relatively accurate assessment of the criticism, the majority of which was published in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, as MacLulich notes, many critics highlight Atwood's social commentary, which D.J. Dooley defines as her exploration of "the virtual disappearance of human beings in a commercial culture" (138). They also examine the gendered dimension of her critique and "interrogate the relation of the sexes in a consumer society" in which men have the upper hand (Srisermbhok 247). In examining the class and gender politics of consumer society, most critics inevitably focus their attention specifically on the character and development of protagonist Marian, who facilitates a microcosmic analysis of these broader contexts. While critics are divided as to how much Marian

changes over the course of the novel—or whether she changes at all—they focus on her journey to self-empowerment and her attempts to negotiate the imposition of social roles and expectations and to balance them with her own desires.

Of particular note is the tendency of critics to relegate Atwood's treatment of academic concerns to the margins of their studies or, as is more often the case, to ignore it completely. Most critics acknowledge that Duncan is a graduate student, but rather than reflect on this fact, they simply present it as one of his many eccentricities and focus instead on how he facilitates Marian's exploration of her inner conflicts and desires: Sherrill Grace argues that "Duncan is most successful as a symbol of Marian's inner life or subconscious" (*Violent* 93); Catherine McLay observes of Duncan, "[b]oth playful and animal, he is the guide who accompanies Marian on her downward journey, her descent into the dark side of self" (131); and Glenys Stow also describes him as a guide "who gradually leads [Marian] towards self-knowledge" (94). The existing criticism thus focuses primarily on Marian; secondary characters such as Duncan are analyzed only to reveal something further about the protagonist. Theodore F. Sheckels takes issue with the fact that critical studies of "Atwood's fiction [center] on female characters, with male characters shoved in the background" (115); unfortunately, his contribution offers only a few superficial paragraphs about Duncan (indeed, none of the male characters receives in-depth attention in this brief article) and therefore does not do enough in the way of compensating for this critical neglect. Unconvinced by Ann Parsons's assertion that "[i]t is never safe to take Duncan too seriously" (104), I draw on the various peripheral analyses of Duncan in order to formulate a detailed exploration of this character. Rather than treat him as a gateway to understanding Marian, I argue that he is a complex

character in his own right who is instrumental not only in furthering Marian's development, but also in advancing Atwood's critique of academe. Through his dissatisfaction with consumer society in general and academe in particular, this reluctant consumer and conflicted graduate student bridges these two spheres, demonstrating that just as consumer culture is predicated upon the exchange of commodities and dependent upon market desires, so too is academe: academic research is the commodity that is shaped by the demands of a specific self-interested market, the academic community. Francis Mansbridge is one of the few critics to acknowledge this direct parallel between academe and consumer culture: "[t]he university, as portrayed in this novel, is little different from other segments of consumer society" (107). He does not interrogate this parallel further, however. Tracing a more substantial connection demonstrates that Duncan's general critique of consumer society relates to and ultimately facilitates a targeted interrogation of the academy.

Duncan is the perfect character to challenge society's values since he is apart from and resistant to social expectations. Commenting on the invasive presence of consumerism in the novel, John Lauber asserts, "the novel insistently asks whether and how anyone can achieve identity in the artificial society it presents" (20). While most of the other characters in the novel believe the answer lies in adopting artificial roles⁹ in keeping with the artificial society, Duncan opts for eschewing identity altogether; he tells Marian at one point that he would like to be an amoeba, an amorphous creature lacking

⁹ Atwood articulates her own distaste for adhering to such social roles in a letter (dated November 28, 1995) to Nathalie Cooke: "I don't give a piss about generalized 'roles.' Never have. If I'd believed in 'roles,' espec. [sic] the ones being doled out in the 50's, I never would have been a writer. Would have been Betty Crocker instead. ... Why are people, espec. [sic] women, always being told they have Roles? It is not a play" (Cooke 49).

boundaries, because “they’re immortal ... and sort of shapeless and flexible. Being a person is getting too complicated” (201). His desire to become an amoeba, a being that resists containment, speaks to his desire to evade consumer society’s attempts to classify and categorize his existence.

In consumer society, “daily desires are satisfied through the acquisition and use of ‘commodities,’ goods which are produced for exchange and are on sale on the market” (Sassatelli 2). Prepackaged commodities are mass-produced and marketed to specific segments of society. In order for this society to function effectively, not only must the products be packaged in a particular way, but so too must the consumers. As Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer note, consumer society operates by “classifying, organizing, and labeling consumers” and “[e]verybody must behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance with his previously determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type” (5). Society must be clearly segmented into specific categories in order for the appropriate products to reach the appropriate market.

People like Marian are forced by social pressure into these preexisting categories while characters like Duncan subvert this imposed categorization by simultaneously occupying contradictory categories. Throughout the novel, Duncan emerges as an ambiguous character who is simultaneously old and young, death-like and vital, experienced and virginal, shrewd and naïve. For example, in their first meeting during which Marian conducts a beer survey for her job at Seymour Surveys, she asks, “[h]ello there, is your father in?” (49), thinking twenty-six-year-old Duncan is no more than fifteen years old. Duncan’s youthful appearance does not equate with vitality and exuberance, however; when Marian first sees him, she notes that he looks “cadaverously

thin” (48). Most critics note Duncan’s jarring sickly appearance: his “extreme, almost deathly, thinness is emphasized” (Cameron, “Faminality” 61) and he is “grotesquely emaciated” (Lauber 23). Far from suggesting youthful vitality, these descriptors convey a sense of death and decrepitude. That Duncan’s physicality aligns him with death is fitting considering his fascination with this macabre topic. One of his favourite places is the mummy exhibit at the Museum, where he likes to “meditate on immortality” (186). These mummies adhere to Duncan’s favoured amoeba aesthetic in that they, too, are ambiguous and resistant to fixed labels—the mummies have “stylized eyes” that “gazed up ... with an expression of serene vacancy” (186), suggesting they continue to live on in death. The fact that Marian confuses the gender of one of the mummies further speaks to their shifting quality.

His combination of youth and deathly sickliness thus turns Duncan into a sort of “aged child” (Stein, *Atwood* 46).¹⁰ Indeed, during their first encounter at the laundromat, Marian notices this bizarre conflation of youth and age: “I could have reached out effortlessly and put my arms around that huddled awkward body and consoled it, rocked it gently. Still, there was something most unchildlike about him, something that suggested rather an unnaturally old man, old far beyond consolation” (99). Throughout the novel, Duncan looks to his peers (his roommates and Marian) as parental figures and nurturers, suggesting a childlike dependency, but at the same time, he is positioned as a wise, all-knowing guide for Marian, teaching her to question her surroundings and to resist social roles and expectations.

¹⁰ Judging from the readers’ reports for *The Edible Woman*, early readers of the novel did not see any significance to Duncan’s ambiguous age. Consider, for example, this anonymous, undated report: “I think it is a pity that in the page 47-50 sequence Duncan is so firmly established in the reader’s mind as almost a child—the use of the word ‘boy’ the insistence that he looks 10 years old—or 15 years old—gives a false impression he is very small or short or immature. This is not the case” (*Atwood Papers* box 95, folder 5).

The more Marian is around Duncan, the more she experiences a destabilizing of distinct categories. This progressive blurring of boundaries begins the day she first meets him. That morning, she awakens from a dream “in which [she] had looked down and seen [her] feet beginning to dissolve, like melting jelly” (43). As she sets out to conduct the beer surveys, she takes in the landscape around her: “[t]he sky was cloudless but not clear: the air hung heavily, like invisible steam, so that the colours and outlines of objects in the distance were blurred” (44). After her first encounter with Duncan, she realizes “the notes [she] had made of his answers were almost indecipherable in the glare of the sunlight; all [she] could see on the page was a blur of scribbling” (55). In each of these instances, Marian is confronted with the realization that the world cannot be definitively categorized and delineated. This realization is continually reinforced throughout her relationship with Duncan. His influence causes her to see the world as it is—fluid, dynamic, and resistant to containment—and prompts her to recognize the constructed, artificial nature of consumer society.

In consumer society, clothing is one of the most overt and concrete means of outwardly manifesting the roles and categories one occupies. While most of the characters in the novel readily wear the types of clothing that match up to their social roles, Duncan once again resists this complicity with categorization. At Peter’s party, Marian steps outside of her comfort zone and wears a dress and hairstyle which are so unlike her normal style; even though she is uncomfortable, she dresses this way for Peter because he asks her to look “not quite so mousy” (208) at the party. He wants her to look the way a rising lawyer’s young wife-to-be should look. He wants her clothing to correspond to her new social role. When Duncan sees Marian at the party, he remarks,

“[y]ou didn’t tell me it was a masquerade. ... Who the hell are you supposed to be?” (239), indicating his disapproval that she has bought into this artificial game of self-fashioning. Even when dressed in her regular clothing, however, Marian displays a degree of social conformity; as Ainsley describes, Marian chooses “clothes as though they’re a camouflage or a protective colouration” (13-14). She attempts to blend in with the masses. Peter’s clothing is always described in terms of costumes; early in the novel, Marian describes him as “wearing one of his more subdued costumes” (65), and later, she notes that “he was wearing one of his suave winter costumes” (146). Ainsley’s description of Peter as being “nicely packaged” (146) is apt: he, perhaps more so than any other character in the novel, is conscious of how society expects him to look and thus packages himself accordingly.

Duncan, on the other hand, puts no stock in his appearance, let alone in his clothing. When Marian first meets him, he is wearing neither shirt nor shoes: “he was wearing only a pair of khaki pants” (49). Duncan’s lack of interest in clothes and appearance is indicative of a larger rejection of the packaging and artificiality that pervade consumer culture, including academe. His only interest in clothes is washing and ironing them as both activities provide him with a momentary respite from the chaos of modern society. The laundromat is “soothing because you always know what to expect and you don’t have to think about it” (94) while ironing enables him to “[flatten] things out, [get] rid of the wrinkles” (95). He further remarks about ironing, “I get all tangled up in words when I’m putting together those interminable papers ... and ironing—well, you straighten things out and get them flat” (142). Clothing for Duncan, then, is a means of escaping social categories rather than conforming to their dictates. By

not dressing up and packaging himself the way Peter does, Duncan resists social conformity and the “classifying, organizing, and labeling” (Adorno and Horkheimer 5) that characterize consumer culture. And by cultivating a relationship with clothes that enables him—through laundry and ironing—to opt out of thinking and writing, he escapes the convoluted nature of academic research in favour of simple, calming activity.

Duncan’s conflation and at times outright avoidance of categories not only disrupt the organizing and labeling impulse upon which consumer culture is predicated, but they also destabilize a corresponding academic impulse: indeed, literary scholars in particular have a tendency to align their subjects of study with established traditions and influences, classifying, organizing, and labeling their subjects in accordance with recognizable literary patterns. Duncan believes that in both consumer culture and academe, this compulsion to classify and organize everything is problematic and limiting—the fluidity of organic experience cannot be contained within finite categories nor can productive research be undertaken from the confines of minutely specialized niches. Academics lose sight of and become abstracted from their scholarly subjects when they manipulate them into conforming with predetermined categories and traditions upon which they have staked their professional claim. As Atwood notes in an interview with Geoff Hancock, “[i]f you’re an academic, you have to concern yourself more with ‘ideas’” and “if you deal in ‘ideas’ you can analyze the structure, the prose, the style, or this and that. But as soon as you do that, you’re analyzing, making an abstraction from the actual thing” (“Tightrope” 197). Rather than depart from preexisting trends and traditions in order to investigate more fruitfully the work in question, academics, according to Duncan, “repeat themselves and repeat themselves but they never get anywhere” (95), compelled to work

within these established standards and conventions, producing research that shares fundamental similarities.

Duncan's refusal to fit within any category, his insistence on occupying opposing classifications simultaneously, suggests his desire not to be anything in particular, or not to be at all: "[i]n other words, his response to being as it is defined in the modern mercantile world—fitting into the cycle of production and consumption, making one kind of garbage into another—is to come as close as possible to not-being" (Dooley 142). Throughout the novel, he is drawn to images and representations of "not-being," from the mummies at the Museum and the death they represent ("What's wrong with death? ... [I]t's perfectly natural" [187]), to the fluidity and transience of snow. When Marian and Duncan go for a walk near the ravine, Duncan remarks, "I like this place. Especially now in winter, it's so close to absolute zero. ... But in the snow you're as near as possible to nothing" (263). He finds comfort in nothingness, and when the imprint of their bodies threatens to leave concrete traces in the snow, "he stepped on them, first on his own and then on hers, smearing the snow with his foot" (265).

Duncan's apprehension at leaving behind any sort of mark also carries into his academic life, where he strives yet again to attain a state of "not-being." He has a problematic relationship with language throughout the novel. Although he has no problems talking and endlessly verbalizing his analyses of those around him, he seems unable to write, "for he sees all writing, not only his own, as the accumulation of garbage" (Carrington 83). He has a fear of committing his thoughts to a fixed medium, which will become a part of the academic consumer culture he disdains and in which his roommates Trevor and Fischer actively participate. This aversion to writing is

demonstrated by his incomplete term papers and his inability to progress in his degree at the same rate as his roommates. As he remarks to Marian during one of their first encounters, “[r]ight now I’m supposed to be writing an overdue term paper from the year before last” (97). Later, he informs her that he was at work on another paper, but “he had been stuck on the opening sentence ... for two and a half weeks” (183). He has difficulty committing his words to paper because not only does he believe that the cycle of production and consumption that his term papers will ultimately enter into is meaningless and repetitive, but he finds that the words themselves are meaningless. According to Duncan, the monotony of scholarly research divests the words and ideas of any real significance:

You read and read the material and after you’ve read the twentieth article you can’t make any sense out of it anymore, and then you start thinking about the number of books that are published in any given year, in any given month, in any given week, and that’s just too much. Words ... are beginning to lose their meanings. (96)

As such, he is no hurry to offer his meaningless contributions to a scholarly enterprise that is rapidly losing all sense of credibility and relevance. Duncan avoids becoming complicit in the consumer culture he criticizes by not only minimizing his social output, but his academic output as well, “never bringing either his studies or his personal relationships to any culmination, any state of stability” (Page 16).

Atwood offers a targeted critique of the academy by highlighting Duncan’s disillusionment with the types of research projects carried out by his roommates, Fischer and Trevor, who are also English graduate students. Fischer describes his bizarre

research interests to Marian at the dinner party at the graduate students' home. David Harkness asserts that the "frivolity of the scene undercuts any temptation for the reader to take Fish's critical analysis seriously" (105). This scene is important, however, because Fischer's research interests, as ludicrous as they may appear, demonstrate the degree to which academics become governed by market demands and increasingly narrowed specializations. He displays his awareness of the commodified nature of scholarly research when he remarks to Marian regarding his interest in Lewis Carroll, "[t]he nineteenth century is very hot property these days" (193). His choice of scholarly subject—specifically, his decision to pursue Lewis Carroll instead of his initial subject, Beatrix Potter—is thus determined at least in part by his adherence to market demands, to the research areas promoted by and popular on the academic market. When he begins discussing with Marian his interpretation of *Alice in Wonderland*, he states, "this is the little girl descending into the very suggestive rabbit-burrow, becoming as it were pre-natal, trying to find her role ... her role as a Woman" (194). Trevor also reveals his awareness of market demands and trends when he dismisses Fischer's approach as being "out of *date*. ... The very latest approach to *Alice* is just to dismiss it as a rather charming children's book" (194-95).

Perhaps in an effort to show how up-to-date he is, Fischer soon shifts to discussing his proposed thesis topic, "Malthus and the Creative Metaphor" (197), which he believes is so cutting-edge that it may be rejected by what he deems to be his "conservative" school. When he describes to Marian this study in which he will use Thomas Robert Malthus, an early nineteenth-century demographer, as a point of entry to analyze the connection between birth rates and the changing face of poetry during this

period,¹¹ his explanations degenerate into the ridiculous and his language becomes a self-parody:

the poet was pregnant with his work, the poem went through a period of gestation, often a long one, and when it was finally ready to see the light of day the poet was delivered of it often with much painful labour. In this way the very process of artistic creation was itself an imitation of Nature, of the thing in nature that was most important to the survival of Mankind. I mean birth; birth. (198)

According to Fischer, when birth rates began to rise and population growth became a concern, birth was no longer as beautiful and welcome of a phenomenon. As such, poetry shifted from mimicking the process of childbirth to something less drawn out and more spontaneous: “the very act of copulation” (200).

Not only is Atwood mocking the pretentious language of academics, but she is also satirizing the pursuit of absurdly obscure topics. Fischer has fallen victim to an inevitable aspect of scholarly research that Duncan explains to Marian:

everything’s being done, it’s been done already, fished out, and you yourself wallowing around in the dregs at the bottom of the barrel, one of those ninth-year graduate students, poor bastards, scrabbling through manuscripts for new material or slaving away on the definitive edition of Ruskin’s dinner-invitations and theatre-stubs or trying to squeeze the last pimple of significance out of some fraudulent literary nonentity they dug up somewhere. (96-97)

¹¹ In her April 1970 and July 1971 screenplay adaptations of *The Edible Woman*, Atwood revises Fischer’s research interests so that rather than study the connection between birth rates and poetry, he looks instead at the connection between birth rates and “the growth of the television industry” (*Atwood Papers* box 84, folder 1), making the link between academic research and consumer culture all the more pronounced.

Fischer has thus succumbed to the pressure to choose an obscure topic in order to secure a unique scholarly niche, which will enable him to advance his publication profile and reputation. Careerist concerns have supplanted his scholarly idealism. That he is compelled to choose a topic with barely even the semblance of relevance reinforces the degree to which commercial and professional interests undermine the potential value and resonance of literary scholarship.

Commenting on scholarly research, Duncan explicitly articulates the increasing connection he sees between consumer and academic culture: “[p]roduction-consumption. You begin to wonder whether it isn’t just a question of making one kind of garbage into another kind. The human mind was the last thing to be commercialized but they’re doing a good job of it now” (143). According to Duncan, consumer culture leads to a leveling effect whereby an impulse towards standardization dilutes risk and worthwhile experimentation. Even though, as Fischer’s scholarly pursuits demonstrate, academics strive to produce innovative research, this innovation is often pursued for the wrong reasons: rather than attempt to uncover untrammelled ground out of an idealistic desire to advance knowledge, Duncan suggests scholars do so in order to add to their dossier. Moreover, this innovation is most often contained by prevailing academic standards and conventions. As Douglas B. Holt notes of consumer culture, “[t]he logic of mass marketing leads to least common denominator goods that produce a conformity of style, marginalize risk taking, and close down interpretation” (71). Similarly, in academe, through scholarly publications and conferences, particular scholarly approaches are mass-marketed and become the least common denominator to which subsequent research conforms. New and exciting research is produced, but it is ultimately circumscribed by

the structures and expectations that shape the field of literary discourse, leading to a certain uniformity and predictability that Duncan bemoans throughout the novel.

Although ideally “the university must also raise questions that society does not want to ask and generate new ideas that help invent the future, at times even ‘pushing’ society toward it” (Shapiro 4-5), in a competitive scholarly climate in which self-interest and professional advancement are prioritized, this ideal is undermined and dismissed in favour of pursuing research projects that offer stronger assurances of success. “The ‘intellectual’ world of Duncan and his roommates Trevor and Fish offers no real alternative to the consumer society” (Lauber 26) because these two realms have become conflated—intellectual pursuits are increasingly dictated by commercial demands and interests.

In spite of his critical, disillusioned attitude, Duncan concedes to Marian early in the novel that he will never be able to escape academe completely:

What else can I do? Once you’ve gone this far you aren’t fit for anything else. Something happens to your mind. You’re overqualified, overspecialized, and everybody knows it. Nobody in any other game would be crazy enough to hire me. I wouldn’t even make a good ditch-digger, I’d start tearing apart the sewer system, trying to pick-axe and unearth all those chthonic symbols. ... No, no. I’ll have to be a slave in the paper-mines for all time. (97)

His acknowledgement that he cannot help but search for symbols and analyze the world around him speaks to his reluctant internalization of the academic culture he longs to escape. Just as general consumers in consumer society often bemoan the inescapable cycle of production and consumption that characterizes modern life, Duncan, through his

inability to reject completely this academic world with which he is disenchanted, emphasizes how entrenched many of these corrupted scholarly values and practices have become.

The emphasis on symbols in the above passage, particularly the reference to Duncan's insatiable compulsion "to pick-axe and unearth all those chthonic symbols" (97), is helpful for understanding the end of the novel. Analysis of symbols is a key component of academic research, particularly in the field of English literature, and Duncan, an English graduate student, should possess some skill in this area. The final scene of the novel, in which Duncan eats the cake-woman Marian has baked for Peter, raises several questions in relation to Duncan's intentions behind eating the cake. Marian intends the cake to serve as a symbol of Peter's domination and consumption of her. Hesitant about the capacity for spoken words to convey concrete and fixed meaning, Marian decides that "what she needed was something that avoided words, she didn't want to get tangled up in a discussion" (267). She explicitly refers to the cake-woman as a symbol when, after Peter flees her apartment in alarm, she acknowledges, "as a symbol it had definitely failed" (271).

That Duncan seemingly ignores any symbolic import behind this cake and simply eats it is provocative. Some critics, giving him little credit, assume that he eats "it without recognition of its symbolism" (Lauber 29) and that "he gives no sign of noticing the cake's metaphorical female shape" (Peel 113). Others suggest that Duncan possesses a degree of discernment when it comes to symbolic analysis: "Duncan, knowing the difference between an image and an identity, between Marian and a cake, cheerfully joins her in eating the cake" (Texmo 75). MacLulich echoes this sentiment: "[s]killed in the

analysis of symbols, he also knows when not to carry out an over-elaborate analysis of hidden meanings. He sees a cake rather than a woman's head; he eats it without compunctions" (127). Although Duncan, much more astute than Peter, is able to recognize the symbolic gesture that underlies Marian's cake, he draws no attention to this symbolic dimension because of its absurdity. To equate Marian's complex selfhood with a baked good is to minimize the significance of her personal journey throughout the novel. Rather than acknowledge this symbolism, he goes out of his way to ignore it, commenting exclusively on the cake's aesthetic qualities: he tells Marian that "it's almost as good as Trevor's," and then, in the final line of the novel, he remarks, "[t]hank you ... it was delicious" (281).

The inclusion of this blatant symbol emphasizes by contrast the complementary presence of various subtle nuances and implications that occur throughout this deceptively comic and light-hearted novel; as Dell Texmo and MacLulich suggest, the discerning scholar knows which symbols to analyze and which to ignore. Although Duncan knows to ignore the cake, several critics of the novel analyze it, thereby inadvertently engaging in self-parody. Indeed, Atwood subtly undercuts attempts to analyze the cake-woman as a legitimate symbol through the character of Ainsley, who, upon walking in on Marian eating the cake, exclaims, "[y]ou're rejecting your femininity!" (272). Her shocked exclamation functions as an effective satire of overly intellectual responses to Marian's absurd cake-woman. Conveniently, the ensuing critical response to the novel and to this scene in particular unwittingly extends Atwood's own critique. For example, Frank Davey is troubled by a series of rather complex questions that, he argues, this scene raises:

the closing scene of the symbolic eating of the sponge-cake woman is more confusing than illuminating. Is Marian's eating of it cannibalistic [sic] or self-reintegrating? Is her severing of its head from its body an admission of her defeat by rationalism or an ironic gesture of victory over it? Is Duncan's eating of the cake an admission of the inevitable exploitiveness [sic] of all humanity and her fiancé's refusal to eat a sign of hypocrisy? ("Atwood" 79)

His detailed speculation regarding this rather simplistic, flawed "symbol" aligns him with Ainsley and her overly "academic" response. In her reading of this scene, Ildiko de Papp Carrington addresses what she identifies as a pressing critical void: "[b]ut not one of these critics comments on the facts that Marian and Duncan eat different parts of the cake, Marian the feet and legs and Duncan the head, and that nobody eats the body. Does this anatomizing mean anything?" (69). She concludes that Marian eats the legs, which represent running away, and this indicates that she has "acquire[d] the psychic energy to begin to change everything" (82) rather than run away from her problems. Duncan eats the head because he is "obviously eliminating the wrong part of himself, the part of himself that is the most active, but the least effective" (83). Interesting that Carrington criticizes Duncan's compulsion to over-intellectualize the world around him when she herself seems to be reading a little too much into this particular scene. MacLulich, whose analysis Carrington endorses in her article, also proposes somewhat questionable interpretations: "[s]o it seems the edible woman must be Marian herself. But the cake-woman is also a *small* woman: therefore a child" (126), meaning that in addition to "accepting her femininity by incorporating the feminine cake-woman or cake-child into herself," her act of eating the cake also suggests that "Marian is symbolically

impregnating herself” (127). MacLulich’s line of reasoning is ultimately more amusing than it is enlightening. It is also ironic that he offers such in-depth analysis of this symbol when in that same article he argues that Duncan ignores the cake because he “knows when not to carry out an over-elaborate analysis of hidden meanings” (127); apparently (at least in this instance) MacLulich does not.

Before seeing the cake, Duncan highlights the impossibility of reducing complex relationships and dynamics to one simplistic interpretation by commenting on Marian’s dysfunctional relationship with Peter:

Peter wasn’t trying to destroy you. That’s just something you made up. Actually you were trying to destroy him. ... But the real truth is that it wasn’t Peter at all. It was me. I was trying to destroy you. ... Maybe Peter was trying to destroy me, or maybe I was trying to destroy him, or we were both trying to destroy each other, how’s that? What does it matter, you’re back to so-called reality, you’re a consumer. (280-81)

That Duncan first articulates the absurdity of attempting to explain definitively and succinctly Marian’s situation and then ignores the most concrete symbol in the novel suggests that perhaps he is beginning to extricate himself from the academic modes of seeing that he had apparently irrevocably internalized. Although he earlier laments to Marian the impossibility of breaking free from entrenched academic values and practices, Duncan here (and indeed throughout the novel) reveals his awareness of their limitations. He highlights the risk inherent in academic analysis of reducing complex, fluid concepts or dynamics to misleading categories and symbols. Atwood stops short of enabling Duncan to make use of this awareness in order to effect some sort of reformation, but in

subsequent novels considered in this study, especially Robertson Davies's *The Rebel Angels*, characters (such as Parlabane) are not only aware of endemic institutional problems, but they also engage in subversive behaviours that directly challenge these problems and weaknesses.

In his introduction to the 1973 McClelland and Stewart edition of *The Edible Woman*, Alan Dawe writes, “[d]ating originally from 1965 and slightly revised in 1967, this book shows promise of still being digestible ten years hence” (i). The novel has exceeded Dawe’s modest projection, maintaining a relevance twenty-seven years following the publication of his introduction and demonstrating the potential to endure for several more to come. Indeed, this novel is valuable for being among the first works of Canadian fiction to engage in the critical discussion of the commercialization of academic pursuits and for articulating an enduring message: by aligning academe with consumer culture, Atwood cautions against a preoccupation with surface rewards and careerist competition that obscures the ostensible purpose behind scholarly research—the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Atwood’s critique of academe, though brief, is more direct. She uses the setting of an academic symposium to explore the potentially negative consequences of adhering to the type of academic analysis Duncan interrogates in *The Edible Woman*. Although Atwood’s description of this symposium comprises only the epilogue and the novel therefore does not warrant classification as an academic novel, this brief section functions as a specific case study that puts into practice Duncan’s

criticism of the climate of self-interest that characterizes the academy¹²—in James Darcy Pieixoto’s conference paper, which he delivers at the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies, he prioritizes his scholarly agenda over the lived experience of Offred, one of the key subjects of his study. Rather than appreciate the details of her firsthand account, he examines it only in order to find evidence that substantiates his beliefs about the men in charge of the Gileadean regime. He consistently criticizes and demeans her narrative because it does not confirm his preconceived interpretation of Gilead—an interpretation around which he has developed his scholarly niche and reputation—suggesting he is more concerned with producing scholarly output that will secure his reputation and advance his career than he is with conducting sound research that will offer a valuable contribution to the advancement of knowledge.

Although my focus will primarily be on the “Historical Notes” epilogue,¹³ it is worth considering both the dedication and the epilogue that frame the tale in order to establish Atwood’s main critique put forth in this concluding section. The novel begins with a dedication to two individuals: Mary Webster, Atwood’s ancestor who was hanged upon suspicion of being a witch (the hanging was not successful and she lived to tell her tale),¹⁴ and Perry Miller, a professor of early American Literature at Harvard University

¹² In a letter to Atwood, Nan A. Talese, editor-in-chief of the New York publishing company handling *The Handmaid’s Tale*, discusses the “Historical Notes” epilogue without acknowledging the parody of academe that it puts forth nor any of its distinct qualities apart from its role in filling in the gaps from the main narrative. She notes, “[t]he introduction to the explanation of the finding of this historical document seemed overlong.” It is this introduction, however, that highlights many of the flaws in Pieixoto’s scholarly method, which I analyze in this section of the chapter. Uninterested in the academic parody, she questions, “I found I wanted to know more about the world at the time of the tape than we are told. What do you think?” (*Atwood Papers* box 73, folder 12).

¹³ In the first draft of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the “Contents” page includes typed chapter headings for each of the chapters, but “Historical Notes” is written by hand, suggesting this section, which puts forth a crucial interrogation of academic values, was likely a later addition to the text (*Atwood Papers* box 72, folder 8).

¹⁴ Writing about Mary Webster surviving the hanging, Atwood states, “if there’s one thing I hope I’ve inherited from her, it’s her neck” (“Witches” 5).

(whose last seminar Atwood took) and “a scholar of Mary Webster’s repressive and religion-dominated society, just as James Darcy Pieixoto ... is of Offred’s” (Bergmann 851). Critics interpret Miller and Pieixoto as two examples—one real and one fictional, but both equally damaging—of scholars who misread history and reduce people and events to scholarly data, amenable to manipulation and exploitation. As Sandra Tomc notes, “the issue in both cases is the failure of the female object of study to fit the patterns of inquiry set out by her male scrutinizer” (81).¹⁵ Both Miller and Pieixoto overlook aspects of their subjects because they approach them with limited (and limiting) perspectives. In *Gone Indian*, Kroetsch extends this critique by examining the similar tendency of literary scholars to reduce complex subjects, particularly literary works, to supporting data, thereby overlooking their complexity and value.

Pieixoto arranges Offred’s tapes, which document her personal observations and experiences of the Gileadean regime, into an order and format that suit his conference presentation and his preconceived characterization of this society gleaned from other sources. As he notes when describing the tapes to his audience, they “were arranged in no particular order. ... Thus, it was up to Professor Wade and myself to arrange the blocks of speech in the order in which they appeared to go; but, as I have said elsewhere, all such arrangements are based on some guesswork and are to be regarded as approximate, pending further research” (314). His imposition of structure onto Offred’s tale, his historicizing of lived experience, “necessarily creates a space in which the text

¹⁵ Atwood obviously recognized the parallels between Miller and Pieixoto when making this dedication, but it is important not to demonize Miller completely: Atwood admired him and credits his lectures with making her “aware of the political nature of literature: words have power, and it matters who speaks them and to whom” (Cooke 94). This recognition of the power of words is crucial to *The Handmaid’s Tale*. One of the main methods of oppressing the women of Gilead is robbing them of all reading and writing material. They are divested of the right and ability to be heard and known.

attempts but fails to reconstruct the event” (Tolan 170). Offred herself acknowledges this gap between lived experience and historical documentation when, during her narrative, she concedes that her story is a “reconstruction”:

This is a reconstruction. All of it is a reconstruction. ... When I get out of here, if I’m ever able to set this down, in any form, even in the form of one voice to another, it will be a reconstruction then too, at yet another remove. It’s impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because what you say can never be exact, you always have to leave something out, there are too many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances; too many gestures, which could mean this or that. (144)

Offred realizes that she is imposing her interpretations on the events that surround her just as Pieixoto will later impose his interpretations on her account. Pieixoto’s analytical approach thus “pretends to ‘objectivity,’ to placing texts within their historical ‘contexts,’ with little awareness that context itself is a construct” (Davidson, “Future” 118). Since Offred herself has acknowledged the biases built into her account, the primary foundation of Pieixoto’s findings is flawed: he is imposing his subjective interpretation of the events onto Offred’s subjective account of the events, calling into question any pretensions to objectivity or basic scholarly validity. “For Pieixoto, history is artifact; for Offred, it is experience” (Grace, *Handmaid’s* 488), but for both, it is ultimately subjective.

David S. Hogsette notes, “[i]n the epilogue, Atwood uses irony to assert that historical representation is itself a fiction and that the historian can never achieve objective distance from his or her narrative subject” (272). Pieixoto’s attempts to glean incontrovertible facts from Offred’s narrative is therefore misguided—not only is her account a subjective reconstruction, but Pieixoto’s approach to her account is subjective,

mired in his own scholarly preoccupations with authentication and legitimacy. Atwood further explores this constructed and subjective nature of history in *The Robber Bride*. Tony, a military historian, remarks, “[h]istory is a construct. . . . Any point of entry is possible and all choices are arbitrary” (4). Even with her recognition of this subjective nature of history—or perhaps *because* of this recognition—Tony pursues her research into war and military strategy enthusiastically, aware at all times of her potential to impose limiting biases. As such, rather than approach her area of study with a specific agenda (as Pieixoto does), Tony is much more open-minded: “[w]ar is *there*. It’s not going away soon. It’s not that I like it. I want to see why so many other people like it. I want to see how it works” (24). She allows her subject to speak to her; she wants it to reveal how it works rather than impose her own self-interested interpretations. Similarly, in *Surfacing* (1972), David approaches his film project, *Random Samples*, in the same way; rather than seek out specific images and situations, he wants to film the random events, people, and objects he and his companions come across during their trip. He explains why he does not approach his film with more structure and definition: “[i]f you close your mind in advance like that you wreck it” (10).¹⁶ It is Pieixoto’s inability to open his mind to Offred’s experiences, to allow her account to speak for itself rather than answer to his own scholarly interests, that leads to his fundamentally flawed and biased version of her story.

