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**Compromising Positions:
Representations of Adultery in Twentieth-Century English-Canadian Prose Fiction**

Tobi Nadine Kozakewich

**Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the PhD in English with a Specialization in Canadian Studies**

**Department of English
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Abstract

The family is often viewed as the most basic social institution and the one on which broader institutions are founded, and traditionally in Canada heterosexual marriage has resided at the heart of the nuclear family. The increasing prominence of adultery in English-Canadian literature throughout the twentieth century, however, raises questions regarding the nature of marriage and the duties and responsibilities associated with it. The challenges implicit in literary works concerned with adultery can fruitfully be read against changing contemporary social mores as evinced, for example, in amendments to Canadian divorce legislation. Moreover, consideration of points of intersection between material experience and literary representations of marriage and adultery can help to clarify shifts in Canadian moral and cultural values, such as the movement toward a more conservative view of adultery in the closing decades of the twentieth century.

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Introduction

Since the English novel emerged as a discrete genre in the eighteenth century, adultery has been one of its staple themes. Its association with such motifs as forbidden passion, secrecy, and betrayal has proven conducive to extended plot development just as its connection to notions of escape, re-creation of the self, and participation in an alternative – and often responsibility-free – reality has allowed for probing, even sympathetic, explorations of character psychology. It is, perhaps, for these reasons that previous studies of adultery in literature have been largely structural or psychoanalytic in orientation.¹ More recently, however, critics such as Bill Overton and Barbara Leckie have adopted a New Historicist approach in their analyses of the subject, drawing on the social milieus of nineteenth-century Continental Europe and England, respectively, to contextualize the representations of adultery that appear in the texts they discuss. The present study will follow their lead, situating the depiction of adultery in English-Canadian novels dating from the twentieth-century within broader cultural debates – such as the literary historical contest between romance and realism that raged during the opening decades of the century – and in relation to changes in Canadian legislation that unfolded throughout the period in question.

The motivation underlying this project has been two-fold. Firstly, while a number of critics have explored the issue of adultery in the contexts of European, British, and American literature, none has as yet undertaken a similar study for Canadian literature. This omission is surprising given the ubiquity of adultery in Canadian literature – authors as

diverse as, among others, Duncan Campbell Scott, Jessie Georgina Sime, Madge MacBeth, Morley Callaghan, Sinclair Ross, Elizabeth Smart, Hugh MacLennan, Sheila Watson, Margaret Laurence, Mordecai Richler, Michael Ondaatje, and Margaret Atwood have all addressed the issue (often repeatedly) in their work. Moreover, the heightened, if not histrionic, attention in the Canadian periodical press to adultery as a social phenomenon prompted by such notorious cheaters as President Clinton and Prince Charles at the end of the twentieth century indicates the enduring centrality of marriage – and adultery – in our cultural imagination.

The present project is not simply an attempt to fill a critical void, however. A second motivating factor has been a desire to undertake a socially meaningful literary analysis. While not entirely refuting an *art for art's sake* aesthetic, this study is informed by the belief that art matters not only in itself, but also for the ways it reflects and informs the material world in which we live. As a result, following the lead of Misao Dean in *Practising Femininity*, this thesis “leaves aside the question of their literary value according to modernist aesthetic standards” (15) and, in addition to more canonical texts, includes a critical discussion of such popular forms of literature as the romance – a genre traditionally dismissed, as Pamela Regis’s *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* makes clear, as being “silly and empty-headed” (xiii). Even when addressing the former class of literature, however, the focus remains more social than aesthetic and the analyses move toward an explication of the author’s – or the text’s – moral commentary.

Drawing on the context of what he refers to as the American “culture wars,” James Davison Hunter has suggested that “the issues contested in the area of family policy touch upon and

may even spill over into other fields of conflict – education, the arts, law, and politics,” leading him to posit that the family has become both “the most conspicuous field of conflict” and “the decisive battleground” on which competing ideologies fight for dominance (176). Though they do not construe the moral debates surrounding the family in as dualistic a manner, Canadian social historians such as Gary Kinsman and Peter Li also identify the family as the fundamental social institution of the twentieth century, hinging their respective moral and economic studies on the changing form and function of the Canadian nuclear family. Li, for example, explains the fragmentation of the family in the closing decades of the twentieth century – evident in delayed marriages, delayed and reduced numbers of births, and increased percentages of divorce – as the logical and inevitable results of Canada’s move toward corporate capitalism. For him, the family thus functions as an index against which the effects of economic change are most evident. Kinsman analogously argues that, on first becoming a legislative concern during the late 1800s, sexual regulation in Canada was justified on the grounds that such measures were necessary to “‘protect’ marriage, to inhibit the social processes of marriage breakdown” (86). Similarly, he identifies subsequent moral reforms as responses to, among other things, “increasing urbanization” that “created the opportunity for men, and later women, to live outside the family or on its margins” (98) and the widespread neglect of children during the wars, when fathers were fighting abroad and mothers supplying the workforce with much-needed labour.

As such social analyses evince, social commentators and reformers in the twentieth century increasingly and explicitly identified the family and marriage as contributing in invaluable ways to Canada’s social stability. That stability was connected, of course, to

traditional ideals regarding family life that carried over from the preceding century. Thus, for example, it was not until 1925 that Canada passed its first Act pertaining to divorce. Prior to that date, marital regulation fell under either the purview of community regulation, through such practices as the “*Charivari*, which were common in early Canada” and “used to punish wife-beaters, adulterers, and violators of ethnic, racial or religious values” (Kinsman 71), or common law, which was effectively an importation of English laws and practices.

Until 1857, in Canada as in England, adultery was “actionable” as the “wrong or tort, known as ‘criminal conversation’” (Puxon 102). As a legal mechanism, the charge of criminal conversation allowed a cuckolded husband to sue his wife’s lover for damages to his property, but did not involve a corresponding suit for divorce. Since women at the time had no legal status as persons, they could not file analogous charges against their husbands.² Moreover, the lover of even an abused or deserted wife could be vulnerable to such legal proceedings, as witnessed by the case of *Hall v. Barrow*, which appeared before the courts in Halifax in 1820. William Henry Hall sued his wife’s lover, Major George Barrow, for £5000 “for the destruction of his peace, tranquility, and social happiness as a husband, and for the injury he ha[d] sustained in the loss of the society, domestic comfort, and assistance of his wife” (*Hall v. Barrow* 3). Given that the alleged offence was to have occurred when the Plaintiff was in debtor’s prison, the extent to which Hall could be said to be bereft of “the society, domestic comfort, and assistance of his wife” as a result of the Defendant’s actions was contentious at best. After the courts considered the Defence’s evidence regarding the emotional and physical abuse to which Hall subjected his wife, in

conjunction with his clear fiscal irresponsibility, they awarded only a fraction of the damages he sought: £400.

Although the case of *Hall v. Barrow* illustrates how antiquated and unjust nineteenth-century views of marital responsibility and moral duty had become, a sexual double standard regarding spousal obligations persisted until well into the twentieth century and was enshrined in the first divorce law to have effect in Canada. Like the common law practices that preceded it, *The Matrimonial Causes Act* of 1857 placed wives under a higher moral standard than husbands:

The Act enabled a husband to divorce his wife for adultery and sue the co-respondent for damages. The wife, however, could only obtain a divorce where she could prove desertion, cruelty, bigamy or incest in addition to adultery; she had no corresponding action for damages. (McCaughan 35-6)

It was not until the federal *Marriage and Divorce Act* of 1925 – the first Canadian legislation regarding these issues – that this double standard was redressed and “adultery alone ... made a ground for divorce upon the petition of the wife” (da Costa 363). As Kathy Carmichael describes it, however, except for the removal of the double standard, this Act was effectively a rehearsal of the 1857 *The Matrimonial Causes Act* and “only applied in provinces where courts had the power to grant divorces” (¶6). It had no authority in other provinces, such as Quebec, and throughout much of the twentieth century, Parliament maintained the practice and obligation of granting divorce decrees as private members’ bills – a time-consuming and often prohibitively expensive process.

Moreover, the *Marriage and Divorce Act* identified adultery as the principal ground for divorce, reinforcing what Kinsman has described as a pervasive “link between marriage

breakdown and sexual conduct” (86). The singular focus on adultery as “the one thing that matters” in marital breakdown (Cartwright 44) – contested as early as the 1920s and 30s by such literary figures as Nellie McClung (Arnup n.74) – became increasingly contentious in the post-war period. By 1960, when Morley Callaghan addressed the issue in his *Maclean’s* article “Why Single Out Sex as the Only Real Road to Sin?” the call for change had become commonplace, and when the *Canadian Divorce Act* was ratified in 1968, it provided “badly-needed comprehensive legislation of divorce, which would be applicable to all of Canada, and ... introduced the new element of non-fault divorce” (McCaughan 148). Since such non-fault grounds as living “separate and apart” required proof of discrete residence for a “period of not less than 3 years” (da Costa 463), the most expeditious means of obtaining a divorce still resided in the “fault” provisions, particularly adultery.

Further changes to legislation in 1985 “creat[ed] a single ground for divorce called marriage breakdown” (Douglas ¶8), but retained a fault component insofar as marriage breakdown could be demonstrated either by one year living separate and apart or by adultery or physical or mental cruelty on the part of the respondent. The compromise of the *Divorce Act* worked against the advice of the Law Reform Commission of Canada, who in 1976 “recommended that, in order to reduce the hostility of the traditional adversarial approach to divorce and to promote more constructive resolutions of family disputes on separation, the only ground for divorce in Canada should be breakdown of the marriage” (Douglas ¶8). Nevertheless, the *Divorce Act* effected significant changes to divorce proceedings in Canada, making no-fault divorces considerably easier to obtain: instead of a three-year period of separation, the courts required only one year. Moreover, proceedings

could be started before the year had expired as long as the spouses had been separated a full year by the time the *decree nisi* was to be ordered.

Just as writers such as Callaghan and McClung engaged in the divorce debate explicitly, so too did writers respond to it in their fictional works. Mordecai Richler repeatedly alludes to the common practice of colluding to obtain a divorce in the years prior to 1968,³ as does Brian Moore in *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* (1960), and in *The Diviners* (1974), Margaret Laurence re-visioned the tradition of punishing an adulterous wife, even in those instances where the wife is mistreated, through her character Julie Kazlik Fennick, who is relieved rather than threatened when her husband, Buckle, “agree[s] to sue [her] – adultery” – to launch the divorce proceedings she desired. Indeed, Julie’s only concern is that “he could change his mind at the drop of a handkerchief, and then I’d have to go for the cruelty charge” (324), which even after the *Canadian Divorce Act* of 1968 was still a more complicated process than a straightforward suit on the grounds of adultery.

This explicit engagement with the divorce debate and Canadian morality has a correlative in the social commentary undertaken by English-Canadian novels throughout the twentieth century, and it is on that commentary that the following chapters shed light. Early in the century, popular romances contained the most explicit discussions of marital transgression, and these texts comprise the primary materials on which the first chapter draws. Framing its analysis of the romance in the crisis of representation that characterized the realism debate, this chapter illustrates the ways these early texts challenged the traditional view of marriage that still obtained in Canada during the period in question. Referring to that marital ideal as heteronormative, the chapter strives to uncover the extent

to which that ideal was a social construction or, to borrow the definition of heteronormativity offered by Britta Wheeler, to “refer[...] to the notion that heterosexual unions and the societal institutions that support these are not necessarily natural, but require an ongoing enforcement in order to maintain them” (160).

Chapters two and three explore how this ideological work was undertaken by realist writers during roughly the same period, with the latter chapter focusing particularly on the works of Frederick Philip Grove and Morley Callaghan. Still working within the same basic framework, chapter four takes as its case studies the two ur-texts of adultery in English-Canadian letters: Sinclair Ross’s *As For Me and My House* (1941) and Elizabeth Smart’s *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (1945). Arguably the first genuine adultery narratives in Canadian literary history, these texts shift the groundwork of the literary representation of adultery, complicating it in the process. Both texts create sympathy for the adulterous others, with Smart’s narrative in particular describing the experience from the perspective of the Other Woman.