Pieixoto treats the details of Offred’s account with condescension. He “hesitate[s] to use the word *document*” and instead refers initially to her account as an “item” (345)

¹⁶ Despite David’s stated approach, though, the various segments that comprise his film are ultimately unified by a violent aesthetic, thereby suggesting the inevitability of some sort of overall framework or research question to govern such projects. Through the example of Pieixoto, however, Atwood warns against being so limited by one’s framework that the resultant scholarly response is fundamentally compromised.

before subsequently referring to it as a “document ... for the sake of brevity” (348), not because he has gained any sort of newfound appreciation for it. He does not analyze the specifics of her tale; he does not recognize “the skilled voice of the rhetorician” (Deer 117) in her tapes nor does he appreciate the insight her daily accounts provide into the workings of an oppressive political and social regime. He does not comment on or refer to the details of her story. Coral Ann Howells notes, “[t]he professor is not interested in her personal memoir except as evidence for his grand impersonal narrative of a fallen nation’s history” (169), yet he does not even look to the content of her tale for evidence—his focus is on the existence of the tapes themselves as concrete evidence from the Gileadean regime. Early in his talk, he establishes the authenticity of the tapes: “tape like this, however, is very difficult to fake convincingly, and we were assured by the experts who examined them that the physical objects themselves are genuine” (315). Later, he completely ignores their content and cites their physical existence as supporting his theory that Nick, not Offred, was the subversive who Waterford was hiding: “[m]ore likely it was ‘Nick,’ who, by the evidence of the very existence of the tapes, must have helped ‘Offred’ to escape” (322).

When Pieixoto does address the content of the tapes, he focuses on Offred’s weaknesses as a documenter. He criticizes “the difficulties posed by accent, obscure referents, and archaisms” (314). He expresses his frustration at being unable to identify either Offred’s identity or those of the others named in her account: “[t]he other names in the document are equally useless for the purposes of identification and authentication” (318). He bemoans the fact that there are too many gaps in the existing material on

Gilead to deduce definitively the identity of the “Commander” from Offred’s tapes; of these gaps, he remarks,

[s]ome of them could have been filled by our anonymous author, had she had a different turn of mind. She could have told us much about the workings of the Gileadean empire, had she had the instincts of a reporter or a spy. What would we not give, now, for even twenty pages or so of printout from Waterford’s private computer! However, we must be grateful for any crumbs the Goddess of History has designed to vouchsafe us. (322)

Here Pieixoto reveals his limited scholarly approach: he considers valuable only what provides direct verifiable fact. He does not appreciate the value of Offred’s tale and the insight her personal experiences provide into the workings of Gilead. Instead, he believes that by determining the identity of the Commander, he will learn all he needs to know since “such a highly placed individual had probably been a participant in the first of the top-secret Sons of Jacob Think Tanks, at which the philosophy and social structure of Gilead were hammered out” (318). Pieixoto demonstrates his misreading and underestimation of Offred’s tale when he completely dismisses it, stating that they have learned “[n]ot very much” (317) about her. For most of his talk, Pieixoto puts Offred’s tale aside and instead focuses on sociobiologist Wilfred Limpinkin’s diary, which provides details about two men who could have possibly been the Commander—Frederick R. Waterford and B. Frederick Judd. In contrast to his dismissive treatment of Offred’s account, Pieixoto readily accepts Limpinkin’s findings. When he is unable to find evidence that either Judd or Waterford were married to a woman named Serena Joy, Pieixoto automatically assumes that Serena is “a somewhat malicious invention by our author”

(321); Pieixoto accepts as fact, however, that Waterford's wife Thelma was a television personality who was similar in character to Serena Joy only because Limpkin had made "several snide remarks" (321) to this effect.

Pieixoto's minimizing of Offred's lived experience to the physical cassette tapes that hold her story and provide supporting evidence to his argument and his tendency to ignore the content of these tapes in favour of Limpkin's account speak to his dismissive attitude towards what Lyotard terms "narrative knowledge." Narrative knowledge consists of such forms as "fables, myths, legends" and "certifies itself in the pragmatics of its own transmission without having recourse to argumentation and proof" (Lyotard 27). Offred's tale fits within this framework. In contrast, Lyotard describes "scientific knowledge" as being dependent upon objective and rigorous experimentation and proof. Although Pieixoto's methods are anything but objective, his dismissal of much of Offred's tale, his challenging of her authority, and his unhesitating acceptance of Limpkin's account align him with Lyotard's conception of the scientist, who classifies narrative knowledge

as belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ignorance, ideology. Narratives are fables, myths, legends, fit only for women and children. At best, attempts are made to throw some rays of light into this obscurantism, to civilize, educate, develop. (27)

This gendering which is a part of Lyotard's description of the scientist is fitting in relation to Pieixoto. Just as Lyotard's scientist associates "primitive, underdeveloped" narrative knowledge with "women and children," so, too, does Pieixoto dismiss

knowledge imparted by women (in this case, Offred) in favour of knowledge derived from male sources (such as Limpkin). Pieixoto looks down on Offred's narrative account as being inferior, incomplete, and ultimately inconsequential. What differentiates narrative knowledge from scientific knowledge is, to use another of Lyotard's terms, legitimation—narrative knowledge lacks proof whereas scientific knowledge is dependent upon it. Pieixoto's focus in his research is on legitimation, or authentication, a concern emphasized in the title of his conference paper, "Problems of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid's Tale*." His past publications, "Sumptuary Laws Through the Ages: An Analysis of Documents" and "Iran and Gilead: Two Late-Twentieth-Century Monotheocracies, as Seen Through Diaries," also were presumably concerned with authenticating or legitimating these documents and diaries, these artifacts of narrative knowledge, not realizing that they answer to a different form of authentication. By virtue of being produced and consumed, these narratives demonstrate their value in providing insight into other cultures and societies.

Pieixoto's prioritizing of male perspectives of the Gileadean regime, from the account of Limpkin to the biography of the Commander, suggests a sexist outlook. He views these male sources as more reliable and authoritative. The sexism that characterizes Pieixoto's approach and methodology extends to his general behaviour in presenting his conference paper. In response to conference chair Maryann Crescent Moon's introduction, Pieixoto remarks, "I am sure we all enjoyed our charming Arctic Char last night at dinner, and now we are enjoying an equally charming Arctic Chair. I use the word 'enjoy' in two distinct senses, precluding, of course, the obsolete third. (*Laughter*)" (312). When describing his colleague Professor Wade's decision to entitle

Offred's narrative "The Handmaid's Tale," Pieixoto explains, "I am sure all puns were intentional, particularly that having to do with the archaic vulgar signification of the word *tail*... (*Laughter, applause*)" (313). And when describing the location in which Offred's tapes were found, Pieixoto alludes to "The Underground Femaleroad," a means of escape for the oppressed women, and remarks that it has been facetiously "dubbed by some of our historical wags 'The Underground Frailroad.' (*Laughter, groans*)" (313). Not only do Pieixoto's sexist jokes reveal his own inappropriate attitude towards women, but the fact that in each of the quoted instances the audience participates through their laughter in the oppression and ridiculing of women suggests that the conference attendees are complicit in this degrading behaviour. Moreover, it suggests that the oppression experienced by Offred is ongoing. The academics are not studying an obsolete regime—they are actively participating in its perpetuation: "Pieixoto's sophomoric, smutty puns and jokes at the expense of those women, like Offred, who endured the religious extremism of Gilead strike the reader as ominous signs that little has really changed" (Garrett-Petts 82). Atwood thus highlights "the complicity of academia in the formation of authoritarian institutions" (Tomc 81). She suggests that academics are not passive scholars but instead they play active roles in shaping the future based on their choices of subject of study and their scholarly methods. Pieixoto's sexist and exclusionary approach to his subject matter, coupled with the conference attendees' positive reception of his research and inappropriate jokes, helps to perpetuate the sexism and oppression of the Gileadean regime.

Pieixoto's complicity in the perpetuation of these negative qualities is particularly ironic in light of his comments regarding Gilead's relationship to pre-Gileadean policies:

As we know from the study of history, no new system can impose itself upon a previous one without incorporating many of the elements to be found in the latter...and Gilead was no exception to this rule. Its racist policies, for instance, were firmly rooted in the pre-Gilead period, and racist fears provided some of the emotional fuel that allowed the Gilead takeover to succeed as well as it did. (317)

These remarks reveal Pieixoto's complete lack of self-awareness—he, too, is perpetuating the evils of an earlier society in the same way that Gilead apparently did. That he does not recognize this blatant parallel enables Atwood to critique scholars who “are content with mere appearances” and who “abdicate their responsibility to think critically” (Foley 51). Pieixoto's tendency to comment on the subjects of his study in such a detached manner, as though he exists on some separate, more elevated plane and is immune to the forces and pressures that afflicted the societies he studies suggests that far from being an all-knowing, enlightened historian, he is a painfully naïve and misguided man. As a representative of academe, he enables Atwood to satirize scholars for this tendency to lose sight of the enduring resonance of the lived experience of their subjects and instead to become consumed by the baser rewards of academic research. Pieixoto compromises scholarly idealism for scholarly advancement. He does not care what happened to Offred and the other handmaids; he wants only to write and deliver a compelling paper that confirms his preexisting research and assumptions and will help bolster his academic reputation. This makes his “editorial aside” in which he implores his audience to “be cautious about passing moral judgment upon the Gileadeans” (314) and “not to censure but to understand” (315) them laughable. He does not care about the Gileadeans beyond the contribution they make to his academic profile. As Arnold E.

Davidson notes, “‘The Handmaid’s Tale’ as text serves as handmaiden to the career-enhancing epilogue provided by the academics. Is this what history is for? To round out the vitae of historians?” (“Future”119). It seems that it is for Pieixoto.

The fact that Pieixoto’s research is being presented at a conference is important. His compulsion to make jokes and entertain his audience throughout his paper, his obvious enjoyment of being in front of a crowd and performing, trivialize the content of his paper. In fact, the research and sharing of ideas constitute only one part of this conference. Before introducing Pieixoto, the conference chair diligently reminds the conference attendees of the numerous social activities awaiting them, including a fishing expedition as well as “The Nature Walk and Outdoor Period-Costume Sing-Song” (311). These events trivialize the research being presented and render it almost secondary to the social and networking function of the conference. As Roszak notes of scholarly conferences,

[n]ormally they provide for an exchange of new and specialized knowledge; beyond that, the conferences are a social occasion—a chance for old colleagues to get together—and, more importantly, they are “flesh markets” where academics and jobs are put in touch with each other. Thus, the conferences of learned societies are, in structure and intention, identical with trade conventions—like those, let us say, of the Association of Plumbing Contractors or the Association of Hotel Managers. (16)

Atwood thus not only criticizes Pieixoto’s scholarly methodology and approach in treating Offred’s tale, but she also criticizes his (and by extension the academy’s) intentions behind the research. Academic research and the means of communicating this

research—scholarly conferences and journals—have become increasingly commercialized. The research itself often matters less than the reputation and rewards it can garner. In a letter to Atwood dated July 17, 1985, Janet Silver, the manuscript editor from Atwood's New York publishing company, remarks, "I still haven't been able to decide whether it's comforting or horrifying to think that academic symposia will be no different in 2195 than they are today" (*Atwood Papers* box 73, folder 12). Although it might be somewhat extreme to suggest that Atwood intends her readers to be horrified by the future directions of academic research, neither does she intend this lack of change to be comforting. Instead, through her portrait of such a misguided and naïve scholar, she encourages a degree of self-awareness and self-examination among her scholarly readership.

That Atwood ultimately grounds her critique of academe in both novels in the realm of consumer culture is telling. The notion that we live in a consumer society is not an entirely welcome one. Although we cannot extricate ourselves from the patterns of production and consumption that regulate and maintain our lifestyles, we tend not to embrace the label "consumer society." As Roberta Sassatelli notes of this label,

from its very first appearance, this term has been used more to convey condemnation than to describe; in particular, instead of being deployed to comprehend what characterized actual consumer practices, it served to stigmatize what appeared to be a growing and uncontrolled passion for material things ... a continuous and unrelenting search for new, fashionable but superfluous things.

(2)

Thus, the idea of consumer society connotes superficiality, a preoccupation with the surface and with fashionable packaging at the expense of actual content and substance.

Atwood's repeated association of academe with consumer culture suggests that she believes academic research is also becoming empty in some sense, that it is lacking in genuine substance and overly concerned with presentation. In both novels, she emphasizes a preoccupation with professional self-interest that takes precedence over scholarly idealism. In *The Edible Woman*, Duncan's destabilizing of the finite categories upon which consumer society is predicated extends to a critique of the potentially limiting categories, patterns, and traditions that are so instrumental to literary scholarship. He criticizes the scholar's tendency to manipulate complex subjects into conformity with overly specialized niches, which in turn help him or her establish a unique reputation and thereby secure a career. The novel reveals the ways in which the organizing impulse and cycle of production and consumption that characterize consumer culture increasingly dictate academic culture. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood further interrogates the commercialization of academic scholarship through Pieixoto's prioritizing of his own research agenda over the lived experience of Offred, ostensibly one of the key subjects of his study.¹⁷ He ignores Offred's narrative because it does not confirm his preconceived interpretation of Gilead nor does it conform to his standards of proof and authenticity; he

¹⁷ In his article "Alice in Disneyland: Criticism as Commodity in *The Handmaid's Tale*," Chinmoy Bannerjee also addresses the presence of commercial concerns in this novel. Rather than address Atwood's critique of consumer culture in general or of the commercialization of academic endeavours in particular, Bannerjee concludes instead that Atwood herself has succumbed to market demands by writing a novel that downplays its sophisticated social critique in order to appeal primarily to a popular audience: "Yet, as we have seen, the novel is a pseudo-dystopia whose structure generates two levels of response: one of naïve consumption through illusion and identification, and the other of sophisticated enjoyment of parodic exercise and play with illusion. At the first, or popular level, criticism is only a lure for consumption; at the second, or aesthetic level, it is dissolved through parodic frames and is ultimately irrelevant. Criticism, I have argued, is not only a form but a force, and *The Handmaid's Tale* uses only the form for consumption and enjoyment" (90).

is ultimately more concerned with advancing his scholarly reputation than he is with engaging with his subject in a meaningful way.

The academic market, as demonstrated by these novels, has become so saturated with publications and conference presentations that the content of the research often matters little; what matters is that something is being produced to feed the machine of academic production and consumption. As such, much of the resulting scholarship is out of touch with the concerns of society rather than being responsive to this society. Atwood warns that in this competitive and saturated academic atmosphere, it becomes increasingly likely that academics lose sight of the ideals of scholarship, prioritizing their own self-interest and reputation above a sincere engagement with their subject.

I would like to conclude this chapter where I began—with a consideration of the date of publication of *The Edible Woman*. The 1960s was a time of major transformation and growth for the Canadian university, making it a fitting time for Atwood to compose her indictment of flawed scholarly practices. The 1960s was also the era of the counterculture, a time when society was beginning to react to and challenge the growing infiltration of consumer culture and invasive marketing tactics. With the changes occurring in both academe and consumer culture at this same time, it seems appropriate for Atwood to address critically both of these spheres in her novel and reveal the ways in which they are interconnected. Atwood was and continues to be deeply involved in an ethos of destabilizing and challenging dominant values and institutions that was emerging at this time. Postmodernism was becoming a recognized influence on Canadian fiction by the late 1960s. As Linda Hutcheon observes of the postmodern impulse in Canadian writing, it consists of “those contradictory acts of establishing and then undercutting

prevailing values and conventions in order to provoke a questioning, a challenging of ‘what goes without saying’ in our culture,” and postmodern writers “are always in a sense ‘agents provocateurs’—taking pot-shots at the culture of which they know they are unavoidably a part but that they still wish to criticize” (3). Although it may not be accurate to label Atwood’s works as postmodern, she channels this growing postmodern influence into her writing of this time. As the first writer of a Canadian academic novel, she sets the stage for subsequent writers to follow her lead and use this sub-genre as a means of interrogating critically the values and practices of the academic domain of which they have all been a part. By rooting her critique in the reality of consumer culture, she also paves the way for these writers to acknowledge that academe does not exist in a vacuum, separated from the concerns and transformations of modern society. Instead, it acts upon and is acted upon by the realities of the society of which it is a part. This recognition of these wider patterns of influence elevates the sub-genre of academic fiction from treating an isolated sphere to challenging and interrogating broader social influences and assumptions. Atwood’s *The Edible Woman*, written during a time of great social and academic change, is thus the perfect exemplar for a sub-genre that continues to interrogate the relationship between academic endeavours and the broader community.

CHAPTER THREE

“[M]orticians of knowledge”: Robert Kroetsch’s *Gone Indian*

Literary critic, academic, poet, and novelist, Robert Kroetsch is an integral figure in the development of Canadian academic fiction. Although Margaret Atwood initiated the rise of this sub-genre with the publication of *The Edible Woman*, Kroetsch’s contribution, *Gone Indian* (1973), is much more direct and pervasive in its treatment and critique of academe. Both novelists were writing during a period of radical change in the Canadian university: the 1960s and early 1970s have been identified as the decades during which public esteem in higher education was growing, student enrollment rates were drastically increasing, and the university governance structure was becoming more democratic, giving students and faculty more freedom and agency (Dunning 49; Jones 4). In this climate of unprecedented expansion and attendant saturation of the academic market, scholars were under more pressure than before to produce research that was distinctive enough to establish and maintain professional reputations. In *Gone Indian*, Kroetsch expands on Atwood’s claim that scholars have become increasingly self-interested and careerist in their approaches, thereby overlooking the fundamental ideal of scholarship—the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. He suggests that in order to ensure inclusive scholarly investigation and to bring attention back to the research itself rather than to external concerns, scholars need to restructure the balance between—to use Jean-François Lyotard’s¹ terms—“narrative knowledge,” obtained from such subjective

¹ In Edinburgh in 1985, Kroetsch presented a conference paper entitled “Disunity as Unity: A Canadian Strategy” (which was later published in *The Lovely Treachery of Words* [1989]). In this paper, he mentions Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, which was published in English in 1984. Even though the interplay of “narrative” and “scientific” knowledge is quite pronounced in

sources as stories and myth, and the traditionally accepted academic standard of “scientific knowledge,” obtained from a rigorous and objective analysis of verifiable sources. More specifically, Kroetsch believes that literary scholars need to appreciate the value of the literary works they study as distinct from the critical frameworks and methodologies that are applied to them. Unlike some of the other novelists considered in this study, Kroetsch values literary criticism and sees it “as an extension of the text” which “liberates the text into its own potential” (“Beyond” 83), yet he nonetheless believes scholars risk minimizing the literature they study and viewing it as little more than supporting data for larger arguments. In so doing, they can become abstracted and disconnected from their ostensible subject and therefore unable to appreciate its deeper “potential” and to “honour the text” (“Contemporary” 42) through the critical act. In response, Kroetsch details the progressive immersion of two academic characters in the narrative modes that they typically study from a detached remove.

Although all of the novelists in this study critique scholarly tendencies which they themselves are guilty of perpetuating, Kroetsch’s critique of the imposition of obscure theory is particularly ironic considering that he was one of the leading proponents of the incorporation of postmodern and poststructuralist theory into Canadian literary discourse (owing in large part to his work as editor and co-founder of the postmodern literary journal *boundary 2*). Indeed, his own scholarly articles are often difficult to follow as a result of his use of challenging theoretical frameworks and concepts. Ultimately, though, the pronounced self-reflexive and self-critical nature of his critique in *Gone Indian* reinforces the degree to which these novelists are in the fraught position of

Kroetsch’s works, he does not comment on these specific concepts. Instead, he mentions Lyotard’s definition of the postmodern (“an incredulity toward meta-narratives”) and then applies this definition to various Canadian novels in order to support his contention that “Canada is a postmodern country” (22).

acknowledging their complicity with many of the negative shifts in literary scholarship over the past few decades. Rather than detract from his critique, Kroetsch's somewhat hypocritical treatment of literary criticism demonstrates the way in which these novelists, through their own example, encourage scholars to exercise a greater degree of self-awareness as the first step towards initiating necessary changes within the academy.

In *Gone Indian*, Kroetsch adopts a unique approach to the academic novel; unlike the other novelists under consideration who critique academe primarily by interrogating the research subjects and methods of scholarly characters, in Kroetsch's novel the scholars *become* the subject under investigation. An exploration of the conflicted pasts and current anxieties of Professor Mark Madham and graduate student Jeremy Sadness, two men whose professional lives are predicated on academic standards, comprises the novel and enables Kroetsch to demonstrate the failure of strictly rational, objective frameworks to offer insight into their experiences. Instead, he promotes Madham's and Jeremy's layered act of storytelling as exemplifying a specific "narrative" mode which provides a level of insight into these characters that would otherwise remain hidden and inaccessible. He argues for accepting such instances of narrative knowledge as informative in their own right without limiting and categorizing them in accordance with prevailing scholarly or "scientific" standards; that is, in keeping with Julie Cruikshank's observations of Native oral tradition, Kroetsch believes narrative knowledge, as Cruikshank states, "can be understood as having the power to inform and enlarge other forms of explanation rather than as data for analysis using conventional scholarly paradigms" (xiii).

In *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Northrop Frye posits that literary criticism should be recognized as “a science as well as an art” because “the presence of science in any subject changes its character from the casual to the causal, from the random and intuitive to the systematic, as well as safeguarding the integrity of that subject from external invasions” (7). He suggests that criticism undeniably incorporates scientific elements as evinced by the following defining characteristics: “[e]vidence is examined scientifically; previous authorities are used scientifically; fields are investigated scientifically; texts are edited scientifically” (8). What remains to be incorporated into the enterprise of literary scholarship, according to Frye, is “a coordinating principle, a central hypothesis which, like the theory of evolution in biology, will see the phenomena it deals with as parts of a whole” (16). Throughout his discussion, he also suggests a distinction between the scholar and the public critic, elaborating that the scholar works from within a systematic critical framework whereas the public critic is more of a public intellectual who “represents the reading public at its most expert and judicious” and who disseminates his ideas through “the lecture and the familiar essay, and his work is not a science, but another kind of literary art” (8).

Writing several decades later, Harold Fromm, without specifically citing Frye, argues in *Academic Capitalism and Literary Value* (1991) that contrary to Frye’s central premise, “[c]riticism is, after all, not a science but an art; yet the multiple escape clauses of ambiguous overreading engage in a pretense of scientificity on which they cannot make good” (247). He believes literary criticism is fundamentally an art that has been too rigidly codified and systematized and its scientific pretensions do nothing but excuse or mask misguided critical approaches. He argues that the literature itself is valued less

in its own right and more as evidence for predetermined conclusions. According to Fromm, critics treat artwork “as a ‘document’ revealing the artist to be less intelligent than they” and “the professionalized, politicized academic analyst is a new sort of colonialist, exploiting the ‘primitives’ for profit, promotion, and prestige” (9). He further suggests that the type of public intellectual alluded to by Frye no longer exists and that all forms of criticism have become subsumed by the academy:

The gradual disappearance of the man of letters, the takeover of the arts and humanities by the academy, the relative dearth of public intellectuals, and the uses of the arts to further professional careers—all these have produced a situation in which poems and novels seem to exist almost entirely for the purpose of being dismantled and reconstituted for political ends, ends that are often not quite as high-minded as the stated ones. (3)

Kroetsch enters into this dialogue by demonstrating how an explicitly scientific approach to literary criticism can be limiting and that scholars can make better use of the narrative modes that at times function as little more than evidence for scholarly analyses. He shows how such knowledge, free from scholarly intervention, can help guide the scholar towards answers rather than function as support for predetermined conclusions. That Madham, a man so entrenched in the academic world, progressively uses the conventions of storytelling rather than those of scholarly discourse in order to understand both his graduate student and, more importantly, himself enables Kroetsch to reinforce the complexity and value of the narrative modes that often get relegated to a secondary position by literary critics and scholars. Furthermore, that Madham progressively embraces the accessible voice of the storyteller alongside his usual intellectual persona

suggests the possibility of interweaving the cloistered scholar and the public intellectual into an integrated whole.

Considering what a prolific writer Kroetsch is and how influential he has been on Canadian literature and criticism, there is a surprising dearth of biographical material on him, especially in comparison to his peers, Atwood, Davies, and Shields. Aside from Aritha van Herk's bio-critical essay, brief biographical sketches in book-length studies on his work by such critics as Simona Bertacco, Gunilla Florby, Robert Lecker, and Peter Thomas, and occasional references to his personal life in interviews, little sustained attention has been devoted to his life.² The information that is provided emphasizes the fact that since childhood, Kroetsch's life has been characterized by a negotiation of contrasts. Born in 1927, he grew up on the family farm near Heisler, Alberta. He describes the dichotomized nature of this experience: "there was a high definition of male and female activity. ... And the one place where I found a kind of open field was the garden because a garden is ambiguous on a farm. It involves women's work but often the men help" (qtd. in Neuman and Wilson 21). In addition to carving out a niche in this highly gendered environment, he had other tensions with which to contend, namely "his father's eastern roots and his mother's western heritage" (Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 3). From early on, then, he became accustomed to viewing the world in terms of opposing tensions and attempting to locate some sort of mediating space between. These tensions continued to characterize his life into adulthood: as he reflects, he often experiences a

² The absence of sustained biographical treatment is especially noteworthy considering Kroetsch's interest in exploring the implications of biography in his fiction. When asked why no one has yet written his authorized biography, he replies, "I guess I'm a bit shy." When asked if I could be the one to write this elusive biography, he humours me by laughing but offers no concrete response (personal interview, 10 May 2008).

feeling of “in-betweenness” occasioned by the contrast of his “rural roots” and his “having lived an urban life” (*The Crow Journals* 81).

The dichotomy most influential on Kroetsch’s work and critical perspective is the mixture of academic and non-academic impulses that has informed his life. As he notes,

I grew up in a very rural area. People were not trained in a literary way, so it was a world of talk, speech and storytelling. Yet I was a very literary kid, I read a lot. So I suppose very early in life I sensed this gap between the language I lived in, and the language I read, and in a way I had to put them together but I didn’t want to erase my sense of that oral tradition. (qtd. in Bertacco 222)

This integration of structured “book learning” with the relatively fluid and unstructured medium of storytelling (particularly tall-tales) is one Kroetsch continues to maintain. As Lecker notes, he had “the desire to balance academic training with ‘hands-on’ experience, the willingness to recognize formal learning and to reject it” (*Robert Kroetsch* 2). This balancing of academic and non-academic pursuits and influences becomes evident from a brief overview of Kroetsch’s academic training and the not-so-academic endeavours that punctuated it: in 1948, he graduated with a B.A. in English and Philosophy from the University of Alberta, but he missed his graduation in order to accept a job for a season as a freight handler on the Fort Smith Portage, then as a Mackenzie River boat purser for another two seasons; he also worked for a catering firm near Hudson Bay in the years between completing his B.A. and commencing his M.A., which he ultimately received from Middlebury College in 1956. He obtained his Ph.D. in Creative Writing in 1961 from the University of Iowa where he submitted an unpublished novel, *Coulee Hill*, to satisfy the thesis requirement (Thomas, *Robert Kroetsch* 10). After receiving his degree,

he taught at the State University of New York Binghamton, the University of Calgary, and the University of Manitoba. Although he eventually immersed himself in the academic milieu, the early part of his educational journey embodies an interweaving of two seemingly disparate realms, making Kroetsch the ideal figure to author a novel in which the rigid demarcations separating experience within and beyond the university are interrogated.

Even when he established himself as a prominent academic, however, Kroetsch did not cease this tendency to complicate his scholarly background and activities with decidedly un-scholarly approaches. His critical essays, collected in various journals (including the Spring 1983 special issue of *Open Letter* and the Summer 1994 special issue of *Great Plains Quarterly*) as well as in his own published work *The Lovely Treachery of Words* (1989), reflect his propensity to integrate academic and non-academic impulses. Although in content these essays analyze prominent Canadian writers such as Margaret Atwood, Ernest Buckler, Margaret Laurence, and Sinclair Ross and draw on the ideas of such established critics and thinkers as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva, their structure reveals a subversion of academic convention. Linda Hutcheon observes that “they are willfully fragmentary, discontinuous, asystematic, incomplete” (160), while Frank Davey notes that their structure “[spurns] the developing argument, the academic model of thesis, evidence, reiteration” (“Introduction” 8). Ultimately, though, Davey sees productive value in Kroetsch’s approach, suggesting that “the essays themselves attempt to renew the critical act by doing violence to our expectations of continuity, unity of tone and diction, ‘scholarly’ detachment, completion” (9). In *Gone Indian*, Kroetsch does “violence” to complacent

attitudes towards literary scholarship. Through Madham's progressive move away from strictly academic standards and towards more intuitive, or "narrative," avenues of understanding the world, Kroetsch promotes a reconceptualizing of literary scholarship such that narrative knowledge becomes valuable in its own right as opposed to functioning almost exclusively as supporting evidence.

It is important to begin with a brief overview of Kroetsch's critical stance because "the notions explored in [his critical essays] cannot be separated from those offered in his fiction" (Hutcheon 161). It is difficult to pin down conclusively Kroetsch's critical perspective. Although Hutcheon has famously labeled him "Mr Canadian Postmodern" (160), van Herk's description of him as a "trickster incarnate" (ix) may be more accurate. Mary K. Kirtz and Dianne Tiefensee argue that he does not always adhere to a postmodern aesthetic, and instead, as Kirtz posits, he adopts an "intramodernist perspective" since he plays "within and among the boundaries of all the 'isms'—realism, modernism, postmodernism" (209). What is unequivocally central to Kroetsch's work is the exploration of fixed categories and binaries, of "the binary patterns that the human mind uses to construct its day and its labyrinth" (Kroetsch, "On Being" 74). While David Creelman suggests that in Kroetsch's writing, "a first term concerned with a static vision of the world is rejected in favour of a second more radical term which focuses on process and activity" (64-65), most critics recognize that Kroetsch does not attempt to integrate binaries nor does he prioritize one half over the other. Instead, they acknowledge his celebration of opposing tensions: Kroetsch welcomes "opposites that do not merge dialectically" (Hutcheon 161); he "thrives in a world of contradiction and paradox" (Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 5); "Kroetsch proposes fabulous and fictitious identities made

up from the contradictory sources and definitions of language” (Mandel 67); he believes in “the simultaneous affirmation of truths which at first seem incompatible” (Sullivan, “Fascinating” 176). As Kroetsch puts it, “I think what one has to do is keep them [the binaries] fluid” (qtd. in Sellery 25). He celebrates opposing tensions and multiplicity in *Gone Indian* through the co-existence of seemingly disparate modes of interpreting and expressing experience, ranging from the “scientific” standard of academic analysis to the “narrative” realm of storytelling.

Although *Gone Indian* is his only novel that deals prominently with academe and thus the only one of his works that can be accurately classified as an academic novel, Kroetsch’s enduring immersion in the academic world invests several of his novels with subtle commentaries on the nature of scholarly research and the limitations of adhering to fixed, unitary perceptions. The “Out West” triptych³—*The Studhorse Man* (1969), *Gone Indian*, and *Badlands* (1975)—and, to a lesser extent, *Alibi* (1983) include a rational and ordered narrator or biographer who structures and often manipulates the experience of a relatively eccentric and chaotic character. In *The Studhorse Man*, mentally unstable (though well-read and educated) biographer Demeter Proudfoot sits in his bathtub in an insane asylum as he assembles an account of the life of Hazard Lepage, a free-spirited man who embarks on a quest to find the perfect mare with which to breed his prized stallion Poseidon; in *Gone Indian*, Professor Mark Madham transcribes the taped account of his aimless and unmotivated graduate student Jeremy Sadness’s experiences in Alberta, where he has traveled in pursuit of an academic job; in *Badlands*, Anna Dawe

³ In an interview with Russell M. Brown, Kroetsch explains his choice to label these novels a triptych rather than a trilogy: “I really call it a triptych, though I find the word rather pretentious. But I don’t like to call it a trilogy because its connections are not narrative ones, they are of another sort: juxtaposition, repetition, contrast” (2-3).

pieces together her archaeologist father's field notes in order to present an account of his seminal journey to the Alberta badlands; and in *Alibi*, the narrative comprises Dorf's journal entries documenting his search for the perfect spa for his extravagant collector boss Jack Deemer, but these journal entries are complicated by the fact that they are being edited, in part, by Dorf's companion, documentary filmmaker Karen Strike. In all of these examples, the biographer imposes structure and definition on his or her subject's experience, thereby circumscribing the experience according to his or her assumptions and biases. This biographical impulse of structuring, organizing, and manipulating extends to a corresponding academic impulse. Ultimately, though, the "rational" narrator in each instance internalizes some of the chaos of his or her subject. As Thomas observes of the triptych (and this point applies equally to *Alibi*), "[i]n a real sense, the conclusions of all three of these novels express a 'letting-go' on the part of the framing narrator, a yielding to the 'coyote self' in its capacity for transformation and rebirth" (*Robert Kroetsch* 4). Indeed, Madham increasingly embraces the spontaneity and fluidity of his biographical subject Jeremy, thereby recognizing the limitations of rigidly codified academic standards in comparison to the dynamic quality of uncensored, uninhibited narrative modes.

*Gone Indian*⁴ focuses on Jeremy Sadness, a disgruntled graduate student who cannot remain focused and motivated long enough to complete a dissertation; as such, he has amassed an impressive collection of failed attempts. His academic failures manifest

⁴ In early interviews (such as in his 1970 interview with Russell M. Brown), Kroetsch reveals that the original title for *Gone Indian* was *Funeral Games*, a reference to Book Five of the Aeneid. In "Inhabiting the Dangerous Middle of the Space Between," Mary K. Kirtz offers a detailed overview of this allusion, suggesting that just as Virgil "gave the various heroes names and lineages that allow contemporary Roman families to trace their genealogies back to Aeneas and his men" (214), Madham "creates a genealogy for himself, starting with his former self, Sunderman, and finally subsuming the life of Jeremy" (215).

themselves on a personal level in the form of sexual dysfunction (he cannot achieve an erection lying down) and marital discord (he has a series of affairs with students while his wife, Carol, has an affair with his thesis supervisor, Mark Madham). Madham attempts to force Jeremy into completing his work and pursuing a professional academic career by setting up a job interview for him at the University of Alberta. This interview prompts Jeremy's westward journey, which comprises the core action of the novel. Jeremy documents his journey on a series of tapes, the content of which Madham later transcribes. At the airport, Jeremy's mistaken claiming of Notikeewin resident Roger Dorck's suitcase in place of his own marks the first in a series of identity shifts and transformations with which he contends over the course of the novel. Furthermore, in his attempts to locate Dorck, who is in a coma in the hospital following a snowmobile accident, Jeremy becomes romantically involved first with Jill Sunderman, and then with her mother Bea. It is through his involvement with these two women that he becomes aware of Robert Sunderman, Bea's husband, who supposedly drowned several years earlier but who, according to some subtle hints throughout the novel, may be an earlier incarnation of Madham. The novel concludes on an ambiguous note—Jeremy travels to Bea's home in a blizzard, they make love, they presumably venture back out into the blizzard, and then they disappear. It is unclear whether they die or have journeyed to an unknown location. The reader is left without any clear answers, only Madham's and Carol's conflicting speculations.