The fifth and final chapter traces changes in the ways texts represented adultery in the second half of the twentieth century, ultimately focusing its analyses on the *oeuvres* of Mordecai Richler and Margaret Atwood. Surprisingly, rather than an extension of the liberalizing tendencies evident in earlier texts, these later ones mark a movement toward greater moral conservatism inasmuch as they suggest that adulterous affairs create more problems than they resolve. That the most relevant of these texts appeared in the wake of significant changes to Canadian divorce law – changes that removed the necessity of and justification for committing adultery – challenges an interpretation of preceding, more sympathetic adultery narratives as endorsing adultery per se and suggests instead that those

earlier texts that convey sympathy toward their fictional adulterers do so only insofar as the affairs represent a necessary and otherwise unobtainable escape from oppressive and damaging familial dynamics.

Notes

¹ Structural and generic approaches include Judith Armstrong's *The Novel of Adultery*, Tony Tanner's *Adultery in the Novel*, and Greiner's *Adultery in the American Novel*; see Laura Kipnis, Helena Michie, and Alison Sinclair for psychoanalytic analyses.

² Katherine Arnup reports that it was not until the passing of *An Act to Secure to Married Women Real and Personal Property Held in Their Own Right* in 1851, for example, that the first Canadian legislation was passed that granted women in New Brunswick the right to hold property and the wages for their labour in their own name. Comparable legislation was enacted in Prince Edward Island in 1860, in Nova Scotia in 1866, and in Ontario in 1872.

³ See, for example, page 25 of *Son of a Smaller Hero* and pages 289-90 of *Barney's Version*.

1. “Something Worse than a Waste of Time”:

The Marriage Romance, 1900-1940

Periodical editors and social commentators at the turn of the last century found themselves in a difficult position: while they self-consciously obscured the boundary between life and literature to facilitate further development of the ‘Canadian’ national identity that had emerged in the wake of Confederation, they also worried about the undesirable ways textual representation was impacting on social mores. Such concerns, ranging from the suspicion that “Excessive Newspaper and Novel Reading” was deadening the nation’s intellect (Cooper 547), to the anxiety that the prevalence of sensationalized reports in the literary marketplace was inuring Canadians to immorality, recur with some frequency in periodicals dating from this time. For example, in condemning the “detailed accounts of the sad misdoings” of unfaithful women that were then so prominent in “Column after column of the daily press,” *Canadian Magazine* editor John A. Cooper allusively suggested that “it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a newspaper man to help the world to righteousness” (“Some Women” 367).

Given the general concern about social morality that obtained in English-speaking Canada during the closing decades of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries, helping the world to righteousness – or, alternatively, hindering that progress – was no small matter. In broad social contexts, purity groups tackled issues as diverse as

“prostitution, divorce, illegitimacy, ‘Indians and Chinese,’ public education, suppression of obscene literature, prevention (of prostitution) and rescue of fallen women, and shelters for women and children” (Valverde 17). In the more particular cultural realm of literature, such moral concerns arose principally *vis-à-vis* the relation between textual representation and social practice. Thus, for example, Cooper interpellates a readerly desire more ‘pure’ than that satisfied by salacious accounts of improper doings while purporting merely to describe current reading practice: readers want “fiction which deals with real people,” he insists, “people such as we find every day in real life, and deals with them not realistically, but in a healthy way” (“Review” 95). This construction of desire suggests the essence of the romance versus realism debate that raged internationally in the late nineteenth century and continued in Canada throughout the long *fin de siècle*:¹ uncomfortable with the ‘unhealthiness’ of realistic treatments of life, Cooper’s readerly desire nevertheless protests as well against the artificiality so characteristic of romance. In the process, it calls for a body of literature that is at best entertaining, but in any event plausible and morally instructive.

The immediate result of these multifarious demands was what Mary Vipond has described as a ‘schizophrenic’ juxtaposition of vastly different popular novels in the early decades of the twentieth century. “The daring romance,” she explains, “existed side-by-side on the best seller lists with righteous and sentimental family novels and idealistic and didactic religious ones” (“1899-1918” 106). Moreover, these latter classes of novel often relied on internal contrasts between righteous and more dubious characters to convey their morals; thus it is, for example, that Gilbert Parker’s *Wild Youth* (1919) compares the hypocritical and tyrannical Joel Mazarine to his poorer but more amiable neighbour,

Orlando Guise. In Mazarine's untimely and exotically-staged death, the novel effectively judges and sentences the abusive husband according to a principle of poetic justice that is, perhaps, more 'healthy' than realistic. However, in the moral tensions resulting from its sympathetic depiction of Orlando's affair with Mazarine's wife and in its simultaneous representation and condemnation of marital dysfunction, the novel presents in concentrated form the crux of the realism debate by raising the question of where representation becomes dangerous, and of what makes it so.

As suggested by this brief account of *Wild Youth's* exploration of the psycho-sexual dynamics surrounding domestic relations, the world of letters reflected contemporary social purity movements in seeing sexual desire as especially threatening, as, in fact, "the most dangerous of forces, the worst threat to civilization, and hence as that which most need[ed] taming" (Valverde 28). At the same time, the apparently chaste nature of Orlando's affair with Louise Mazarine suggests that the period's sensitivity to connections between textual representation and social practice translated, in novelistic terms, into a widespread sublimation of this "most dangerous of forces" such that sexual desire, when it appeared at all, appeared on the narrative margins, relieved of its full subversive potential. This observation holds especially true with representations of adultery in early twentieth-century English-Canadian romances, which typically construct an ethical or social barrier around the characters who transgress the parameters of fidelity and which, in any event, typically obscure or ignore the repercussions of adultery in pursuit of happy and morally reassuring conclusions. Keeping in mind these normative conclusions, and using Northrop Frye's formulation of romance as its starting point, this chapter will argue that the specific literary deployments of sexuality in its broadest sense – and adultery more narrowly – that appear

in English-Canadian romances from this period correspond with Michel Foucault's principal argument in *The History of Sexuality*: namely, that "sexuality" was initially conceived to affirm a heterosexual familial unit rather than to condemn alternatives to that model. Ironically, as this chapter will ultimately suggest, in their assertion of one particular form of sexuality, English-Canadian romances created a literary and discursive space in which subsequent texts could posit an alternative and present challenges to the heteronormative idea. While evident in several discrete romances dating from this period, these conflicting tendencies are, this chapter will suggest, most apparent as they recur within an author's oeuvre, especially in the context of the autographic sequel.

In his study of romance, *The Secular Scripture*, Northrop Frye contests the genre's marginal status in literary studies. His concession that the sentimental romance has traditionally been viewed by "the guardians of taste" as "something worse than a waste of time" (23, 24) is equaled in irony only by his rehearsal of commonplace objections to the genre:

Romance ... is, we say, 'sensational': it likes violent stimulus, and the sources of that stimulus soon become clear to the shuddering censor. The central element of romance is a love story, and the exciting adventures are normally a foreplay leading up to a sexual union. Hence romance appears to be designed mainly to encourage irregular or excessive sexual activity. This may be masturbation, which is the usual model in the minds of those who

speak with contempt of 'escape' reading, or it may be a form of voyeurism.

(24)

In a more serious vein, Frye insists that this critical formulation of romance is problematically simplistic, for in eliding the erotic with the pornographic, it construes popular literature as merely pandering to a populist desire for sex and violence, implying in the process that at stake in the traditional condemnation of the 'secular scripture' are both moral fiber and social class.

His alternative formulation, which focuses on what popular literature demands in literary terms (i.e., "the minimum of previous verbal experience and special education from the reader" [26]) rather than on what it delivers in sexual ones, invites consideration of how readers approach romance and of what role romance plays in the wider literary context. By attending to structure and literary form rather than content, Frye's formulation redirects attention in a Foucauldian manner: what is at issue is not sex *per se*, but sexuality – the discourses that create, regulate, and contain "sex-desire" and its manifestations. Form transcends content insofar as it is the generic structure that here makes possible the deployment of new textual-sexual strategies. In the process of this redirection, and writing at a time when feminist critics such as Germaine Greer were dismissing romance as "dope for dupes," Frye anticipates the analyses of the genre that feminist scholars launched during the 1980s and, more especially, the 1990s – analyses that see romance as a genre "in crisis," "under pressure," and "in process" (Stacey and Pearce 24). The literary, formal focus Frye employs invites consideration first, of how readers approach romance; and second, of what role romance plays in the wider literary context.

Early twentieth-century English-Canadian romances repeatedly demonstrate both Frye's tenet that romance requires "the minimum ... special education from the reader" and its correlative effect – that lacking prior education, readers look to romance itself as an instructive genre, as a productive discourse that, despite its stereotypes and conventions, makes sense of daily life. Their doing so reinforces the inter-relation between discourse and materiality – between life and literature – that early periodical writers noted with such alarm. For example, Pearl Watson, the protagonist of Nellie McClung's best-selling *Sowing Seeds in Danny* (1908), applies the knowledge she has acquired through her experience of romance to 'real life' when she commiserates with Tom Motherwell about his ill-destined attachment to Nellie Slater. "Keep a stout heart and all will be well," she tells him (186), rehearsing a maxim she picked up from romance:

Pearl knew all about frustrated love. Ma had read a story once, called "Wedded and Parted, and Wedded Again." Cruel and designing parents had parted young Edythe (pronounced Ed'ith-ee) and Egbert, and Egbert just pined and pined. How would Mrs. Motherwell like it if poor Tom began to pine and turn from his victuals. The only thing that saved Egbert from the silent tomb where partings come no more, was the old doctor who used to say, "Keep a stout heart, Egbert, all will be well." That's why she said it to Tom. (187)

The tone of this passage and its culmination, a few paragraphs later, in Pearl's empathetic sobbing aloud at the grief she imagines Tom's suffering could cause his mother indicate that McClung is here parodying romance through her young heroine. But if McClung ridicules the genre's conventions, she also employs them, whether in the last-minute medical miracle that saves Arthur Wemyss in *Sowing Seeds in Danny*, or in the timely

reunion of Arthur and Martha Perkins in *The Second Chance* (1910), or in Annie Gray's improbable reconciliation with her father-in-law in *Purple Springs* (1921). Indeed, the Pearl Watson trilogy is nothing if it is not romance, and Pearl comes to benefit from her schooling in the genre, for she remains steadfast to her true love, Dr. Clay, and to her sense of her own worth even when community gossips denigrate her as a match for the young doctor in preference to the more genteel Miss Morrison. Thus, although McClung speaks with gentle deprecation about the way romance shapes 'real life' perceptions in her autobiographical (and much later) *Clearing in the West* (1935), her early and most successful works take advantage of the genre's didactic potential and suggest that textual instruction can impact on – and even improve – material lives.²

Frye's formulation of romance has a second implication, for if romance requires the "minimum of previous verbal experience and special education from the reader," it does so because, despite frequent forays into 'historical' periods, it concerns itself primarily with the contemporary and familiar. In fact, these are, according to Frye, the distinguishing features of popular literature in general and romance in particular: accessibility and a focus on the proximal.³ In other words, whereas 'elite' literature looks backward and occasionally abroad, privileging tradition and erudite obscure allusions, popular literature looks around and ahead. As a result, it is the latter that typically "indicates where the next literary developments are most likely to come from" (Frye 28). This observation, though international in the context of Frye's study, corresponds closely to the ways romances anticipated the rise of the adultery novel in English-Canadian literary history.

In the opening decades of the twentieth century, the sentimental romance was far from being a new arrival on our literary scene; on the contrary, it already had a long history,

reaching back as far as Francis Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769). It was not, however, a tradition to which later romancers were slavish, and popular writers such as McClung, Ralph Connor, and Gilbert Parker often played with generic conventions, expanding and complicating them in the process. For instance, while love triangles are a traditional staple of the romance plot, texts such as Ralph Connor's *The Man from Glengarry* (1901) and McClung's *The Second Chance* present a reversal in the standard triangular dynamic. Earlier texts employing the love triangle – John Richardson's *Wacousta* (1832) and Rosanna Leprohon's *Antoinette de Mirecourt* (1864), for example – regularly focus on scenarios wherein the female principal struggles to choose between two lovers, but the later texts shift the choice onto the male character.

This reversal has clear implications for the ways in which the texts construct gender: it suggests an increased mobility in women, who no longer simply stay home and entertain unwanted suitors the way Antoinette anxiously does on occasion,⁴ and it interpellates increased sexual consciousness in men, for rather than competing with another man for one woman, as Sir Reginald Morton and De Haldimar compete for Clara Beverley in *Wacousta*, Connor's Ranald MacDonald and McClung's Arthur Wemyss confront a veritable dilemma: they need to consider which of two women would make the better wife. The process that sees them do so subtly refocuses the male perspective such that these men turn inward instead of jealously looking outward to the men who threaten to abscond with Maimie and Thursa respectively. As a result, they are able to discover that it was not the fickle women, but their own misguided and misplaced attachment that was to blame for their romantic disappointments. More generally, their atonement for and correction of their

initial mistakes suggest the possibilities and potentialities of a pragmatic and domestic – as opposed to a passionate and extramarital – sexuality.

In the Connor and McClung texts, disillusionment for the male principals results in recognition of the merit of the female alternates and in the launching of relationships that are more likely to lead to domestic comfort and marital happiness. But the love triangle and problem of choice that it poses reverberate in many romances dating from the period, and not always in conjunction with such convenient resolutions. For Kathleen Wantage – because in Gilbert Parker's *The Right of Way* (1901) it is initially a woman who forms the apex of the triangle – disenchantment comes too late. When choosing between Charley Steele and Captain Fairing, Kathleen is bamboozled by monetary considerations and chooses the financial stability Charley offers over the sincerity and good intentions that are the Captain's chief assets. She eventually atones for her original error, marrying the Captain after Charley is presumed dead, but her early mercenary propensities, the bigamous nature of her second marriage, and Charley's eventual resuscitation as a character of moral worth all complicate her second marriage. Ultimately, by deferring disillusionment until after the initial marriage has occurred, *The Right of Way* stresses more emphatically than *The Man from Glengarry* or *The Second Chance* the gravity of choosing poorly in the first place.

In his subsequent attachment to Rosalie Evanturel, Charley experiences similar difficulties in atoning for past errors, though his are less clearly of a romantic nature than are Kathleen's. His principal dilemma, connected to his dissolute ways and his brother-in-law's exploitation of them, hinges on whether he should set the record straight by returning to Montreal or simply begin anew in Chaudière. His indecision keeps him static, and while

the increasing intimacy of his relationship with Rosalie pushes matters to a crisis, his murder at the hands of thieves means that neither Charley nor the text need decide on a definite course of action; it also removes the adulterous and bigamous aspect of Kathleen's second marriage, effectively sanctifying the domestic happiness it suggests in the process. Thus, although it invokes the spectre of adultery, *The Right of Way* avoids considering the material consequences of such infidelity and removes the adulterous complications from a marriage that is, in the end, heteronormative.

Two decades later, Grace Murray Atkin's *The New World* (1921) similarly glosses over the moral and emotional ramifications of its adulterous triangles. Like Kathleen Wantage, Atkin's Margherita Borghese discovers too late her husband's flaws. Gabriele Borghese is both an adulterer and a hypocrite, but even after "The story of his attentions to other women [has] filtered" back to Margherita's familial estate, "enraging those who loved [her]" (272), Margherita remains trapped in her marriage by her grandmother's strident propriety and her own strict Catholicism. While strong enough to determine her conduct, however, her religion is not influential enough to curb her passions, and in the face of pending war, with "the emotion of men and women [coming] very near to the surface" (131), Margherita embarks on a romantic relationship with the story's protagonist, Dante Ricci. The narrative description of the climax of this affair is ambiguous,⁵ but a subsequent image suggests agony rather than consummation:

As Dante and Margherita walked up to the house, they saw that a snipe, attracted by the long waiting light in Margherita's window, had flown against the pane and stunned by the concussion of its beak upon the glass, had fallen dead to the ground. (184)

The metaphoric connection between Dante and the bird is reinforced later when the Abbé communicates his expectation that Dante's love for Margherita would have "clip[ped] the wings of the young Idealist" (284). Of course, at this point, the broken bird's collision with the glass barrier forms a contrast to the professional success Dante has realized by sublimating his desire for Margherita and channeling it into his highly acclaimed political treatise. The moral attached to the snipe thus explains the sacrifice symbolized by the dead bird as the price the lovers have to pay to maintain their integrity and realize their individual ambitions.

While plausible in itself, this justification for the lovers' repression and self-denial becomes less convincing when viewed in the context of the entire romance. The image of Dante and Margherita forever faithful to each other but divided by an ocean both literal and symbolic contrasts tragically with the outcome of a second and actually adulterous affair. The triangle associated with this latter relationship comprising Whiteface Bailey and Felicity and John Dowden remains on the narrative margins, and its moral impact is consequently less profound than that involving the romance's principal characters. Nevertheless, through its culmination in marriage, the secondary affair provides a clear foil to that of the main plot, suggesting additional – and in some ways preferable – possibilities. Granted, in freeing his wife to marry her new lover, John Dowden's death in battle repeats the simplification strategy earlier employed by Parker, bringing this novel's most explicitly adulterous chapter to a conveniently normative close. Indeed, in this respect, Atkin's novel is even less morally complicated than Parker's, for Felicity and Bailey are at the time of their wedding genuinely free to marry. The evasion of moral crisis that Dowden's death permits thus diminishes the subversive potential suggested by Felicity and Bailey's early

intercourse and results in a union that is an idealistic realization of the romantic dynamic of the main plot. In other words, whereas the principal affair cannot fully actualize itself in marriage, the subplot romance can, and its doing so suggests that, though not always productive of enduring happiness and affection, marriage represents the only stable and viable manifestation of romantic attachment. In its absence, desire – that “most dangerous of forces” – needs to be stifled or sublimated.

Not as rigorous in its exploration of sexuality as his later novel *Grain* (1926), Robert Stead’s *Neighbours* (1922) is nonetheless more probing than either *The Right of Way* or *The New World* in its consideration of infidelity and in its assertion of a heterosexual marriage ideal. Stead does not present a wife’s breach of faith as the logical consequence of a husband’s cruelty and infidelity the way Atkin does with Margherita and Gabriele (and, incidentally, the way Parker does with Louise and Joel Mazarine in *Wild Youth*), nor does he avoid the issue of wifely agency by doing away with a troublesome husband the way Parker does with Kathleen Wantage and Charley Steele. Rather, he acknowledges that spouses may stray with far less provocation, and he suggests, moreover, that their doing so may be understandable if not defensible. In Stead’s romance, Jean Lane breaks off her engagement to the protagonist, Frank Hall, for no better reason than anticipated boredom, yet in doing so, she appears thoughtful and forward-looking rather than merely fickle:

“... Breakfast, work; dinner, work; supper, work; sleep; breakfast—the whole circle over again. I couldn’t stand it, Frank; there’s no use pretending I could. I’d—I’d run away with some one!”

“Jean!”

“Yes, I know what you’re thinking. But it would break the routine, anyway; it wouldn’t be that way I would lose my soul; perhaps that way I might save it.”

“You’re a strange girl, Jean.”

“Yes? After all these years? I am so glad. As long as I am strange you will be interested in me. That’s the trouble with you; you’re not strange. I know all about you. And I wouldn’t be your housekeeper for life for the sake of being your lover for a week.” (261-2)

Jean’s candor regarding the break up and Frank’s recognition of the merit in what Jean says sway textual sympathy in her favor, and, ultimately, by subscribing to the philosophy Jean espouses, Frank is able to regain her affections, and the romance ends happily, with a marriage pending between the two central characters.

Granted, Jean’s reasons for returning to her first love are not altogether this straightforward, for they include as well the rejection of her proposals by the man she temporarily prefers to Frank. This third man, significant enough as the apex of the romance’s principal love triangle, assumes additional importance when he reveals to Frank and Jean his true relation to the ‘widow’ Alice Alton (i.e., he was married to her). This revelation provides the material correlative to the intellectual speculation about adultery that Jean and Frank entertain earlier in the narrative and demonstrates more clearly than the principal characters’ abstractions the text’s tentativeness regarding moral absolutes insofar as Spoof questions the justice of his response to Alice’s betrayal of him:

“I married this woman that you know as Mrs. Alton five years ago Christmas Day. ... In the course of time Gerald was born. Up until then, and for some time afterwards, everything was all right.

“Then—something happened. In what I chose to call righteous indignation I turned her out. Perhaps it was more mortified pride, or just blind, beast jealousy. Never mind. Through it all I gave myself credit for being just, even generous. I gave her half my ready money, which wasn't much; I've never been much of a money-grabber, Hall; it has always seemed such an inconsequential business. But I gave her half of what I had, and settled on Gerald the small income I could command, and let her keep the boy. ...” (299-300)

Spoof's doubt about his motivation (was it “righteous indignation” or merely “mortified pride”?), his retrospective misgivings about how “generous” he had actually been, and the comfort he derives from having allowed Alice to keep their son all imply that Spoof comes to doubt the gravity of Alice's offense. While neither he nor Stead goes so far as to condone her conduct, Spoof's reconciliation with his wife and desire to protect her from community gossip point to his complete forgiveness of her. Moreover, at its conclusion, the text provides no reason to doubt that the reunion of Spoof and Alice will be any less successful than that of Frank and Jean.

In its reliance on even improbable circumstances to make the reconciliation of the couple estranged by adultery possible, *Neighbours* reveals a pronounced disinclination to resolve the adulterous dilemma by killing off problematic characters. Nevertheless – or perhaps as a result – it asserts more strongly than the other texts the imperatives and

perseverance of the heteronormative marriage institution, with the books' comedic conclusion (the marriage-reconciliation count totals for couples out of a community of scarcely a dozen families) clearly asserting the primacy of marriage. As a result, while the frequent recurrence of the adulterous triangle in the genre as a whole gestures toward the prominence adultery would assume in English-Canadian literature later in the century, *Neighbours* represents a particularly apposite case study of how popular romance literature can anticipate the development of more serious literary forms as well as of how discourse constructs and advances particular social relations.

The texts by McClung, Parker, and Stead were all best-sellers in their time. The collective work that they perform in constructing discourses of fidelity and marital stability created a space wherein it became possible to address subjects explicitly that had until then only been suggested, and to rework dynamics of earlier texts, as occurred with respect to the inter-relation between gender and agency within the love triangle. In turn, contemporary and succeeding romancers, such as Mazo de la Roche and Arthur Stringer, as well as realist writers such as Morley Callaghan, Sinclair Ross, and a host of others besides, would revisit and reconfigure the tensions in these early-twentieth-century romances.

In fact, the early romances themselves demonstrated the creative possibilities of revisiting the tensions immanent in the love triangle. *Neighbours* represents an autographic rehearsal of those tensions with Stead's *oeuvre*,⁶ and, apart from *The New World*, which marked the first foray into book-length fiction for Atkin, the romances mentioned thus far all present a reworking of issues that arise in other of their authors' books.⁷ This process of repeatedly

returning to a given concern, latent in many writers' *oeuvres*, is a key characteristic of what Gérard Genette describes generally as 'literature in the second degree.' In a specifically Canadian context, Carole Gerson, referring to Faye Kensing's *Children of the Series and How They Grew*, observes that one particular manifestation of such 'second degree' literature – series production – “peaked during the second decade of the twentieth century” (“Dragged” 148). While Gerson's discussion focuses specifically on L. M. Montgomery's *Anne* books, the popularity of the autographic series (whether as chronicles, trilogies, or sequels) was not limited to children's literature and juvenile concerns. Arthur Stringer's *Prairie Stories* (1915-22) and Mazo de la Roche's *Whiteoak Chronicles* (1927-40), for example, two series of international popularity dating from roughly this period, demonstrate in concentrated and explicit form the kind of reconsideration of the adulterous triangle that Parker and Stead undertake in their works.⁸

Posterity has dismissed both Stringer and de la Roche as popular writers whose works were of only transient interest, but as Frye and others have shown,⁹ popularity itself can be constitutive of literary 'value,' especially when appearing in relation to a project of literary historical analysis. Several critics have recognized this truth in relation to the *Jalna* books, but they have been less willing to approach Stringer's with comparable appreciation.¹⁰ While this disjunction in critical attention may reflect differences in stylistic sophistication or purely aesthetic merit, the generic – and indeed thematic – similarities between the two series are sufficiently pronounced to make a comparative analysis of them instructive. Thus, rather than beginning with a somewhat anachronistic *a priori* notion of immanent literary inequality, the present study takes as its initial premise the similarities between the two series and uses their subsequent points of divergence to facilitate an

understanding of how and why de la Roche's *Chronicles* ultimately develop the more psychologically-sophisticated apprehension of the adulterous triangle.