The proliferation of academic elements in this novel is undeniable: the two main characters, Jeremy and Madham, are a graduate student and a professor, respectively, and Jeremy's pursuit of an academic job provides the impetus for the events that compose the

plot. While Madham seemingly embraces and promotes the standards and conventions of academe and their alignment with closure and definition, Jeremy seeks to break free from them. Although critics have not ignored the pronounced presence of academe in the novel,⁵ with Stanley Fogel conceding that in *Gone Indian*, “Kroetsch indulges in something seldom seen in his other works, a caricature of the university ambit that he knows so well” (“I See” 235), this “caricature” does not form the focus of their analyses. Instead, most critics acknowledge academe and its association with closure, structure, and definition but only insofar as it provides a contrast to the openness and fluidity of the prairie. Madham, academe, and the east are thus contrasted with Jeremy, the prairie, and the west: “[w]hile Madham inhabits what Kroetsch sees as a sterile, *named* American east characterized by concluded speech and written form, Jeremy flees to an open-ended realm of possibility that defies stasis, history, and endings” (Lecker, “Caught” 140). Bertacco also emphasizes the opportunity and possibility offered by the relatively open prairie: “[t]he main *topos* that we find in *Gone Indian* is the West as the land of free choice and enterprise, a place where one can grow in self-realization” (10). Writing in a similar vein, Thomas sees Jeremy’s flight from academe as offering the opportunity for “the reconstitution of the self” (*Robert Kroetsch* 69). Academe is not interrogated in detail in much of the existing criticism; instead, the critics allude to it as embodying the closure and definition that Jeremy must escape. Jeremy’s journey to the west is interpreted as his quest to seek an authentic sense of self, free from the imposition of meaning and definition most often associated with academe. This dichotomy between

⁵ Thomas is perhaps the only critic to refer to the novel as an academic novel; he remarks that “this is an academic novel since Jeremy and Madham share a common vocabulary and the habit of thinking in terms of literary analogues” (“Robert Kroetsch” 275). He does not expand on this assessment in his brief analysis of the novel, however.

prairie and academe is a useful (and almost unavoidable) framework for approaching the novel, but it can be employed in such a way that the academic dimension is interrogated more substantially.

It would be an oversimplification to suggest that all critics operate within this strict binary of east versus west, academe versus prairie. As J.R. Snyder notes of Kroetsch's fiction, "the novels portray the struggle to escape the definition of identity in the restrictive binary form of 'if I'm not that, then I must be this'" (2). Speaking specifically of *Gone Indian*, Justin D. Edwards similarly observes, "Kroetsch pokes fun at Jeremy's belief that he must choose between identifying with the rationalism of academia or with the primitivism conventionally associated with 'Nativeness' and the wilderness" (90). And Ann Mandel suggests it is Jeremy's task to free himself from all imposed meaning and experience—not necessarily of the academic variety—that "threaten to define him" (53). Even the critics who challenge and dismantle this binary, however, neglect to explore academe in detail; although they do not isolate it as a root cause of Jeremy's stunted identity formation, they also do not examine it beyond reflecting on it briefly as one of many influences in Jeremy's life and constitution of identity.

The presence of academe in this novel must be examined in greater detail. Its exclusive function is not to act as an obstacle to or constituent element of Jeremy's identity formation. Nor, as many suggest, does it represent an approach to knowledge that needs to be altogether abandoned: Lecker describes Jeremy's westward journey as "a quest for original knowledge divorced from institutionalized learning" ("Caught" 141); Louis K. MacKendrick highlights Jeremy's progressive discovery of "the failure of ...

educational constructs” (25); and Fogel notes, “Jeremy’s wit, however, reveals not only Kroetsch’s caustic sense of the academic milieu, but also an ennui, a jaded despair about the edifices of language and learning” (“I See” 235). These critics overlook the fact that Kroetsch was an academic for many years; far from involuntarily being part of a world he rejects, he enjoys academic pursuits, criticizing them in order to provoke positive change. And far from promoting a complete abandonment of scholarly values and practices, he encourages a revisioning of literary scholarship such that, in Lyotard’s terms, “narrative knowledge” co-exists with and complements “scientific knowledge,” with both existing on an equal plane rather than having the former completely subsumed, interrogated, and analyzed by the latter. This ensures that the nuances and complexities of the literary works under investigation are appreciated more fully and that the scholar does not prioritize the critical act over the literary subject. By demonstrating how both Madham and Jeremy learn more about themselves (and, in some respects, one another) the more they embrace various modes of narrative knowledge, Kroetsch emphasizes the fact that these forms of knowledge serve a greater purpose than functioning as supporting data. Instead, they can and should help illuminate and guide pressing research questions.

Unlike Madham, who seemingly embraces his role as an academic, Jeremy’s dissatisfaction with his research and his role as a burgeoning academic are clear from the outset: “[b]ut what am I supposed to do, slave away at a dissertation, teach two sections of Lit and Comp, review for a final oral, put up with the bull dyke who shares my office, grade fifty papers a week—and screw my horny wife on the hour?” (24). In Atwood’s *The Edible Woman*, Duncan is also dissatisfied with his academic role, but he is not as overtly frustrated by this dissatisfaction as Jeremy is; Duncan deems academic research

to be as meaningless as any other activity consumer society offers, so he passively resigns himself to it since he does not see any attractive alternatives. Jeremy, however, is frustrated by his current predicament because the pursuit of an academic profession was not his choice—it was initially imposed on him by his parents and then forcefully encouraged by Madham. Jeremy has not had the opportunity to explore other options and to experience the world beyond the ivory tower. As a child, Jeremy learns that his father, a sailor who abandoned his family, named him “Jeremy Bentham” after the accomplished philosopher in hopes that Jeremy, like his namesake, would become an influential intellectual and make something of his life. The fact that the original Bentham “had ordered himself stuffed and embalmed” so that “he had become his own icon, sitting in a chair in a fine display case. In University College” (51) makes him an especially unsettling namesake—he embodies the fixity that Jeremy fears throughout the novel. This act of naming⁶ and this imposition by the father of his own failed quest onto his son put intense strain on Jeremy—from birth, he is burdened with an academic identity and set of expectations which are not his own. As an adult, Jeremy is pressured by Madham to complete his dissertation and obtain an academic job. Indeed, he embarks on the westward journey to Alberta that comprises the bulk of the novel because Madham tells him to go there in pursuit of a job opportunity: “Professor Madham, you did this. You sent me out here. You, with your goddamned go-get-a-job syndrome, publish, head a committee. Become a dean and die” (19). Jeremy’s struggle to find his fit within an

⁶ In his article “Ordering the Chaos: Name Strategies in Robert Kroetsch’s Novels,” W.F.H. Nicolaisen explores the significance behind the names that Kroetsch so carefully chooses for his characters. He does not provide a detailed commentary of Jeremy’s name other than to observe that “Jeremy Sadness ... is probably the most onomastically preoccupied” (51) of Kroetsch’s characters. Sylvia Söderlind provides a more concrete reading of his name: “Jeremy’s name is clearly tautological. His story is a jeremiad, or a tale of woe, and his last name is nothing but a repetition of his first: ‘Jeremy’ is synonymous with ‘sadness’” (185).

academic profession and lifestyle is thus exacerbated by the fact that he did not choose this path in the first place.

Madham, in contrast, actively seeks out and cultivates his academic identity. He was born on the prairie and voluntarily heads eastward in pursuit of an academic job. As the novel progresses, however, we learn that this is not an uncomplicated move from prairie to academe. That Madham sends Jeremy westward, back to the place of his own origins, speaks to his unresolved feelings regarding his adoption of an academic identity and rejection of his upbringing; as he reflects, “[t]he truth is, I was myself born out there on those wind-torn prairies, on the ripped edge of that northern forest ... I sent him out there as on a mission, as on a veritable quest for something forever lost to me and yet recoverable to the world” (13-14). Although Jeremy is hesitant about pursuing the academic job, he welcomes the opportunity for a westward journey because it enables him to emulate his childhood hero, Grey Owl, and indeed, Madham “casts [this journey] as a fulfillment of Jeremy’s childhood dream, but clearly it is his own quest that Jeremy vicariously fills for him” (Turner 63). By editing and transcribing the taped account of Jeremy’s journey, Madham is able to experience vicariously this move away from academe and back to his origins. Through Jeremy, he is able to question academic values and explore alternatives without overtly rejecting academe, a move he is not yet ready to make.

Throughout the novel, there is a near fusion of Jeremy’s and Madham’s identities. As much as Madham may want to believe that he is the well-adjusted and successful academic while Jeremy is the floundering, misguided student, they are both grappling with similar issues—they both struggle to find a comfortable fit within what for them is

becoming an increasingly oppressive academic climate. By transcribing Jeremy's tapes, Madham takes on the role of biographer, manipulating and commenting upon Jeremy's account in order to express and work through his own issues. Of *The Studhorse Man*, Carol L. Beran notes, "in some respects speaker and subject are one, because Demeter's identity gradually merges with that of his subject" (191). Kroetsch continues this trend of merging biographer and subject in *Gone Indian*, with Jeremy warning, "[o]ne false move, Professor, and instead of addressing you, I'll be you" (62). As Kroetsch notes in an interview with Donald Cameron, "in writing biography, when you're telling another man's story, you have to be involved yourself" (88). Madham takes this point to an extreme, at times subjugating Jeremy's experiences in order to explore his own. The layering of their accounts—with Madham's transcriptions infusing Jeremy's story with his own personal memories and concerns—reveals the fundamental similarities between their experiences and anxieties. Like Jeremy, Madham is unable to complete his scholarly undertakings; as Jeremy questions, "[o]h yeah, Dr. Tragic Vision in Modern Prose: while we're examining my insatiable need for total failure. What about your own goddamned masterpiece, fifteen years in the burgeoning?" (48). Madham's frustration with Jeremy's collection of incomplete dissertations is thus a projection of his own feelings of inadequacy and failure.

Indeed, both Madham and Jeremy are markedly disconnected from their scholarly endeavours. Even though the pressures to produce scholarly output oppress both men, at no point does Kroetsch concretely articulate what either of them is researching. Jeremy's description of Madham as "Dr. Tragic Vision in Modern Prose" (48) is about as close as the reader gets to discerning Madham's scholarly area. Despite Madham's numerous

research trips (“[t]wo sabbaticals and one leave of absence. Three summers in the south of France. Four trips to the British Museum. Fulbright in Athens. Guggenheim in Rome. Nine incidental grants-in-aid for miscellaneous expenses” [48-49]), his work remains, according to Jeremy, an “unpublished, unwritten, ill-conceived definitive study of nausea” (49). Madham makes little to no concrete progress on his vague scholarly undertakings and instead depends upon past successes and discoveries to sustain him; as Jeremy puts it, “[s]itting there in your office in the Library Wing, chewing your cud, the grass you cropped off the green fields twenty years ago, vomiting it up into your own mouth, chewing it again” (19). He later describes Madham and his colleagues as being “morticians of knowledge” (88), a fitting description which suggests that these scholars have abandoned their mission of *advancing* knowledge; instead of uncovering new insights, they rehash existing findings and, like morticians who make the deceased look presentable, employ impressive theoretical frameworks and discourse to “dress up” their studies and distract from the lack of meaningful content.

For all his criticism, Jeremy is no better and this is perhaps unsurprising considering the example set by his mentor. Jeremy also does not appear to have a clearly defined research interest; instead, he shifts from dissertation topic to dissertation topic, and the only insight the reader is given into these various projects is their titles, perhaps the most telling of which is “The Columbus Quest: The Dream, the Journey, the Surprise” (62). Not only does the evocation of Christopher Columbus relate to Jeremy’s desire to engage with and emulate Native culture, but it also foregrounds the complications of discovery, whether geographical or scholarly. Just as Columbus erroneously “discovers” land that had already been inhabited by indigenous peoples, both

Jeremy and Madham struggle to stake their scholarly claim on uncharted, worthwhile ground. Their failure to carve out and successfully pursue a scholarly niche is reinforced by this persistent absence of any concrete details relating to the research pursuits that oppress them both. Moreover, this absence underscores their increasing detachment from and disillusionment with the type of scholarship they are expected to undertake. The pervasive presence of storytelling throughout the novel is the means through which Kroetsch reconnects these jaded academics to the enterprise of literary scholarship by reaffirming the value and complexity of the domain of narrative knowledge.

Kroetsch places great importance in storytelling. He believes that an integral aspect of the Canadian identity is the fact that as a result of our colonial history, we as a nation “cannot agree on what [our] meta-narrative is” (Kroetsch, “Disunity” 21). Because Canada’s past is inextricably linked with a European past, he believes that Canadian writers need to strip away this inherited European version of our story, which is not our story at all, and assert an authentic version of the Canadian experience: “Canadian literature, at its most radical, is the autobiography of a culture that tells its story by telling us repeatedly it has no story to tell” (Kroetsch, “The Veil” 193). He contends that although Canadian writers have distanced Canadian national identity from inherited, inappropriate narratives, they have yet to replace them with new, authentic ones. Instead, this absence of a distinctive national literature has, according to Kroetsch, become Canada’s defining narrative. Because of his preoccupation with this intersection between narrative and identity, many of Kroetsch’s characters adhere to an impulse of speaking themselves into existence, of telling their story in order to confirm and affirm their authentic presence. As he reflects, “[i]n a sense, we haven’t got an identity until

somebody tells our story. The fiction makes us real” (“A Conversation” 63). This is perhaps most saliently the case in *The Words of My Roaring* (1966), a novel that focuses on a provincial election that pits undertaker Johnnie Backstrom against his mentor and the town’s doctor, Doctor Murdoch. Backstrom is the clear underdog with his success relying entirely on an accidental promise that he will bring rain to the drought-ridden town. Throughout the novel, Backstrom progresses from being an aimless drinker to a motivated campaigner capable of delivering moving speeches; his success and transformation are directly related to the fact that he “creates himself out of nothing by telling his own story.” This is slightly less so with Demeter in *The Studhorse Man* who “creates himself out of someone else’s story” (Ball 16), namely, out of Hazard Lepage’s; Demeter ultimately co-opts Hazard’s quest and takes over the challenge of perpetuating Poseidon’s line. In *Gone Indian*, the novel itself is Madham’s response to a letter from Jill Sunderman in which she inquires into the ultimate fate of Jeremy, asking Madham to “explain everything” (1). Madham tells Jeremy’s story to Jill, and in so doing, creates not only Jeremy’s self and experience, but also his own since “Jeremy’s story is really part of Madham’s effort to establish his own persona” (Kirtz 213).

In the character of Madham, Kroetsch brings together the scholar’s voice and the storyteller’s voice. On the surface, Madham approaches his task of transcribing Jeremy’s tapes as a scholar⁷—he imposes order on the taped accounts and inserts his own critical commentary throughout. Jeremy’s tapes thus become the text under critical scrutiny. Progressively, though, Madham’s critical intrusions become the foundational pieces of a dynamic story rather than a scholarly analysis. As Kroetsch notes, “[s]o in a novel like

⁷ In the original manuscript of *Gone Indian*, Madham’s commentary was presented in the form of footnotes (van Herk xxvii), thereby emphasizing his scholarly pretensions even more.

Gone Indian I take the idea of the critical act and treat it as a way to write a fiction” (qtd. in Hancock, “An Interview” 40). Thus, rather than overpower the literary work, the critical act fuses with it, such that both inform one another. The novel begins with Madham’s letter⁸ to Jill Sunderman in which he informs her that in response to her request that he explain what happened to Jeremy, he is enclosing his transcriptions of Jeremy’s tapes. Madham suggests that Jeremy take a tape recorder with him on his journey so that “in spare moments, he might commit to tape the meditations and insights that would help him complete his dissertation.” Instead, according to Madham, “he used the recorder to insult everything the university must stand for” (1). Immediately, Madham’s need to defend academe and Jeremy’s desire to challenge and resist it become evident. Jeremy’s recordings offer little material for his dissertation and instead document the bizarre people and events he encounters while in Alberta. Although he sends these tapes back to Madham with the firm instruction “don’t try to correct them” (1), Madham ignores Jeremy’s instructions and manipulates and edits these tapes at length. Rather than allow Jeremy’s narrative to speak for itself, Madham believes he must impose some sort of order and coherence on it; in so doing, he channels the scholarly compulsion to elevate mere narrative to scholarly document. Despite his best efforts, though, the resulting transcription is not especially scholarly.

While Madham may claim to be a scholar, his intrusions into and manipulations of Jeremy’s account suggest a decidedly unscholarly approach. Indeed, he begins his letter to Jill by stating, “I feel under no obligation to explain anything” (1). This assertion complicates the nature of the transcriptions that follow—if he does not feel under any

⁸ Madham’s return address, which appears at the top of this letter, was Robert Kroetsch’s address when he taught at the State University of New York at Binghamton (van Herk xxvii).

obligation to explain anything, then what is the purpose of these transcriptions? Perhaps Madham is highlighting how objective he is in that he will present the transcriptions without imposing any of his own interpretations or explanations; this assessment is undermined, however, by the following description: “I am transcribing a few passages from those same tapes, simply that you might better appreciate the kind of rascal you found yourself involved with” (1-2). This statement demonstrates that far from being objective and detached, Madham is a selective and biased “biographer”: rather than present Jeremy’s complete story, he transcribes only as many tapes as he deems necessary to prove his preconceived interpretation of Jeremy’s “rascal-like” demeanor. That Madham proclaims, “it is my own opinion that everything [Jeremy] says can be taken at face value” (2) reinforces his un-scholarly approach—he has no intention of considering the deeper nuances or implications of Jeremy’s words. Instead, he manipulates them to support his conclusions. His transcriptions thus appear to be more the fictions of a storyteller than the products of an objective scholar.

Furthermore, Madham abruptly shifts focus in this letter from discussing the transcriptions to describing his personal encounters with Jeremy’s wife Carol. In particular, he comments on their habit of visiting the zoo: “[w]e walk through the smell of the caged and fenced animals, past the zebras and the dromedary, to the highest paddock. There we sit on the grass and watch the old buffalo bull, the buffalo cow” (2). Here Madham describes his habit of watching the buffalo, while later, Jeremy describes a dream in which he becomes a buffalo. Whereas Jeremy interprets the buffalo as representing liberation, renewal, and re-creation, Madham here sees the buffalo as existing among the “caged and fenced animals”; this distinction reinforces Madham’s

tendency to resort to a categorizing and ordering impulse versus Jeremy's attempts to transcend such limiting categorizations. Towards the end of the letter, however, he describes going to the zoo with Carol the previous night; this time, rather than watch the buffalo, "we ourselves, down on the blue-shadowed grass outside the fence, began to frolic, even as children might. We tussled and romped on all fours. The buffalo, I must add, came to the fence to watch us" (3). They then proceed, after Madham's initial objections, to make love outside in the grass. That Madham progresses from watching the "caged and fenced animals" from a safe remove to engaging in spontaneous, uninhibited behaviour demonstrates his capacity for breaking away from the security of conservative values and conventions. Moreover, this tangent in the letter reveals that already at this early stage in the novel, Madham seems more interested in telling stories and reminiscing about his own personal memories and experiences than objectively presenting Jeremy's. That he signs the letter "(Professor) R. Mark Madham" (3) is appropriate—the parenthetical "(Professor)" effectively captures his tenuous and shifting position in academe.

As much as Madham purports to espouse the values of academe and embrace scholarly objectivity and detachment, he further reveals his tenuous faith in and alignment with academe through his inability to maintain his "academic" voice in his transcription of Jeremy's tapes; for example, when describing Jeremy's anxious demeanor during his first meeting with Jill Sunderman, Madham notes, "God knows, he could be a pretentious little fucker, when he was rattled" (22). This degeneration in his language also reveals the informal, fluid nature of his rendering of Jeremy's experience; the objectivity of the scholar's voice does not enable Madham to interrogate his personal

investment in Jeremy's journey, but the fluidity of the storyteller's voice does. He is able to break away from a strict presentation of Jeremy's experiences in order to insert his own commentary and frustrations, thus transforming his transcriptions of the tapes from a detached rendering of Jeremy's story to a dynamic exploration of their shared contradictory attitude towards academe. As Cruikshank notes, "[a]n enduring value of informal storytelling is its power to subvert official orthodoxies and to challenge conventional ways of thinking" (xiii). The primacy of storytelling in the novel speaks to Kroetsch's belief in the need to liberate scholarly investigation from the limitations of approaches predicated on standards of objective analysis and categorization; storytelling, by contrast, is a fluid and dynamic form that can "reframe issues by providing a larger context" (Cruikshank 4), which exists beyond the limits of academic convention.

This shifting back and forth between the scholar's and the storyteller's voice provides a salient connection to Lyotard's distinction between scientific and narrative knowledge. Whereas scientific knowledge is objective and dependent upon experimentation and authentication, narrative knowledge is associated with the realm of myth, folklore, and legend and is dismissed by scientists as being "savage, primitive, underdeveloped" (Lyotard 27). Scientific knowledge is part of the academic domain and is predicated upon logical order and definition whereas narrative knowledge is associated with the fluid realm of the storyteller. These distinctions are not as clear as they at first appear, however. The order and definition that Madham wishes to impose on Jeremy's taped account are not objective or scientific; instead, they contribute to his personal need to uncover a coherent narrative that explains his own life experiences. He sees in Jeremy's experiences a reversal of his own journey away from the prairie to academe. As

such, Jeremy's story becomes a skewed version of Madham's own, and the order and coherence he attempts to impose upon it derive from a misguided desire to assert agency and meaning on his own life choices, about which he continues to be conflicted. Indeed, storytelling enables a reworking of an unsatisfactory reality, and it "is usually prompted by some crisis, stalemate, or loss of ground in a person's relationship with others and with the world. ... Storytelling is a coping strategy that involves making words stand for the world, and then by manipulating them, changing one's *experience* of the world" (Jackson 18). By manipulating Jeremy's words and by inserting his own critical commentary and interjections, Madham is able to analyze and justify his own past actions, namely, his complete (though conflicted) rejection of the world outside of academe and academic convention.

Although Madham often abandons scholarly objectivity in favour of the informality and fluidity of the storyteller's voice, he cannot admit to this prioritizing of a non-academic approach. Instead, he attempts to maintain the scholar's stance by positioning himself as an authority on how best to present and narrate experiences, even those that are not his own. When Jeremy describes meeting Bea Sunderman for the first time, he abruptly claims, "[t]his, Professor, is the woman you should have married." Madham believes that this statement has no place in Jeremy's account, noting, "[h]e simply does not give us adequate motivation, adequate *allowance*" (30). Furthermore, he justifies editing Jeremy's tapes and selectively transcribing their content, arguing that "the mere onslaught of detail merely overwhelms" (13); he believes that what is more important than the minute detail that Jeremy provides is "the professor's domain: the world of reflection, of understanding. The insight born of leisurely and loving

meditation” (13). As a result, Madham freely interprets and reflects upon Jeremy’s tapes, but when Jeremy attempts to insert such reflection, he insults him and describes him as “muttering pretentiously into his precious microphone” (25). Madham thus simultaneously praises and insults “the professor’s domain,” reinforcing his own conflicted position within it.

As a scholar, Madham’s reticence to embrace his role as storyteller is understandable considering how seemingly antithetical the values and practices of scholarship are to storytelling. Lyotard notes that storytelling and narrative knowledge in general are often associated with an earlier, more primitive time and that we no longer place as much importance in the knowledge imparted through this medium. In “The Storyteller,” Walter Benjamin explores this declining value placed in storytelling, arguing that “the art of storytelling is reaching its end” (87) because “experience has fallen in value” (83-84). In particular, as a result of new technologies that enable the rapid dissemination of specific information, which “lays claim to prompt verifiability” (89), people no longer place as much stock in wisdom in the general sense, which is what stories traditionally impart. In academic circles, stories are used as evidence for scholars’ theories and arguments, but are not always appreciated for what they can convey in their original form, free from scholarly intervention and manipulation. Benjamin notes that information is “shot through with explanation,” which makes it appear more authoritative and valuable, whereas stories are “free from explanation,” which can suggest that they are more simplistic but which instead makes them more dynamic, enabling the reader (or listener) to “interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks” (89). Benjamin’s description of “information”

places it under the purview of the scholar, who is governed by a compulsion to interpret and explain for his reader, rather than allowing the reader that luxury. Although Madham initially treats Jeremy's tapes as documents containing information to be explained, he soon relates to them as both expressing Jeremy's story and inspiring the articulation of his own.

By filtering Jeremy's story through Madham, Kroetsch questions the stability and authenticity of truth—we cannot be certain how Jeremy's experiences transpired or whether Madham's presentation of them has fundamentally altered them, rendering them fictions in support of the story of his own life. As Florby notes in relation to *Alibi* (though this point applies equally here), “we are forever wondering whose story it is, how much editorial manipulation has gone into it” (“Self-reflexions” 200). Madham's increasing abandonment of the scholar's objectivity in favour of the storyteller's fluidity and spontaneity enables him to stray from the ostensible subject of his transcriptions in order to explore his own memories, motivations, and regrets. This destabilizing and decentering of truth and of subject connect to Kroetsch's distinction between archaeology⁹ and history as narrative modes: “[a]rchaeology allows the fragmentary nature of the story, against the coerced unity of traditional history. Archaeology allows for discontinuity. It allows for layering. It allows for imaginative speculation” (Kroetsch, “On Being” 76). The layering of Jeremy's taped accounts with Madham's editing and commentary opens a new level of meaning—the layering reveals the

⁹ Kroetsch borrows from Michel Foucault's conception of the archaeological. David Creelman offers a useful explanation of the underlying differences between their respective uses of the term: “For Foucault, ‘archaeology’ is a powerful term referring to the process of unlayering the many ideologies and struggles which are imprinted in the text by the social and political powers of their day. ... Kroetsch, on the other hand, is not interested in the power structures embedded in texts; indeed, he claims ‘I’m quite aware of being without ideology’ (*Labyrinths of Voice* 33). Thus archaeological reading practises become a way, not to deeper understanding of western society, but to empower the reader and make her a more active participant in the signifying process” (68).

interconnections and parallels between the two men's lives. Kroetsch highlights the tentative nature of the archaeological model: "[i]nstead of a sense of failure at not being able to put it all together, what excites us is that very incompleteness. Systems are open to adjustment, to change, to game, to our elaboration. And I think that we are more at ease with that tentativeness" (qtd. in Neuman and Wilson 28). With the archaeological model, there can be no objective truth, no meta-narrative—only distinct fragments that can be assembled and re-assembled, layered and unearthed, in multiple ways, creating multiple truths and histories.

Kroetsch positions Madham's editing and interpretation of Jeremy's tapes as liberating, as representing the layered, open, communal, and fluid nature of oral storytelling whereas Atwood, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, presents Pieixoto's treatment of Offred's tapes as being limiting, manipulative, and oppressive. Kroetsch's positive treatment of Madham's intrusive actions is at first puzzling considering the numerous negative parallels between these two instances of editorial manipulation. In both cases, the man editing the tapes has an agenda—Madham belittles Jeremy in order to undermine his challenges to academe, the world in which Madham has invested so much, while Pieixoto has a preconceived scholarly interpretation of Gilead that he uses to dictate and shape his presentation of Offred's account. Both Madham and Pieixoto impose meta-narratives to order and rationalize the accounts they edit, ignoring instances when their subjects—Jeremy and Offred, respectively—act in ways that are inconsistent with their interpretations of them. Furthermore, neither Jeremy nor Offred is present to dispute the manipulated presentations of their experiences.

The instances from these two novels differ in fundamental ways, however, largely as a result of the differences between Jeremy and Offred—whereas Jeremy is a male academic who knows his “biographer” personally, Offred is an oppressed female, a relic from Pieixoto’s distant past, who, owing to this combination of her gender, her historical distance, and her lack of a comparable educational background, is more vulnerable than Jeremy. The most noteworthy distinction, however, is the fact that for Kroetsch, re-telling stories is the only way to resist the imposition of limiting meta-narratives; as he notes, “[e]very story needs another story” (qtd. in Neuman, “Unearthing” 234). Even if Madham is manipulating Jeremy’s account, there is no indication that his will be the final word; perhaps another voice will step in and dispute or add to Madham’s version. The *possibility* of additional voices and stories is what is so liberating for Kroetsch. In Atwood’s example, this liberating possibility is not as available because of the context in which Pieixoto is presenting his information—an academic conference. Whereas Madham is responding to a personal letter from Jill Sunderman and can therefore ostensibly carry on a personal dialogue with her in which Jill can interrogate Madham’s assumptions based on her own knowledge of Jeremy and the events he experienced, Pieixoto is communicating his version of Offred’s account in an academic setting in which he is positioned as credible authority. Although by entering his ideas into academic discourse other academics have the opportunity to respond to and potentially dispute Pieixoto’s reading, the fact that his reading is part of an insulated academic world limits the number and type of people who will have access to his findings. Most importantly, there is no way for Offred’s voice to enter into this dialogue since she is completely detached from it, both historically and culturally. Neither she nor anyone she

knows can possibly counter Pieixoto's claims and thus his (likely self-appointed) positioning as credible authority will remain uncontested. It is the removal of Madham's and Jeremy's account from a strictly academic domain and the interweaving of the scholar's and the storyteller's voice that invest it with more liberating possibilities; scholarly presentations couched in academic discourse and bolstered by (at times tenuous) claims to authority do not invite as organic and dynamic a response as do personal narratives. Taken together, these parallel instances from the two novels reveal the relative elitism of the academic sphere and the need to ensure scholarly undertakings are more accessible and responsive to a broader public.

Madham is not the only character who is governed by a storytelling impulse throughout the novel. Jeremy's act of taping his oral account of his journey positions him within the Native tradition to which he is increasingly attracted—particularly to the tradition of oral storytelling. Indeed, it is worth considering at this point why Jeremy is so fascinated with Native culture and why he desires to “go Indian” as opposed to emulating another cultural identity. In part, Native tradition is stereotypically associated with the primitive, which is as far from academe as one can get. Jeremy feels stifled by academic pressures and is attracted to the sense of possibility and spontaneity that Native culture, with its celebration of oral tradition and spirituality, offers. As Karl Kroeber notes, “the culture of a society that does not use writing, where most culture does not exist until someone speaks, is very largely constituted by storytelling. This is one reason Indians tell their stories over and over again” (1). This celebration of oral storytelling is particularly attractive to Jeremy because the fixity of these stories is compensated by a fluidity—there is a fixed central story that is being communicated, but each subsequent

rendering of this story is subject to the additions, revisions, and exaggerations of the teller. Jeremy's numerous failed dissertation attempts indicate his aversion to committing his words to the fixed medium of written text. This distrust and suspicion of the written word are shared by Duncan (from *The Edible Woman*) who also fears the fixity of committing his thoughts to paper. Oral storytelling, however, enables Jeremy to express himself without the fear that the words he uses will define him. Kroetsch comments on the distinction between written and oral texts: "I suppose that is one of the things print did to us: we suddenly have a fixed text. I'm still tempted by oral models where the story in the act of retelling is always responsive to individuals, to the place, to invention" (qtd. in Neuman and Wilson 13). The oral tradition thus engenders a sense of community in that the storytelling experience is a communal one—the story remains vital and dynamic as a result of the successive retellings by different people who each add to the story their own interpretations and experiences. Indeed, Madham's act of transcribing (and interpreting) Jeremy's taped account contributes to the vitality of the original. That Jeremy *tapes* his oral account of his experiences in Alberta complicates his engagement with oral storytelling, however. Although his words are not visually fixed to the page, they are aurally fixed to the cassette tape. His attempts to distance himself from academic convention and to immerse himself fully in the possibility of fluid narrative modes are thus ultimately undermined by his own inability to break free from a documenting and categorizing impulse that characterizes the scholar's approach.

More so than Madham, though, Jeremy is willing to embrace approaches and experiences that cannot be definitively grouped in the category of "scientific knowledge." Indeed, Jeremy is so attuned to his intuitive, spiritual side that he at one point has a

vicarious dreaming experience in which he dreams Mrs. Beaver's dream of the return of the buffalo that had been driven nearly to extinction by European settlers in the nineteenth century. In the dream, he strips away the imposed destruction brought upon by the settlers and returns the prairie to an original state of sustenance. That Jeremy himself eventually becomes a buffalo in his dream suggests his desire to re-emerge from the oppression of external pressures, most often presented in the novel in the form of academic pressures, and return to a state of potential and possibility. For Jeremy, then, the buffalo are symbolic of renewal and re-creation.

Unlike Jeremy, Madham does not put much stock in the value of dreams. Following Jeremy's dream, Madham's response to Jeremy's calm assertion, "I was a *buffalo*," is to remark, "[t]he poor fucker finally flipped out. He was a buffalo's ass from the word go" (106). As Jurgen Schafer notes,

Professor Madham's persistent efforts to cut and censor Jeremy's tale of symbolism and dream vision, his insistence on having successfully lived down his own Indian encounters, ultimately reveal his desperate attempt to repress a truth uncomfortable for Western rationality: the Indian spiritual tradition has to be absorbed by the white settler on Canadian soil. (87)

The fact that Madham resists the significance and meaning imparted by dreams demonstrates that he, more so than Jeremy, is governed by academic standards of knowledge and verification. Even though Madham is not as receptive to the credibility of dreams, he does embrace the creative and transformative potential of storytelling in spite of the fact that it is at odds with the scholarly objectivity that the academic domain demands. This demonstrates that Madham deserves more credit than many critics give

him. Several critics view Madham as a relatively static character who remains firmly aligned with academe throughout the novel: Peter W. Sinnema highlights “Madham’s loyalty to the eastern university in Binghamton as a cultural ‘centre’” (87); Lecker describes Madham as embodying “written codes and [a] codified worldview” (*Robert Kroetsch* 61); throughout his article, MacKendrick aligns Madham with “educational constructs” (25); and Snyder positions Madham as Jeremy’s “surrogate father, further encouraging academic discipline and rationality” (6). Although they concede that his act of transcribing Jeremy’s tapes causes him to reflect upon his own life choices and his move from the prairie to academe, and, as Thomas notes, “Madham’s security in the structures of his literary and academic culture is weakened” (*Robert Kroetsch* 123), they conclude that Madham ultimately embraces and continues to espouse academic values. What these critics overlook is the fact that Madham at no point in the novel unequivocally embraces the rigidity and definition of academic approaches. From his letter to Jill that appears at the beginning of the novel, he displays several un-scholarly tendencies. Throughout the novel, he employs the fluid, informal storyteller’s voice more often than the detached scholar’s in order to convey his experiences and interpretations, indicating that although he and Jeremy are at different stages in this progression, both are open to a reconceptualizing of academic standards, particularly in the realm of literary scholarship.

Kroetsch explores the need to reconfigure traditional academic perspectives into something more inclusive and dynamic through his incorporation in the novel of a Rabelaisian carnival spirit, which is described in *Rabelais and His World*: “[a]s opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the

prevailing truth and from established order” (Bakhtin 10). In *Gone Indian*, the events that compose the Notikeewin Winter Festival are the most blatant examples of this move away from established order; for example, the beauty pageant with three identical contestants abandons all semblance of rationality and logic, forcing Jeremy to devise new ways of approaching this contest and the other bizarre Festival events. Mikhail Bakhtin argues, “[t]his carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things” (34). Kroetsch explores Bakhtin’s conception of the carnivalesque in his essay “Carnival and Violence: a Meditation,” in which he aligns this concept with the works of writers such as Susanna Moodie, Thomas Haliburton, Herman Melville, and Mark Twain. He posits, “carnival rejoices not in our completeness but in our incompleteness; the mask allows us to partake of several possibilities; we are allowed to cross boundaries; we can at once be serious and mocking, be ourselves and caricature others, be others and criticize ourselves” (116). Kroetsch’s incorporation of the carnival spirit in this novel is what enables Jeremy and Madham to cross the boundaries separating academic from non-academic and experiment with the dynamic possibilities this crossing allows for. In *Labyrinths of Voice*, he discusses his application of carnival to *Gone Indian*: “*To go Indian*: an ambiguous phrase: to become released or wile in the carnival sense. And I was playing that off against the professor (Madham) and graduate student (Sadness)—people who are into the whole notion of control ... ordering, explaining. It is their extreme movement from this professorial stance into carnival that interested me” (qtd. in Neuman and Wilson 36-37). Ultimately, this movement into carnival does not indicate a complete abandonment of academic standards; rather, it prefigures a re-entry into

academe with a more inclusive, balanced perspective that is able to accommodate both scientific and narrative approaches. Kroetsch's choice of epigraph is quite fitting in this regard: as Frederick Jackson Turner states, "*for a moment*, at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant" (emphasis added). Both Madham and Jeremy distance themselves from the university but in so doing they are better equipped to return to it with a more inclusive scholarly perspective.

Kroetsch believes "Canada produces a very confessional voice" (qtd. in Brown 15). Although Madham at one point criticizes Jeremy by questioning, "[i]s it not odd, this impulse in the erring man: this need to divulge, to confess" (95), Jeremy's story and Madham's telling of it are manifestations of the need of *both* of these characters to confess. Although critics such as Margaret E. Turner and Sylvia Söderlind have acknowledged the presence of a confessional impulse in this novel, it has not been explored in detail. Michel Foucault has observed that "since the Middle Ages at least, Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth" (*History* 58). Truth is at issue throughout this novel, with the veracity of Madham's rendering of Jeremy's tale being suspect. When Madham's rendering is viewed as a form of personal confession, however, it takes on a new meaning: although he may not be presenting Jeremy's experiences in the most accurate light, he is providing insight into the legacy of guilt and deception that has characterized his own life. Viewed in this light, Madham's unscholarly outbursts and commentaries that pervade the transcriptions become more clear—his anger and frustration are not so much directed at Jeremy as they are at himself. His response to Jill's letter asking that he "explain everything" (1) can be viewed as a confession that enables him to work through

his feelings of guilt and regret for having left the western prairie and his family, for being “a western boy that ever dreamed east” (95). He co-opts Jeremy’s story and abandons scholarly detachment because the act of transcribing Jeremy’s tapes becomes a personal act of catharsis. Throughout the novel, there are subtle suggestions that Madham used to be Robert Sunderman, a young man who fell through the ice during a hockey game and presumably died. As his wife Bea explains to Jeremy, “[t]hey never found the body, you know. Only the hockey stick, beside the hole in the ice” (33). The implication is that Sunderman faked his death and re-emerged as Mark Madham, an established academic in the east. By responding to Jill and explaining, through his criticisms of Jeremy, his frustrations with the west and its menacing “solitude of *unbounded space*” (123), Madham is able to absolve himself of any residual guilt that his eastward flight caused. His act of confession enables him not only to relive and reassess his move to the east, but it also provides him with the opportunity of experiencing vicariously Jeremy’s journey west, the implications of which have already been discussed. Moreover, his selective transcription of Jeremy’s tapes can be understood as Madham’s attempts to include only that which will aid in his own confessional quest since confession “is no longer a question simply of saying what was done ... but of reconstructing, in and around the act, the thoughts that recapitulated it, the obsessions that accompanied it” (Foucault, *History* 63). Thus Madham manipulates Jeremy’s taped account such that the events he chooses to transcribe recreate, or reconstruct, his own past experiences, which he in turn reassesses and analyzes in order to rationalize and understand his life choices.

Jeremy also offers an examination of the impact of guilt and the impulse to confess. His mounting academic responsibilities leave him in an unrelenting state of

guilt, feeling as though he should constantly be working on his dissertation and teaching duties. This guilt manifests itself through sexual dysfunction, leaving Jeremy unable to achieve an erection when lying down: “[e]very time I lie down I feel guilty because I’m not up and studying” (35). He even thinks his irritating officemate is a spy sent by Madham to perpetuate these feelings of guilt: “Professor, you son of a bitch, you assigned that raving monstrosity to my office. To persecute me. To spy. To make me feel guilty” (46). To deal with all this guilt, Jeremy needs a medium through which he can unburden himself. The tape recorder, which Madham had intended as an aid to assist Jeremy with his dissertation writing, is the perfect confessor to Jeremy’s confessant. Indeed, at times he explicitly uses the language of Catholic confession when speaking into the recorder: “[b]less me Father it is thirty degrees above zero in this sacristy” (34). When Jeremy’s taped accounts are interpreted as an act of confession, his emotional outbursts and shifts in focus are more understandable—as Madham does in transcribing the tapes, Jeremy is engaging in a personal act of storytelling. It is through confessing his frustrations with academe that Jeremy takes the first steps towards freeing himself from its oppressive hold on him. Once he realizes the folly of remaining in academe only to appease the expectations of others (namely, his father and his thesis supervisor), Jeremy can potentially enter into a more suitable niche. As Foucault observes, confession is “a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation” (*History* 62). Indeed, confession is the means through which Jeremy reaches a closer

understanding of the authentic self that has been buried under the expectations of others; it thus aids in the shedding of an imposed story and the telling of an authentic one.

The novel revolves around Jill Sunderman's request to Madham that he "explain everything" (1) that happened to Jeremy and her mother Bea. Ultimately, Madham is unable to fulfill this request because the novel ends on an inconclusive note—Jeremy and Bea disappear mysteriously. Perhaps, as Madham believes, they veered off the bridge into the river below and died, or, as Carol believes, maybe they faked their deaths and journeyed away together on the train. It is thus unclear whether Jeremy has successfully "gone (become) Indian" or whether "he is a gone (dead) Indian" (Davidson and Davidson, "Crossing" 166). Kroetsch is not one to provide his readers with definite answers: "I want the reader to be engaged with me in fiction making. I work a reader pretty hard, I guess, in that I want him to enter into the process with me" (qtd. in Hancock, "An Interview" 42). As he states more forcefully and succinctly elsewhere, "[w]e must resist endings, violently" ("Exploding" 57). Jeremy's inconclusive fate following his disappearance in the blizzard epitomizes what for Kroetsch is a characteristic quality of Canadian writing: "[a]gain and again in Canadian writing, there is destruction by fire, death by drowning. The physical literally goes back to elemental water and air. Men vanish into blizzards, under snow. Existence and doubt. We return to the condition preceding creation" ("The Canadian" 14). Indeed, throughout the novel, Jeremy progressively strips away and throws into oblivion various aspects of his self, represented most concretely by the suitcase he misplaces at the airport as well as the jacket and keys he later discards. More subtly, his tape recordings, which become a form of personal confession, enable him to take the final steps towards shedding the

expectations and standards imposed upon him by external forces and pressures.

Throughout the novel, Madham's scholarly intrusions gradually become the interventions of a storyteller whose story, like Jeremy's, is largely a personal confession. Both men thus employ narrative strategies in order to learn more about themselves and one another; storytelling becomes a dynamic means through which to reveal the hidden anxieties that oppress them both. As John Clement Ball notes in relation to Jeremy's gradual uncovering of an authentic centre, "[i]n terms of Canadian literature, this means that a writer who peels away the layers of inherited languages and literary traditions to get to the silence of an unnamed world can build in a number of directions of [sic] top of that foundation" (17). And in terms of literary scholarship, this suggests the potential for peeling back existing standards and approaches in order to make room for new, potentially more effective ones that recognize more fully the value of and insight provided by the texts under critical scrutiny.

In *The Edible Woman*, Atwood aligns academe with consumer culture in order to explore the ways in which both spheres are governed by an impulse to impose structure and order on the surrounding world. Furthermore, she draws attention to the way in which scholars increasingly lose sight of the ideals of scholarship in favour of protecting and advancing their own self-interests. In *Gone Indian*, Kroetsch also critiques the ordering impulse of academe by suggesting that conventional methods of scholarly analysis and discourse are perhaps not always up to the task of appreciating the nuances of the literary works being studied. Although this novel was written at a time when the Canadian university was undergoing substantial restructuring which was, for the most part, positive and productive, scholarly values and methodologies became corrupted

rather than enriched in the process. Scholarship became increasingly codified and structured in order to ensure the efficiency of an increasingly active scholarly climate. As a result, the uninhibited surrender to scholarly investigation was undermined and replaced by a much more rigid, categorical approach. The degree of scientificity inherent in current critical frameworks and interpretive methodologies often renders literary works as little more than data to be categorized and analyzed. Kroetsch dispenses with such frameworks and demonstrates the dynamic quality of the narratives themselves. By positioning both Madham and Jeremy as storytellers and by gradually transforming Madham's critical act into a narrative one, Kroetsch highlights the value of "narrative knowledge" free from "scientific" constructs and in so doing he reaffirms the power of literary works—they have the potential to illuminate issues and perspectives that strict "scientific" analyses may miss and they have the ability to do so in a more accessible fashion. Kroetsch notes, "I'm intrigued by the way in which the world hints of meaning. That's exactly where my imagination encounters and counters both experience and language. Where there is a *hint* of meaning. If there was a genuinely apparent meaning, then you'd simply elaborate it, I suppose. If there was no meaning, maybe you'd be able to quit" (qtd. in Hancock, "An Interview" 44). Literature and narrative, unlike other forms of expression and writing, provide that hint of meaning that can be interpreted in a myriad of ways and therefore also possess that "amplitude that information lacks" (Benjamin 89). Rather than circumscribe and limit this amplitude, academics, according to Kroetsch, must learn from it, enabling literary texts to help provoke and guide the scholarly response instead of functioning almost exclusively as the passive recipient of scholarly imposition.

In “On Being an Alberta Writer,” Kroetsch laments, “we fail to recognize the connection between art and life. We separate the two fatally. Knowledge becomes, for us, knowledge of someone else. We become a kind of perversion—and witness our universities—a society that is reluctant to study images of itself” (73). Not only does he draw attention to the fact that he is among a relatively small group of Canadian writers who examine the university in their fiction, but more importantly, he emphasizes the enclosed nature of academe, a sphere that produces scholarship that does not always have a clear connection to the realities that exist outside of the university. Not only does this disconnection alienate the broader public from the resultant research, but this absence of discernable relevance also detaches the scholar from his or her own work. In *Gone Indian*, Kroetsch suggests that in the context of literary scholarship in particular, scholars need to reinvest their work with greater potential. Rather than be among the disillusioned “morticians of knowledge” (88) who have become abstracted from the literary works they study as a result of the pressures to publish unique, marketable research, Kroetsch encourages scholars to reconnect with the power and dynamic quality of narrative itself and thus reconnect with the underlying purpose of literary scholarship—to advance our understanding and appreciation of literary texts and demonstrate the enduring cultural and social resonances of these complex, multi-faceted works.

CHAPTER FOUR

“The scholar’s life is a good life”: Robertson Davies’s *The Rebel Angels*

Margaret Atwood and Robert Kroetsch provided a crucial foundation for the subsequent flourishing of Canadian academic novels: Atwood was the first Canadian novelist to raise and significantly examine questions about the nature and value of literary scholarship in her fiction while Kroetsch advanced the sub-genre further by placing academic characters and concerns at the centre of his novel rather than as part of a broader social critique. It was not until the publication of Robertson Davies’s *The Rebel Angels* (1981), however, that the sub-genre definitively announced its presence in the Canadian literary canon. Published in the early 1980s, this novel is distanced enough from the substantial transformation that characterized the Canadian university in the 1960s and early 1970s that Davies is able to offer a more sustained, considered reflection on this changing academic climate than Atwood and Kroetsch did. This novel, even more so than its precursors, offers a detailed and nuanced critique of scholarly endeavours through the exploits of a series of characters firmly situated within the academic milieu. Almost every sentence in this dense novel offers some sort of commentary on academe, whether a subtle joke perceptible only to academic insiders or explicit satiric jabs aimed at deflating scholarly pretension and excess. The central character who unifies these various critical commentaries and who therefore facilitates Davies’s project in this novel is renegade monk and scholar John Parlabane, a disruptive presence who destabilizes the other academic characters’ exclusive reliance on conventional approaches to scholarly inquiry at the expense of alternate, often more suitable, methods.

Like Atwood's Duncan and Kroetsch's Jeremy, Parlabane is an academic character who challenges and subverts the academic world of which he is a part—he challenges the types of knowledge that have become institutionalized as “scientific” and thus “scholarly” to the complete exclusion of alternate knowledges (in particular, those of the spiritual and intuitive variety), which, to use Michel Foucault's terminology, have become “buried” and “subjugated” as a result of not possessing the power “ascribed to a science and reserved for those who speak a scientific discourse” (“Society” 10). Parlabane is the perfect champion of subjugated knowledge. Throughout the novel, he is associated with base, illicit activities and is an unapologetically depraved, violent character who openly seduces his students, consumes excessive amounts of alcohol, and indulges his drug addiction. He embraces his “shadow,” which Carl Jung¹ defines as comprising the shameful and repressed aspects of the self, and he therefore embodies the incorporation of subjugated elements he urges his scholarly peers to embrace in their research; in other words, Parlabane's promotion of the shadow side of human nature extends to a corresponding promotion of the shadow or subjugated side of knowledge and scholarly inquiry. As Jung observes, “[w]hat our age thinks of as the ‘shadow’ ... contains more than something merely negative” (*Undiscovered* 58); indeed, the shadow contains those ignored elements which are necessary for a complete and comprehensive vision of the issue at hand. A Jungian reading of Parlabane² thus allows for the

¹ The study of Jungian psychology runs in Davies's family. His daughter Miranda “has published clinical papers, has lectured and taught widely and has co-edited a book on Jungian child psychotherapy” (Grant, *Man of Myth* 424); his daughter Jennifer married a psychologist, and his daughter Rosamund “managed the bookshop of the Analytical Psychology Society of Ontario ... and edited its publication, *Chiron*” (425).

² Numerous critics have commented on the overtly Jungian influence in Davies's fiction. Patricia Monk offers the most detailed examination in her book-length study *The Smaller Infinity: The Jungian Self in the Novels of Robertson Davies* (1982). Her chapter “The History of an Affinity” provides an especially useful overview of Davies's growing fascination with Jung and the ways in which this influence manifests itself not only in his fiction but also in his journalism. Because Monk's study was published in 1982, she was

exploration of an alternative, more inclusive scholarly research paradigm, predicated upon the incorporation of the Foucauldian conception of “subjugated knowledge.”

In order to appreciate Parlabane’s complicated and contradictory attitude towards academe, it is useful to begin by examining Davies’s own conflicted relationship with the academic world. In his book-length study, Michael Peterman³ presents Davies’s varied professional background in a single statement, describing him as a “[d]ramatist, internationally acclaimed novelist, journalist, editor, essayist, critic, theatre historian, lecturer, professor, master of Massey College at the University of Toronto” (1). Davies’s immersion in these fields makes him a keen observer of Canadian life and culture. And his immersion in academe, as a professor and Master of Massey College, provides him with the necessary insight and firsthand experience to transform the general critiques of academe he put forth in the Salterton trilogy of the 1950s to the in-depth satire in his most fully realized academic novel, *The Rebel Angels*. Davies’s attainment of an academic career was not without its complications, however, and so a brief overview of his life and his unconventional entry into academe helps contextualize his approach in this multi-faceted novel.

unable to extend her analysis beyond the Salterton and Deptford trilogies. Gordon Roper’s article “Robertson Davies’ *Fifth Business* and ‘That Old Fantastical Duke of Dark Corners,’ C.G. Jung” is another valuable study but it was also published too early to address the Cornish trilogy.

³ Peterman’s *Robertson Davies* (1986) was originally undertaken by Davies’s friend Gordon Roper, but Peterman soon after took over at Roper’s request. Davies did not hesitate to express his dissatisfaction with Peterman’s approach; as he describes in a 1984 letter to Roper and his wife, “his critical method is truly academic—which is to say that at all costs the critic must Know Best about Everything. It is thus academic reputations are made” (Davies, *For Your Eye Alone* 129). In another letter to Roper dated two years later, Davies’s assessment did not much improve: “My feeling about Peterman ... was that he belonged to the class of academic who regards authors as candidates for marks, and himself as a stern examiner” (160). Peterman was well aware of Davies’s opinion of him: “I did get the sense that he disliked the book and he disliked me. Maybe he wanted a sycophant-ish, positive book and I did say I didn’t think the plays were up to scratch” (qtd. in Ross, *Portrait* 297).

Born in Thamesville, Ontario in 1913, Davies shortly after moved with his family to Renfrew, Ontario. His father, Rupert Davies, was quickly establishing his prominence in the newspaper world, purchasing and running such publications as the *Thamesville Herald* in 1907 and later the *Kingston Whig-Standard* in 1925. Because of his work in newspaper publishing, “[w]riting was a competence Rupert Davies expected of his children” (Peterman 5). As such, Robertson Davies had the makings of a skilled writer from an early age, with his father sending him out to write reviews on local happenings as early as age ten. Mathematics, however, was a different matter; because of his difficulties with this subject as a student at Upper Canada College, he was unable to matriculate and thus entered Queen’s University in 1932 as “a special student, which meant that he could go to classes, do the assignments and write examinations, but not take a degree” (Grant, *Man of Myth* 140). Although this status precluded him from obtaining an undergraduate degree, as a result of his father’s connections he was able to study at Oxford University where he obtained his B.Litt in 1938. He “was drawn to the scholarly excitement Oxford generated” (Peterman 8), and his positive academic experiences at this institution motivated some of the more affectionate portraits of academe in his fiction. Although he faced academic difficulties and had to overcome obstacles in order to obtain his degree, later in life, as a result of his impressive writing career, he received numerous honorary degrees from various universities.

As a student at Upper Canada College through to Queen’s and Oxford, Davies was active in contributing to campus publications as well as participating in the student drama societies. After graduating from Oxford, he became involved in the Old Vic theatre company before returning to Canada in 1940. Upon his return, he began

contributing regularly to his father's papers—the *Kingston Whig-Standard* and the *Peterborough Examiner*—and to *Saturday Night* as book editor. In Peterborough he became unofficial editor of the *Peterborough Examiner* from 1942 to 1960 and “launched his career as playwright and novelist and established himself as an outstanding newspaper editor.” Living in this conservative community as a man “with an air of university life and the stage about him” (Peterman 12), he had to learn how to balance his academic and intellectual disposition with a more accessible one his community could understand and embrace, a balancing act he explores in the Salterton trilogy, particularly in *Leaven of Malice* (1954), as well as in *The Rebel Angels*.

The 1950s was a prolific decade for Davies, both with respect to his involvement in the theatre as well as his writing, for not only was he on the board of the Stratford Festival during this formative period, but he also published the Salterton trilogy, which comprises *Tempest-Tost* (1951), *Leaven of Malice*, and *A Mixture of Frailties* (1958), wherein he introduces academic themes—such as the tension between academic and creative writing—that he progressively develops in his later fiction. The 1960s initially appears to be a markedly uncreative period for Davies as he was most concerned with academic responsibilities during this time. In 1961, he was appointed first Master of Massey College at the University of Toronto by Vincent Massey, who wanted as Master someone “who could stimulate the students to see beyond their course work and their research” (Grant, *Man of Myth* 400). Although he did not publish any novels during this decade, he was busy drafting and laying the groundwork for the Deptford trilogy, composed of *Fifth Business* (1970), *The Manticore* (1972), and *World of Wonders* (1975). Some of his experiences at Massey College inspired him in the early writing

process for *Fifth Business*—just as Dunstan Ramsay is prompted to write a letter detailing his life in part because he feels misunderstood and unappreciated by his students, so too did Davies often believe that his students at Massey College overlooked and ignored the efforts he was making on their behalf (Grant, *Man of Myth* 474).

Although Davies was at times ambivalent about his position at Massey College, he ultimately embraced it: “[h]ow often is one given the opportunity to shape something which is of significance to large numbers of people?” (Davies qtd. in Ross, *Portrait* 169). During his tenure, he strove to make the college “embody the centuries of collegiate tradition” and “be humane and personal, a genuine community of scholars with something of Oxford’s merriness” (Grant, *Man of Myth* 410). Along with this appointment came a full professorship, which saw Davies teaching graduate courses until his retirement. Not surprisingly, he had to contend with resentment from his colleagues: “[i]t was a time when a doctorate had become a requirement for tenure, and here was Davies, with only a B.Litt., vaulted to a full professorship and a much-coveted appointment to the graduate school” (433). When he accepted this position, he anticipated the inevitable resentment and hardship that would accompany it: “I am leaving the comparative ease of being publisher of a paper for the certain unease of running a particular sort of college; I am leaving a world where [sic] few people cheek me for one where aged profs sneer at me because I am not, and never will be, their notion of a scholar” (qtd. in Ross, *Portrait* 169). Nonetheless, he enjoyed his tenure at Massey College, profiting from the unpleasantness some of his colleagues exhibited towards him by modeling some of his unforgettable characters on them; for example, the abrasive Urquhart McVarish from *The Rebel Angels* is inspired in large part by one of Davies’s

chief detractors at Massey College, Professor W.A.C.H. Dobson (Grant, *Man of Myth* 528). Davies held his appointment until he retired in 1981, the year *The Rebel Angels* was published.⁴ In this novel, he highlights many of the weaknesses he saw in the university system during his tenure at Massey College while also painting a picture of the ideal scholarly community he longed to recreate for his own students; he presents “the dark side of scholarship, silhouetting that menace against the brightness of its promise” (Cude 198).

Davies is quick to acknowledge that he has not followed a traditional academic path nor is he the most thoroughly educated individual: “I am not of formidable learning; I am a very scrappily educated person, and I am not of formidable intellect; I really am not a very good thinker” (qtd. in Cameron, “Robertson Davies” 83). Considering the impressive range of learning and reading he displays in his fiction from the intricacies of the theatre and art worlds to an in-depth grasp of Jungian psychology, he is either being modest or blatantly lying. However he chooses to characterize his intellect, he enjoys and thrives in academic settings. His time at Oxford appears to have been the most influential, cementing in him an appreciation and idealization of the concept of a “community of scholars.” He notes, “[t]he greatest gift that Oxford gives her sons is, I truly believe, a genial irreverence toward learning, and from that irreverence love may spring” (“Shakespeare” 262). Indeed, what he praises about academe is the exchange of ideas with academic peers: “there *is* a lot of pleasure about exploring truly interesting

⁴ Grant comments on Davies’s reaction to this timing of publication: “[a]nd he was relieved when it turned out that it would not appear in print until after he had retired from Massey College, for even though, as he told his old friends Gordon Roper and Horace Davenport, it was to be ‘a celebration of what is great in universities’ and ‘a great paean to the learned life,’ he anticipated that some aspects of the portrait would give offense” (*Man of Myth* 524).

things at considerable length with other interested people, and that is what my work area allows me to do now. And I enjoy it very much indeed” (qtd. in Soles 92).

What Davies has problems with are the realities of academic culture that exist outside of this idealized realm of engaging in scholarly discussions with one’s intellectual peers; most of his charges against academe have to do specifically with literary criticism. As he reflects, “Canada as she really is, and Canada as she is seen through the eyes of our professors, are two very different places, and as long as our poetry and our criticism are in the hands of our cultured and well-meaning but essentially unpassionate and unimaginative educationists we cannot expect much from it” (“Letters” 147). He believes that academic writing and creative writing are most often antithetical, and so the critical act has the tendency to limit and misconstrue the creative work rather than, as others such as Kroetsch believe, “[liberate] the text into its own potential” (“Beyond Nationalism” 83). As Davies remarks, “[t]he great difficulty is that the emphasis in universities is likely to be on criticism of literature, rather than on delighted discovery and surrender to it” (“The Conscience” 122). One of the major faults Davies sees in academic criticism is the scholar’s tendency to read the literary work through his or her own limited lens, which is based upon his or her often too narrow specialization: “when you fall into the hands of academics you’re a gone goose. They will interpret and say what they think and there’s nothing you can do about it” (Davies qtd. in Heatherington and Kampf 115). Moreover, academic criticism helps foster a culture of elitism whereby the creative work is removed from general society by becoming the subject of criticism written for and by academics: “[y]ou see, the academic critic who writes for 2500 people in a journal or whatever it is that he writes for, rarely thinks outside of that and does not

often value the opinion of people whom he calls patronizingly ‘laymen’” (Davies qtd. in Fulford 271). In contrast, he promotes “Light-Hearted Scholarship,” which “is of general interest and it appeals to a person neglected in Canada, the Intelligent General Reader” (“Light-Hearted” 190). He contends that the climate promoted by the contemporary university is inimical to such accessible, responsive scholarship: “[a]t the risk of seeming ungrateful to our universities I must record my own conviction that imagination does not flourish in an academic atmosphere. Convention and rules are enemies of great inspiration” (“Letters” 145-46). In response, in *The Rebel Angels*, Davies promotes a more organic approach to scholarly research that is unfettered by an over-reliance on limiting categories and specializations and that is therefore more accessible and resonant to a broader readership.

Although academe factors into almost all of Davies’s novels, *The Rebel Angels* is unquestionably his definitive work of academic fiction—it is set in a university environment and revolves around academic characters and their shifting relationship to scholarly values. His first group of novels, the Salterton trilogy, tangentially addresses academe, set as it is in the fictitious university town of Salterton (likely based on Kingston, Ontario). Though these three novels contain characters affiliated with the university, most notably Professor Vambrace and Solly Bridgetower, the university is not a central or even substantial focus. Granted, through the character of Solly, Davies briefly explores the tension between creative and academic writing and the belief that the former is more valuable than the latter; this brief criticism is not developed at length, however, and thus the novel cannot be considered a fully developed work of academic fiction. In the Deptford trilogy, one of the main characters, Dunstan Ramsay, is a

scholarly character who researches and publishes on the lives of saints; because he is not affiliated with a university or scholarly environment beyond the boys' school where he teaches, he does not allow for sustained critique or commentary of academe.

Nonetheless, that Davies emphasizes Dunstan's lack of a Ph.D. and the fact that Dunstan conducts his research on his own time and for his own fulfillment enables Davies to put forth a subtle critique against humanities scholars: as Dunstan observes, "a serious study of any important body of human knowledge, or theory, or belief, if undertaken with a critical but not a cruel mind, would in the end yield some secret, some valuable permanent insight, into the nature of life and the true end of man" (*Fifth Business* 196). Davies thus critiques the elitism of these scholars by suggesting that their work can be conducted by anyone, Ph.D. or not, who approaches his or her subject with the right intentions and frame of mind. He is also likely reinforcing the fact that his own lack of a Ph.D. has not impeded his scholarly abilities. And although subsequent novels in the Cornish trilogy—*What's Bred in the Bone* (1985) and, in particular, *The Lyre of Orpheus* (1988)—include academic characters and offer commentary on scholarly pursuits, the focus is less on the academic milieu and more on the art and theatre worlds respectively. That these novels are not as focused on academe as *The Rebel Angels* does not mean that they may be ignored entirely; the insights they raise in their tangential treatments of academic values will supplement the analysis of *The Rebel Angels* and demonstrate Davies's enduring concern with the university world.

Set in the College of St. John and the Holy Ghost (nicknamed Spook), *The Rebel Angels* is alternately narrated by two characters—graduate student Maria Theotoky and Anglican priest and professor Simon Darcourt—who idolize and idealize the university.

Maria, who is researching François Rabelais, is not pursuing higher education “to acquire what is now called expertise”; rather, she “wanted nothing less than Wisdom” (Davies, *Rebel* 38). Fittingly, her sections are entitled “Second Paradise,” a reference to the Paracelsus quotation, “[t]he striving for wisdom is the second paradise of the world” (39). Darcourt similarly believes that “the scholar’s life is a good life” (168), and he views the university as a noble scholarly institution which provides “the most congenial of lives” (12). Although narrated by two academic idealists, the novel explores the limitations of adhering too strictly to the scholarly values espoused by their beloved university.

The Rebel Angels is not amenable to a straightforward plot summary. More so than any of Davies’s other novels, this work lacks a central unifying narrative (a lack criticized by several, including, most notably, Sam Solecki) and instead comprises several interconnected threads. The core plot of the novel revolves around recently deceased art collector Francis Cornish’s estate. According to Cornish’s will, his three friends—Professors Clement Hollier, Simon Darcourt, and Urquhart McVarish—are to act as advisors, cataloguing his enormous, disorganized art collection under the supervision of his nephew, Arthur Cornish, the chief executor of his uncle’s estate. Rivalry ensues when Hollier and McVarish begin fighting over a rare Rabelais manuscript, which is missing from Cornish’s collection. Whereas narrators Maria and Darcourt have a solid respect for scholarly pursuits and ideals, embracing the idea of an inclusive scholarly community, Hollier and McVarish’s struggle to claim ownership over the manuscript takes to an extreme the notion of academic competition. Hollier, a specialist in folk traditions and the impact of ancient customs on the present, wants the manuscript to give to his student, Maria, in part to assist her research and in part to ease

his own guilt for having slept with her with no intention of pursuing a romantic relationship. McVarish, a crude and unlikeable Renaissance scholar, believes he is entitled to the manuscript as a result of some tenuous claims that his ancestor was a preeminent Rabelais translator. In spite of their best efforts—including gypsy curses and murder—the manuscript is returned to the Cornish estate before ultimately being given by Arthur to Maria as a wedding gift.

Alongside this narrative thread, several others emerge: Maria spends much of the novel pining over her supervisor Hollier before ultimately falling in love with and marrying Arthur; Darcourt must learn to overcome his own romantic feelings for Maria; and in her earlier attempts to get close to Hollier, Maria introduces him to her gypsy family—her overbearing mother Mamusia and her eccentric uncle Yerko—thus disrupting her persistent attempts to keep her academic identity separate from the gypsy heritage of which she is ashamed. The unexpected return of Parlabane, formerly a classmate of Hollier's and Darcourt's and currently a renegade monk, instigates the resolution of most of these threads, in some cases overtly, such as when he murders McVarish and then kills himself, thereby ostensibly freeing up the Rabelais manuscript for Hollier, but in most cases more subtly, by prompting the characters to reflect on the (dis)connections between their personal and academic lives and to reorient their perspectives accordingly, integrating the varying planes of knowledge and experience that inform their lives and scholarly pursuits.

In spite of the complicated and wide-ranging plot, Davies has a unifying vision. Just as Kroetsch promotes the complementary presence of scientific as well as narrative knowledge in scholarly analyses, Davies also believes that humanities scholarship can

benefit from a broadening of scope by incorporating traditionally marginalized forms of knowledge.⁵ Whereas Kroetsch is a firm believer in the value imparted by narrative modes in particular, Davies, in *The Rebel Angels*, celebrates a wider range of dismissed categories of knowledge. Foucault's conception of "subjugated knowledge" is especially useful in illuminating Davies's critique. Foucault describes subjugated knowledge as comprising a "whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity" ("Society" 7). He uses the term "genealogy" to describe a tactic that enables an "insurrection of knowledges" (9) by exposing how power rather than inherent value often leads to the prioritizing of certain forms of knowledge over others. The function of genealogy "is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us" ("Nietzsche" 146). Those knowledges categorized as "science" are thus not necessarily more valuable or rational or governed by stricter standards of verification; they derive their authority and prestige from being assigned the "power-effects" ("Society" 10) of scientific discourse, from being classified—at times erroneously—by those in power as a science.

In *The Rebel Angels*, Davies, adhering to a genealogical impulse, demonstrates the ways in which subjugated and buried knowledges offer comparable, if not greater, insight into the issue at hand and should thus be incorporated more readily into academic

⁵ Although both Kroetsch and Davies explore similar academic concerns in their novels, Kroetsch has remarked on the clear distinctions between their approaches as novelists: "I am at the opposite end of the scale from ... Robertson Davies, say. I'm just not terribly interested in psychological depth. I'm more interested in story: *how we function*" (qtd. in *Labyrinths* 192-93).

research and discourse not only to provide a more comprehensive perspective, but also to reconnect the isolated scholar to the world he ostensibly examines. Specifically, he scorns those scholars who adhere rigidly to their respective “fields” and traditionally accepted scholarly approaches and instead celebrates those, like Hollier and Ozy Froats, who are able to integrate different avenues of knowledge and understanding—from folk beliefs to spirituality to science—and to appreciate value in the otherwise degraded and dismissed. Indeed, Froats’s scientific study of excrement takes this idea of promoting marginalized knowledge to an extreme. Ultimately, “[Davies’s] work is concerned with revealing this glory in the commonplace” (Hoy 69), thereby making academe more accessible and relevant to the broader community and unearthing traditionally ignored methods for approaching subjects of study. He believes scholarship should be undertaken for its own sake rather than to gain a competitive edge, and scholars should be risk-takers, willing to explore unsavoury and unpopular topics out of an idealistic pursuit of knowledge and truth and out of a sincere desire to connect with and understand the world around them; as such, he employs the simultaneously attractive yet disturbing figure of Parlabane, the darkest and most depraved of the three rebel angels (the others being Hollier and Darcourt), to force the academic characters to break free from their limiting scholarly obsessions and embrace a broader range of knowledge, experience, and understanding which have become subjugated and marginalized over time.