Both series are typical manifestations of the sequel phenomenon as characterized by literary historians such as Gérard Genette, Terry Castle, and Marjorie Garber insofar as they capitalize on an early success by prolonging their initial narratives. 'Success' here translates as high sales and revenues, but these are not mutually exclusive from positive assessments by literary critics. The first book of Stringer's trilogy, *The Prairie Wife* (1915), was undoubtedly a publishing success, with two American firms bringing out illustrated editions alongside the Canadian version by McLeod & Allen,¹¹ yet brisk sales in the literary marketplace appear not to have jeopardized the book's immediate critical reception. Although the review in the *Canadian Magazine* initially damns with faint praise, it ultimately suggests that, if nothing else, *The Prairie Wife* is entertaining and worth reading for that reason. Moreover, a later review in the magazine by Raymond Knister, which characterizes the trilogy as a whole as a "work of a vital if popular order" demonstrating the "authentic gifts" of its author (30), suggests a shift in that periodical's editorial view toward a more definite critical appreciation of Stringer's work. Other reviewers did not require the perspective afforded by a dozen years and the two subsequent books to find merit in *The Prairie Wife*. In their reviews of the first Prairie romance, for example, both the *New York Times Book Review* and *Nation* commend Stringer's sensitive portrayal of the prairie landscape, with the latter also applauding what it describes as the book's careful "analysis of a woman's soul" and "delicate, often merciless, psychology" (438).

Mazo de la Roche's *Jalna* (1927) marks an even higher achievement in terms of both marketplace success and critical appreciation. In beating out almost thirteen hundred other entries to win the prestigious Atlantic-Little, Brown Award in 1927, it secured itself an international audience and demanded for itself serious critical attention regardless of whether, as Ruth Panofsky suggests, de la Roche's long-standing friendship with Ellery Sedgwick, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, influenced the outcome of the competition (60). Since news of the award preceded by six months the publication of *Jalna* as a discrete novel,¹² American and Canadian presses reporting on the competition could not immediately discuss the merits of the winning book. Instead, the reports were largely biographical and retrospective, presenting de la Roche as a rising Canadian novelist and touting the merits of her earlier works, *Possession* (1923) and *Delight* (1926).¹³ By the time *Jalna* was released in autumn of that year, critics were more than ready to view it and its author as serious players on the literary field, with the conclusion to the *Montreal Gazette* review being representative of the general critical tenor: "The story is original, humourous and tragic in parts, and interesting from beginning to end" (6).

Although overwhelmingly positive, the critical reception of *Jalna* was not unanimously so. Perhaps anticipating some dissent, the *Saturday Night* review, absolute in its appreciation of the book, intermingles its praise with strategic defense, often performing both tasks at the same time. "As a novel of Canadian origin," it claims, "[*Jalna*] is almost alone in its class" (8):

the few other first rate Canadian novels are each so different in mood, construction, setting and approach that comparison with them is difficult, and neither profitable nor illuminating. Judged merely by itself, '*Jalna*' is an

excellent performance – a good story, carefully worked out in details and plan of presentation, and always completely ‘in hand’: but, finally, it is the exceptional quality of the writing itself that makes the book. (8)

This setting *Jalna* apart from other Canadian texts prefaces both an insistence that it be accepted on its own terms and a defense of the book against charges that it is un-Canadian.¹⁴ In conceding that *Jalna* might not present “the typical Canadian,” the reviewer questions whether such a person “is yet really in existence” (9) and maintains that, if not typical, the world de la Roche creates is nevertheless plausible and realistic: “Life has been caught and imprisoned in these pages. ... there people live, and the scenes in which they move are real” (9). Comparable appreciation of the book’s realism is reiterated in reviews published in the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *New Republic*, and the *Saturday Review of Literature*.

Despite such contemporary critical claims, the realism of both *Jalna* and *The Prairie Wife* is tenuous at best, limited largely to their descriptions of the natural world. Even while taking domestic relations as their principal concern, in their treatment of characters these books are romances and, rather than analyze, merely tantalize with the psycho-social dynamics they invoke. *The Prairie Wife*, for example, immediately summons the scandalous figure of “the *Other Man*” (2), but promptly proceeds to normalize the potentially subversive lover: no dark knight who has swept Chaddie off her feet, her ‘other man’ is a gaunt, poorly-dressed “broken-down engineer”-turned-rancher (5) whom she accepts in marriage not so much because she loves him (she does not) as because the affections of her original suitor, Count Theobald Gustav, collapsed at the same time as her fortunes. Potentially setting the trajectory for a realistic exploration of marital relations,

Stringer's rejection of the stereotypical 'other' and Chaddie's pragmatic motivations are soon buried under mounds of romantic drivel and bliss, for Chaddie promptly comes to love her convenient husband "with all her heart and soul" (87). Moreover, in a suggestively metafictional summary statement, she offers up their unadulterated happiness as a standard of the inevitable 'reality' of prairie life: "There isn't much room for the Triangle in a two-by-four shack. Life's so normal and natural and big out here. ... Not that Dinky-Dunk and I are so goody-goody! We're just healthy and human, that's all, and we'd never do for fiction" (119-20).

Fortunately for its fictional life, the McKail marriage is not as "healthy" as Chaddie seems to believe, and the arrival of Percival Woodhouse soon reveals that there is room enough for "the Triangle" – and jealousy, too – in Chaddie's prairie environs. Duncan's "Tragic" expression on finding Percy and his wife reading poetry by the fireplace (160), his angry retreat and slamming of the door, and Chaddie's running out after him into the cold without coat or overshoes bring the emotional tensions surrounding this triangular relationship to near histrionic proportions. And lest one love triangle and bout of jealousy is not enough to sustain interest in this narrative couple, Stringer gives Chaddie cause for concern of her own in the form of a Nordic blonde who arrives on the ranch looking for work. Alone in the shack, thinking of her husband in the fields with this other woman, Chaddie starts "wondering if Dinky-Dunk is going to fall in love with Olga" (214) and then, unable to bear her suspicions any longer, rides out stealthily to observe his behaviour. The anti-climactic resolution of this scene – Chaddie finds Duncan and Olga some two miles apart from each other – anticipates a more general anti-climax to the McKails' marital tensions: Olga and Percy, the suspect apexes of what threatens to become a love

quadrangle, eventually confess their mutual affection, marry, and move away from the McKail ranch. Thus, although it relies on the spectre of the adulterous triangle for its narrative tensions, *The Prairie Wife* culminates, as romances so often do, in a comedic assertion of domestic felicity.

Following de la Roche's portrayal of infidelity in *Possession* and adultery and bigamy in *Delight*, *Jalna* is more forward than *The Prairie Wife* in suggesting actual adultery in addition to vaguer marital suspicions and jealousies. Indeed, it alludes – more or less explicitly – to many of the sexual transgressions and conflicts that provide the subversive subtext to the *Whiteoak Chronicles* as a whole: Maurice's pre-marital infidelity to Meg, Alayne's untimely love for Renny, and Eden and Pheasant's affair. So pervasive are these sexual underpinnings that one reviewer was prompted to surmise that it was the "sex complex in triple form," along with "delineation of characters" and "meeting descriptions of nature," that earned *Jalna* the Atlantic Monthly prize ("Rural Family" 7). Yet to call *Jalna* "a pathological study of one inverted family" or, worse, to say that it is "a deliberate study of family perversion," presenting "what amounts to a quiet orgy of the unrestrained" ("Rural Family" 7), as this reviewer does, is to ignore the various narrative and psychological repressive strategies that the book and its characters employ in relation to sexual desire.

These strategies, though not entirely successful in suppressing the salacious and subversive aspects of the story (complete success would render them invisible, after all), nevertheless subordinate the text's sexual transgressions to its other, more orthodox concerns – prominent among them, the integrity of the familial estate.¹⁵ For despite the scandalous carryings-on of many members of the Whiteoak family, *Jalna* appears

throughout the narrative as a fortress of stability. For example, while the marriage and arrival at Jalna of Piers and Pheasant produce immediate furor and dissent, once Renny “lay[s] down the law” (*Jalna* 81), the family more or less accepts the couple, integrating them into their folds. Later, after the affair of Eden and Pheasant is discovered, the house plays a material part in containing the adulterous threat, as Pheasant does enforced penance in the isolation of her room, protected alike from those who would condemn her as well as those who, like Eden, would take advantage of her need for affection. Indeed, even when trouble, in the form of Renny and Alayne, comes home to roost on its front porch, Jalna remains in a sense impregnable, with Adeline’s inability to perceive this affair symbolic of the stubborn resilience of the house to that which it cannot easily subsume.

Nor is the house alone in being set off from the morally dubious aspects of the romance: the narrative regularly identifies the cause of any threat to the dynastic stability of Jalna as ‘other’ not only to the house itself, but also, perhaps surprisingly, to the Whiteoak family that seems to be at the center of the various ‘perversions.’ Culpability for the principal sexual conflict, comprising the two inter-related triangles of Eden, Alayne, and Renny on one side, and Piers, Pheasant, and Eden on the other, is subtly directed to the two outsiders in the love complex. In the case of Pheasant, the ignoble circumstances surrounding her birth relegate her to the margins of the narrative community and render her too inferior in status to be on a par with the Whiteoak clan, with its pretensions of moral superiority. With her father unwilling to extend the purview of his own status to his illegitimate daughter and with a congenital inheritance of ‘bad blood’ from her mother, Pheasant becomes an involuntary agent of discord, succumbing to Eden’s temptations when Piers fails to “sav[e] her from herself” (239).

For her part, Alayne is even more explicitly an outsider, coming from a different social position, a different ideology, a different country altogether. Even though she anticipates a warm welcome, having received Meg's congratulatory letter of invitation, Alayne travels toward Jalna "with a feeling approaching sadness" (114):

... This sea that was not a sea, this land that was not her land, this new brother [Piers] with the unfriendly blue eyes and the sulky mouth, she must get used to them all. They were to be hers. Ruth—"amid the alien corn." (114)

Ironically, her apprehension here reveals the depths of Alayne's incompatibility with the Whiteoak way of life, for the land, the brother – these were never "to be hers." Rather, she was to become one of theirs, one of them, and her inability to do so, her failure to appreciate their homogenizing impulse and the tenacity with which they cling to each other and their way of life, means that she always remains on the outside, where she falls easy prey to the family's surveillance. Thus, Finch, the uncles, and later Meg as well all perceive the shift in Alayne's affection from one brother to another that precedes Eden's seduction of Pheasant. Yet while so observant of Alayne, none seems to notice that Eden had, in fact, been the first to pull back, retreating every morning to the summerhouse after a honeymoon at Jalna more easily measured in days than in weeks.¹⁶ By suggesting that Eden's affair with Pheasant was a retaliatory one, and by obscuring the possibility that the shift in Alayne's affections had itself been reactionary, the narrative effectively inculcates Alayne for her husband's infidelity, thereby characterizing the source of this sexual complex as foreign to the Whiteoak family and its ancestral home.

The narrative further sequesters Jalna and the Whiteoak family from the adulterous affair by constructing two of the Whiteoaks who are most involved in the affair – Eden,

through his philandering, and Finch, through his discovery of it – as atypical Whiteoaks who inherit their predominant propensities from their mother rather than from the father they share with Renny and Meg. Eden’s poetic sensibility, setting him apart from his boisterous brothers and tyrannical Grandmother, is repeatedly derided by Piers and, more importantly, by Renny, “Chieftain” and principal representative of Jalna (81). For his part, Finch is, in many respects, even more anomalous than Eden, with his nervous sensibility bringing him to the brink of hilarity at the most inopportune times and with his failure – unique among his brothers – to excel at any sport or subject translating into such a poverty of currency in the Whiteoak economy that not even Wakefield, his much younger brother, has any respect for him at all. Moreover, despite the temporary prominence that the principal sexual conflict affords them, both Eden and Finch return promptly to the narrative margins, with Eden literally disappearing from Jalna and with Finch facing metaphoric disappearance in the departure of the only person who sees and understands him: Alayne, herself an outsider.

In addition to demonstrating the narrative tendency to characterize threats to Jalna’s stability as originating from ‘outside’ the Whiteoak ethic, Finch’s involvement in the romance’s sexual crisis illustrates a stylistic repression of subversive matter. The fragmented fluster and imagistic nature of his reaction on finding his brother and sister-in-law in the woods, for example, provides a syntactical correlative to Finch’s internal upset:¹⁷

Oh, they were wicked! He could have rushed in on them in his rage, and slain them. It would have been right and just. They had betrayed Piers, his beloved brother, his hero! In imagination he crushed in on them through the hazel bushes, trampling the ferns, and struck them again and again till they

screamed for pity; but he had no pity; he beat them down as they clung about his knees till their blood soaked the greensward and the glade reverberated with their cries—— (258)

The vivid, even sadistic, vengeance fantasy that the discovery of his closest brother's betrayal inspires in Finch suggests his difficulty in internalizing the trauma of this familial dysfunction, which, for Finch, doubles as an epistemological crisis, for although it is in his nature to be perceptive and to investigate peculiarities in his environment, he is ill-fitted for the revelations his investigations bring about. Unable to redress the 'injustice' he finds, he retreats to a surreal and violent mental space where he can right the wrongs he uncovers. Existing solely in the realm of the imaginary, however, Finch's retributive actions fail to produce the catharsis he requires, leaving him "dazed" in a state of complete impotence (258). Yet in terms of the narrative's account of the lovers, Finch's presence does result in a curtailing of their intercourse, interrupting their abandon by raising their awareness of their vulnerability to discovery. Moreover, his introduction into the scene deflects attention away from the transgressive lovers and refocuses it, through his righteous indignation, on notions of propriety and morality.