Parlabane is frequently associated with evil and depravity, with his “shadow,” which Jung associates with the shameful aspects of the self we attempt to ignore and repress. In *Jung on Evil*, Murray Stein compiles several of Jung’s writings that explore his views on evil. Although he notes, “[w]hile Jung wrote a great deal about evil, it

would be deceptive to try to make him look more systematic and consistent on this than he actually was” (2), the collected writings demonstrate a sustained interest in this phenomenon, specifically in the shadow, which “is a portion of the natural whole self that the ego calls bad, or evil, for reasons of shame, social pressure, family and societal attitudes about certain aspects of human nature” (9). While Jung’s formulation of the shadow is concerned primarily with the shameful aspects of the *self*, Parlabane also promotes the shameful, repressed, and ignored aspects of knowledge and experience more generally, the aspects that have gradually become subjugated and ignored in favour of more “scientific” modes. Through his interactions with each of the central characters, he prompts these academics to acknowledge and appreciate the experiences and information that do not fit clearly within objective and scholarly constructs.

Throughout the novel, Davies interrogates current scholarly practices and promotes a more inclusive model of scholarship, thereby firmly positioning this work as an academic novel. Although most critics appreciate Davies’s emphasis on intellect in his novels, particularly in *The Rebel Angels*, they do not examine this dimension in detail and therefore do not go as far as classifying this novel within the sub-genre of academic fiction. Some, such as W.J. Keith, dismissively characterize the intellectual dimension as consisting of “the strange intellectual and physical passions of university academics” (118). George Woodcock offers a similarly reductive assessment, arguing that because Davies presents “academe as the terrain of such strange conflicts ... one feels often [he] is trying to compensate for his frustration with the dullness of real Canadian academic life” (46). These assessments focus on the superficial, comical aspects of Davies’s

treatment of academe, overlooking his project of critiquing the flaws and gaps in scholarly approaches to understanding and examining the world.

James Mulvihill moves beyond the surface details of the plot, characterizing this (and Davies's other novels) as "a novel of ideas," which is "a novel in which ideas not only take precedence over character and plot but largely determine them" (184).

Speaking of the Deptford trilogy, he notes the inclusion of "different intellectual systems . . . that Davies's characters variously employ as they attempt to reconcile apparently conflicting aspects of themselves and of the world" (186). This point holds true for the Cornish trilogy as well. Indeed, he describes *The Rebel Angels* as being primarily concerned with "the management of intellect" (189), the ordering of these various intellectual systems. Ultimately, though, he downplays the degree to which they inform one another and thus broaden the individual characters' perspectives. As he notes, the "characters talk at each other from their particular intellectual viewpoints, seemingly failing both to understand and to be understood" (190). John Harris also acknowledges a deeper interrogation of the nature of intellect, arguing that the novel's principal theme is "the nature and role of human consciousness, of intellect" (113); he does not, however, appreciate the complicated nature of this interrogation. Harris believes Davies is ultimately *defending* intellect and scholarly approaches, arguing that because "all the other characters in the story are scholars," "only the intellect gets to take the stand, and the rational analysis and defense of intellect are about as convincing as a police investigation of police corruption" (113). He does not acknowledge that rather than unequivocally defend scholarly approaches, Davies—through the incorporation of varying intellectual and knowledge systems—demonstrates the weaknesses of adhering

solely to academic, objective approaches. Indeed, his project is to critique academe's disconnection from the surrounding world as a result of an over-reliance on "scientific" approaches at the expense of more intuitive, fluid, and accessible forms of knowledge; as a result, not only does he analyze academe, but he also, contrary to what Harris may believe, necessarily integrates non-academic characters, perspectives, and approaches. Despite Woodcock's point that "working-class people are introduced [in Davies's novels] only for comic relief" (37), characters such as Mamusia and Yerko are integral for providing alternative, non-academic modes of understanding and examining the world. This is not to say that Davies prioritizes these alternate modes; not only does he expose "the limitations of a world of facts and reason ... within the context of a larger, spiritual world" (Hoy 70), but he also points to the limitations of adhering strictly to this larger spiritual world. His point is that the scholar should embrace a multiplicity and interconnection of knowledge systems rather than be limited by the few avenues deemed "scientific" or "scholarly."

Critics such as Solecki remark that the novel is too disorganized in its focus and "creaks under an excess of intellectual baggage" (31).⁶ Wilfred Cude suggests that this disorganization, coupled with its "sustained and sincere admiration for the professional scholar" (185), complicates the novel's placement in the sub-genre of academic fiction, which, he argues, tends to criticize rather than praise academe. Although Cude is one of

⁶ David Lodge, one of the most prominent academic novelists, shares Solecki's opinion of Davies's "intellectual baggage," and although his brief review of *The Rebel Angels* strives for a positive tone, that Lodge is not entirely impressed by the novel is unmistakable: "*The Rebel Angels* is one of those novels that impart a good deal of information—in this case rather esoteric information—as well as entertainment to the reader. Its flavour will be a little too gamy for some tastes, its high spirits too redolent of high table; but as the production of a writer in his sixty-ninth year, it is a work of impressive vigour and vivacity, which no addict of the campus novel will want to miss" (267). The concluding positive assessment seems somewhat forced.

the few critics to examine this novel as an academic novel,⁷ his exploration is somewhat flawed: he acknowledges but does not substantially interrogate the fact that while Davies praises academe, offering idealistic depictions of certain aspects, this praise is balanced with significant critical interrogation, most often introduced through the character of Parlabane, thus justifying the novel's unequivocal classification in this sub-genre.

Furthermore, although he acknowledges the comic tone, it is more complex than Cude admits; "[u]nderneath the comic, there is always an awareness of the horrid, the evil, the tragic" (Balisch 34), and this awareness is most often emphasized by Parlabane.

Woodcock asserts that "no character—not even wicked Parlabane ... is sufficiently realized to sustain one's interest" (46), but Parlabane is a complex character whose influence permeates the entire novel and whose promotion of the evil, shadow side of human nature corresponds to a promotion and incorporation of subjugated knowledge in scholarly pursuits. Todd Pettigrew suggests that Davies positions "the university as a place primarily concerned with truth" (62), though Parlabane, through his promotion of subjugated avenues of seeking knowledge, demonstrates that the university and institutionalized forms of knowledge do not have an exclusive hold on truth and insight. Although Cude acknowledges the presence of evil in the novel, he takes it at face value, largely ignoring the Jungian underpinnings of this term. David Lucking offers a more nuanced reading of Davies's use of evil in his fiction: "[t]he idea is that a comprehensive

⁷ Most critics, including Victor Lams, Peterman, and Todd Pettigrew, mention the academic dimension since it is so pronounced as to be unavoidable, but other than Cude, none focuses his exploration around this dimension. For example, in Lams's *The Cornish Trilogy: A Reader's Guide*, the opening sentence of *The Rebel Angels* section reads: "*The Rebel Angels* is a university novel" (5). He does not expand on this classification, however. Similarly, Nicholas Maes offers an apt one-sentence summation of Davies's critique of academe without elaborating on it: "By the time he was ready to set the story down, he knew he wished to draw a detailed portrait of the university, celebrating its medieval origins, its spirit of inquiry, and its centrality to Western civilization, even as he described its less admirable aspects—the feuding between professors, the pedantry of academic life, and its encouragement of credentialism and hostility to anything non-rational in nature" (135).

knowledge of self, and the enlargement of moral perspective that this entails, are benefits that can be attained only through a confrontation with—and even an incorporation of—evil” (45). He focuses exclusively on the Deptford trilogy, however, and, like Jung, analyzes evil primarily in relation to one’s understanding of the self without also applying it to one’s understanding of and relation to the world more generally.

Parlabane is the most concrete embodiment of evil in the novel, and evil, in its various manifestations, is a concept which has concerned Davies throughout his career as a novelist.⁸ *Leaven of Malice*, the second installment of the Salterton trilogy, examines the spanning influence on several individuals of one man’s vengeful submission to the local newspaper of a false engagement notice; the Deptford trilogy traces the lifelong impact on three characters of young Boy Staunton’s cruel childhood act of throwing a stone concealed in a snowball at Mary Dempster; and the Cornish trilogy offers a more subtle treatment of evil, examining it as embodiment of the unknown and unexplored. Drawing on Jung, Davies observes, “[t]he devil seems to me to be not the commonplace symbol of evil but the symbol of unconsciousness, of unknowing, of acting without knowledge of what you’re intending to do. ... The devil is the unexamined side of life; it’s unexamined but it’s certainly not powerless” (Davies, “A Talk” 317). He believes that people must embrace the evil or shadow side of their nature: “I think it is absolutely necessary for a man to recognize and accept the evil in himself. If he does that he is in a

⁸ Davies delivered a four-part lecture series in 1976 at Trinity College (at the University of Toronto) in which he examined fictional depictions and treatments of evil by a variety of authors. His published version of these four lectures (“The Devil’s Burning Throne,” “Phantasmagoria and the Dream Grotto,” “Gleams and Glooms,” and “Thunder Without Rain”) is accompanied by the following introductory remarks: “The problem of Evil in Literature had engaged me for some years, and I knew from personal experience that to make Evil palpable and acceptable in fiction was not simply a matter of inventing horrors and displaying them through the agency of characters who had been labelled as bad. Why bad? and who determines what badness is? I do not pretend that I met and defeated the problem, but I think I gave it a tussle, in terms of what public lectures may do” (“Devil’s” 179).

position to make the evil work in a different way; the charges of psychological energy involved can be re-directed in not necessarily good paths, but at least in understood paths” (“A Talk” 316). In *The Rebel Angels*, evil, with its association with the unknown and unexamined, functions as a contrast to the order and rationality of academe and scholarly investigation and as a representative of the types of knowledge that have become buried and subjugated by the dominant academic discourse. Rather than fully demonize Parlabane, the embodiment of evil, Davies presents him as attractive, suggesting that academics would benefit from broadening their horizons and incorporating unexplored avenues of knowledge into their scholarly pursuits. Commenting on the criticism that his novels are not about Canada, Davies remarks, “I think they are, because I see Canada as a country torn between a very northern, rather extraordinary, mystical spirit which it fears and its desire to present itself to the world as a Scotch banker. This makes for tension” (“The Table Talk” 314). This assessment of Canada as nation holds true for the Canadian university, which similarly—according to Davies—attempts to deny what cannot be clearly categorized as rational or “scientific.” This denial prevents scholarship from developing as organically and productively as it should.

Davies experiments with the Jungian conception of evil most explicitly in an earlier novel, *The Manticore*, the second installment of the Deptford trilogy. In this novel, David Staunton works with a psychiatrist at the Jung Institute in Switzerland in order to understand and cope with the stress and anxiety he experiences after his father’s (Boy Staunton’s) death, which concludes the preceding novel, *Fifth Business*. As a lawyer, he is accustomed to the world of rules and logic, making it difficult for him to

accept the primacy of dreams and the unconscious mind in Jungian analysis. Whereas in *The Rebel Angels* it is the rationality of the university that stands in contrast to the fluidity of other forms of knowledge and understanding, in *The Manticore* it is the courtroom; in both novels, however, Davies criticizes strict adherence to socially prescribed avenues of understanding experience: as David's psychiatrist reflects, we live in a time "when thinking and learning have been given such absurd prominence, and we have thought and learned our way into world-wide messes" (90). Jung comments on the dangers of relying too heavily on rationality: "[m]odern man does not understand how much his 'rationalism' ... has put him at the mercy of the psychic 'underworld.' He has freed himself from 'superstition' (or so he believes), but in the process he has lost his spiritual values to a dangerous degree" (*Man* 94). David's psychiatrist implores him to set aside his rational assessments of his life and experiences and to take seriously the messages imparted by his dreams, to embrace the intuitive knowledge that emerges from these explorations into the unconscious: "[b]ut accepting this ugly creature [your shadow] is needful if you are really looking for psychological wholeness" (84). Davies gives "this ugly creature" concrete form in *What's Bred in the Bone* through the character of Francis's older, deformed brother, whom Francis simultaneously fears and loves. Liesl makes a similar point in *Fifth Business* when she urges Dunstan to "shake hands with [his] devil" (267). Both of these women are encouraging the embrace of the unknown, unexplored aspects of the self; similarly, in *The Rebel Angels*, Parlabane acts as an agent of the devil, of the shadow side of knowledge, promoting the exploration of the otherwise

ignored and unseen in order to invest scholarly research with a greater degree of wholeness.⁹

Parlabane is the perfect character to encourage the shadow side of academic pursuits. From a young age, he is marked as an outcast, relegated to the margins of society as a result of a disfiguring childhood accident. During one of his summer camp activities, an accident involving a heated pot of glue scarred his face for life. Not only does this accident leave Parlabane physically disfigured, but his mother's complete lack of support and concern for his welfare following this accident renders him emotionally scarred and stunted. This early introduction to neglect and ostracism fosters in Parlabane a deep-seated affinity with the shadow side of existence and experience; his scarred face is physical testimony to his embodiment of his shadow. Rather than resist his alignment with this realm, Parlabane actively cultivates it, embracing all that is shameful and typically considered "bad" or evil. Speaking to Maria of sin, he states, "[s]trip it of its darkness and danger and what is left? An eccentricity, as if I stuck this spaghetti into my ear instead of into my mouth. ... No: let my sin be Sin or it loses all stature" (67). He thrives on the presence of evil and sin in his life. Indeed, it is the inability of the monastery to provide for Parlabane some darkness to compensate for the overwhelming good that motivates his abrupt departure from the brotherhood:

The Society offered a good life, but that was precisely the trouble—it was so unremittingly *good*. I had known another world, and I became positively sick for the existentialist gloom, the malicious joy at the misfortunes of others, and the

⁹ Both Patricia Monk and Gordon Roper emphasize Davies's fascination in his fiction with the Jungian conception of "individuation," "the concept of the growth of the individual personality towards wholeness" (Roper 35). In *The Rebel Angels*, Parlabane's promotion of the shadow side contributes to this overall sense of personal wholeness as well as wholeness in scholarly pursuits.

gallows-humour that gave zest to modern intellectual life outside the monastery. I was like a child who is given nothing but the most wholesome food; my soul yearned for unwholesome trash, to keep me somehow in balance. (73)

His need for balance demonstrates the importance of traditionally dismissed and ignored avenues of knowledge and experience—they are necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand. Even though Mamusia also embraces the shadow side, unlike Parlabane this is almost all that she embraces. Barry Asker describes both characters as being “replete with arcane and ancient knowledge of intellectual, but, more importantly, dark, unwholesome, intuitive knowledge” (180), but this assessment is inaccurate since Mamusia does not possess the same balance of intellectual and intuitive knowledge as Parlabane does. He is among “the passionate believers who are also worldly, who savour food and/or sex inordinately, and whose carnal dimensions are as fully developed as their cerebral and spiritual ones” (Fogel, *A Tale* 121) whereas Mamusia’s intellectual faculties are not nearly as developed as her mystical, spiritual side. Like Davies himself who attained the prominent position of Master of Massey College even though he lacked a graduate degree and who therefore straddled the boundary between academic and non-academic realms, Parlabane, a renegade scholar and monk, is uniquely situated to interrogate both of these realms and encourage the other characters to see the possibilities for interconnection between the two.

Although not the central concern of the novel, in *The Rebel Angels* Davies echoes Atwood’s exploration of the commercialization of academe—Duncan highlights the ways in which the idealistic pursuit of knowledge has been corrupted by careerist competition and self-interest while Parlabane subverts this trend by reminding his peers of the true

purpose and spirit of scholarly investigation, which should be removed from commercial concerns. While Maria appears to have a legitimate scholarly interest in Rabelais, Hollier and McVarish become interested in this manuscript for more selfish motives—they want the prestige of being the sole proprietor of valuable academic property. As outlined in Chapter Two, Lewis Hyde argues that scholarly research is not amenable to capitalist demands because rather than belonging to a market-driven economy, such research is part of a gift economy in which sharing and community take precedence over acquisition and personal profit. Hollier and McVarish's competition over the Rabelais manuscript demonstrates that the desire to further one's career and reputation often overpowers the idealistic pursuit of furthering scholarship and knowledge more generally. Moreover, during the first Guest Night, the Warden describes the increasingly commercialized approach to higher education:¹⁰

Our tradition of the relationship between student and professor had always been that of the aspirant toward the adept; part of the disturbances arose from a desire to change it to a consumer-retailer arrangement. That caught the public fancy too, you know, and consequently governments began to talk in the same way, if you will allow me to say so. ... Education for immediate effective consumption is more popular than ever, and nobody wants to think of the long term, or the intellectual tone of the nation. (174)

¹⁰ In "A Chapter of Autobiography," which was originally published in Upper Canada College's alumni magazine, Davies reminisces about his experiences as a young student at this school and his words parallel quite closely those of the Warden's quoted above: "Its dominating characteristic was that the relationship between the masters and the boys was that of adepts to aspirants, not that of retailer to consumer, or employer to unionized worker, which sometimes seems to be the ideal of our state schools. The authority they had was maintained by their superiority of learning, experience, and intellect; whatever rights we achieved we had to earn by showing our fitness to use them wisely. And the influence of the Headmaster, that learned, enthusiastic, vivid, mercurial man, set the tone for everything. We were encouraged to live in the large, and some of us had a shot at it" (39).

Although the Warden is focusing more on the pedagogical side of academe—on the student-professor dynamic—than on the research side, his commentary nonetheless emphasizes that contrary to the idealistic assessments put forth by Hyde, the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is often subjugated in favour of personal advancement and corrupted by the imposition of the type of efficiency and organization demanded by a capitalist market economy in which education is a product to be consumed. Parlabane disrupts this commercialization of scholarly undertakings by bringing attention back to the pursuit of knowledge itself rather than to the gains this pursuit can accrue. He compels the other characters to strive for holistic understandings of the experience or issue at hand. His promotion of the shadow side of knowledge encourages the characters to move beyond their specific research question in order to embrace its broader context: he makes Maria appreciate the connection between her research on Rabelais and her troubled relationship with her gypsy heritage; his influence prompts Hollier to move beyond simply studying folk cultures and beliefs from an objective distance to immersing himself in them more substantially; and he forces Darcourt to confront the fact that his two idealized spaces—the church and the university—exist in a fluid relationship, such that spirituality and faith on the one hand interweave with rationality and objectivity on the other. The characters are thus compelled to put aside their scholarly preoccupations long enough to recognize that their research not only provides them with status and scholarly reputation, but this same research, if undertaken with the correct frame of mind, also has the potential to enable them to achieve a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them.

Considering how integral Maria is to the novel, it is fitting that she is the first character to meet with Parlabane and be affected by his influence. Although some isolate Maria as the central character, “an archetypal female figure who represents for [Parlabane, Hollier, and Darcourt] opportunities for self-discovery” (Asker 176), her interactions with Parlabane reveal that he is the one who most pervasively impacts the other characters’ perceptions of themselves and the surrounding world. Whereas Parlabane exerts a more subtle influence on the other characters, he takes a special interest in Maria, overtly and intrusively meddling in her life. From their first meeting in Hollier’s office, Parlabane disrupts Maria’s life and work. He moves into Hollier’s office, disturbing Maria’s chief work space for her dissertation research on Rabelais; he sleeps on the couch upon which Maria had slept with Hollier, shattering any romantic associations she had made with it; and he probes into her personal life, easily discovering the gypsy roots she longs to suppress. Maria notes of him, “he had got into my special world, and had already taken much of it from me” (11). Indeed, during their involved conversations, Parlabane not only discovers more than Maria intends to reveal, but he also causes her to question these integral aspects of herself. He is quick to point out the dysfunctional nature of her relationship with Hollier: “[y]ou love him. Worse, you’re subsumed in him, and he doesn’t know it” (34). He dissects Maria’s conflicted attitude towards her gypsy heritage:

Don’t suppose I think you capable of anything so stupid and low as a desire to conceal your Gypsy blood, my very dear Molly. I am not so coarse in my perceptions as that. I think you are trying to suppress it because it is the opposite of what you are trying to be—the modern woman, the learned woman, the

creature wholly of this age and this somewhat thin and sour civilization. You are not trying to conceal it; you are trying to tear it out. But you can't, you know.

(205)

Parlabane is especially adamant that Maria embrace her gypsy heritage because he has an affinity with gypsies¹¹—like him, they exist on the fringe of society, challenging its dominant values by perpetuating their own brand of social custom. Not only does he believe that Maria should embrace her gypsy side, but he also believes it would be beneficial if the university incorporated this gypsy spirit in order to liberate it from the confines of stale conventions in favour of the freedom of innovation and risk, which should ideally inform scholarly inquiry.

Parlabane also alerts Maria to the disconnection between her lifestyle and that of Rabelais,¹² the subject of her dissertation research. Whereas Rabelais celebrates the satiric and the bawdy, the carnivalesque upsetting of established rules and order, Maria thrives in the definition and order academe provides; as such, her priorities and values are antithetical to those of a Rabelaisian outlook. She insists that contrary to Parlabane's assessment of Rabelais as "a dirty-minded man" (12), he is an honorable man who "loved learning, and didn't use it as a way of beating other people to their knees, which seems to

¹¹ Davies has had an enduring fascination with gypsy culture; in 1945, he wrote the play *A Jig for a Gypsy* in which a gypsy fortune-teller is employed to prophesy the outcome of an election. Furthermore, an actor friend of the Davies family, Jamie Cunningham, observes of Davies, "he identified with the gypsies of the theatre. In fact, he wrote that play about gypsies. Gypsies are always camping on the outskirts of town...perhaps his conflict was between establishment and gypsy" (qtd. in Ross, *Portrait* 104).

¹² Davies has often expressed his esteem for a Rabelaisian scholarly spirit: "But where are our scholars in the tradition of Rabelais? Where are the men who cultivate learning, not for livelihood and in hope of a university chair, but for the glory of God and for the entertainment of themselves and, incidentally, for the amusement and instruction of mankind?" ("Light-Hearted" 190). In "Can a Doctor Be a Humanist," he aligns knowledge with scientists and wisdom with humanists, arguing that the ideal intellectual figure would combine elements of both spheres, thus becoming a humanist physician. He isolates Rabelais (as well as Paracelsus) as being among the greatest of these elusive humanist physicians, describing him as "another mighty rebel against the domination of the accepted wisdom of his time—which was university scholasticism" (103).

be your [Parlabane's] game" (68). When Maria accuses Parlabane of subscribing to "the common idea of Rabelais" (201), he dismisses her characterization of the satirist: "[y]ou are putting forward critical opinions as if they were facts" (202). Not only does he criticize her for not admitting that her lifestyle is contrary to the type promoted by Rabelais, but he also points out basic flaws in her general understanding of Rabelais and in her scholarly method. Her grasp of Rabelais is limited by her preconceived characterization of him and her refusal to acknowledge the aspects of his life and work that do not conform to her assumptions.

It is appropriate that Parlabane is the character who makes Maria realize her hypocritical attitude towards Rabelais as he is the one character who adheres most fully to the Rabelaisian outlook. In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin describes the medieval carnival of Rabelais's time as a "boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations [that] opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture" (4). In Rabelais's novels, "clowns and fools ... are characteristic of the medieval culture of humour. They were the constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season" (Bakhtin 8). Barbara Godard argues that "Davies's work [is rooted] firmly in the tradition of Rabelaisian laughter and the carnival world" ("World of Wonders" 239). Indeed, in *The Rebel Angels*, Parlabane is Davies's adaptation of the Rabelaisian clown, one who challenges not ecclesiastical and feudal culture, but the order and rigidity of the university, an institution that represents the ordering impulse of society. He offers constant disruption to the lives of the central cast of academics and to their internalization of scholarly approaches and values, and his promotion of a carnival spirit prompts them "to enter a completely new

order of things” (Bakhtin 34), one that allows for a more dynamic, responsive scholarly research paradigm.

Even if Parlabane may misread or underplay certain aspects of Rabelais, he is correct in his assertion that Maria, with her inability to appreciate the gap between her values and those espoused by Rabelais, has a skewed understanding of her subject of study. The one aspect of her life that does adhere to a Rabelaisian aesthetic is her gypsy family, yet this is the side of herself that she strives ardently to keep at a distance. Speaking of gypsy music, Maria notes, “I had to fight this music; its primitivism and sentimentality grated on everything the University meant to me” (132). She further observes, “being a Gypsy in the modern world—especially the University world—simply doesn’t do” (140). Her family’s gypsy heritage is rooted in folk tradition,¹³ which is central to the development of the Rabelaisian carnival: it is out of this tradition, out of the celebrations and feasting of the common people, that the carnivals challenging official feasts and ceremonies emerged. Parlabane makes Maria realize how hypocritical it is to attempt to deny the one part of herself that conforms most fully to her subject of study. By the end of the novel, as she discusses with Darcourt her impending wedding—a wedding which will include several gypsy traditions—Maria concedes that Parlabane’s “talk about the need to recognize your root and crown as of equal importance has made me understand that my Gypsy part is inescapable. It has to be recognized” (310).

Parlabane draws on Rabelais in his promotion of the root and crown. Bakhtin explores the way in which Rabelais celebrates the oft-neglected root through the concept of grotesque realism, which is central to the Rabelaisian carnival spirit: “[t]he essential

¹³ Monk highlights how Davies’s interest in folk tradition parallels Jung’s promotion of folklore and the primitive past more generally: “Both agree, however, that folklore has value because it extends humanity’s self-knowledge” (10).

principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (Bakhtin 19-20). For Rabelais, this degradation is productive—or reproductive—leading to a form of renewal: “[d]egradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time” (21). If a person’s crown remains disconnected from her root, then there will be an accompanying disconnection between that person’s intellectual assessments of the world and her ability and willingness to experience this world. By enabling the crown to be renewed by the root, by having these two extremes inform one another, one understands firsthand the world one is attempting to analyze and examine rather than remain alienated from it, a tendency of academics Davies criticizes throughout his fiction. Parlabane’s advice to Maria—“My advice to you, my dear, is to let your root feed your crown” (205)—encapsulates this idea of balance and interconnection which is integral to Davies’s project in this novel: he believes that an idealistic spirit of scholarly inquiry can take shape only when the scholar is open to incorporating and integrating seemingly disparate planes of knowledge and experience into a unified vision.

Although Parlabane is the most overtly and unapologetically controversial and depraved academic character in the novel, Davies is careful to include a dark side to the personality of each of his characters. Jung believes that we all possess a shadow side to our nature: “[t]o become conscious of it [the shadow] involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance”

(qtd. in Stein 95). Jung argues that we can understand ourselves fully only when we take into account both the socially acceptable and shameful components of our identity. By extension, we can understand the world around us only if our investigation incorporates both rational elements and marginalized, subjugated ones. Indeed, as Stein notes, “[w]holeness is the master concept of Jung’s life and work, his personal myth. ... At bottom good and evil must be united, both derivative from a single source and ultimately reconciled in and by that source” (15-16). Parlabane aids the other characters not only in confronting their shadow side but also in applying this confrontation to their scholarly endeavours: by first accepting the ignored aspects of their personal identities, these scholars can progress towards recognizing the importance of subjugated elements for their research.

Maria’s gypsy heritage is an odd component of her otherwise straight-laced, intellectual persona; it is the shadow she attempts to stifle and ignore. In her repeated attempts to distance herself from her family and heritage, she comes across as the most elitist academic character of the novel. She repeatedly suggests that the life of the mind and scholarly pursuits are somehow better than more spiritual, intuitive, and folk-based approaches to gaining knowledge and understanding. It is through Parlabane’s lecturing and Hollier’s intense interest in her heritage that she gradually begins to embrace this side of herself.¹⁴ By accepting her heritage, Maria is now in a position to immerse herself fully in her research on Rabelais and the folk traditions he promoted. Rather than study

¹⁴ In subsequent novels of the trilogy, Davies makes sure to emphasize that Maria does not achieve an unequivocal acceptance of her heritage: in *The Lyre of Orpheus*, she continues to clash with her mother and hopes that “[l]earning and scholarship would surely help her to rise above the fact that she was half Gypsy” (31). Although she begins to accept her heritage in *The Rebel Angels*, the fact that she continues to have a conflicted relationship with it emphasizes the complicated nature of seamlessly incorporating the shadow side of one’s self and experiences.

him from a distance, she is now able to recognize the enduring relevance and resonance of his bygone era on her present moment. It is precisely this engagement with one's subject of study that Davies encourages and believes should be more readily apparent in humanities scholarship.

Parlabane also encourages both Hollier and Darcourt to take those final steps towards embracing their shadow side. Upon his return to Spook, his subtle rather than direct influence prompts both Holler and Darcourt to break free from a complacent acceptance of their conception of what it means to be a scholar. Solecki notes of these two scholars, "each is a rebel in name only; in every other respect they are conventional and conventionally tame academics"; he believes that Parlabane is the only true rebel angel, from whom "we have the stench of brimstone" (31). Although Parlabane is the most explicitly and aggressively controversial character within the academic context of the novel, both Hollier and Darcourt pose their own challenges to staid academic values, even without Parlabane's influence. As Maria explains to Darcourt, the rebel angels "were real angels, Samahazai and Azazel, and they betrayed the secrets of Heaven to King Solomon, and God threw them out of Heaven. And did they mope and plot vengeance? Not they! ... Instead they gave mankind another push up the ladder, they came to earth and ... taught everything" (257). These angels thus promote the shadow side of knowledge, imparting to mankind an otherwise unknown, undiscovered store of knowledge and learning. They are champions of buried, subjugated knowledge. That Maria considers Parlabane as well as Hollier and Darcourt to be her rebel angels suggests that the latter two men deserve more credit than Solecki gives them.

Hollier's research interests—in the emerging field of paleo-psychology—provide a refreshing change from “the scholar's disclaimer ... it's not my field” (53) and therefore pose a challenge to typical scholarly undertakings. As Maria explains to Parlabane,

[h]e tries to recover the mentality of the earliest thinkers; but not just the great thinkers—the ordinary people, some of whom didn't hold precisely ordinary positions. Kings and priests, some of them, because they have left their mark on the history of the development of the mind, by tradition and custom and folk-belief. He just wants to find out. He wants to comprehend those earlier modes of thought without criticizing them. ... He hunts for fossil ideas, and tries to discover something about the way the mind has functioned from them. (33)

Hollier's work challenges the prevalence of specialization in academic research. He is not limited by a specific research question—he just wants to immerse himself in the past and see what it can tell him. He lets his findings dictate his response rather than allow his own preconceived notions to manipulate the findings. His willingness and enthusiasm in involving people such as scientist Ozy Froats, who is so outside of his specialty, in his research demonstrate how unimportant lines of specialization are to Hollier. Moreover, his interest in “the ordinary people” helps remove his work from an elitist academic sphere and demonstrates his recognition that knowledge can be found in the most unlikely of sources. That non-academics such as Mamusia and Yerko, who are so removed from the university world and everything it represents, can understand and appreciate Hollier's work speaks to its accessibility and applicability to the “real world.”

Hollier's research into marginalized categories of knowledge demonstrates the value of tapping into the shadow side of scholarly investigation. His competitive nature, however, reaches such extremes that rather than use subjugated knowledge and methods for the advancement of scholarship, he turns to these dismissed stores of knowledge to appease his obsessive pursuit of the Rabelais manuscript. His obsession with the manuscript and his aggressive hatred of colleague McVarish speak to his less than stable position within an inclusive brotherhood or community of scholars. Although Hollier's seemingly untarnished reputation suffers when he has a sexual encounter with his student Maria, his dark side emerges most significantly and threateningly when he approaches Maria's mother for help in cursing McVarish, who has stolen the Rabelais manuscript and letters he longs to possess. His monomaniacal quest to obtain these documents causes him to embrace what his scholarly training had until now forced him to keep at a distance: "[b]ut for me it [magic] is a subject of study, a psychological fact but not necessarily an objective fact. A thing some people have always believed but nobody has quite been able to prove. I have never had a chance to experiment with it personally because I have never had what was necessary—the desire and the belief" (265).

His evocation of psychological versus objective fact is reminiscent of Dunstan Ramsay's sustaining research interest in *Fifth Business*—Dunstan studies saints and views the miracles they perform as holding psychological if not objective truth, with both, in his estimation, having the potential to be valid. Even if these miracles cannot be objectively proven, the fact that people believe in them and derive strength from them suggests that they hold truth and validity on a more subjective plane. Dunstan embraces intuitive knowledge and recognizes that at times it can serve to complement objective

fact while at others it can supplant it. For example, Dunstan's fictional biography of Magnus Eisengrim—a later incarnation of Paul Dempster—is completely fabricated in terms of the objective facts, and this fabrication is truer to the spirit of Magnus's life and beliefs than any objective account could be. Whereas Dunstan recognizes the value of psychological fact in offering deeper insight into the person or issue at hand, Hollier employs it for his own personal gain. He turns to it as a man obsessed rather than as an idealistic scholar searching for truth and knowledge and he therefore fails to employ it to its full potential.

Hollier's relentless pursuit of the Rabelais manuscript motivates him to put objective scholarly distance aside and instead gives him "the desire and belief" (265) to embrace magic—specifically gypsy curses—but Mamusia refuses to help him, arguing that he is too consumed by anger and bitterness to appreciate the forces of Balance that will eventually compensate for the curse: "[w]hen Balance decides the time has come to settle the scales awful things happen" (268). That Hollier has progressed from simply studying gypsy culture to engaging in it, experimenting with magic and seeking curses for his benefit, means that he is no longer an objective scholar, observing phenomena from a safe remove; instead, he is beginning to immerse himself in his subject of study, adopting the type of uncharacteristic, hands-on approach that Parlabane promotes. He has immersed himself so deeply, however, that he has lost sight of his scholarly interest and has become consumed by personal vengeance and obsession. Rather than engage in gypsy culture in order to understand it, he does so in order to satisfy his own selfish desires. Hollier is unwilling to admit this progressive embrace of his shadow; as such, he attempts to absolve himself of his own missteps and questionable behaviour by criticizing

Parlabane whose most overtly depraved act—murdering McVarish—was an act Hollier himself was coming close to committing. Indeed, Parlabane murders McVarish in part for Hollier—with McVarish out of the way, Hollier can have the manuscript (that is, until Darcourt returns it to its rightful owner, Arthur). Shortly after Maria meets Parlabane, Hollier warns her, “Parlabane is an evil man, and evil is infectious, and you mustn’t catch the infection” (77). Hollier has already caught the infection but he is unwilling to admit how deeply he has tapped into his shadow side. He is an extreme example of an academic who has prioritized self-interest to such a degree that he has completely lost sight of the ideals of scholarship and of the selfless pursuit of advancing knowledge for its own sake. He embraces his shadow, but neglects to maintain any semblance of balance.