The long dash that concludes the description of Finch's vengeance fantasy, indicating the break in his thought and his transition into a temporary mental catatonia, marks another manifestation of *Jalna's* stylistic repressions. Participating in a tradition extending as far back as Sarah Fielding, Eliza Fenwick, and Jane Austen, de la Roche uses the dash at this moment of textual crisis as a typographical representation of that which cannot be articulated verbally.¹⁸ Its function in this respect becomes still more manifest when Finch tries to tell Piers what has happened:

“What the devil is the matter with you?” asked Piers, coming around to him. “Have you had a fright?”

Finch caught his brother by the arm and repeated: “In the wood—making love—both of them—kissing—making love——“

“Who? Tell me whom you mean. I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Piers was impatient, yet, in spite of himself, he was excited by the boy’s wild words.

“Eden, the traitor!” cried Finch, his voice breaking into a scream. “He’s got Pheasant in the wood there—Pheasant. They’re wicked, I tell you—false as hell!”

Piers’ hand was as a vice on his arm.

“What did you see?”

“Nothing—nothing—but behind the hazel bushes I heard them whispering—kissing—oh, I know. I wasn’t born yesterday. Why did they go so far away? She wouldn’t have let him kiss her like that unless——” (259-60)

Generally indicative of Finch’s inner turmoil, the dash here more specifically represents the fragmentation of his cognitive and linguistic abilities – a fragmentation that both symbolizes and attests to his sense of the irrevocable destruction of his family’s unity. Unable to synthesize his findings into a cogent narrative, Finch’s account is consequently marked by syntactical breaks, represented by the single or short dash. The longer dash, appearing as further proof of Finch’s distress, ultimately foregrounds the text’s reticence about the moral dilemma it presents, most notably by raising the question, at the end of the

passage, of what it means for Pheasant to allow Eden to “kiss her like that” (260). In other words, the text effaces the thought content represented by Finch’s “unless——” by not specifying the extent to which Pheasant is culpable – aware and agential – in the escalation of her affair to actual adultery.

The result of these halting textual silences, in conjunction with the displacement of the adulterous threat to people and places outside the core of the Whiteoak family and its ancestral estate, is an obscuring of the motivations for and consequences of the adulterous liaison that *Jalna* presents. While the text capitalizes on its sexual conflict as the source of the moral and psychological tensions that drive the narrative, it uses both the conflict itself and the tensions it produces as an occasion for titillation rather than as an entry point into a sustained interrogation of the repercussions of infidelity. Indeed, in the brief dénouement that brings the romance to its close, Pheasant reappears in the family circle, renewed with the “wistful energy of a growing child” and an overwhelming happiness despite her sense that her joy is inappropriate (287).¹⁹ As mentioned above, Eden simply disappears, fleeing from Jalna and the upset he has helped set in motion, leaving the family free to resume some sense of normalcy by taking with him – at least in Piers’s eyes – no small part of the blame for what has happened as well as the threat of its recurrence. Finally, with Alayne’s departure imminent, whatever threat to the family unity and stability she might pose is similarly defused, with Renny’s refusal to kiss her again, his “put[ting] her from him” and joining his brothers on the other side of the fire, ultimately evincing the renewed supremacy of his commitment to his family.

The first books of both *The Prairie Stories* and the *Whiteoak Chronicles* fail, then, to confront the adulterous figures they raise, employing a range of repressive strategies and narrative twists in the process. As already suggested, however, both series return repeatedly to this marital manifestation of infidelity, revealing, as they do so, increasing persistence and courage in pushing their explorations beyond the scope of their initial considerations. In Stringer's *Prairie Stories*, the result is a gradual escalation of intensity, from the groundless suspicions of book one, to the more material threat posed by Lady Alicia Newland and Peter Ketley in *The Prairie Mother* (1920), to the full realization of the adulterous threat in the character of Alsina Teeswater in the final volume of the trilogy.

Like Alayne and Pheasant in *Jalna*, Lady Allie in *The Prairie Mother* is an outsider, notwithstanding her vaguely-defined cousinly relation to Duncan. She makes Chaddie uncomfortable from the start, the mere mention of her name in conversation inspiring feelings of suspicion and animosity in the romance's protagonist, who silently denigrates her Ladyship's status while Duncan waxes apprehensive on his loss of her fortune. Lady Allie's alienation of Chaddie by displacing her at Casa Grande and enlisting Duncan as her ranch manager, requiring his constant attendance at the large house and, by extension, his perpetual absence from the honeymoon shack where Chaddie remains; her shady past as reported by her waiting maid; and her *modus operandi*, which, according to Chaddie's ranch hand, is akin to behaviour that had got women "“ridden out o' Dawson City on a rail more times than once”" (224) all mark her as different from – and more morally suspect than – the kind of woman normally encountered on the Prairies.

The fundamental difference between Lady Allie and Chaddie in particular is most pronounced in the way each capitalizes on what agency she commands in her romantic life.

While Duncan forms the apex of the principal love triangle, bringing Lady Allie and Chaddie into unhappy proximity as rivals for his attention, each of these women is herself the apex of a secondary triangle – a triangle in which Duncan represents merely one of the possibilities the women could choose to pursue. Despite Lady Allie’s insinuations to the contrary, Chaddie never loses sight of her husband, evading Peter Ketley’s romantic attentions even while drawing support from his friendship. When his declaration of love brings matters to a crisis, she rejects his proposals and insists he relinquish any hope he might have of changing her mind: “‘It’s no use,’” she tells him; “‘as I told you before, I’m one of those neck-or-nothing women, one of those single-track women, who can’t have their tides of traffic going two ways at once’” (242-3). Lady Allie, on the other hand, chooses her alternate lover, Colonel Ainsley-Brook in preference to Duncan. With her own personal history proof of the precariousness of the marriage state,²⁰ Lady Allie’s decision to marry the Colonel appears as a drastic response to her romantic disappointment with Duncan – one that suggests a change in her own understanding of the relation between romance and marriage. In any event, with her sending him away and Chaddie summoning him to her side, the women’s respective choices ultimately determine Duncan’s in a way that their prior and “primitive” (210) battle of words could not. Thus, in both Lady Allie’s marriage to the Colonel and in Duncan’s reconciliation with his “true blue” wife (353), *The Prairie Mother* repeats the closing gesture of *The Prairie Wife* by suggesting that domestic happiness follows from marital fidelity.

In contrast to the comedic frame of the first two books in the trilogy, the final volume, *The Prairie Child* (1922), opens with Chaddie’s discovery of Duncan’s infidelity and ends with the dissolution of the McKail marriage. The adulterous other in this volume,

Alsina Teeswater, leaves Casa Grande after Chaddie finds her and Duncan “with their arms about each other” (4), but unlike the removal of Peter Ketley and Lady Allie in *The Prairie Mother*, or Olga and Percy in *The Prairie Wife*, Alsina’s retreat from the scene does not engender a restoration of familial harmony. Rather, as the title of this last volume suggests, the children – and especially “Dinkie” – take center stage in a play on Chaddie’s affections that leaves Duncan feeling jealous of his eldest son and excluded from the circle of family intimacy. Though both hover on the margins of the McKail family, neither Gershom Binks, the man who replaces Alsina as community teacher, nor Peter Ketley, who corresponds with the family before secretly purchasing and returning to Alabama Ranch, produces the sustained drain on Duncan’s authority and security that his own son effects.

Given Chaddie’s early observation that “you can’t burn the prairie over twice in the same season” (*PC* 4), coupled with the family history that had seen both Chaddie and Duncan overcome external threats to their marriage in the past, Duncan’s sense here that his hold on Chaddie has become subordinate to that of their children assumes especial prominence as a likely cause for the marital disintegration the book describes.²¹ Whereas in *The Prairie Wife* Chaddie fetches Duncan from his solitary smoking in the stable, insisting that “no baby is ever going to come between you and me” (268), in *The Prairie Child*, Chaddie begrudgingly admits that her children have done exactly that, to the detriment of her marriage:

I suppose I *have* given most of my time and attention to my children. And it’s as perilous, I suppose, to give your heart to a man and then take it even partly away again as it is to give a trellis to a rose-bush and then expect it to stand alone. (*PC* 14)

With her metaphor missing the gravity of her actual situation, Chaddie's qualified acceptance of responsibility here joins with Duncan's frustration at being reduced to "a retriever for a *crèche*" (*PC* 19) to create textual and readerly sympathy for Duncan, whom, as Victor Lauriston puts it, "though we can't quite like..., we cannot bring ourselves entirely to blame" (151).

Nor can we bring ourselves entirely to blame Alsina Teeswater. Even more so than Duncan, this 'other woman' garners textual sympathy, which is no small feat given that *The Prairie Child*, like the earlier volumes, employs first-person narration, with Chaddie being both seer and scribe. Yet despite her reasons for resenting Alsina, Chaddie concedes from the start that the young teacher had not "been merely playing with fire" and that her obvious attachment to Duncan was "almost dignifying" in its transparency (*PC* 4). Similarly, when Alsina resurfaces at the end of the book, asking Chaddie rather audaciously whether she will step aside and allow the divorce suit to proceed unopposed, Chaddie sees in her rival "an air of honesty" and a genuine desire to explain "both her predicament and her motives" (353). Her sensitivity to the other woman's situation leaves Chaddie feeling an odd sense of commiseration for the woman who, by her own admission, is in her relation to Duncan as powerless as Chaddie herself and who, Chaddie remembers, "might some day sit eating her pot of honey on a grave" (354). With narrative sympathies divided between Chaddie, Duncan, and Alsina, *The Prairie Child* would seem to respond to one of Chaddie's early criticisms regarding characterization in popular fiction; namely, that it typically puts people "so strictly into two classes, the good and the bad" (*PM* 119). While *The Prairie Stories* trilogy does not confound such distinctions altogether, it does acknowledge the moral ambiguities and complexities of diurnal domestic life.

It is the presence of such extenuating circumstances in the *Prairie Stories* that complicates and nuances Stringer's treatment of adultery in ways that see the trilogy move beyond the scope of individual fictional studies of the subject dating from the period, such as *Wild Youth* or *The New World*. In the process, the trilogy addresses as well the other principal shortcoming of contemporary fiction as Chaddie perceives it – its oversimplification of 'life':

How different is life from what the fictioneers would paint it! How hopelessly mixed-up and macaronic, how undignified in what ought to be its big moments and how pompous in so many of its pettinesses!

I told my husband to-day that Poppsy [their daughter] and I were going back to Casa Grande. And that, surely, ought to have been the Big Moment in the career of an unloved invertebrate. But the situation declined to take off, as the airmen say.

“I guess that means it's about time we got unscrambled,” the man I had once married and lived with quietly remarked. (PC 364)

Notwithstanding her repeated disavowal of a relation between life and literature, Chaddie ultimately has a hard time accepting that “modern life never quite lives up to its fiction” (PC 7), for she long nurtures the wish “to live with [Duncan] like a second ‘Suzanne de Sirmont’ in Daudet's *Happiness*” (PC 2) and when she finds she cannot, she is perplexed and disappointed by the banality of her failure.

Her disappointment in this respect foregrounds the disjunction between the stories she would have liked her life to imitate and the manner in which it actually unfolds. That her final confrontation with Duncan should end like “The Hollow Men,” “Not with a bang

but a whimper” (Eliot 99), is almost as difficult for Chaddie to accept as the actual breach it signals – not because she is flighty and histrionic at the end of the trilogy, but because, after all the upset and outrage of less consequential moments in their marriage, the quiet acquiescence and passive indifference that characterize this last meeting make its very finality elusive, with the result being that Chaddie is left without the sense of closure she thinks she requires. In other words, Chaddie here suggests that fiction misleads with its structure of ‘beginning, middle, and end’ insofar as it implies that endings are possible and necessary, for in the narrative ‘reality’ represented by her life, she cannot realize an ending, finding herself unable to react “like the outraged wife of screen and story, walk[ing] promptly out of the door and slam[ming] it epochally shut after [her]” (PC 6). Despite what contemporary fictions may have taught her to expect, Chaddie discovers that there is not always a door to slam shut and that, even if there is, one does not always have the strength (or the authority) necessary to slam it. And yet life nevertheless ebbs and flows, with one epoch leading into another even when the transition between them is not signalled by such temporal markers as the figurative shutting of a door. The ending of *The Prairie Child* speaks to this fluidity, its ambiguity and comparative open-endedness contrasting with the comedic conclusions of the first two volumes of the *Prairie Stories*. Not fully tragic, the final image of Chaddie “waiting” – for her divorce to go through, for Peter to leave and return, for Dinkie to mature and realize his potential – is nevertheless a poignant reminder that the end of a romance is not the end of a life, nor even, perhaps, the end of the story. Thus, while elsewhere reinforcing the relation between domestic and marital happiness, Stringer’s trilogy in this respect anticipates later novels such as Sinclair Ross’s *As for Me and My House* and Margaret Laurence’s *The Diviners*, which take the narrative

beyond the point of infidelity, disillusionment, and, at least in the latter instance, marital dissolution.

Whereas the *Prairie Stories* begin with petty suspicions that increase in intensity and degree throughout the series, culminating in the actual adultery that brings the trilogy and the McKail marriage to their close, in the affair of Eden and Pheasant (married both), the first volume of the *Whiteoak Chronicles* presents a paradigm of actual adultery that subsequent books amplify and explicate. The double nature of this paradigm means that de la Roche is able to trace different trajectories from the same initial transgression, thereby suggesting more explicitly than Stringer that neither the marriage nor the real story need end with the adulterous act. More broadly, by taking an instance of actual adultery as an initiatory premise, de la Roche has time and space to move beyond the underlying moral and social concerns that mark Stringer's trilogy. She is, as a result, able to undertake a more rigorous exploration of the psychological implications of marital infidelity, to realize more fully than her predecessor the thematic and stylistic possibilities that such psychological subtleties can bring to an extended work of fiction, and to consider more explicitly than Stringer the issue of moral responsibility.

Of the five succeeding volumes in the *Whiteoak Chronicles*, three revisit the Eden-Pheasant affair at length,²² illustrating in the process how the same act of infidelity can engender diverse responses and consequences. Reconciliation is one possibility, and through her study of this line of action in Piers and Pheasant's relationship, de la Roche suggests that, while difficult to tread, this avenue is nevertheless a fruitful one to follow. Although he brings Pheasant back to Jalna the night Finch discovers her with Eden, Piers

struggles for a long time with a memory of his wife's adultery and brother's betrayal that is at once hauntingly unreal and indelibly vivid:

... Why was it that at times like these [when Piers is lying with his wife on a calm and peaceful night] Eden's face should come out of the darkness to trouble him? First as a pale disturbing reflection on the sea of his content, like the reflection of a stormy moon. Then clear and brilliant, wearing his strange ironic smile, the blank look in his eyes, as though he never quite clearly knew why he did things. Piers shut his own eyes more tightly. He clenched his teeth and pressed his forehead against Pheasant's shoulder, trying not to think, trying not to see Eden's face with its mocking smile.

He tried to draw comfort from her nearness and warmth. She was his! That awful night when Finch had discovered the two in the wood together was a dream, a nightmare. He would not let the dreadful thought of it into his mind. But the thought came like a slinking beast, and Piers's mouth was suddenly drawn to one side in a grimace of pain. Pheasant must have felt his unease, for she turned to him and put an arm about his head, drawing it against her breath. (*WJ* 50-51)

With no form of redress available to him, having forgiven his wife and being unable to enact vengeance on his absent brother, Piers involuntarily and repeatedly relives the trauma of their combined infidelity. Characteristic of obsessive thought patterns, his attempt to bar "the dreadful thought" from his mind only leads to its escalation, as Piers moves from an imagistic fixation on "Eden's face with its mocking smile" to other more disturbing mental pictures – in this instance, those of Eden and Pheasant's coition.²³ That from his

perspective these latter visions are purely fictitious renders them no more volitional nor any less damaging. Indeed, as de la Roche foregrounds with impressive psychological accuracy, Piers's mental distraction here culminates in physical distress, thus attesting to the depth of his psychic wound.

Pheasant is similarly haunted by her adultery. Years later, a conversation with Aunt Augusta about marital bliss triggers a memory of Eden that follows the same pattern as the bed-time panics Piers suffers in the immediate aftermath of the affair. Beginning as an indistinct apparition, "shadowy, like a figure in a dream" that intrudes on her happiness, the image of Eden that Pheasant carries solidifies around his "veiled, half-sad smile" (*MJ* 26) just as Piers's vision moves from "a pale disturbing reflection on the sea of his content" to the "clear and brilliant" image of "[Eden's] strange ironic smile" (*WJ* 51). The thought of that peculiar smile induces in Pheasant a body memory – "the touch of his hands" now "branded on her soul" (*MJ* 26) – just as it inspires in Piers imaginary visions of the consummation of his betrayal. Finally, the recollection of that past contact generates in Pheasant a physical reaction – a shudder signifying unease sufficiently intense to inspire an imaginative murdering of her seducer and a hastened return to the safety offered by her husband and children – just as knowledge of that contact results in physical pain for Piers and the need to turn to his wife, who draws him closer toward herself. That Pheasant should still experience this thought cycle some seven years after the affair suggests the extent and duration of her suffering, and the passage's culmination in her vehement wish that Eden remain away forever gestures toward the complexity of her retrospective understanding of her infidelity: in addition to accepting her guilt for having "almost wrecked her life with Piers" (*MJ* 26), Pheasant comes to accept that, rather than

representing a coming together of equals, her adulterous affair had signaled manipulation and exploitation insofar as Eden had taken advantage of her especial vulnerability to sexual attention, represented elsewhere in the series by references to her bad blood.

While acknowledging the difficulty Piers and Pheasant face in reconciling themselves to the affair, the *Whiteoak Chronicles* nevertheless insist that reconciliation between spouses is a viable option, even in the wake of an adulterous affair. In doing so, they implicitly provide practical advice to facilitate the rebuilding of marital stability by suggesting the usefulness of subordinating thoughts of the past affair to the more immediate exigencies of domestic relations. For example, after returning “with ... greater ardour” to her familial role (*MJ* 27), Pheasant refocuses her attention on her husband and her life with him and demonstrates new confidence and cognizance of the sexual dynamics around her,²⁴ suggesting that her affair has made her more wary and suspicious and consequently less susceptible to the seductive intentions of others. From an innocent child, she matures into a competent wife and mother, evincing a balance between passionate and maternal love that neither Alayne nor Clara Lebraux manages to strike, with “passion dominat[ing] maternity” in the former and “sexual love [being] overshadowed by maternal” in the latter (*WH* 104). The fact that Pheasant’s relationship is the most successful of the three suggests that this balance is an integral part of domestic contentment and thereby produces a comparatively realistic contrast to the extreme passions that typically characterize relationships in the romance genre.

For his part, Piers holds Eden solely responsible for the affair, showing a willingness even to aggravate the nature of his brother’s offense insofar as he concerns himself less than the rest of the family with the question of whether Alayne had driven

Eden away by her blatant attachment to Renny. Ironically, Piers's animosity and hardness toward Eden facilitate his forgiveness and acceptance of Pheasant, and whether the former causes or results from the latter, Piers's decision to foster his relationship with his wife in preference to that with his brother marks him as unique within the Whiteoak clan. His subsequent decision to move his family out of the ancestral home, first renting and then purchasing the neighbouring Lacey cottage, reinforces his singular commitment to his wife and children, indicating the extent to which he has diverted his attention away from the maintenance of inherited familial relationships toward the fostering of present and future ones of his own making. Given that Piers and Pheasant's marriage is the most companionate and stable relationship the *Whiteoak Chronicles* present, these gestures on Piers's part would seem to suggest that de la Roche had a more realistic and normative understanding of familial relations than critics traditionally have acknowledged.²⁵ Couched as it is in a context of unconventional intimacies and peculiar sleeping arrangements, Piers and Pheasant's marriage is, after the affair with Eden, conventional in both its fidelity and integrity, and exemplary in its balance of conjugal and parental love.

The post-adultery success of Piers and Pheasant's marriage reflects a contemporary conservatism that saw forgiveness and abnegation – even in the wake of adultery – as the price of protecting the stability of the Canadian marriage institution from the destructive possibilities of divorce.²⁶ Alayne's marriage to Renny, predicated on her prior separation from Eden, thus provides the correlative to the marital reconciliation Piers and Pheasant achieve. Emerging as it does from the ashes of Eden's affair with Pheasant, Alayne's second marriage never manages to rise above the confusion, hurt, and betrayal that issue from Eden's infidelity. Its contrast to the marriage of Piers and Pheasant in this respect

construes the trajectory of divorce and remarriage as less satisfactory than that of reconciliation – a point the juxtaposition of Piers and Renny makes still more evident. The far less supportive husband of the two, Renny, by justifying Eden's infidelity and tormenting Alayne by blaming her for it, conveniently detracts attention away from the fact that his early passion for her had been as inappropriate as hers for him. In the process, he is able – albeit subconsciously – to assuage his guilt by vindicating himself along with the brother he has wronged and to mask his impropriety behind the moral confusion and uncertainty that arise from Alayne's on-going negotiations of the space between having, as she intuits, been wronged by Eden and having, as Renny insists is the case, done wrong by him.

Ironically, the *Whiteoak Chronicles* collectively exculpate Alayne through Renny's self-serving and hypocritical condemnation of her, setting the responsibility for the sexual disorder at Jalna squarely on his shoulders. Although Alayne would willingly move beyond Eden's affair as Piers and Pheasant do, Renny's repeated efforts to engage her in conversations about her ex-husband create an overlap between her two marriages that allows the negative patterns of the one to carry over into the other. The repetition of destructive male infidelity (in Renny's affair with Clara Lebraux) and excessive female contrition (in Alayne's willingness to excuse her husband and condemn herself) does not, of course, replicate exactly the initial precedent. Rather, factors such as the passion that characterizes the second marriage and the unwillingness Renny displays to relinquish control over his wife mean that the repetition here is effectively revision, with the recurrence of these patterns marking an escalation in emotional upset and a widening of the psychological schism that emerges between the spouses. When compared with Piers and

Pheasant's ultimate liberation from the past, the intensification of the initial adulterous dynamics in Renny and Alayne's marriage supports the series' underlying conservatism regarding marital stability while at the same time broaching a neo-feminist critique of the misuse of male power.

In the final book of the *Whiteoak Chronicles*, the descriptions of Alayne's obsessive thinking delineate even more explicitly the inter-relation of domestic discord, psychological disorder, and improper masculine agency implicit elsewhere in the series. Similar to Piers's in kind if not in degree and consequently impossible to dismiss as a peculiarly feminine form of neuroses, Alayne's fixations originate in and are exacerbated by Renny's betrayal of her trust and manipulation of her conscience. Most immediately, they derive from his affair with the widow Lebraux, and in their first manifestation, appropriately center on the adulterous relation, with Alayne thinking for "hours ... of nothing but the fact that Clara ... had lain in his arms, as she herself had lain" (*WH* 42). When her first obsessive episode escalates into auditory hallucinations, Alayne tries "With all the strength in her" to banish the 'hateful' thoughts from her mind. Instead of conquering them, however, she succeeds only in displacing them, as thoughts about her first marriage and Eden's infidelity stand in for those concerning her second experience of a husband's adultery. Her repeated rehearsal of Renny's claim that, at the time of Eden's affair, she had been "'far more provocative to [him] ... than Clara Lebraux has ever been'" (*WH* 43) reinforces her initial negative identification with Clara as a surrogate who had lain with Renny in her stead. Later, when thinking about her unborn child, she imaginatively identifies with Minny Ware, the woman with whom Eden runs away, "pictur[ing] herself as dying" delivering a daughter who, like Minny's, would arrive at Jalna motherless (*WH* 214). Culminating in her metaphoric self-

annihilation, these peculiar sympathies for her husbands' extra-marital lovers trigger in Alayne an identity crisis that suggests how fully Renny's constant pricking of her conscience has confounded her moral principles and undone her sense of self. More generally, arising after her divorce and remarriage, they suggest a subconscious anxiety in Alayne regarding the legitimacy of her second marriage – a suspicion, perhaps, that her position in relation to Renny is not so unlike that of Clara Lebraux or that of Minny with Eden. By reinscribing the primacy of first marriages, such a suspicion on Alayne's part subtly reinforces the preference for reconciliation first suggested in the series through Piers and Pheasant's relationship.