Other than a propensity for drink, Darcourt is the most seemingly “good” of the cast of academic characters. One would expect nothing less of a scholar-priest. He at first appears to be the most devoted to academe and to maintaining a scholarly demeanor. Not only does he take his research seriously, but he also places great importance on his role as an educator: “I do not simply dole out lectures I prepared long ago; I engage my classes” (45). Unlike Hollier who succumbs to a misguided moment of passion and sleeps with Maria, Darcourt is more logical with his feelings for this desirable graduate student—he calmly tells Maria how he feels, offers her marriage, and accepts her refusal and friendship. The one time he fails to uphold the image of the ideal academic is when he is faced with the task of writing numerous recommendation letters for his students. As he sets out to write the letters, he wonders, “[w]hat would happen ... if I filled out these forms honestly?” (244), and indeed, he proceeds to write such honest assessments as

“[h]e is a good-natured slob, and there is no particular harm in him, but he simply doesn’t know what work means” (244). Although somewhat guilty about this “Slaughter of the Innocents,” he is ultimately “cheered by the hope that [he] had caused that body [the Canada Council] a lot puzzlement and confusion” (245) with these unconventional letters. Darcourt’s deepest foray into the dark side of his nature, however, occurs later in the concluding installment of the Cornish trilogy, *The Lyre of Orpheus*, in which he steals art work from the university library and from the National Gallery in order to conceal the fact that what were thought to be ancient paintings were the relatively recent work of Francis Cornish. He justifies this act of thievery by reasoning that once the truth behind the work is discovered, the paintings will be dismissed as fakes, as somehow less worthy. In response to the claim, “it is a fake,” Darcourt asserts, “[p]erhaps in the substance. Certainly not in the spirit” (*What’s Bred* 318). Just because Francis did not create these works in the time period during which they were thought to have been produced does not mean that they are any less representative of the style, of the spirit, of this artistic period. Darcourt thus promotes the value of tradition and the belief that “[p]atterns necessarily repeat themselves” (307), a theme recurring throughout *What’s Bred in the Bone*. In relation to *The Rebel Angels*, this incident reveals the importance of the work of scholars such as Hollier who look to the past for some insight into the present. Darcourt deems Francis’s paintings worth protecting because they help to perpetuate an important artistic style and tradition that otherwise run the risk of being subjugated and forgotten.

Hollier’s work in the field of paleo-psychology explores marginalized forms of knowledge through the lens of scholarly investigation. As a scholar-priest, Darcourt endorses both the rational, objective forms of knowledge espoused by the university and

the abstract, spiritual knowledge promoted by the church. Like Hollier, Darcourt is attracted to the ignored and unacknowledged; he was inspired to pursue his current career path out of a desire to highlight knowledge which had been relegated to the margins: “I ... became a scholar-priest because I wanted to dig deep in mines of old belief that were related ... to those texts which the compilers of the Bible had not thought suitable for inclusion in the reputed Word of God” (235). Parlabane, however, more so than his fellow rebel angels, embodies this co-existence of differing forms of knowledge in a more complete, unified fashion. Indeed, Hollier often exhibits a disingenuous engagement with the subjugated knowledge he investigates; his scholarly ambition ultimately trumps any sincere desire to engage with the experiences, developments, and thinkers of past societies. And although he employs an unconventional approach to scholarly research, he has not immersed himself as deeply in the shadow side of intellectual pursuits as Parlabane has. Whereas Hollier believes truth can ultimately be found as long as one is willing to probe into marginalized categories of knowledge, Parlabane believes that truth is ultimately elusive and ungraspable. Indeed, his scholarly interest is “the history of scepticism: the impossibility of real knowledge—no certainty of truth” (26). For Parlabane, because truth cannot be located definitively, all categories of knowledge are equally valid in that they are equally devoid of concrete truth. As Parlabane explains to Maria, skepticism “leaves you with a cautious recognition that the contradictory of any general proposition may be asserted with as much claim to belief as the proposition itself” (195). Rather than be limiting, Parlabane’s belief in skepticism is liberating because it empowers the individual to embrace a wide range of knowledge and experience instead of being oppressed by the search for answers. Although Hollier is not

guided by specific questions, he still hopes to uncover quantifiable answers to justify his research. Parlabane, on the other hand, champions the unrelenting immersion in knowledge and learning, unimpeded by any end. His model of scholarship is not exactly practical but it does enable Davies to critique the tendency of academics to force their research prematurely towards firm conclusions.

Furthermore, Hollier may purport to celebrate ordinary people and folk beliefs, but he is still a part of the university world, playing the stereotypical role of the professor from the safe remove of the ivory tower. For example, when discussing with Darcourt his indiscretion with Maria, Hollier describes their encounter in detached, elevated language, saying that he “wronged her, gravely” (94) by having “had carnal knowledge of her,” to which Darcourt replies, “Oh, for God’s sake! You sound like the Old Testament. You mean you’ve screwed her?” (95). And even though Darcourt employs a more conversational, colloquial tone compared to Hollier’s measured, academic voice and generally appears to be more grounded, he has yet to find a comfortable balance between his two identities: “[t]he priest and the professor would function suitably if Simon Darcourt, the whole of him, lived in a serious awareness of what he was and spoke to the rest of the world from that awareness” (56). Parlabane, like Darcourt, was associated with the church during his tenure as a monk; when he realized that the monastery, a great source of spiritual knowledge, would not offer the level of intellectual stimulation to which he had become accustomed, he fled, suggesting his need for a balance between the shadow and explicit sides of knowledge and intellect. Darcourt is disturbed by Parlabane’s insistence on continuing to wear his monk robe after his flight from the monastery, and accordingly, lends him some of his own, more professor-like

attire. Parlabane's disregard for the type of clothing he wears speaks to his belief in the fluidity of identity categories and, more specifically, to the fluidity between the spirituality of the monastery and the rationality of the university; Darcourt's discomfort with Parlabane's inconsistent attire reveals his belief in the rigid separation of identity and knowledge categories. The more he is exposed to Parlabane's uncharacteristic relationship to both the church and the university, however, the more Darcourt is compelled to acknowledge that these two idealized spaces are more complex and interconnected than he originally admits.

Unlike the other characters, unlike even Parlabane himself, McVarish is the character who comes closest to being governed entirely by his shadow and who therefore does not possess the balanced perspective Davies promotes throughout the novel. Darcourt describes him as "one of the few men I really dislike" (12) and as someone who had "a sense of the unimportance of anybody else's needs or wishes if they interfered with his convenience" (42). While Maria, Hollier, and Darcourt each possess varying degrees of affection, or at least respect, for Parlabane, none holds any for McVarish. Indeed, as Peterman observes, "Davies makes an important distinction between the conscious, unmitigated malice of Nasty McVarish ... and the wise, if inescapable, evil of Parlabane" (157-58). McVarish's selfishness on a personal level corresponds to a self-interest that pervades his scholarly undertakings. As demonstrated by his unprofessional and immoral concealment of the Rabelais manuscript, he is more concerned with making and securing his scholarly reputation than he is with advancing knowledge in his field. Because he is so governed by the dark side of his nature, he becomes a one-dimensional character, incapable of commanding respect on either a personal or scholarly level. Any

sense of responsibility and idealism has been overpowered by his shadow and he is therefore incapable of channeling darker energies towards more positive, productive paths.

McVarish's problematic use of gossip demonstrates his inability to recognize the potential of his shadow and of subjugated forms of knowledge. He pays Parlabane to help him facilitate his bizarre and elaborate sexual fantasies, such as "The Two Old Edinburgh Ladies" (287), the fantasy they indulge in the evening of his murder. In this fantasy, both men dress as—appropriately enough—two Edinburgh ladies who exchange gossip about the university in order to arouse McVarish sexually. He revels in any information—whether substantiated or not—that reveals the suffering or misfortune of his academic peers. That McVarish combines sexual fantasy with gossip is fitting considering Patricia Meyer Spacks's alignment of eroticism and gossip: "[g]ossip, even when it avoids the sexual, bears about it a faint flavor of the erotic. ... The atmosphere of erotic titillation suggests gossip's implicit voyeurism. ... [W]e thrill to the glamour and the power of secret knowledge" (11). This association of gossip with "secret knowledge" suggests gossip is a means of accessing "subjugated knowledge." Spack further elaborates, "[gossip] embodies an alternative discourse to that of public life, and a discourse potentially challenging to public assumptions; it provides language for an alternative culture. ... A rhetoric of inquiry, gossip questions the established" (46). It is thus appropriate that Parlabane, the character who most explicitly champions the subjugated, marginalized aspects of knowledge and experience, is the one who encourages and satisfies McVarish's craving for gossip. That Parlabane is integral to the development of gossip throughout the novel, functioning as either its subject or its

communicator, reinforces its role as a tool that facilitates the genealogical impulse of unearthing and exposing subjugated fragments.

Because McVarish veers too far into his shadow side, he uses gossip to satisfy malevolent desires. Darcourt, however, puts gossip to better use; he employs it to write a chronicle of his university, one that moves beyond documenting the mundane, “unilluminated crap” and that instead takes into account, as Darcourt’s colleague Ellerman suggests, “all the odd ends and scraps in it that nobody ever thinks of recording but which are the real stuff of life. What people said informally ... all the gossip and rumour without the necessity to prove everything” (13). Darcourt takes as his model John Aubrey’s *Brief Lives*, and accordingly, the sections of the novel he narrates are entitled *The New Aubrey*. Darcourt’s chronicle, unlike the official one commissioned by the university, seeks to explore and expose the shadow side of university life, and is thus in keeping with Parlabane’s influence. Darcourt uses gossip not to ridicule others but to bring to light aspects of his colleague’s lives and of his university that would otherwise go unnoticed and which offer potentially valuable insight into the university and its community.

Considering that Parlabane, like Darcourt, also sets out to write a manuscript—a novel, in his case—it seems fitting that he should pursue a project similar to Darcourt’s, one that will enable him to utilize gossip to expose and put into circulation subjugated and hidden elements. Instead, *Be Not Another* is a convoluted mess of a novel, which his colleagues are certain will never get published. Although in execution Parlabane sabotages himself with his scholarly pretension (“every sentence contains a complex nexus of possible meanings, giving rise to a variety of possible interpretations” [240]),

his plan for the novel sums up his philosophy of learning, which pervades *The Rebel Angels* as the ideal to which the other characters should strive:

The reader follows the movement of his [the protagonist's] soul from its infantile fantasies, through its adolescent preoccupation with the mechanical and physical aspects of experience, until he discovers logical principles, metaphysics, and particularly scepticism, until he is landed in the dilemmas of middle age—early middle age—and maturity, and finally to his recovery, through imagination, of a unified view of life, of a synthesis of unconscious fantasy, scientific knowledge, moral mythology, and wisdom that meets in a religious reconciliation of the soul with reality through the acceptance of revealed truth. (241)

Parlabane aligns the movement from fixation on physical and concrete manifestations of knowledge to the acceptance of spirituality and a plurality of knowledge with aging and maturity, suggesting that his philosophy—the embrace of multiple modes of understanding the world—is an ideal which is attainable only by the wise and which marks the pinnacle of one's intellectual development. Characters such as McVarish, who are consistently concerned with status, reputation, and advancement, are still caught up in the adolescent stage of this paradigm, unable to appreciate the broader context and import of their pursuit of knowledge. On the other hand, Maria, Darcourt, and, to a lesser extent, Hollier are gradually progressing towards a more “unified view of life,” recognizing the value that lies beyond their immediate scholarly concerns.

Although each of the central characters—Maria, Hollier, Darcourt, and McVarish—has dark sides to their personalities and pose their own challenges to scholarly convention, none recognizes the value of his or her respective shadow to the

degree Parlabane does: Maria eventually comes to embrace her gypsy heritage but, as demonstrated in subsequent novels of the trilogy, this is not an uncomplicated or permanent acceptance; Hollier taps into his shadow to appease a monomaniacal quest rather than to pursue knowledge out of a spirit of scholarly curiosity and enterprise; McVarish veers too far into his shadow side, reaching destructive rather than productive depths; and Darcourt, though closer to achieving psychological and scholarly wholeness relative to his peers, is reluctant to acknowledge and integrate the varying and seemingly conflicting elements that compose his university. This reluctance is demonstrated most explicitly during the Guest Night festivities that he organizes and oversees—he insists that they mark “one of civilization’s triumphs over barbarism, of humane feeling over dusty scholasticism, an assertion that the scholar’s life is a good life” (168). He takes offense at McVarish’s attempts to degrade these festive occasions: “I wished he had not compared our pleasant College occasion to a Rabelaisian feast” (169). He strives to uphold a certain image of the university that does not account for the various marginalized, ignored, and subjugated elements that are a crucial part of its existence.

That Parlabane is the only academic absent from the Guest Night feast that concludes the novel is noteworthy as it emphasizes how distinct he is from his scholarly peers—they are still incapable of appreciating their shadow and instead content themselves with discussing Parlabane’s odd, depraved behaviour from a comfortable distance. As the assembled professors discuss McVarish’s bizarre murder, they also debate whether Parlabane should be applauded for the murder, whether he “deserves public thanks” (324). Professor Durdle valorizes the murder: “It’s our Crime, don’t you see, and a real beauty! ... It gives us a quality all our own, lifts us high above every other

university on this continent. ... Raises us all immeasurably in our professional stature!” (325). Durdle views Parlabane’s criminal act as something that aligns their university with “the great scholars of the past” as opposed to the modern scholar, “a frowsy scarecrow of bourgeois conventionality.” He adds, “some grotesquerie, some wrenching originality, is a necessary part of real scholarship, and brings a special glory with it” (325). While Durdle’s enthusiastic support of a murderer is questionable, he articulates clearly the spirit of Parlabane’s message throughout the novel: scholars need to acknowledge and incorporate the messy, controversial, and seemingly illogical aspects of experience in order to attain a comprehensive picture. Rather than uphold the status quo, they must interrogate and challenge it; they must question the types of knowledge that have become entrenched as “academic” and “scientific” to the complete exclusion of other, equally valid forms. The Warden at first fails to appreciate the import of Durdle’s commentary; he dismisses the talk of murder and instead focuses on Ozy Froats’s probable attainment of Nobel Laureate status as being worthy of discussion: “[t]hat is what lends splendour to a university. ... Not these dreadful interruptions of the natural order” (326). In response, one of the assembled professors reiterates Durdle’s (and Parlabane’s) message: “[y]ou lean always toward the light, Warden; perhaps both are necessary, for completeness” (326). Parlabane is the one character who most often injects the necessary darkness to balance the light and rationality of academe.

In many ways, Parlabane is similar to Atwood’s Duncan—both are eccentric outcasts who challenge and question the academic world of which they are a part. Parlabane differs, however, in that he retains an affection for academe and thus sees the potential for productive reformation of its values and practices whereas Duncan is

disillusioned to the point of apathy. And whereas Kroetsch's Madham and Jeremy often become oppressed by academic values and pressures, Parlabane maintains a self-assured attitude throughout, confident that it is possible to balance institutionalized forms of knowledge and methods of scholarly inquiry alongside those that have been unnecessarily marginalized and subjugated. He urges his peers to recognize that academe need not be so restrictive and exclusionary. Through his embrace of the shadow side of his nature, he exemplifies the possibility of balancing and interweaving socially accepted traits with marginalized and dismissed ones. This balancing act is essential for confronting the shadow side of personal existence: "[i]t is everybody's allotted fate to become conscious of and learn to deal with this shadow. ... The world will never reach a state of order until this truth is generally recognized" (Jung qtd. in Stein 178). More importantly, though, such balance is necessary to elevate scholarly research from the limiting confines of standards and conventions predicated on rationality and objectivity to a more unified plane upon which various knowledge systems cohere. Rather than unquestioningly accept the finite avenues of scholarly investigation offered to them, academics, as Foucault argues, need to interrogate why certain forms of knowledge have been marginalized and subjugated. Parlabane encourages this interrogation, prompting his peers to recognize that valuable approaches to knowledge and understanding have been hidden and should be unearthed so that a more comprehensive version of truth can emerge from scholarly undertakings. As Parlabane gradually reveals, folk beliefs, spirituality, and mysticism all have their place in scholarly investigation.

By evaluating different avenues of seeking knowledge and truth, Davies, as Kroetsch does in *Gone Indian*, suggests that to attain a comprehensive understanding of

the world, one must adapt conventional models of scholarly inquiry in order to embrace the plurality of experience and knowledge. And, following Atwood's lead, Davies discusses and criticizes academe in such a way as to make his commentary applicable to "the real world"—just as Atwood situates her critique of academe within a broader critique of consumer culture, Davies's treatment of academe also incorporates the broader non-academic community in order to advance his critique of the insularity of academe, of its inaccessibility and at times inapplicability to the surrounding world. Davies advances the sub-genre further, however, by emphasizing the need for academics not only to break free from complacent attitudes and standard methodologies, but also to become pioneers and risk-takers in the process. By employing a character such as Parlabane to usher in a more inclusive model of scholarship, Davies suggests that scholars need to be more willing to examine unconventional categories of knowledge and subjects of study as well as (and perhaps more importantly) pursue and produce research that is controversial and unsettling and will therefore impact the community both inside and outside of the university. Scholars need to be rebel angels, courageously and tirelessly uncovering valuable knowledge and insight that have been hidden and imparting them to their societies for their betterment and advancement rather than for individual gain and reputation.

Like his fellow academic novelists, Davies is situated within the academic world he interrogates; thus, he continues the tradition of using his fiction to highlight weaknesses within the academy and suggesting directions for positive growth and progression. These novels are not self-indulgent portraits of the academic world written by complacent academics; instead, they are socially relevant documents that prompt a

reassessment of academe's values and its place and function in the broader community. Writing in the wake of the massive restructuring of the university and in the midst of renewed debate about the value of humanities scholarship, one of Davies's central aims in this novel is to defend the academic world in which he has invested so much by demonstrating that scholarly undertakings can have wider applications and resonances. As a result of the increasing commercialization and bureaucratization of the Canadian university, scholars have over time enabled external careerist concerns to infiltrate and undermine their research endeavours. Davies suggests that if scholars reorient their perspectives and reconnect with the fundamental purpose of their research, thereby relegating professional self-interest to its rightful secondary position, they will be better situated to conduct meaningful research that illuminates complex, enduring phenomena rather than the obscure, minute details upon which limiting specializations and counter-productive competition thrive.

Unlike the other novelists, however, Davies occupies an unconventional and tenuous position in academe—although he was a professor and Master of Massey College for many years, he did not attain a graduate degree. His prestigious placement in Massey College coupled with his lack of an advanced degree enabled him to be both a part of and apart from academe. By his own admission, he was ostracized by many of the scholars with whom he worked. Davies, more so than the other novelists considered in this study, was in the unique position of being simultaneously an academic insider and outsider, someone who straddled the boundary between academic and non-academic and who was thus especially suited to interrogate and attempt to minimize the gap between these two realms. He was able to look at seemingly esoteric humanities scholarship from the

perspective of both the committed scholar and the skeptical everyman. Although his promotion of a more inclusive model of scholarly inquiry may at times appear too idealistic or far-fetched, Davies's general message that scholars need to engage more fully with their subjects of study and be risk-takers, open to acknowledging and exploring traditionally dismissed categories of knowledge, is worth heeding in order to foster the continuing relevance and progression of humanities scholarship.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Scholarship [is] bunk”: Carol Shields’s *Swann*

In *The Edible Woman*, Atwood initiates an exploration into literary scholarship, highlighting the tendency of academics to abandon the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake in favour of more self-serving, careerist ends. In *Gone Indian*, Kroetsch suggests that in order to bring attention back to the research itself, scholars need to break free from an over-reliance on “scientific knowledge” to the complete exclusion of the equally, at times more valuable domain of “narrative knowledge.” And in *The Rebel Angels*, Davies takes Kroetsch’s critique one step farther by arguing for the incorporation not only of narrative knowledge, but of all forms of knowledge that, according to Michel Foucault, have been excluded from the limited domain of scientific discourse, which comprises those select knowledges that have been invested with a greater degree of power and authority by virtue of being designated a science. In *Swann*, Carol Shields concretizes Davies’s exploration of “subjugated knowledge” through the poetic output of Mary Swann. In particular, she explores the many misguided attempts of the academic characters to impose on Mary’s work poetic influences and traditions which will enable them to legitimate her work and shift it from the domain of subjugated knowledge to a recognized and acceptable standard, amenable to academic inquiry. In so doing, they each essentially construct their own version of the poet and her work, one that reflects their own interests and concerns; they progressively erase any legitimate traces of Mary herself and ultimately prioritize the critical act over the literary work.

Like Davies, Shields wrote her novel in the aftermath of the restructuring of the Canadian university, a period when society was taking stock of the numerous changes and their implications. She thus echoes many of the concerns raised in *The Rebel Angels*—namely, she responds to the growing skepticism among the general public about the value and relevance of humanities (or, in this case, literary) scholarship. The character of Mary Swann, whose life and work are so far removed from the academic domain, enables Shields to examine the ability of current literary standards to respond effectively to dynamic subjects and to appreciate and account for (rather than mask and minimize) their unique nuances. Moreover, this confrontation between such a non-academic subject and such overly specialized, academic approaches prompts an assessment into whether literary criticism has any relevance or applicability outside of the academy and whether the existing tools of this discourse are even capable of engaging with subjects and experiences that do not adhere to established literary traditions and patterns of influence—that is, Shields questions whether literary scholarship as it now stands can feasibly push our understanding of literary works in new directions which speak to the unique qualities of these works and the conditions of their production or whether the enterprise of literary studies ultimately operates within a predetermined and self-serving cycle of shared patterns and assumptions which are meaningful only to that privileged minority within the university.

A brief overview of Shields's personal and professional lives reveals her investment in the academic world that she examines in *Swann*. Shields grew up in Oak Park, Illinois, “an exceedingly WASP suburb of Chicago,” where she felt safe and protected, almost excessively so. Although she has likened her upbringing to “living in a

plastic bag” (Shields qtd. in Wachtel 5), in a subsequent interview, she rethinks this assessment: “[t]here was a period in my life when I went around, rather ostentatiously, saying I’d grown up in a plastic bag.” She realizes a greater complexity: “I’ve come to see that there were hundreds of disruptions in its surface, signs that I seem almost deliberately to have suppressed” (qtd. in Thomas, “Epistolary” 75).

Shields studied abroad during the junior year of her undergraduate degree at Exeter College in London; it was here that she met her future husband Donald Shields, a Canadian engineer. They married the summer after Shields graduated from Hanover College;¹ she graduated in 1957 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English as well as with teaching credentials, which her parents insisted she obtain (Wachtel 13). Donald’s academic career took Shields and their growing family (they had five children born between 1958 to 1968) to universities in various Canadian cities, including Ottawa, where, in 1969, she began her Master’s degree in English Literature at the University of Ottawa. Because of Donald’s appointment at this institution, Shields was offered free tuition; she reflects, “[b]eing very thrifty about these things, I decided I’d better take advantage of it” (qtd. in Wachtel 23). One of the few mature students in the program at the time, Shields obtained her degree in 1975, taking five years to complete it even though she had originally planned to do so within two years. The extra time was more than warranted: not only was she married and raising five children, she was also writing and publishing during this period—she published two poetry collections, *Others* (1972) and *Intersect* (1974), and she took a term off from school in order to concentrate on

¹ Shields has described the atmosphere at Hanover as being somewhat conservative and repressive. The following incident reflects the overall climate of the college: Shields “earned the John Livingston Lowes Award as the outstanding English major at the college” and the English Department “decided to give the award to the next-highest ranking student because he was a man and the award would help him in his career” (Eden and Goertz 5).

writing her first novel, which was ultimately rejected by several publishers (Lang 418). Because the rejection letters were nonetheless encouraging, Shields persisted in her attempts to publish a first novel and set to work on *Small Ceremonies* (1976), which was published the year following her graduation.

Her Master's thesis on Susanna Moodie proved fruitful for her creative writing endeavours: "I had all this material left over from my thesis on Susanna Moodie that I couldn't use because it was too conjectural. So I thought I would try to do something with it. And that became *Small Ceremonies*" (qtd. in Wachtel 27).² Her Moodie research also inspired indirectly the conception of *Swann*: "I knew I wanted to write about the disappearance of manuscripts. When I was working on my thesis on Susanna Moodie, some of the material had been stolen from the archives at the University of Western Ontario. I began to wonder what would happen if someone tried to monopolize this market of Moodie papers" (qtd. in Wachtel 34-35).

Although Shields withdrew from the Ph.D. program at the University of Ottawa within her first year as a result of writing and family obligations (McMullen 44), she went on to balance academic and writing pursuits for most of her career, with both aspects of her professional life informing and enriching one another. She taught at the University of Ottawa, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Manitoba, she was appointed Chancellor of the University of Winnipeg in 1996, and she published ten novels, three poetry collections, three short story collections, numerous plays and screenplays, and several critical articles (Hammill, "Annotated" 285-91). She

² William French, in his 1976 review of *Small Ceremonies* for *The Globe and Mail*, comments somewhat unfavourably on Shields's use of left-over thesis material for her novel: he notes that she "[tries] out theories she wouldn't use in a work of scholarship—the possibility that Mrs. Moodie suffered from a hormone imbalance, for example." Although the incorporation of conjectural, "unscholarly" material may have weakened the novel in French's view, other reviews from the period are generally positive.

comments on the benefits of her dynamic, multi-faceted career: “[m]y teaching years, about twenty of them, were good to me and good *for* me. Just being part of a university, interacting with my colleagues and students, has widened my window on the world, and this is precisely what novelists need” (qtd. in Hollenberg 345).

Despite the fact that her inspiration for *Swann* derived from the academic activity of conducting thesis research and the plot of the novel revolves around academic characters and the scholarly values Shields was exposed to during her many years teaching at universities, she is reticent to label the novel an academic novel. In an interview with Donna Krolak Hollenberg, she notes, “I’m told that my writing often reflects academic pursuits, but I haven’t (yet) written a genuine academic novel, and probably won’t.” When pressed by Hollenberg to acknowledge *Swann* as such a novel, she replies,

I suppose *Swann* really is an academic novel, and a satiric one at that. Writers are always cautioned not to write academic novels, since no one wants to read them except other academics. But the material is so rich. I’d like to see (or write) a novel that, instead of satirizing academe, praised it. What an extraordinary life academics are offered, though they do love to grumble. (I suppose this is because they’ve been critically trained). Time, space, and immense freedom—these are gifts. (345)

Although Shields concedes that *Swann* is an academic novel, she overlooks the fact that her novel does indeed praise academe (in addition to satirizing and criticizing its values). She challenges the manipulative and limiting aspects of scholarly research, but she also incorporates affectionate portraits of academic characters. Her protagonist, Sarah

Maloney, offers faulty, self-serving analyses of Mary Swann's life and work, but she is also aware of her shortcomings and of the weaknesses of literary scholarship generally; as she works through her conflicted relationship with her academic profession and repeatedly asserts her genuine appreciation and love of literature, she gestures towards more productive, inclusive scholarly practices and thus reaffirms the potential value of literary scholarship.

Although *Swann* offers Shields's most sustained treatment of academe, a cursory overview of her many other published novels demonstrates an enduring interest in academic themes and characters. Her first novel, *Small Ceremonies* (1976), which will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter, contains various literary scholars as secondary characters and raises important questions about the connection between literary canons and national identity. In *The Box Garden* (1977), protagonist Charleen helps edit *National Botanical Journal*, a scholarly journal created by her ex-husband Watson and subsequently run by his friend David, both botanists and university professors. Even though she has no expertise in the area, Charleen edits the various submissions. When David insists they reject a particular article for not being scholarly and objective enough, Charleen laments, "[i]t's inhuman. The prose style sounds factory-made, all glued together with qualifying phrases. And here at last was an article spurting with passion" (82). In the companion novels *Happenstance* (1980) and *A Fairly Conventional Woman* (1982), Jack's profession as an historian is often compared to his wife Brenda's newfound career as a quilt-maker. Whereas Jack emerges as "a woolly academic type" (*Happenstance* 32) who over-intellectualizes everything, Brenda is much more down to earth. Jack is somewhat critical of Brenda's quilt-making, questioning,

“[w]asn’t the refining and shaping of ideas the important thing, and not filling up the world with more and more objects?” (34), yet Shields draws various intriguing parallels between their two seemingly distinct worlds. When he mistakenly assumes that an ex-girlfriend is about to publish a similar historical study, Jack is forced to confront the utility of “filling up the world with more and more” books. Moreover, Brenda’s trip to Philadelphia to attend the National Handicrafts Exhibition reveals how similar this convention is to the academic conferences at which Jack often presents: both have similar social dynamics and both involve esoteric theorizing of primary documents, whether historical narratives or quilts. Although *The Republic of Love* (1992) focuses primarily on the unlikely romance between Fay McLeod, an Associate Folklorist at the National Center for Folklore Studies, and Tom Avery, a radio DJ, Fay’s scholarly interest in mermaids often surfaces in the background. In *The Stone Diaries* (1993), Shields introduces yet another botany professor, Barker Flett. Because part of the novel is set in 1916, Shields is able to offer brief commentary on the role of academics in wartime Canada; specifically, she draws attention to the fact that male students are largely absent since they “have put on the uniform of the Dominion and gone to war.” She also highlights the pressure on scholars to produce work “deemed crucial to the war effort” (42). In *Larry’s Party* (1997), Larry grows increasingly estranged from his second wife Beth, an academic who researches on female saints, as a result of her penchant for doling out “swiftly applied intellectual therapy” (168) and her growing scholarly ambitions, which lead her to resent deeply that Larry, a maze designer who lacks a university degree, wins a Guggenheim fellowship instead of her. In *Unless* (2002), that protagonist Reta Winters is a novelist enables Shields to comment on the at times pretentious nature

of literary criticism and reception. One book columnist bemoans that “[t]he stream of current fiction about middle-class people living in cities was diluting the authentic national voice that rose from the landscape itself and—,” in response to which Reta thinks, “Oh, shut up, shut up” (32). Her pedantic editor begins to recognize the quality of her work only after an established academic writes a review of her first novel, so that “[w]hat was simple is now seen as subtle” (318).

Unlike these novels which only tangentially address academic concerns and literary scholarship, *Swann* offers a focused interrogation. The novel revolves around unknown Canadian poet Mary Swann, “the absent centre” (Eagleton 313) and “*idée fixe*” (Gamble 53) of the narrative. Mary is brutally murdered by her husband shortly after she drops off a bag full of her poems with independent publisher Frederic Cruzzi. Cruzzi’s wife Hildë accidentally damages these poems when she disposes of fish remains in the bag containing them; she and Cruzzi then frantically attempt to salvage the poems. Because they were written in washable ink, the remaining fragments are largely unreadable, leaving Cruzzi and Hildë to progress rapidly from restoring Mary’s body of work to rewriting it completely. Fifteen years later, young feminist scholar Sarah Maloney discovers this collection of poems (entitled *Swann’s Songs*) while on a retreat at a Wisconsin cottage; her discovery arouses the interest of the scholarly community, particularly professor Willard Lang, who organizes a symposium in the poet’s honour. Not only do several academics vie for a sense of ownership over this obscure poet, but three non-academics—biographer Morton Jimroy, Nadeau resident Rose Hindmarch, and editor, publisher, and journalist Cruzzi—become invested in promoting their own skewed version of Mary Swann’s life and work. The novel is divided into five sections: the first

four are presented from the perspective of Sarah, Jimroy, Rose, and Cruzzi³ respectively and the final section describes the Swann Symposium in the form of a film script, which complicates the authenticity of the sections that precede it as well as the sincerity of the events that comprise it. Throughout these disparate yet ultimately interconnected sections, two key mysteries emerge—why are all the Swann documents gradually disappearing, and more pressingly, who is Mary Swann? These mysteries are linked in that the progressive erasure of her material traces contributes to a corresponding erasure of her identity.

Although the characters enthusiastically embrace the opportunity to make their name as the preeminent Swann scholar, Mary Swann's life and poetic output complicate the scholars' attempts to use her as a viable subject of academic analysis. Little is known of her life other than the fact that she was married to a farmer who brutally murdered her. The details and motivation behind this murder are unknown. Other than Rose Hindmarch, none of the residents of her hometown Nadeau, Ontario knows Mary Swann. Even Rose barely knows her, exaggerating their few limited exchanges into a deep friendship in order to feel important and useful to the scholars and biographers now interested in Mary. Sarah notes while visiting the Swann farm, "[t]he fact that art could be created in such a void was, for some reason, deeply disturbing" (44); she later observes, "[b]ack to the same old problem: Mary Swann hadn't read any modern poetry. She didn't *have* any influences" (55). The details of her life are sketchy at best, and her work appears to have been created within a vacuum. In order to cope with this "void," the Swann scholars become increasingly inventive, irresponsibly so, ascribing to Mary

³ From this point on, Morton Jimroy and Frederic Cruzzi will be referred to as Jimroy and Cruzzi respectively since they are primarily referred to by their last names throughout the novel.

influences with absolutely no indication or proof of their validity and investing her work with a level of meaning and depth that is not convincingly substantiated by the few concrete details about her they do possess.

Shields has commented on the way in which she simultaneously embraces and rejects the emphasis placed in academe on literary canons and traditions that unify large bodies of work. Speaking of the small national literature of Hungary, she reflects, “[p]art of me yearns for that degree of cultural saturation, a whole tradition compacted like a gemstone” with “every cultural moment ... secured, *and* refracted and enlarged, by common references, quotations, allusions, nuances, a body, in fact, of shared belief.” She immediately counters, “[a]nother part of me would resent deeply the unity of this order. To be defined by a culture as tight and total as this is surely to be confined” (“A View” 22). Specifically, she is hesitant about “cementing literature belly-to-belly to the national destiny so that every variation is suspect, is threatening, is minor or anomalous or marginal or subversive” (23). Shields satirizes this tendency to link literature to national identity in *Small Ceremonies* when it is ultimately discovered that “Furlong Eberhardt, Canadian prairie novelist, the man who is said to embody the ethos of the nation, is an American!” (154). She offers a more in-depth exploration of this tendency in *Swann*, however: in their attempts to locate Mary Swann within a recognizable poetic tradition and canonize her work through a symposium in her honour, the Swann scholars aim to “cement” Mary’s work to a national tradition, thereby erasing any unique nuances and imposing the type of unity and order Shields bemoans. Shields concludes her essay with the assertion, “I’m more at ease with the rich variables of a randomly evoked, organically spilling, unselfconscious, disorderly, unruly, uncharted and unchartable pouring out of

voice” (23). In *Swann*, Mary’s “organically spilling” voice is consistently circumscribed by the interpretations and agendas imposed by the Swann scholars who strive to contain her work within academic bounds.