In the instance of Alayne and Renny, however, the *Whiteoak Chronicles* are more attuned to such power dynamics as might complicate attempts at reconciliation. Thus, in addition to confounding her own epistemology, Renny's continual chastising of Alayne's past conduct inspires in his wife a double sense of guilt – not only for driving Eden away by her attention to Renny but also for driving Renny away by refusing to relinquish control of her modest savings. Ultimately, her contrition makes their reconciliation possible, but it is a reunion notably different from that of Piers and Pheasant. Whereas the latter results in an egalitarian balance of power and division of labour, the former marks a return to a dynamic of male dominance, with Renny still wielding undue power and influence over his wife, likely because his reunion with Alayne is predicated on her disproportionate sense of guilt regarding his affair. Insofar as Renny's avoidance of responsibility in this respect imitates his unaccountability for the circumstances involving their neo-adulterous relationship when Alayne was with Eden, there is little reason to expect the second stage of the marriage to be any more ordered or mutually satisfactory than the first stage had been. This poor

prognosis reinforces still further the *Whiteoak Chronicles* preference for the post-adultery trajectory followed by Piers and Pheasant while raising the additional issue of male culpability.

In the larger context of the series as a whole, Renny's mistreatment of Alayne's sensitivity functions as an extreme manifestation of the pattern of exploitive masculinity de la Roche's men repeatedly demonstrate: Eden, in his treatment of Alayne and Minny; Renny, in his treatment of Lulu (in *Young Renny*), Clara, and Alayne; Maurice, in his early treatment of Meg; Finch, in his treatment of Sarah Court; and to a lesser extent, de la Roche suggests, Piers, in his treatment of Pheasant (*FF* 142). Typically resulting in domestic discord and regularly involving some form of sexual betrayal or exploitation (often one that hypocritically juxtaposes male infidelity with [often paranoid] male jealousy), male misuse of power in the *Whiteoak Chronicles* reflects and supports concerns of female moral reformers who, in the opening decades of the twentieth century, inculcated "males ... as the main culprits of sexual disorder" and agitated for "a single standard of sexual morality" to protect the integrity of the institution of marriage in Canada (Valverde 30). Thus, de la Roche would seem to expand on the critical commentary of adultery Stringer provides in the *Prairie Stories*, stressing more rigorously than her male predecessor the particular culpability of men in domestic disorder in general and adultery in particular.

Despite its roots in the romance genre, de la Roche's series reflects the correlation between social context and textual suggestion – if not representation – that was present, in more or less explicit forms, in several English-Canadian romances dating from this period. Its

stylistic suppressions and narrative gaps, which evince the tension between interrogating and repressing unconventional manifestations of sexual desire (a tension also present in the *Prairie Stories* as well as many discrete romances by writers such as Gilbert, Atkin, and Stead), illustrate the representational dilemma that was central to the realism debate: in order to critique a particular kind of behaviour, it is necessary first to create a discursive space for its textual representation. This paradox, also present in the context of social purity movements, is, as Michel Foucault suggests, characteristic of all strategies of social repression. In their illustration of this sociological irony, and because of their contemporary popularity, the English-Canadian romances discussed here serve as apposite case studies of contemporary social mores, not only describing extant views, but also anticipating, and in some cases influencing, subsequent shifts in public sentiment.²⁷

In a more specifically literary context, their particular focus on the sexual problematic of infidelity and their various strategies for subtly conjuring without fully engaging the dynamics of adulterous affairs reflect the tentative interrogations of such relationships in roughly contemporary realist fictions as well as gesturing more remotely toward the sustained and explicit considerations that would later occur in such *bona fide* adultery novels as Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*. Inasmuch as they do so, they merit a place of considerable importance in twentieth-century English-Canadian literary history notwithstanding – indeed precisely because of – their status as popular literature.

Notes

¹ See *Realism and Romanticism in Fiction*, edited by Eugene Current-García and Walton R. Patrick, for an overview of the international debate.

In addition to being a later arrival on the cultural scene in Canada than elsewhere, the realism debate played out somewhat differently here: Canadians were less willing than their international counterparts to relinquish their affinity for romance. Indeed, not even as prominent a Canadian realist as Sara Jeannette Duncan was willing to abjure romance altogether, with trace elements of it appearing in works as different from each other as her “A Mother in India” (1903) is from *The Imperialist* (1904). While the cultural climate of English Canada changed enough in the first two decades of the twentieth century to make arguments against realism necessary by 1920, a residual allegiance to romance appears in as late and prominent a work as Northrop Frye’s *The Secular Scripture*.

² I do not mean to say here that McClung uses romance unselfconsciously, and, indeed, the earlier reference to her parodic playfulness gestures to the ways McClung interrogates the conventions she employs. At the same time, however, I would not go as far as to say, as Misao Dean does, that “McClung’s novels assume conventional language, as well as the popular genre of ‘domestic family fiction,’ as artificial limitations to be broken and discarded in the service of asserting the real. In ... narrative strategy..., McClung’s fiction signifies reality as difference by evoking the conventions of a traditional genre in order to subvert and undermine them” (84). I would contend, rather, that McClung’s sense of the ‘real’ is much more closely connected to her sense of ‘romance’ in particular and literature in general than Dean suggests and that she evokes convention sometimes to subvert it, but sometimes to exploit its instructive value, and for a panoply of other reasons besides.

³ Though seeming to confound the distinctions between romance and realism that marked the realism debate earlier in the century, Frye’s formulation in this respect actually clarifies one of its most contentious points: realist texts purported to reflect the ‘real’ world more accurately than romances, but critics interpreted their dark focus and preoccupation with psychological minutiae as being unrepresentative of how people were perceiving the world in addition to being morally compromising.

⁴ The increased agency in heroines in this period is also demonstrated by a more striking reversal: in such romances as Robert J. C. Stead’s *The Cow Puncher* (1918) and *Neighbours* and Gilbert Parker’s *The Money Master* (1915), female principles take over the conventional male role in significant ways— twice by saving their male counterparts from the threat of drowning and once by jacking up a car to replace a flat tire when the male principle is unable to come to grips with the mechanics of the task.

⁵ The two lovers take a boat ride together in the moonlight, after which, “At the end of the lake on a sandy bay, Dante ground[s] his canoe” (Atkin 184).

⁶ He had also done so, for example, in *The Cow Puncher*, a novel that, although more recently dismissed by Thomas Saunders as having “no lasting quality ... and little of genuine merit” (vi), nevertheless appealed widely to contemporary audiences, ranking ninth on Vipond’s best-seller index for 1918.

⁷ For example, Parker’s sympathetic representation of the affair of Louise Mazarine and Orlando Guise in *Wild Youth* had been anticipated by various manifestations of such affairs in, as already noted, his immensely popular *The Right of Way*, and then less evasively in his similarly successful *A Ladder of Swords* (1904) and *The Money Master*. While I would not venture to chart a trajectory of increasing sensitivity to marital discord and correlative sympathy for extramarital affairs in Parker’s *oeuvre* as a whole, certainly the later works among this shortlist gesture toward greater moral complexity than the earlier ones.

⁸ ‘*Prairie Stories*’ is meant to connote the three Prairie Family romances that Stringer published from 1915 to 1922, which were subsequently collected and published as a one-volume trilogy. Although the following discussion often refers to the trilogy as a whole, citations will come from the individual books: *The Prairie Wife* (1915), *The Prairie Mother* (1920), and *The Prairie Child* (1922). By ‘*Whiteoak Chronicles*’ I mean the first six books of the *Jalna* series (*Jalna*, *Whiteoaks of Jalna*, *Finch’s Fortune*, *The Master of Jalna*, *Young Renny*, and *Whiteoak Harvest*), which were collected and published as one volume, entitled *Whiteoak Chronicles*, in 1940. Again, citations will reference the specific books from which they are drawn.

I should mention at this point that critics and publishers vary in how they discuss the Whiteoak saga, with some using the narrative chronology and with others using the order in which the texts were actually published. I follow the latter practice, which means I treat *Jalna* as the first volume in the series even though, for example, *Young Renny* predates it in narrative time, because one of my interests here is the way de la Roche as a writer revisits her early concerns in subsequent books.

⁹ See, for example, Misao Dean’s *Practising Femininity* and Jane Tompkins’s *Sensational Designs*.

¹⁰ See, for example, Ronald Hambleton’s *Mazo de la Roche of Jalna* (1966); Dorothy Livesay’s “Getting It Straight” (1973); Douglas Daymond’s “Whiteoak Chronicles” (1975); Dennis Duffy’s “Mazo de la Roche” (1982); Sherry Klein’s “The Damnable Plot” (1988); Joan Givner’s *Mazo de la Roche* (1989); Daniel Bratton’s “The Wildman in the Whiteoaks” (1996); and Ruth Panofsky’s “At Odds” (2000).

Colin Hill, in contrast, stands virtually alone in calling for a similar reappraisal of Stringer’s work, with those who have not forgotten *The Prairie Stories* altogether evidently accepting John Moss’s condemnation of their “authorial ineptitude” (*Reader’s* 341). (Victor Lauriston’s 1941 biography and anthology, *Arthur Stringer*, is too full of platitude to count as a genuine call for reappraisal.)

¹¹ The two American firms were The Bobbs-Merrill Company and New York’s A. L. Burt. While London’s Hodder & Stoughton did not immediately publish their own edition of *The Prairie Wife* for English audiences, they did publish the second book, *The Prairie Mother*, the same year as the North American editions were released. Moreover, following the success of that second novel, they issued their own octavo edition of *The Prairie Wife* in 1921.

¹² The award was decided on the basis of manuscripts, not books already in print, and included a \$10,000 prize, serial publication of the winning manuscript in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and then publication as a separate volume once the serialization was complete.

¹³ See, for example, “A Canadian Prize Winner,” *Saturday Night* (April 16, 1927), 8; and Gertrude Pringle’s “World Fame to Canadian Author” (*The Canadian Magazine* 67.5 [May 1927], 19 and 32). While the more lengthy article by far, Pringle’s fails to mention *Possession* in its discussion of de la Roche’s prior works – a remarkable oversight given that Pringle purportedly reports information garnered in interviews with de la Roche herself.

¹⁴ “In a country of contrasts,” the reviewer asks, “what is ‘typically Canadian’? – ‘Viking Heart’? ‘The Kingdom of the Sun’? ‘The Seats of the Mighty’? ‘Salt Seas and Sailormen’? or ‘Settlers of the Marsh’?” (“English Whiteoaks” 9).

¹⁵ I am not alone in seeing *Jalna* itself as a key figure in the *Chronicles*. Dennis Duffy reports that Edward Weeks, de la Roche’s first editor at Atlantic, Little, Brown, claimed with some authority that “*Jalna* itself was the hero of the initial novel” (83).

¹⁶ While latent from the first book, Alayne’s culpability in Eden’s affair becomes more apparent as the series unfolds, particularly in *Whiteoaks of Jalna* and, especially, in *Whiteoak Harvest*. By the time of the latter

volume, Alayne herself seems to have forgotten that Eden had pulled away first, willingly accepting the blame the rest of the family – and Renny especially – places on her shoulders.

¹⁷ As we shall see, de la Roche returns to and refines this technique in *Whiteoak Harvest*, where she uses it to convey similar distress in Alayne and Renny in the aftermath of the latter's affair with Clara Lebraux.

¹⁸ See my "Editing Jane," co-authored with Juliet McMaster and Kirsten MacLeod, for a synopsis of use of the dash in the late eighteenth century.

¹⁹ On her return to the family, Pheasant is, ironically, accepted more fully than she had been on her first arrival, as witnessed by the Grandmother's acceptance of her kiss, in the closing lines of the book, as "good" and generative of a new vitality (290).

²⁰ Her waiting maid tells Chaddie that Lady Allie had no choice in her relocation to Canada: "'she'd 'a' been co-respondent in the Allerby and Crewe-Buller divorce case if she's stayed where the law could have laid a hand on her'" (PM 214-5).

²¹ In a contemporary review, the *Springfield Republican* foregrounded the "distasteful" triangle that emerges around the mother-son relation, claiming the "conventional" triangle that the romance depicts is, in comparison, "negligible" (7).