In her article “Carol Shields and Pierre Bourdieu: Reading *Swann*,” Mary Eagleton provides a useful analysis of these attempts to make Mary Swann more “academic.” Specifically, she applies Bourdieu’s concept of “the field” to the novel, arguing that “[i]n the terms of Bourdieu, Swann is in danger of being lost, as have so many similar writers before her, because the literary field has few positions for working-class, rural, female writers and, conversely, the dispositions of those same writers do not match the available positions in the field” (316). In order to make her fit within the literary field, the academics employ various strategies, including looking “to sources, influences, and precursors as a way of situating her” (320). Faye Hammill agrees, arguing that the “academics ... insist on forcing her work to fit established but uncongenial patterns of ‘Canadian literature’” (“Native Genre” 87).

Foucault’s interrelated concepts of “subjugated knowledge” and “genealogy” are helpful in illuminating the fact that although, as Eagleton and Hammill observe, there is a danger in attempting to locate Mary’s work within a preexisting tradition, there is also something productive about this clash between subjugated fragments (Mary’s recently discovered poetry) and dominant literary standards. In *Swann*, Mary’s poetry is an example of subjugated knowledge by virtue of its distinction from other poetry: her work does not fit clearly within an established poetic tradition, nor does she appear to be drawing from any particular influences. As Foucault observes of subjugated knowledge, it “derives its power solely from the fact that it is different from all the knowledges that

surround it” (“Society” 8); it does not fit with standardized, widely accepted approaches. Foucault believes these subjugated fragments are valuable and need to be unearthed and put into circulation; he describes “genealogy” as a tactic that attempts “to desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them free, or in other words, to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific theoretical discourse” (10). By revealing a history of various knowledges competing against one another for recognition and dominance, the process of genealogy demonstrates that there does not exist one unequivocal form of or approach to knowledge. Although genealogy is a positive process whereby subjugated knowledges are able to challenge dominant discourses, the unearthing of these knowledges carries a particular risk—there is the “danger that they will be recoded, recolonized by these unitary discourses” (11). In spite of this risk, Mary’s subjugated work is valuable for the way in which it challenges dominant standards and prompts us “to specify or identify what is at stake when knowledges begin to challenge, struggle against, and rise up against the institution and the power- and knowledge-effects of scientific discourse” (12). In other words, Mary’s poetry prompts a reassessment of the applicability and relevance of current standards of literary analysis, thereby paving the way for a broadening and reconfiguration of these approaches.

Sarah “desubjugates” Mary’s poems by discovering them in the cottage and subsequently sharing them with the academic community, and she and the Swann scholars also attempt to “recode” and “recolonize” her poetry by manipulating and rewriting her life and work so that they will fit more readily within acceptable, dominant standards of scholarly discourse. Of the four main characters, Sarah and Jimroy

(although he persistently distances himself from academe) are the most academic or scholarly, while Cruzzi and especially Rose are less so; at first it seems that Sarah and Jimroy are more persistent in their attempts to recode Mary while Cruzzi and Rose resist these attempts on Mary's behalf. All of these characters, however, are complicit in the recoding of Mary and her work. While they may not be manipulating her work along strictly academic lines, all attempt to make Mary fit into a predetermined narrative that either supports an academic or biographical theory, provides meaning and purpose on a personal level, or addresses a combination of these factors. Even though on the surface the characters may appear successful in their attempts at recoding, that they must manipulate her life and work so egregiously demonstrates Shields's point that it is the dominant standards and traditions that need to be reconfigured into more inclusive models, while the individual lives and works should speak for themselves, as free as possible from scholarly manipulation and intrusion.

The novel begins with Sarah Maloney's section. Sarah is a young scholar who has enjoyed success following the publication of her graduate thesis as a bestselling book, *The Female Prism*. Like the academic novelists considered in this study, even though Sarah is part of the academy, she does not hesitate to criticize it; specifically, she repeatedly questions her colleagues' scholarly ethics: "Willard Lang, swine incarnate, is capable of violating her [Mary Swann] for his own gain, and so is the absent-minded, paranoid, and feckless Buswell in Ottawa" (31). She views these academics as being driven by competition and reputation and almost completely abstracted from the idealistic pursuit of knowledge for the sake of furthering knowledge itself rather than one's career. Yet she herself is far from being an ideal scholar who has transcended the need for

reputation and its attendant material gains. Her section opens by describing her clothing as a means of establishing the way her academic reputation and success have altered her lifestyle: “[a]s recently as two years ago, when I was twenty-six, I dressed in ratty jeans and a sweatshirt with lettering across the chest. That’s where I was. Now I own six pairs of beautiful shoes. ... Not one of these pairs of shoes costs less than a hundred dollars” (11). As she heads out to the university, she is careful to mention picking up her “purse-cum-briefcase, Italian, \$300” (12). She was able to buy her quaint “Hansel and Gretel house” (19) with the royalties accrued from *The Female Prism*. She has profited from her academic success, enjoying the materialistic comforts it provides.

What most aligns Sarah with the colleagues she criticizes, however, is her hypocritical treatment of Mary Swann. She is frustrated by Lang’s and Buswell’s use of Mary to further their own careers, yet she herself is guilty of this same offense. Perhaps even more explicitly than the other Swann scholars, she has a vested interest in Mary. She claims, “[i]n a sense I invented Mary Swann and am responsible for her” (30); she appoints herself Mary’s “watchwoman, her literary executor, her defender and loving caretaker” (31), protecting her from the “Scavengers. Brutes” (32). It is not Mary’s interests that Sarah protects, however. Instead, she wants to capitalize on her discovery of Mary’s poems in the Wisconsin cottage by claiming ownership and special rights that will enable her to secure her position as preeminent Swann scholar. She wants to use Mary as a means of furthering her career beyond the status she has achieved with *The Female Prism*.

At the beginning of her section, Sarah describes herself as “a feminist writer and teacher who’s having second thoughts about the direction of feminist writing in America”

(11). She turns to Mary as the perfect subject of study to help reinvigorate feminist studies: “Mary Swann is going to be big, big, big. She’s the right person at the right time for one thing: a woman, a survivor, self-created” (32). This assessment is questionable. Mary is not the best example of “a survivor” considering she is brutally murdered by her husband and leaves behind no concrete traces or clues into her life, much to the dismay of her biographer Jimroy. She cannot even be said to live on in her poetry since her original poems are damaged while in the Cruzzis’ possession and are instead (re)created throughout the novel, first by Frederic and Hildë Cruzzi, and later by the symposium attendees, thus also calling into question Sarah’s positioning of Mary as “self-created.”

Sarah is impressed by Mary’s treatment of the quotidian in her poetry because she invests it with transcendent meaning: “[t]he quotidian is what’s left. Mary Swann understood that, if nothing else. ... She spelled it out. The mythic heavings of the universe, so baffling, so incomprehensible, but when squeezed into digestible day-shaped bytes, made swimmingly transparent” (21). She further muses, “[d]ailiness to be sure has its hard deposits of ennui, but it is also, as Mary Swann suggests, redemptive” (22). In her analysis of a poem about radishes, Sarah begins, “[t]hinning radishes was for Swann an emblem for....” She trails off, realizing that “[t]here’s a gap that needs explaining, a synapse too quickly assumed. ... Radishes to ultimate truth?—that’s the leap of a refined aesthete” (55). Although she here acknowledges the unsubstantiated leaps in logic that literary scholars can potentially make, she stands by her claim that radishes are emblematic of something deeper—she just needs to fill in that gap, find out how Mary knew “to make that kind of murky metaphorical connection” (55). She fails to appreciate that perhaps there is no metaphorical connection that needs to be explained, that perhaps

Mary's poems are meant to be taken at face value and that she really is writing about what she knows—the day-to-day activities of a farmer's wife.

I acknowledge that here as elsewhere throughout this chapter my attempts to analyze Sarah's (as well as Jimroy's) misreadings of Mary's works are complicated by the fact that Mary's poems no longer exist—her original poems have been destroyed and subsequently rewritten by the Cruzzis and various Swann scholars. Even so, for all they know these are Mary's original words that they are analyzing and they do have some knowledge, however superficial, about Mary's life, so an examination of their misguided interpretations of both Mary and her poetic intent is warranted. Some may also question whether—in light of all of these rewritings of her work—Mary Swann even matters. Perhaps Shields's point is that that the author does not matter. Indeed, must literary scholars remain beholden to authorial intention? Must they take into account the biographical details of their authors? Does it matter that Mary was a farmer's wife? In a word, no. While taking such factors into account is a legitimate approach to literary analysis, so too is a more New Critical orientation in which such external, contextual concerns are disregarded. Given the fact that the Swann scholars *are* so concerned with her material traces and the details of her life and given the fact that they selectively acknowledge only those details which corroborate their interpretations, Mary Swann *does* matter. Even though she is literally dead, she is very much alive in the minds of these scholars. If a scholar decides to base his or her approach on biographical details and perceived authorial intention (as the majority of Swann scholars appear to do), then care must be taken to be as objective as possible when dealing with such contextual information.

Sarah's questionable treatment of Mary's notebook—a catalogue of shopping lists and routine observations of the farm—demonstrates her corrupt and self-serving use of such contextual details and evidence. Although she finds value and meaning in Mary's poetic treatment of the quotidian, she is unable to find a corresponding value in what seem to her to be meaningless, mundane jottings in a notebook:

Profound disappointment is what I felt when opening that notebook for the first time. What I wanted was elucidation and grace and a glimpse of the woman Mary Swann as she drifted in and out of her poems. What I got was 'Creek down today,' or 'Green beans up,' or 'cash low,' or 'wind rising.' This 'journal' was no more than the ups-and-downs accounting of a farmer's wife, of *any* farmer's wife.
(49)

Because she is unable to impose a consistent interpretation on the notebook and "recode" it so as to align it with her scholarly notion of Mary, Sarah keeps this notebook to herself, not allowing anyone else to see it, including Jimroy, who repeatedly requests to consult the notebook for his biography. She does not want anyone else to discover this less-than-poetic side of Mary. She hopes that with repeated readings she will be able to glean some deeper significance, "a key that would turn the dull little entries into pellucid messages" (49). When it becomes clear that such deeper meaning is not to be found, she persists in keeping the notebook to herself so as not to tarnish the widely held (in the scholarly community, at least) image of Mary as a sensitive, nuanced artist, "the Emily Dickinson of Upper Canada" (129). In an even more aggressive attempt to uphold this image of Mary, she throws away the rhyming dictionary that Rose gives her, feeling that "it began ... to seem ominous and to lend a certain unreality to the notebook beside it" (46). At

this point, Sarah has not yet read the notebook, and so she naively believes that it holds the key to Mary Swann, while the dictionary is too overtly incongruous with her perception of the poet, prompting her to discard it.

Although Sarah essentially invents levels of meaning to Mary's work and selectively acknowledges her few material possessions (the notebook and dictionary), she avoids the aggressively manipulative practice in which other Swann scholars (most notably Jimroy) engage—the imposition of literary influences. Like her fellow scholars, Sarah is troubled by their shared assumption that “Mary Swann hadn't read any modern poetry. She didn't *have* any influences” (55); rather than fabricate suitable influences, she acknowledges and attempts to address this fundamental lack in her analyses of Swann's work. She thinks of her grandfather who, having no prior knowledge of the existence of trigonometry, “spent several years working up an elaborate table of numerical relationships that was, in essence, an ordinary logarithm chart. He had reinvented trigonometry” (55). In the same way, according to Sarah,

Mary Swann invented modern poetry. Her utterances, the shape of them, are spun from their own logic. Without knowing the poetry of Pound or Eliot, without even knowing their names, she set to work. Her lines have all the peculiar rough thrusts and the newly made syntactical abrasions that are the mark of the prototype. You can't read her poems without being aware that a form is in the process of being created. (55)

Of course, even this assessment is an unsubstantiated interpretation of Mary's work. Reading her “rough thrusts” as indication that her work is a “prototype” is once again to imbue the poetry with more nuance and sophistication than is perhaps warranted. The

assertion of a complete lack of influences is almost as misguided as the imposition of influences—even though it is difficult to detect any recognizable influences, Mary may have read or heard other obscure poetry. Jimroy later learns from Mary’s daughter Frances that she liked to read nursery rhymes, particularly *Mother Goose* (93). He conceals this influence, and so Sarah likely would not have known about it, but the fact remains that Mary was reading and being exposed to other works, even though they may not have been considered particularly “literary.” Sarah’s assumption that Mary is writing “[p]oetry at the forge level” (55) speaks to the way in which she too attempts to recode Mary into academic discourse; although she does not impose a tradition of influences on her, she also cannot concede or acknowledge that she may have read less sophisticated works, those which fall into the domain of “subjugated knowledge.” Sarah is working with absolutes—either Mary has read and been influenced by prominent literary works or she has read nothing. She will not allow for the possibility that Mary has been influenced by less respected works such as nursery rhymes or the like because such influences would render her work less amenable to serious scholarly analysis than would no influences at all.

Through the character of Sarah, Shields demonstrates that even the most seemingly well-adjusted academics, those who are critically aware of the competitive climate within which they work and research, can succumb to the pressures of reputation and status, losing sight of the objectivity that should govern their work and feeling compelled to adhere to predetermined standards of academic analysis. Unlike other academic characters such as Willard Lang, Sarah never comes across as aggressively opportunistic, however. That she discovers *Swann’s Songs* while on a personal retreat in

a cottage—a completely non-academic setting—and finds immediate comfort in these poems speaks to her initially visceral connection to them: “[r]eading Mary Swann’s poetry for the first time ... I found myself suddenly grabbed by an elemental seizure of the first order. I was instantly alert, attenuated, running my fingers under the words, writing furiously in the margin” (40). Brian Johnson makes a valid point about the location of these poems: that they are “not discovered in an urban center but on a ‘lonely’ and unnamed Wisconsin lake emphatically conveys a sense of the book’s peripheral social value” (60). More important, though, is the fact that this non-academic setting enables Sarah to experience these poems in a fundamentally different way. Initially at least, she is attracted to these poems not out of any specific scholarly motives or limiting research questions, but out of an unencumbered appreciation of their aesthetic merit. She is able to immerse herself in this poetry collection, free from the pressure to construct a nuanced and impressive scholarly argument based on it. Indeed, she discovers *Swann’s Songs* during a moment in which she “seemed to inhabit an earlier, pre-grad-school, pre-Olaf self. My thesis, *The Female Prism*, and the chapter that had to be rewritten were forgotten” (17). Shields has commented on the value in such “unscholarly,” organic reading practices:

As you know, there is a time in our early reading lives when we read anything, when we are unsupervised, when we are bonded to the books we read. When we are innocent of any kind of critical standard, so innocent and avid and open that we don’t even bother to seek out special books, but read instead those books that happen to lie within easy reach, the family books, the in-house books. These books have a way of entering our bodies more simply and completely than library

books, for example, which are chosen, or school texts that are imposed. (“A View” 19-20)

Shields’s alignment of “innocence” with the lack of critical standards is evocative as it implies that the use of such standards renders one guilty or corrupted in some sense. In *Swann*, the scholars are guilty of corrupting Mary’s poetry through their persistent attempts to align it with established traditions and patterns of influence. In this Wisconsin cottage, Sarah temporarily reverts to an earlier, more fulfilling mode of reading, thereby extricating herself from such potentially manipulative and limiting scholarly practices. That she ultimately imposes critical standards on a collection of poetry that she initially encounters in such a non-academic context is telling: the juxtaposition of this initial visceral connection with her subsequent scholarly possessiveness and manipulation demonstrates the degree to which academic pressures and competition can impinge upon and corrupt a relatively pleasurable encounter with literature. Shields suggests that this divide between “pleasure reading” and “academic reading” needs to be minimized such that the innocence and pleasure associated with the former mode of reading is retained in the latter; this will ensure that literary scholars engage more meaningfully with the works under critical scrutiny as opposed to becoming increasingly abstracted from them.

With Jimroy’s section, Shields provides a shift in perspective from that of an academic to a biographer, and Jimroy makes sure to emphasize his distance from the academy. During an invited talk, in response to a student addressing him as “Dr. Jimroy,” he is quick to respond, “[i]t’s plain mister, I’m afraid” (82). Lest the reader assume Jimroy bemoans his lack of academic credentials, his section is infused with

criticisms against academic perspectives. He believes “[u]niversities are nothing but humming myth factories” that enable our need “to systematize and classify what is rich and random in life. ... Scholarship was bunk. ... It was just a matter of time before the theoreticians got to Mary Swann and tore her limb from limb in a grotesque parody of her bodily death” (81). His criticisms are hypocritical in that he fails to see that biographers, too, impose structure and order on their subjects in order to make them fit coherently within a biographical narrative. Several critics note Shields’s preoccupation with biography in this as well as in her other novels: Helen M. Buss applies to the novel William Epstein’s concept of “abduction,” which is “a complex process by which biographers, while seeking to represent their subjects, must, by necessity, exclude and/or revise portions of the subject so that she can be ‘recognized’ by current commodification standards” (428); Donna E. Smyth remarks on the characters’ compulsion to “collect evidence, documents, testimony, and elaborate a rationale to make bearable the irrational nature of Being” (142); and Heidi Hansson, in one of the more in-depth explorations of Shields’s biographical impulse, comments on the novel’s “emphasis on the unstable and elusive nature of biographical information” (355) and “the role of interpretation” and “choice in biography-writing” (356).

Jimroy actively perpetuates the manipulative and limiting tendencies of biography that Shields highlights. Like Sarah, Jimroy is unwilling or unable to accept that perhaps there are no deeper levels of significance to Mary’s work and that instead, her poetry reflects the daily concrete realities of a farmer’s wife. In her work, he sees “intelligence masked by colloquial roughness” (87); he ignores the significance of the “roughness” itself, acknowledging it only as a gateway to a level of meaning whose presence is not

substantiated by any evidence. His inability to appreciate the surface level of the poetry and to acknowledge that this surface may be all there is prompts him to make such erroneous, misguided assertions as “[t]he fact is, the poems and the life of Mary Swann do not meld” (108). In actuality, the poems and her life are a fairly good fit—the poems document the details of her daily life on the farm. In an effort to elevate her life and work to a level he deems more respectable and worthy of study, Jimroy, as Sarah does, manipulates the limited evidence he possesses about Mary. Despite what Mary’s own daughter says to the contrary, Jimroy persists in his belief that Mary “came in contact with the work of Emily Dickinson,” and he “intends to mention, to comment extensively in fact, on the Dickinsonian influence, and sees no point, really, in taking up the Edna Ferber influence; it is too ludicrous” (110). Apparently there is nothing ludicrous about completely fabricating a major literary influence. Professor Buswell says it best during the symposium when he notes of Jimroy’s liberty with assigning influences to his biographical subjects, “[h]e exaggerates. Romances. The bugger should have been a novelist, not a bloody biographer” (272).

Even though Jimroy at one point questions, “[w]hy should a biographer be expected to explain, justify, interpret or even judge?” (84), he consistently engages in these activities. Considering how freely he “revise[s] portions of [his] subject” (Buss 428), the one overt instance in which Jimroy refrains from such revision and manipulation is noteworthy. As he ponders his latest biographical subject, “Jimroy’s nose feels tweaked by tears when he thinks of Mary Swann’s reddened hands grasping the stub of a pencil and putting together the first extraordinary stanza of ‘Lilacs.’” Immediately following this image comes a parenthetical qualification: “(But he

romances; it is believed that even her early poems were written with a fountain pen—and how can he assume the fact of those reddened hands?” (87). Not only does this qualification draw attention to the minute details that concern Jimroy (pencil versus fountain pen) at the expense of more relevant information, but more importantly, it shows him rejecting his pervasive tendency to impose interpretation on his subject when, for the first time, his interpretation, though unsubstantiated, is more valid than usual. His assumption of Mary’s “reddened hands” is a logical one considering the manual labour in which she engages daily on the farm. Since Jimroy has repeatedly demonstrated that he has no qualms with imposing his own judgments and manipulations on his subject, his immediate retraction of this relatively valid interpretation has little to do with his desire to maintain the biographer’s objective distance and more with his persistent attempts to ignore what is inconsistent with his preconceived view of Mary Swann as a complex artist figure.

Jimroy’s biographical endeavours are weakened by his unrelenting search for “the one central cathartic event in Mary Swann’s life. It must exist” (111). Just as Sarah is “deeply disturb[ed]” that “art could be created in such a void” (44), Jimroy also needs to find the defining moment in Mary’s life that will provide unity to and reveal the motivation behind her work. In part, this defining moment will enable both Jimroy and Sarah to impose order and coherence on Mary’s life and work by providing them with the fixed centre around which to organize the details they have about her, excluding anything they deem inconsistent. In this way, their search for the “central cathartic event” that will fill in the “void” becomes part of a process of “recoding” Mary into the dominant scholarly discourse. Once they determine the elusive key to Mary, they will be better

situated to identify her influences and the literary tradition in which they seek to locate her. Even though Jimroy criticizes academics for seeking to “classify what is rich and random in life” (81), that both he and Sarah actively attempt to find that centre that will enable them to classify Mary emphasizes how interconnected the values and strategies of biographical and academic analysis are—both often overlook and dismiss details that, although relevant and valuable in their own right, do not contribute to a larger, cohesive whole which neatly integrates consistent elements while excluding all others.

That Jimroy and Sarah manipulate their findings on Mary and attempt to uncover a definitive centre of meaning around which to understand and rationalize the seeming gap between her life and poetry cannot be attributed entirely to their efforts to recode her in accordance with academic standards. Their treatment of Mary also speaks to their recognition of a void within their own lives and a desire to discover, through Mary, a means of coping with this void in order “to make bearable the irrational nature of Being” (Smyth 142), an endeavour Smyth highlights as being central to the characters’ questing for biographical information. As Sarah notes, “[w]hat I need is an image to organize my life” (51). Both Sarah’s and Jimroy’s sections reveal an individual who is struggling for a sense of purpose and acceptance.

Sarah may be a successful young academic, but the emphasis in the opening pages on the new clothes and image that her newfound success has afforded her suggests a superficiality to the fulfillment gained by her career. Her distant relationship with her lover Brownie and her inability to commit to marrying a previous boyfriend, Olaf Thorkelson, emphasize a sense of absence in Sarah’s personal life as well. Although she loves her mother, their regular Sunday meetings and her description of herself as “a

professional daughter” (33) suggest a perfunctory quality to their relationship. In addition to this pervasive sense of lack, throughout her section Sarah emerges as a character with a fractured identity. Her favourite pastime is corresponding with her friends and acquaintances through letters: “I write letters that are graceful and agreeable, far more graceful and agreeable than I am in my face-to-face encounters” (23). An even more pronounced split in her identity than this division between “in-person” Sarah versus “letter-writing” Sarah is the one that has emerged between her personal and professional personas. Her identity as a successful academic is so distinct from what she considers to be her true or everyday self that she labels this academic self “the irrepressible Sarah.” She finds herself increasingly fearful of this aspect of her identity: “[h]er awful energy seems to require too much of me, and I wonder: Where is her core? Does she even have a core?” (64). With this line of questioning, Sarah reveals her desire for more substance and a sense of unity to bring together the disparate pieces of self. Her quest to connect the daily conditions of Mary’s life with her poetic output in a meaningful way can thus be taken as a projection of her desire to locate a corresponding sense of connection and unity in her own life. Her affinity with Mary is best conveyed in the image of the “fossilized fetus” (56) her mother has carried within her since birth. Sarah’s mother has an operation to remove what doctors fear is a tumor but what turns out to be the bone and hair of her unborn twin whom she somehow absorbed. When reflecting on this bizarre situation, Sarah reveals, “I’m tempted to grope under the band of my skirt, grab hold of my flesh and see what it is that’s weighing me down—whether it’s Mary Swann who has taken up residence there or the cool spectre of loneliness that stretches ahead for me. Because it does, *it does*” (58). Here Sarah demonstrates that alongside her scholarly interest in Mary

exists a personal one, both of which contribute to her skewed, manipulated treatment of the poet.

Jimroy, too, has a complicated relationship with Mary in which personal and biographical interests conflict and intertwine. Like Sarah, Jimroy's personal life is lacking in a fundamental way, and he uses his biographical subjects to compensate for this absence of action and significance in his own life. The opening line of his section is telling: "Jimroy was feeling lonely his first month in California" (69). After years in a dysfunctional, loveless marriage, Jimroy and his wife Audrey divorce, leaving Jimroy alone again and unsure how to interact with other people: after a play he attends early in the section, he panics when a young man asks him if he would like to get a drink, and later, he is unsure whether or not he should ask out to dinner the married woman from whom he is subletting a home. Any interaction, however minor, he has with other people reveals the "failing of Jimroy's, not knowing what other people expected" (77). That he is so invested in the letters he receives from Sarah, a woman he has not yet met, reveals how dysfunctional and inconsequential his social life is and how alone he is; these letters (to which Sarah gives little more than passing thought) "stabilize him, keeping away that drifting sadness that comes upon him late in the evening, eleven, eleven-thirty, when the density of the earth seems to empty out." Even more disconcerting, they "make his throat swell with the thought of sex" (78). He becomes so obsessed with Sarah that he begins calling and hanging up on her (as he does to his ex-wife as well) in order to hear her voice and have even a tenuous sense of human connection.

Jimroy selects biographical subjects with whom he shares an affinity; specifically, he chooses to research the lives of people who, like himself, have an emptiness in their

lives, a void in their personalities, in the hopes that by studying them, he may discover how to fill in the corresponding sense of lack in his own life. His first biography was on Ezra Pound, a poet to whom Jimroy is initially attracted because of their similarities: “[l]ike persons who in secret sniff the foul odours of their bodies, he had been mesmerized by Pound’s sheer awfulness, by his *own* sheer awfulness” (84). Over time, however, he begins to hate Pound, “desir[ing] to hold the man up to ridicule” (83). Similarly, he detects a kinship between himself and his second subject, “the exasperating, unhappy, unswervingly self-regarding John Starman” (85), before progressively developing a hatred for him. With both of these subjects, Jimroy begins to hate them the more he realizes that the negatives qualities he shares with them do not diminish but remain constant. They do not offer an escape or solution to his emptiness and unhappiness. With Mary, this biographer-subject dynamic remains the same. In her, once again he sees a kindred spirit, a “[n]aive, pathetic, obsequious, but certainly sincere” woman who “[p]robably thought life had passed her by, though her despair was sharp rather than heavy and, oddly, she seemed always to be keeping back little smiles.” Although Jimroy immediately attributes these misplaced smiles to his belief that “[s]he may have been menopausal” (87), he also sees in them evidence that Mary has found a way to cope with her oppressive life, that she has had that “one central cathartic event” (111) that enables her to derive meaning and purpose from a seemingly meaningless existence. That he follows his typical pattern and soon begins to “distrust Mary Swann slightly” before eventually seeing his “distrust turn to dislike” (88) demonstrates the elusive quality of this cathartic event—Jimroy is unable to locate it and thus dismisses

Mary, along with Pound and Starman, for failing to offer him deliverance from his unfulfilling life.

Sarah and Jimroy, both governed by the interconnected aims and values of academic and biographical analysis, repeatedly manipulate their evidence and analyses of Mary's life and work in order to make them conform to acceptable academic standards and to their preconceived readings of her. Their personal investment in her, rather than conflict with their scholarly treatment, helps focus it. In their scholarly treatments of her, they are searching for a central locus of meaning that will give definition and shape to her life and body of work. And their personal investment is also predicated upon a search for a definitive centre of meaning—they see in her a potential key to their individual existential crises. In addition to being interconnected, these scholarly and personal agendas are equally damaging—they both cause Sarah and Jimroy to overlook crucial details of Mary's life and work in favour of distilling relevant findings into one neat package that satisfies their own agendas.

Rose and Cruzzi provide an interesting counterpoint to the characters of Sarah and Jimroy. Unlike the latter two, Rose and Cruzzi are not directly affiliated with academe or scholarly endeavours—Rose is Nadeau's town clerk, librarian, and museum curator, to name a few of her many positions, while Cruzzi is an editor, journalist, and publisher.⁴ Both characters challenge the recoding of Mary into the academic domain but, like Sarah

⁴ Clara Thomas comments on the unavoidable connection between Cruzzi and Robertson Davies: "With Part IV, 'Frederic Cruzzi,' we are satisfyingly, unmistakably in the world of Robertson Davies. How could one avoid connecting 'retired newspaper editor Frederic Cruzzi of Grenoble, Casablanca, Manchester, and Kingston, Ontario, aged eighty,' who suffers no fool gladly, writes snappy letters to obtuse correspondents, and castigates the yahoos with glee, to Samuel Marchbanks? Or, in his wide travels, European sensibility, and considerable wisdom, to Dunstan Ramsay? Or, for that matter, with Davies himself" ("A Slight" 118-19).

and Jimroy, they are ultimately complicit with a selfish manipulation of Mary's life and work for the fulfillment of their own personal needs.

Rose emerges as a meek, unassuming character, an assessment corroborated by Sarah's initial impression of her: "Rose Hindmarch turned out to be a little turtle of a woman with a hair on her chin like a hieroglyph, quintessentially virginal, mid-forties, twinkly eyed, suppliant, excitable" (41). Throughout her interactions with Sarah, Jimroy, and the other academics at the concluding symposium, Rose consistently takes on an attitude of deference to these scholars, as though she is "less than" by virtue of her lack of comparable formal education. Even though she is one of the few people to have had prolonged, firsthand exposure to Mary, the scholars generally dismiss her insight and she readily accepts this dismissal. Sarah and Jimroy are kind to her, but theirs is a kindness with an unavoidable level of condescension. Rose provides Sarah with two of the only material traces of Mary's life—her notebook and her rhyming dictionary—but Sarah is quick to dismiss these rare pieces of concrete evidence, thereby overlooking Rose's helpful contribution to her scholarly endeavours. Rose attempts to highlight to Jimroy his misguided reading of Mary's poetry by offering a more straightforward interpretation grounded in the daily realities of Mary's life, but she stops short of vocalizing her valid interpretation; she believes that the blood in one of Mary's poems refers to menstruation rather than, as Jimroy believes, to "the continuum of belief, a metaphysical covenant with an inexplicable universe" (150). She puts so much stock into the ideas of these scholars who have taken a sudden interest in Mary and, by extension, in her that she shies away from sharing her own insights. She has internalized their dismissal of her. Fellow Nadeau resident Homer Hart attempts to make Rose realize the value of her opinions:

“Why you’re the expert, Rose. If anyone knows about Mary Swann, you’re the one. The only one who really got to know her” (141); Rose, however, is too impressed by the idea of scholars in her midst to take Homer’s words seriously. It is not until the end of the novel that Rose commands some respect when her knowledge of detective fiction sheds light on the thefts of all of the Swann documents.

Although this respect seems long overdue, the degree to which Rose deserves it is complicated by the fact that she is not an objective party; far from being an innocent bystander amidst the increasingly manipulative treatments of Mary and her work, Rose is an active participant. “She had not intended to exaggerate her friendship with Mary Swann” (152), but the fact remains that she does exaggerate a brief, superficial acquaintanceship into a deep connection in order to maintain the scholars’ tenuous interest in her. Furthermore, because Mary’s home was sparsely furnished, “Rose was forced to use her imagination when it came to furnishing the Mary Swann Memorial Room” (162) at the Nadeau Museum. This imposition of imaginative speculation removes this museum exhibit from the reality of Mary’s home just as the Cruzzis’ re-writing of Mary’s poetry erases the original work and Sarah’s, Jimroy’s, and the other symposium scholars’ interpretations of her poetry prioritize their own scholarly preoccupations above a reasonable and substantiated analysis of her work. Even though Rose is not engaged in a process of academic recoding and instead represents a counterpoint to such scholarly standards and analysis, she is still complicit in the increasing erasure of Mary’s identity.

Cruzzi also provides an alternative to the strictly scholarly perspectives that circulate throughout the novel, but unlike Rose, he is openly critical of these perspectives.

His distaste for academe prevents him from immediately accepting an invitation to the Swann Symposium. As he writes in response to Sarah's letter of invitation,

[f]rankly, the endless checking of one text against another, this tyranny of accuracy that rules the academic world, is all rather tiresome. I have found that it is sometimes better to look at the universe with a squint, to subject oneself to a deliberate distortion, and hope that out of the jumbled vision, or jumbled notes if you like, will fall the accident that is the truth. (192)

Perhaps this idea of truth emerging from the jumble is Cruzzi's way of justifying his act of essentially re-writing Mary's body of work—he implies that from his and his wife's "deliberate distortion" and re-writing of the poems emerges Mary's true vision. His reply to Willard Lang's letter inviting him to the symposium offers a contradictory sentiment. He initially rejects the invitation by expressing his disapproval of the heightened scholarly interest surrounding Mary: "[i]t has always seemed to me that the glory of Mary Swann's work lies in its innocence, the fact that it does not invite scholarly meddling or whimsical interpretation" (186). Surely his and Hildë's increasingly aggressive re-writings of the poems constitute "meddling" and "whimsical interpretation." Although Cruzzi may believe that he and Hildë refrained from overt meddling and although they did initially take care to preserve Mary's intended words, they progressively abandoned such fidelity to her vision: "[t]hey puzzled and conferred over every blot, then guessed, then invented" (222-23). There is no denying that they ultimately engaged in an act of meddling and interpretation more overt and aggressive than any the Swann scholars could have imagined.

Cruzzi's hypocritical assertion of the "innocence" of Mary's work and his claim that "it does not invite ... interpretation" stem from his desire to distance himself from and minimize the guilt that consumes him for having almost entirely re-written her body of work. He is in denial over what he has done. This guilt that he experiences in relation to Mary extends to a corresponding and even more crippling guilt that colours his memories of his deceased wife Hildē. When he realizes that Hildē has damaged the poems, he strikes her: "[h]e threw her off violently with the whole force of his being, and an arm reached out, his arm, striking her at the side of the neck. They both knew it was a blow delivered without restraint. It sent her falling to the floor, slipping on the fish guts, out of control, banging her jaw on the edge of the table as she went down" (220). Not only does Cruzzi physically harm his wife, but he also hurts her on a more emotional level when he refuses to publish her poetry in their independent press. He is completely unmoved by her poems: "[h]er poems, he saw with sadness, had no edges, no hardness. The words themselves were pleasing enough, melodious and rather dreamlike, but there was also a quality in some of the lines that he identified as kittenish—and that surprised him" (204). The fact that Hildē is the one who rewrote most of Mary's poems, which went on to achieve such scholarly acclaim and attention, suggests that she had more talent than Cruzzi gave her credit for. Although there is the possibility that the Swann scholars embrace Mary's poetry less for its merit and more for the bizarre circumstances surrounding its composition, perhaps there is some intrinsic merit to these poems, suggesting that Hildē could have attained poetic success if Cruzzi had been more encouraging of her earlier endeavours.

Cruzzi's memories of Mary are associated with his mistreatment of his beloved wife; by dismissing the recent scholarly fervor surrounding Mary and by reinforcing his belief in the merit of her work free from external manipulation, he attempts to distance himself from his misguided behaviour in relation to Mary's work and the corresponding cruelty that he exhibited towards Hildë. Thus, he recodes Mary in such a way as to appease his guilty conscience. Although he does not share the academic characters' desire to manipulate Mary's work into accordance with dominant literary standards, he echoes Sarah's, Jimroy's, and Rose's compulsion to use Mary to work through personal conflicts.

Cruzzi dismisses and rejects academic analysis, yet it is his and Hildë's re-writings of Mary's poems that become the occasion for the academic symposium that concludes the novel.⁵ Most reviewers of *Swann*, though positive and enthusiastic about the novel as a whole, are unimpressed by this concluding section: Margaret Cannon describes it as "a teensy bit pretentious"; Alice H.G. Phillips believes it to be "a bit thin"; Dean Wilson deems it a "not entirely successful final chapter"; and Michael Darling, in the most unflattering assessment, calls it "badly bungled, as Carol Shields seems to believe all the clichés about academic conferences. Even if the whole section is meant to be taken ironically, it is really not very funny." Despite these negative readings, this final section, which is presented in the form of a film script, is a crucial component of the narrative as a whole; not only does it bring together the four sections that precede it, but the artificial nature of the script reinforces the artificial, constructed nature of the version

⁵ As Lorraine McMullen observes of Shields's graduate student years at the University of Ottawa, "Carol was here when we initiated the Department of English series of annual symposia on Canadian writers" (40). Faye Hammill also notes Shields's attendance at these symposia and remarks, "The Swann Symposium functions as a gentle parody of their overblown valorizing of English Canadian writers and their elaborate quest for traces of national and regional identity in the texts" ("Native Genre" 89).

of *Swann's Songs* that has inspired the current scholarly mania. Moreover, the conclusion of the section facilitates one of Shields's more explicit critiques of literary scholars.

The symposium ends with the attendees gathered together and attempting to re-write, from memory, Mary's stolen body of poetry. The Director's Final Note offers a description of this scene:

The faces of the actors have been subtly transformed. They are seen joined in a ceremonial act of reconstruction, perhaps even an act of creation. There need be no suggestion that any of them will become less selfish in the future, less cranky, less consumed with thoughts of tenure and academic glory, but each of them has, for the moment at least, transcended personal concerns. (311)

On the surface, Shields seems to present this act of reconstructing Mary's work as positive and productive, thus implying that the Cruzzis' earlier re-writing and the academics' manipulative scholarly practices are all similarly positive. Most critics agree with this reading: Kathy Barbour comments on the "inescapable ... cooperative merging of individuated voices at the end of 'The Swann Symposium'" (279); Sarah Gamble posits that the novel "ends with a ringing endorsement of the benefits of creative recycling, in which narratives are shared and enriched by the inspiration of many" (59); Burkhard Niederhoff reads the ending as presenting "research in an affirmative way, as a fundamentally important and human activity" (81); Alex Ramon sees in this scene "an act of atonement and an act of love" (91); and Smyth similarly describes the assembled academics as constituting "a loving community" (144).

Absent from these analyses is any acknowledgement of the ominous tone of this concluding scene—the scholars readily reconstruct a body of work with little thought given to the increasing erasure of the original poet. Moreover, this reconstruction reveals the fundamentally tenuous, unstable, and in this case, fabricated basis of literary criticism since these scholars are essentially creating the work they will then somehow “objectively” analyze. How is one to have any respect or confidence in an enterprise that is predicated upon flawed, self-serving, and grossly manipulated primary texts? As the Director’s Final Note highlights, the “reconstruction” is more accurately “an act of creation”; thus, these scholars are negating the importance of artists and poets and essentially creating for themselves the works they will study. This scene ultimately suggests that literary criticism is more important than the literature itself.⁶ This overt rewriting of Mary’s work takes Foucault’s conception of recoding subjugated knowledge to another, more destructive level—the Swann scholars have progressed beyond simply manipulating perceived authorial intention in order to situate Mary’s work within an existing literary tradition to rewriting her poetry altogether in a mode most suitable to academic analysis. Given the fact that Shields herself is a prolific novelist, it is unlikely that she condones such blatant marginalization and manipulation of literary works in order to advance scholarly output. Indeed, to interpret the Swann scholars’ intrusive and aggressive rewriting of Mary’s poetry as anything other than satirical is to overlook Shields’s point that literary scholars have become too governed by their own specialized

⁶ Atwood offers a fitting commentary on the relationship between literary works and resultant criticism: “a writer has to write something before a critic can criticize it. This is in no way to imply that words spoken first are always better than the critical fabrics raised upon them. It is only to state what seems to be the obvious; that is, you can’t have a thought about a stone without first seeing a stone” (“Introduction” *Second Words* 11).

niches and research agendas and therefore too abstracted from the literary works that should form the basis of their studies.

This is not the first time that Shields has explored the idea of the “creative recycling” (Gamble 59) of writing. Her first novel, *Small Ceremonies*, prompts a reconsideration of the implications of plagiarism and the communal exchange of writing. Protagonist Judith turns to writing fiction as a means of escaping the tyranny of facts and objectivity that governs her work as a biographer: “I’m tired of being boxed in by facts all the time. ... Fiction might be an out for me. And it might be entertaining too” (54). While in England during her husband’s sabbatical year, Judith reads over the rejected manuscripts written by John Spalding, the professor from whom they are renting their flat. Upon her return home, she takes—or, to use her term, “borrow[s]” (71)—the storyline from these manuscripts to compose her own story, which she submits to her creative writing seminar. Soon after, she regrets her actions and asks the instructor, her friend Furlong Eberhardt, to destroy her submission. Instead of destroying it, Furlong “borrows” Judith’s borrowed plot to write and publish his own novel. Judith begins to wonder whether Spalding had stolen his plot: “[t]he chain of indictment might stretch back infinitely, crime within crime within crime” (106). Although she becomes progressively consumed with the implications of this chain of creative theft, Furlong dismisses her worries, insisting that everyone borrows plots. Towards the end of the novel, Spalding visits and stays with Judith’s family while he is in town meeting with publishers. He reads Furlong’s novel—based, indirectly, on his own rejected manuscripts—but fails to see the connection to his work. Instead, Spalding is conflicted with his own fears that Judith will suspect *him* of a form of plagiarism since his current

novel is based on Judith's family's stay at his home during her husband's sabbatical year. Spalding furnishes his story with details drawn from the letters exchanged between his daughter Anita and Judith's son Richard.

As opposed to *Swann*, in *Small Ceremonies* the acts of appropriating another's writing are mitigated by a few factors. There is no innocent party in the network of "creative recycling" explored in this novel; everyone is complicit in the dishonest act of borrowing plots, whether from manuscripts, novels, or letters. The chain of plagiarism is so long that the original authors have become completely obscured—as Judith learns, Spalding, seemingly the victim, likely did not create the plot that both she and Furlong subsequently borrowed. In *Swann*, however, even if little is known of Mary, her presence is still felt in the novel and in the lives of the scholars who so blatantly rewrite her work. Although she is not physically present to defend herself and her work, she is a spectre that draws attention to the scholars' destructive, intrusive practices. In this respect, taken together, the two novels demonstrate how increasingly acceptable such recycling and theft become the further removed and obscured the original author is. Such acts appear more damaging in *Swann* because the original author, Mary, is firmly identified and her victim status is reinforced throughout the novel—she is oppressed and then brutally murdered by her husband and her poetic voice is progressively erased and reinvented by the Swann scholars. In *Small Ceremonies*, however, the absence of a concrete original author and victim almost negates the destructive, dishonest implications of creative borrowing and recycling.

Shields is not necessarily condoning such recycling, but she does highlight the inevitability of this practice. As she argues in "Narrative Hunger and the Overflowing

Cupboard,” narrative is all around us; just by being out and about in the world, we cannot help but overhear snippets of conversation or witness situations that end up finding their way into our own stories. Shields concedes, “[l]ike most writers, I suffer a sort of scavenger’s guilt, and often feel the impulse to confess on the title pages of my books something like ‘I’m sorry’ or ‘Forgive me’” (21). She highlights the inevitability of being influenced by the variations of narrative that we encounter in our daily lives—such as Judith’s initially innocent perusal of Spalding’s manuscripts and Furlong’s justified reading of his student’s creative writing submission. In *Swann*, however, there is a difference—there is nothing innocent about the Swann scholars’ appropriation and rewriting of Mary’s body of work. Rather than being influenced by Mary’s words in order to write their own poems, these scholars actively and intrusively re-write her words in order to substantiate their interpretations and bolster their scholarly reputations. Whereas in *Small Ceremonies* the “creative recycling” facilitates continued artistic production and thus valorizes the work of novelists and creative writers, in *Swann* it serves to silence and subjugate the voices of these artists in favour of promoting the voices of literary scholars whose work is satirically positioned as being more valuable and legitimate.

Another mitigating factor in *Small Ceremonies* is the fact that all the key participants in the “creative recycling” are more or less on the same level—Furlong and Spalding are both professors and novelists while Judith is a respected and accomplished scholarly biographer who is married to a Milton specialist. They are all affiliated with the academic domain. Similarly, in *Gone Indian*, Madham’s appropriation of Jeremy’s taped accounts is more positive than it is damaging because both characters have similar

backgrounds and are able to speak out and assert their presence and respective place within the stories being told and retold; their layered telling of their respective experiences is ultimately productive in that it reveals the interconnections between their seemingly disparate lives. Mary Swann, on the other hand, is an uneducated farmer's wife whose writing is manipulated and (re)constructed by a group of academics who impose on it their own specific set of standards. Not only is Mary unable to defend herself and her work because of her physical absence, but even if she were alive and present, she would be at an extreme disadvantage—the Swann scholars would dismiss the input of someone so far removed from their elite circle of education, legitimacy, and advantage. One need only consider their dismissive treatment of Rose. Furthermore, as Eagleton has also noted, there are revealing parallels between Mary and Offred (from *The Handmaid's Tale*): like Offred, whose narrative is co-opted, manipulated, and ultimately dismissed by Professor Pieixoto, Mary is also subjected to the self-interested manipulation of her story—as presented in her poetry—at the hands of academics who believe their intrusions are justified, valuable even, by virtue of their superior education and scholarly background. Just as Offred's experiences are reduced to supporting evidence in Pieixoto's grand and pre-established narrative of Gileadean history, so too is Mary relegated to the role of substantiating the claims of self-professed Swann experts.

Through Mary's literal murder at the hands of her husband and the figurative murder of her poems—via Hildë's physical destruction of them and the numerous re-writings of them—Shields blatantly puts forth Roland Barthes's conception of “the death of the author,” a connection noted by critics such as Briganti, Gamble, Hansson, and Johnson. How is this absent author, so tenuously connected to the poems under analysis,

supposed to usher in, as Sarah optimistically believes, a new chapter in feminist writing? How can the details of her life possibly illuminate and unlock deeper levels of meaning to her work, as Jimroy believes? This persistent invocation of an author almost wholly unrelated to the work—a sign that does not correspond with its referent—is problematic. For Barthes, the identity and life of the author have no bearing on the creative work. He argues that “writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin” (142) and that “[t]o give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (147).

Johnson analyzes Shields’s engagement with the “death of the author” concept, arguing that she progresses beyond Barthes’s premise and ultimately explores Foucault’s “author-function.” Johnson highlights Foucault’s dissatisfaction with “Barthes’s installation of the reader in the place of the author” (57-58). Quoting from “What Is an Author?”, he isolates Foucault’s key point of contention with Barthes’s model: “it is not enough ... to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared ... Instead, we must locate the space left empty by the author’s disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers” (Foucault qtd. in Johnson 57). As Johnson explains, “Foucault shows how, despite our supposed acceptance of the author’s ‘transcendental anonymity,’ we impose an image of the author onto the text of our own making” (57). Applying this concept of Foucault’s “author-function” to *Swann*, Johnson suggests that each of the academics engages in “self-interested author construction” (69) wherein they construct an image of Mary Swann that corroborates their own readings of her text.

Johnson argues that “Mary Swann’s murder [is] a parodic metaphor for Barthes’s treatment of the author” and the inclusion of this metaphor suggests that Shields ultimately deems “Barthes’s total eradication of the author ... too severe” (59), embracing instead Foucault’s model of the “author-function.” Johnson overlooks the fact that the concluding scene in which the symposium attendees rewrite Mary’s poems is another “parodic metaphor,” this time aimed at Foucault. In the conclusion to his essay, Johnson once again quotes Foucault, who hopes for an “absolutely free state, in which fiction would be put at the disposal of everyone and would develop without passing through something like a necessary or constraining figure” (qtd. in Johnson 70). Though Foucault may hope for this, he himself characterizes this “free state” as “absolute romanticism” and concludes “What is an Author?” by positing that there will always be “a system of constraint”—even if in time it is no longer the author, there will be some sort of constraining force (731). Johnson acknowledges “the persistence, as Foucault says, of ‘the necessary’ figure of constraint,” yet he characterizes the concluding scene of *Swann* in which the various scholars work together to rewrite Mary’s poetry as one in which Shields promotes “the poststructural promised land” gestured towards by Foucault. That the characters affix Mary’s name to the poem they are (re)writing is what, for Johnson, indicates ultimately that “[a]t the end of it all, the author still functions” (70). It is not simply this one act of aligning Mary’s name with the poem that undermines Foucault’s idealistic vision: this entire concluding scene, in which the consistently bickering and competitive Swann scholars thoroughly and without hesitation put aside their differences in order to reconstitute Mary’s work, is too overtly incongruous with the scholars’ typical behaviour to be taken seriously. Furthermore, one must remember that

this scene takes place within the film script which emphasizes its artificiality and disingenuousness. Rather than at any point realizing Foucault's idealistic hope, Shields is consistently dismantling it, revealing not only the impractical nature of this particular vision, but also her belief in the potentially tyrannical and inapplicable quality of literary theory in general.

In "A View From the Edge of the Edge," Shields, reflecting on the emergence of Canadian novels in the 1960s, writes, "[b]ecause we needed a critical language to talk about the new Canadian writing, theories were hastily concocted and eagerly taken up. These cobbled-together theories became hobbling tyrants" (24). As an example, she cites Northrop Frye's "garrison mentality." Although Shields is speaking specifically of Canadian literary theory, she is also expressing a general discontent with and suspicion of the imposition of theoretical readings. Indeed, Foucault's "author-function" is not a "cobbled-together" theory, nor was it devised specifically to accommodate and make sense of the sudden growth in Canadian writing, but Shields's parodic illustration of this theoretical concept in *Swann* combined with her literal presentation of Barthes's theory in the gruesome murder of Mary speaks to her attempts to destabilize such readings. She is not necessarily arguing for the complete eradication of theoretical readings in scholarly discourse; rather, by illustrating these theoretical models in such an extreme and absurd fashion, she deflates the authority with which scholars tend to invest them. By doing so, she encourages the complementary presence of visceral, aesthetic responses to literature that—like Sarah's initial response to *Swann's Songs* in the Wisconsin cottage—are more natural and organic, free from the type of categorization and imposition of meaning that are necessary for theoretical readings to succeed. That Sarah, who ultimately trades in

her visceral appreciation for critical interrogation, remains a positive, likeable character throughout the novel suggests that Shields is not demonizing scholarly approaches; indeed, the use of such approaches is inevitable, as indicated by my incorporation of various theoretical contexts throughout this and other chapters. These contexts have become an entrenched part of academic discourse and analysis. What Shields is warning against is becoming so invested in and governed by theoretical approaches that one loses sight of the original work under investigation; she cautions against enabling these approaches to dictate rather than supplement literary analyses.

The Swann scholars allow their theoretical and critical contexts to dictate their treatment of Mary's life and work. Because she is unlike typical poets in that she has no discernable influences and is not part of a recognized tradition, these scholars forcibly ascribe such influences and locate her within a tradition in order to make her amenable to scholarly analysis. They take this atypical poet, one whose work is part of the marginalized realm of "subjugated knowledge," and recode her and her writing in accordance with dominant academic standards. Rather than adapt their methods and approaches to accommodate this unique poet, the scholars ignore and erase her subtle nuances and force her to conform to their dictates.

Swann is a fitting novel to include in this study and a particularly effective work with which to conclude the main trajectory of this dissertation. Of all the novels addressed in this project, *Swann* is the only one mentioned consistently in the existing American and British studies of academic fiction. Although the substantial presence and development of Canadian academic fiction has not yet been recognized outside of the present study, *Swann* is repeatedly highlighted as Canada's one contribution to what is

most often deemed a thriving American and British sub-genre—Janice Rossen and Elaine Showalter include brief analyses of the novel in their book-length studies of the sub-genre and Adam Begley is one of numerous critics to incorporate the novel in briefer, article-length discussions of academic novels. He isolates *Swann* as a work that “rivals *Possession* as the smartest of these novels” (39).

Part of the appeal of *Swann* is that it balances a focused interrogation of scholarly values and practices with a broader commentary on the human condition, on the awkward and often unsuccessful attempts of people to understand themselves and connect meaningfully with others. Even though it is among the most “academic” of the novels considered in this study in that the characters and plot development are deeply and explicitly linked to the scholarly treatment of Mary Swann and the narrative culminates with an academic symposium, it is also the most relatable and accessible for the way it situates and almost buffers the academic critique within a more transcendent, existential exploration. In attempting to identify and explain Mary Swann, the four core characters learn more about themselves than they do about the elusive poet. As Kroetsch does in *Gone Indian*, Shields thus reaffirms the value of literary subjects and their ability to illuminate pressing contexts rather than simply function as supporting data amenable to manipulation. As all her fellow academic novelists do, Shields also emphasizes the need for humanities scholars to avoid conducting research in such a way that prioritizes their own research agenda above all other concerns. Such an approach produces scholarship that confirms public sentiment about the esoteric, inapplicable quality of the humanities. Instead, by demonstrating how attempts to “recode” atypical forms of knowledge into the dominant academic discourse are ultimately flawed, Shields emphasizes the need for

scholars to devise new approaches that speak more effectively to dynamic subjects.

Considering the increasing saturation of the academic market from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, the period during which the novelists under consideration were writing,

Shields's call for a revisioning of exhausted standards and practices in the field of literary scholarship is especially appropriate and timely.

CONCLUSION

The four novelists considered in this study focus on the contemporary state of humanities scholarship in Canada, examining in particular the growing alienation of the scholar from his or her work. Writing in the 1960s, Margaret Atwood highlights the cause of this alienation—the heightened pressure to produce unique scholarship in an academic climate increasingly dictated by market ideology—while Robert Kroetsch, Robertson Davies, and Carol Shields promote varying ways of reconnecting with what should be the scholar's fundamental motive: the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. Focusing on literary scholarship in particular, Kroetsch and Shields highlight the complex, fluid nature of literary subjects in order to remind scholars that manipulating these subjects in accordance with preexisting assumptions upon which their professional reputations rest is to overlook their broader resonance. Literary works, they argue, must speak louder than the critical and theoretical frameworks that contain them and at times obscure their depth and complexity. Although Davies examines the humanities more generally, he echoes the importance of immersing oneself more fully in one's subject in order not only to appreciate the dynamic quality of these subjects, but more importantly so that the scholar ultimately encounters the types of knowledge that have been hidden from public view and is thus in the position to unearth and share these marginalized stores of knowledge with the community at large. In so doing, humanities scholars become vital contributors to public discourse rather than detached figures whose broader purpose is often under debate.

It is noteworthy and perhaps somewhat counterintuitive that all four novelists, though reacting to contemporary stresses and anxieties within the academy, posit in varying ways a return to an earlier, indeed ancient, approach to scholarship wherein the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is the primary motivating factor for conducting research. The earliest medieval universities were governed by a greater degree of scholarly enterprise and inquisitiveness because scholarship was essentially non-existent; everything was yet to be discovered, analyzed, and interrogated. It may therefore seem unrealistic to suggest that the contemporary scholar should remain unchanged from his medieval counterpart; in this day and age, novel subjects of study are not as prevalent and the job market is so competitive that a greater degree of ambitious self-interest is necessary in order for the individual to have any chance of professional success and stability. Yet even with a more active scholarly climate and an inevitable (and heightened) degree of competition, the foundational ideal of the disinterested pursuit of knowledge is as valuable today as it ever was. Whether from the medieval era or from 2010, scholars can and must adhere to this guiding principle in order to ensure that the research itself always trumps whatever gains it can potentially accrue. As in any profession, academics must look after their own interests and prospects for career advancement and cannot be faulted for doing so, but such concerns cannot and should not take precedence over their scholarly undertakings.

Although maintaining this level of idealism may seem easier said than done, especially in an academic climate in which it becomes increasingly difficult to unearth untrammelled ground that is both interesting to the scholar and valuable to society at large, Atwood, Kroetsch, Davies, and Shields suggest that perhaps it is just a matter of

perspective. Indeed, when potential scholarly subjects are viewed through the limiting lens of conventional approaches and established literary patterns and canons, the possibilities are finite. If scholars reorient their perspectives, however, and enable narrative knowledge to speak for itself, for example, rather than be filtered through scientific or objective contexts, new layers of scholarly investigation reveal themselves. When scholars seek out alternative subjects which have traditionally been marginalized or neglected, new possibilities become uncovered. When scholars adapt their approaches and perspectives in response to their subjects of study rather than manipulate their subjects into conformity with preexisting standards, new directions emerge. When career advancement remains secondary to scholarly discovery, scholarship, whether conducted in the humanities or the sciences, has the potential to illuminate pressing questions and contexts.

Although the various alternative scholarly models and approaches that these novelists promote are attractive in theory, can they be successfully implemented in practice? And although it is a nice idea to prioritize uninhibited scholarly investigation above professional self-interest, is this even feasible? Would not the implementation of these ideas necessitate a complete (and unrealistic) overhaul of the standards and structures that govern the field of academic work? Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's conception of "the field," explored in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (1993), is useful in addressing these questions. Bourdieu argues that society is divided into a series of fields, each of which is governed by its own distinct set of rules that dictate how the various agents in the field are positioned and how they interact with one another in order to attain or maintain power and resources. The

academic field depends upon certain standards and structures that ensure its efficiency and overall operation. For example, there must be a certain level of competition amongst scholars in order to ensure that their research is part of a collaborative process in which studies are in dialogue with one another, with each scholarly contribution responding to the claims and gaps in existing studies. Scholarly journals and conferences are the necessary means through which this research is disseminated amongst the academic community. In order for scholars to engage in a meaningful dialogue, their work must share certain foundational commonalities. In literary scholarship, for example, particular traditions of influence, national canons, and theoretical perspectives are among the many structures in place to provide an overall sense of coherence and context to the work under analysis. These various structures and conventions cannot be dispensed with completely or else the entire enterprise of literary scholarship would degrade into utter incoherence and chaos.

The novelists in this study are not advocating a complete revolution through which all existing academic parameters are abandoned and new, more appropriate ones are erected in their place.¹ They do promote innovation and risk-taking from within these structures, however. Although it is impossible for scholars to ignore entirely the pressures to “publish or perish” as it were, this anxiety need not completely dictate the types of research one undertakes. It is possible to balance innovative approaches and subjects with the standards and expectations that shape the field. Although scholars cannot dispense with literary traditions and canons, they can and should be more willing

¹ Some academics, such as Len Findlay, do encourage more decisive action. He suggests that scholars “need ... to carry their talents for critique from the classroom and library to the places where curriculum is ratified and resources assigned” (300) because “[i]nstitutional policy ... has to be altered and knowledge diversified by the academic community itself” (301).

to recognize that not all literature can fit within existing paradigms; new ones need to be introduced that complement those that are already in place in order to ensure that the field is responsive to dynamic, fluid subjects. And although the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake may seem an archaic, simplistic guiding principle, it is also a crucial one—this fundamental ideal helps ensure that the research itself always remains paramount.

Rewards and reputation, though attractive incentives, must ultimately remain secondary to this core purpose of advancing knowledge. If not, then no matter how efficiently structured the academic field is, it will ultimately be inconsequential.

This is not to say that valuable scholarship in the humanities is not already being produced. It is and indeed has been all along. Even so, for every valuable book or article that pushes its audience to rethink entrenched assumptions and challenge complacent viewpoints or approach an important literary work in a fruitful new way, there are also several scholarly publications that are so specialized or obscure that discerning the intent or meaning of the work is more difficult than it should be. It is these scholars who are governed by increasingly narrowed, esoteric perspectives that the academic novelists are targeting. Ultimately, though, all scholars can benefit from the reminder to stop and take stock of their scholarly output in order to ensure that it enriches not only their dossier but their society as well. Reconnecting with a broader social purpose is what will help to undermine the damaging yet persistent public perception of the humanities scholar as an isolated and largely irrelevant figure safely enclosed in the ivory tower. The novelists in this study encourage renovating and relocating this detached tower such that it becomes a part of rather than apart from the society and culture it examines. An increased level of self-awareness within the scholarly community is the first step towards realizing

productive alterations within the academy, and the academic novel is an invaluable (albeit satirical) mirror that facilitates this much-needed reflection.

Atwood, Kroetsch, Davies, and Shields were writing during a period characterized by significant expansion and restructuring in the Canadian university. These changes and their enduring effects provided fertile ground for an interrogation of academic values and practices, making this the perfect time for the Canadian academic novel to announce its somewhat belated presence. As already noted, these novels were published during a limited span (1969-1987). Although encompassing a mere eighteen years, this period was more eventful for the Canadian university than were the preceding several decades combined. Even so, if the Canadian academic novel does indeed constitute a legitimate and thriving sub-genre, then surely it must extend beyond these limited years. I have opted to limit my focus to the progenitors of the sub-genre, the canonical, influential, popular Canadian novelists who helped to announce and shape the parameters of the Canadian contribution to this internationally recognized category of novels. Canadian academic novels have continued to be published in recent decades, however, thus reinforcing the endurance and relevance of this sub-genre. Recent titles include David Adams Richards's *Hope in the Desperate Hour* (1996), Alan Cumyn's *Losing It* (2001), Mary Lawson's *Crow Lake* (2002), and Lynn Coady's *Mean Boy* (2006). Although an in-depth analysis is beyond the scope of this project, it is worth noting briefly by way of conclusion some of the main concerns addressed in these novels.

Considering his troubled relationship with academe, it is not surprising that Richards's novels offer exceedingly critical portraits of the academic world. Expelled

from high school three times and barely accepted into university only to quit in order to pursue a writing career (Richards, “Remembering” 18), he is noted for criticizing the cloistered and condescending nature of academic communities and the ignorance of literary critics. While Kroetsch believes “criticism, as an extension of the text, liberates the text into its own potential” (“Beyond” 83), Richards sees literary critics as “intellectual illiterates; they have no idea what it is they are reading” (Tremblay, “Interview” 38).

Richards’s critique of literary criticism is further illuminated in *Hope in the Desperate Hour* through his exploration of the alienating tendency of the academic to immerse himself in, and define himself by, his work. Neil Shackle distances himself from his family and community through his increasing immersion in the academic world, first as student, then as professor, and finally as university president. His avoidance of his family and its destruction reaches a point of callousness; he refuses his brother a much-needed loan that he could afford to give “because he was still unsure of his tenure” (Richards, *Hope* 43). Against his wife’s wishes, “they had narrowed themselves by being part of the inner circle” (59) of intellectuals at the university. Christopher Wheem, first Neil’s fellow classmate and later his colleague, also turns his attention exclusively to getting ahead in academe at the expense of his personal and familial relationships. It is this immersion in the academic world, this inability to balance academic pursuits with one’s personal life and to remain engaged with the outside world, that leads Richards to question the reliability and usefulness of the work of literary critics; as stated by the narrator in the novel, “[n]or, more often than not, did it [the university] have anything to do with the life it was pretending to examine” (86). Ultimately it is the novels of Emile

Dexter, a writer who was unappreciated and persecuted when he was alive, that offer more insight into the town and its people than any academic article could. Although *Hope in the Desperate Hour* provides Richards's most sustained analysis of academe, several of his works, including *Mercy Among the Children* (2000) and *The Friends of Meager Fortune* (2006), suggest that the endurance of the downtrodden characters who populate the Miramichi region of New Brunswick is more valuable than the condescension and naivety that according to Richards characterize the academic world.

Cumyn's *Losing It* uses sexuality and sexual perversion to explore the extreme attempts of an English Literature professor "to be someone else for a time" (95). Throughout the novel, Edgar Allan Poe scholar Bob Sterling seeks a means of escape. His rambunctious two-year-old, his dementia-stricken mother-in-law, and his stressed young wife (formerly his student) combine to make his home life increasingly oppressive. His academic life does not provide a suitable retreat as his struggles to produce impressive scholarship leave him feeling inadequate. He achieves his sought-after escape, temporarily at least, by both engaging in an affair with undergraduate student and poet Sienna Chu and dressing in women's clothing. Sienna encourages his cross-dressing, helping him to overcome his shame and hesitations; as Bob notes, "[i]t isn't even that I want to become a woman. It's more this sense ... of transcendence. ... That is the most erotic thing for me. To move beyond, completely outside my usual life" (253). That Sienna encourages Bob for her own scholarly ends, using him as a subject for her study "The Sexual Proclivities of English Professors: Preliminary Research" (306), means that Bob's act of transcendence, of movement beyond the academic sphere, is ultimately co-opted and contained by that very sphere. Moreover, once incriminating

photographs of him are leaked and emailed to the university community, Bob's personal and professional lives are irrevocably damaged and he finds himself longing to regain the very relationships and stability he earlier strove to escape.

Lawson's *Crow Lake* explores the university's disconnection from the outside world by chronicling protagonist (and professor) Kate's increasing withdrawal into academe and corresponding alienation from her family and upbringing. The novel traces the tragic aftermath of a car accident that leaves four children struggling to get by without their parents. The eldest son, nineteen-year-old Luke, foregoes attending teacher's college in order to care for his younger siblings, Matt, Kate, and Bo. Considering how highly education is esteemed in the Morrison family, Luke's sacrifice is a major one. Matt, even brighter than Luke and often referred to as a "natural scholar" (57) by his friends and family, ultimately wins every scholarship for which he is eligible and is thus on the path to achieving a university education, but he too sacrifices his education for family obligations—he opts to stay home and marry the young woman carrying his child. Kate is the only Morrison to follow through and attend university. She attains a Ph.D. in zoology and becomes a professor at the University of Toronto. Kate harbours a lifelong resentment towards her beloved brother Matt, unable to understand how he could have made such a stupid mistake that in turn derailed his academic future. She is consumed by perpetual guilt that she has the academic career that her brother should have had; she copes with this guilt by retreating further and further into the university world and holding her family and small-town upbringing at a distance. At the end of the novel, Kate's boyfriend Daniel, who had just met Matt that day, explains to her her fundamental misunderstanding of Matt: "[h]e had his chance and he blew it, which is a real shame. ...

But it's just a shame. It's not a tragedy. It makes no difference to who Matt is. Can't you see that? No difference at all. The tragedy is that you think it's so important. So important you're letting it destroy the relationship the two of you had" (282).

In *Mean Boy*, Coady explores the breakdown of a professor and poet, Jim Arsenault, and his dysfunctional and obsessive dependence on his student Larry. After he is denied tenure, Jim's students, led by Larry, rally to protest this seeming injustice; Jim encourages the students and begins to depend on Larry as a crutch to help him deal with his own insecurities and failings. He becomes so caught up in external validation, from the university administration in the form of tenure and from the literary community in the form of glowing reviews of his work, that he loses sight of his passion—being a poet. As Jim remarks, "[w]e forget in this place, it's a forgetting-factory, we get so buried in things like grades and texts and committees and meetings and then one day you wake up and say, Wait a minute. This is about writing. This is about art. What in hell are we doing?" (200). Indeed, through the character of Jim, Coady examines this intersection between poetry and the university or "[t]he tension between art and institutionalized education" (16). Moreover, the novel also explores the divisions between the university community and the broader public. Larry's parents seem somewhat frightened for their son because university culture is so foreign to them that they have difficulty understanding his experiences and feel helpless in the face of his academic anxieties and Larry in turn cannot help but be embarrassed and frustrated by their naivety.

Unlike the core novelists discussed throughout this study who were all academics—specifically, professors in university English departments—Richards,

Cumyn, Lawson, and Coady lack this defining characteristic. All were immersed in academe as students, but none was part of this world professionally. The implications of this shift in authorship are worth investigating in detail, but for the present, I will offer brief speculation. This shift can be viewed in a positive light in that it speaks to the growing presence of academic concerns in the public consciousness and suggests that the broader public is now entering more actively into debates about the value of scholarship and, more specifically, about the need for the university to produce the type of public scholar gestured towards by Ira Katznelson—that is, scholars whose “public aspirations ... enmesh them in the wider culture’s institutions, values, and practices” (190). Indeed, these recent novelists focus in particular on examining the individual scholar and his or her (in)ability to be well-adjusted and engaged both within and outside of the university. Moreover, if these novels continue to be written exclusively by academics, they risk eventually becoming, at best, somewhat repetitive and, at worst, self-indulgent and irrelevant. If academics cease writing these novels altogether, however, there is the chance that the academic dimension of these novels will slowly recede into the background and become merely incidental rather than central. The complementary presence of academic novels written by people from varied backgrounds, both academic and non-academic, will ensure that contemporary academic concerns retain their prominence in these works and that a wide range of voices and perspectives are accommodated in the continuing debates inspired by the sub-genre.

This variation in terms of authorship bodes well for the continued development of the sub-genre as a vehicle for inspiring dialogue about and critique of the contemporary Canadian university and suggests the need for further study into the changing face of the

Canadian academic novel. Considering the dynamic character of English departments in particular, with the rise in recent years of cultural studies programs and increasingly interdisciplinary approaches as well as the emerging study of the intersection of the humanities and internet culture, the potential is high for the publication of a new wave of academic novels through which to interrogate these various transformations and the production of an accompanying critical response.

My hope is that this dissertation will help to shape a valuable precedent for future studies of the Canadian academic novel—rather than subsume these works into the American and British traditions, thereby minimizing the unique nuances and influences that the Canadian academy and field of literary scholarship have had on these novels, scholars must continue to study the uniquely Canadian character of these offerings. The American and British academic novels, especially since their proliferation in the mid-twentieth century, have always been accompanied by a strong critical response, which legitimates and extends the concerns they explore. Perhaps it is this complementary presence of an assured critical acknowledgement and examination that at least in part motivates these novelists to keep writing these works—they can be fairly confident that the concerns they raise are entering into informed debates, both within and beyond the academy. Canadian academic novels need a comparable critical audience and response in order to validate the sub-genre and encourage its continued presence and development. The present study is my attempt to initiate what will, I hope, become an enduring critical dialogue on these engaging and important novels.

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