²² Of the two that do not, one is set abroad, focusing on Finch's sojourn in England (*Finch's Fortunes*) and the other, *Young Renny*, precedes the affair in narrative time.

²³ See Daniel M. Wegner's influential study *White Bears and Other Unwanted Thoughts* for a particularly succinct and readable psychological account of obsessive thought patterns.

²⁴ In *Whiteoak Harvest*, for example, Pheasant is quick to recognize the nature of Renny's relationship with Clara Lebraux, yet she refuses to be troubled by her knowledge. The threat that her brother-in-law's wandering could pose to the familial stability serves largely to refocus Pheasant on Piers and to renew yet again her admiration of and devotion to him.

²⁵ Joan Givner, for example, interprets the Jalna novels as proof that de la Roche "had very little understanding of heterosexual relationships or of sexual habits between married couples" (88).

²⁶ See, for example, Poppet Smith's "Are Broken Marriages Cost Paid for Peace-at-any-price Policy?" which argues the importance of forgiveness and compromise in successful marriages, and Ann Foster's "'Other' Man or Woman is not always the Cause of Divorce," which sees the trebling of the Canadian divorce rate between 1935 and 1945 as more disturbing than any individual instance of infidelity brought about by, in this case, the marital estrangement resulting from war.

²⁷ Givner reports that the *Jalna* novels strongly influenced the moral and ethical stance of readers, with fans responding to the peculiar (and legally suspect) relationships of various characters not with disapprobation, as de la Roche's publishers feared, but rather with letters "protesting the laws and suggesting that they be changed" (3).

2. “Sinister Forces”: The ‘Eternal Triangle’ and the Rise of Realism, 1920-1940

While the popularity of romance during the early twentieth century was in large part the result of nineteenth-century reading praxes that privileged such writers as Sir Walter Scott (Gerson, *Purer* 47), the emergence of realist texts was inextricably bound up in the realism debate, which in the 1920s was still gathering momentum.¹ Before then, romances and regional idylls so dominated the English-Canadian literary scene that critical consideration and arguments in favour of realism were either both isolated and idiosyncratic or, more commonly, simplistic and antagonistic. Thus, Sara Jeannette Duncan, foremost among early proponents of realism, reviled the tenacity with which writers clung to “the exotic of the ideal” as early as 1887, in her review of Agnes Ethelwyn Wetherald and Graeme Mercer Adam’s *An Algonquin Maiden* (83), only to be castigated after putting her realist principles into practice in *The Imperialist*.² Moreover, though ultimately conceding that Duncan was an “interesting writer” (223), some seven years after her critique of his romance, Graeme Mercer Adam retaliated by lamenting the “degeneracy” present “in the novels of certain female writers,” especially “novels of the realistic order,” which purport (but fail) to make up “for their objectionable character on the score that they are cynical and clever” (219). Despite this opening tirade against realism, the bulk of Adam’s argument is more positive, focusing on the “purer fiction” being written in the tradition of Thackeray and Scott (219). This proclivity for assessing realist texts against a romance standard

continued even into 1920s, with book reviews in *The Canadian Magazine* balancing censure of “bluntly bitter” realist works with praise for their romanticist counterparts, which, these reviews claim, “justify themselves” by providing pleasure to their readers (“Sisters” 190; “The Ridin’ Kid” 278).

Gestures toward realism in literature as opposed to criticism appeared in the opening decades of the twentieth century in works by writers such as Duncan and, in 1919, J. G. Sime, but it was not until the 1920s, that a significant number of English-Canadian writers began departing radically and repeatedly from the conventions of more traditional genres. At that time, innovative fictional texts, including Douglas Durkin’s *The Magpie* (1923), Robert J. C. Stead’s *Grain* (1926), and Raymond Knister’s *White Narcissus* (1929) emerged on the literary scene, encouraging a shift in critical attention away from romance and toward realism, with later writers, such as Frederick Philip Grove and Morley Callaghan, bringing into still greater relief the realist mode.³ This shift in focus meant that the relative (de)merits of romance took second stage to those of realism and that, as a result, new critical positions emerged showing a greater appreciation of realism, such as those articulated in Archibald MacMechan’s *Headwaters of Canadian Literature* (1924) and, especially, A. J. M. Smith’s periodical articles. Indeed, even those critics who favoured traditional genres and values began refocusing their arguments to foreground the issues of realism more clearly.

This growing body of criticism did not result in an immediate clarification of the terms of the realism debate, for the opposing factions regularly focused on different issues. As suggested in chapter one, supporters of romance typically concerned themselves with the moral repercussions of representation. Even during the 1920s, after shifting their

attention away from the didactic potential of romance, they still expressed their concern for literary morality, albeit in a newly-negative way, by denouncing the moral reprehensibility of realist works rather than by lauding the moral uplift romances could inspire. For example, in the *Canadian Bookman*, Hilda Glynn-Ward refrained from alluding to the benefits of “the strait-laced puritanism of other days” until the final paragraph of her “Plea for Purity” (64), concentrating until that point on describing realism’s harmful proclivity for “pandering to the morbidly unwholesome in human nature”; on constructing *ad hominem* attacks against “The German monomaniac, Freud,” and “such neurotic sensationalists as D. H. Lawrence and Sherwood Anderson”; and on decrying the ubiquity of the “eternal triangle,” which so confounds morality as to elevate “the Magdalene ... to a position of super-sanctity” and to caricaturize “all the dully righteous people ... as hard-hearted ogresses or sanctimonious hypocrites” (64).

Writing in 1924, Lionel Stevenson grudgingly observed that over the past few years “it has become apparent that the tradition [characterized by L.M. Montgomery and Ralph Connor] is no longer satisfactory” and that “the noteworthy new novels show a determined effort toward more serious treatment of life, and an assumption of the harshness that is loosely termed realism” (158). Although it followed Adrian MacDonald’s 1922 “English Realism to a Canadian,” which conveyed enthusiastic anticipation of the direction being taken by new writers, such as Frederick Philip Grove and poet-critic A. J. M. Smith, Stevenson did not seem to accept MacDonald’s insistence that the “aim of these newer [realist] novelists” is “the creation of a style that is unlaboured, but at the same time is vivid and strong, ... put down in simple, idiomatic, carefully-wrought English, free alike from crudities and ‘purple patches’” (234).

Offering the more thorough of these two analyses of realism in Canada, MacDonald was not able to dismiss moral and representational issues altogether. For example, he responds implicitly to such concerns by insisting that realist texts in fact avoid caricatures and present plausible, balanced character psychology: “the realists cut into the mind of an individual and reveal to us its hidden interplay of healthful and sinister forces” (235). Their works may not be all about “the beauty of the human creatures moving” within their fictional worlds, he avers, but neither are they all about “the perversity, the repulsiveness, the oddity” of the characters they present (235). Caged though it is, MacDonald’s moral accounting here is among the more explicit articulations of such views amongst proponents of realism. Francis Dickie’s response to Glynn-Ward’s “Plea for Purity,” for example, couches its concession that it is not possible to “uphold all these [sex novels] as teaching any moral” in a more fully-realized argument in defence of the *sincerity* and *originality* of the realists Glynn-Ward attacks (110).

As suggested by the writings of MacDonald and Dickie, for the proponents of realism, moral concerns remained on the periphery when they arose at all. What mattered was form and style, for it was these that distinguished realism from other forms of writing. In “Realism in Literature,” Frederick Philip Grove stresses this point even more explicitly than MacDonald when he contests the “common acceptation of the word realism” as signifying “frankness in matters of sex” (51). In arguing that “realism in this mistaken sense is a matter of the choice of subject, not of literary procedures” whereas “realism in my sense is a matter of literary procedure, not of the choice of subject” (53), he clarifies realism’s relation to style and content in a manner that clearly privileges the importance of the former. Nor was Grove the first to articulate such a position with force.⁴ In his 1928

article “Wanted—Canadian Criticism,” A. J. M. Smith deplors the resistance of his contemporaries to “The idea that any subject whatever is susceptible of artistic treatment, and that praise or blame is to be conferred after a consideration, not of its moral, but of its aesthetic harmony” (223). Smith’s “License in the Library” similarly subordinates morality, defending the ubiquity of “the ‘eternal triangle’” in literature not so much on moral grounds as on the basis of a long-standing literary tradition involving adultery that extends back through Modernist texts to nineteenth-century novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Anna Karenina*, and even to *The Bible* and beyond (229). Just as Grove uses “literary procedure” to distract from the issues of morality and sexual content (“Realism” 53), Smith invokes the respectability of tradition to obscure moral and representational issues.

Given the different focal points (morality for the romanticists, and form for the realists) and the shifting parameters of the debate, it was, perhaps, inevitable that some confusion would arise over what ‘realism’ meant and which texts fit under its rubric. As early as 1907, Gilbert Parker was attuned to these vagaries, though rather than clarifying the terms, he simply elaborated on their ambiguities:

No great and permanent work of fiction can properly or arbitrarily be labelled naturalistic, idealistic, romantic, realistic or symbolistic. Love and fighting are not necessarily romance; nor are soup-kitchens and divorce courts necessarily realism. If realism means minuteness of detail, and to be journalistic, in information, photographic in description and hopeless in finale, then “The Toilers of the Sea,” “The Cloister and the Hearth” and “A Tale of Two Cities” are deeply realistic. But if the sweep of wide and powerful imagination, the rush of large ideas, the impact of great conflicting passions,

the beauty of sacrifice ... are romanticism, then these tales are also highly romantic. (99)

Echoes of Parker's position reverberate through the 1920s, in J. D. Logan and Donald G. French's *Highways of Canadian Literature* (1924), for example. Though Logan and French acknowledge the "marked similarity of method and treatment" amongst realist texts, a confusion of terms – "It was but natural that a reaction should set in against the realistic romance with its insufficiency of motivation and its lack of fidelity to real life" (312) – confounds their already-imprecise definition of "the 'New Realism'" as a "fresh and original attitude" (312). Differences between romanticist and realist texts became increasingly apparent as the decade progressed, but distinguishing texts as being one or the other remained problematic, and, indeed, remains so to this day: even a figure such as Frederick Philip Grove, still acknowledged as being "in the forefront of those writers who demanded a greater use of realism in literature" (Fraser 298),⁵ is occasionally guilty of "melodramatic" characterization and "stilted and unnatural" dialogue (Bobak 98). E. L. Bobak's observation regarding realism is thus particularly apposite: "Realism is a slippery concept at best, and in the context of the Canadian novel of the twenties, it is especially hard to define" (95).

Given the 'slipperiness' of realism in English-Canadian letters, this chapter, which focuses on realism through the 1920s and 1930s, includes texts from various points on the continuum between romance and realism. Some, such as Martha Ostenso's *Prologue to Love* (1932) and *The Mad Carews* (1927), are arguably little more than "respectable examples of light romantic fiction" (Harding 281); others, including texts that critics traditionally label 'prairie realist,' such as Robert J. C. Stead's *Grain* and Ostenso's *Wild*

Geese (1925),⁶ occupy a more intermediary position; while others still, the works of Jessie Georgina Sime among them, come close to a polar – or pure – realism. What these texts all share – to greater and lesser extents – and what the present study strives to elucidate is a further complication of the problematics of the love triangle as described in romances by such writers as Stringer and de la Roche.

The insistence on form that realist proponents such as Grove and Smith articulated is thus in one sense particularly appropriate, for the content of such texts as *The Mad Carews*, *Grain*, and *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) is not so quantifiably different from the content of *The Prairie Wife*, *Jalna*, or *Neighbours*. Yet in focusing so exclusively on style, contemporary critics of the former texts obscured the subtle nuances and more explicit power dynamics that punctuate the content of these novels' portrayals of adulterous and familial relationships. In this sense, the inevitable participation of realist texts in the socio-sexual discourse to which literature contributes renders the realist emphasis on form somewhat suspect, as a strategy of deflecting attention away from the social and moral ramifications of the effects of form on content.

W. H. New sees past this ruse in his *History of Canadian Literature*, explaining “‘Realism’ was less a particular form than a way of restructuring social norms by challenging the accuracy of those in place” (149). Informed by New’s perspective, this chapter will argue that, despite realist writers’ widespread disavowal of sexuality’s centrality to the genre, realist texts from across the spectrum consistently launch challenges to the domestic ideal that are more explicit and vehement than those found in contemporary romances. I would suggest, moreover, that in presenting characters who deliberately and freely resist traditional social parameters, these texts demonstrate the key role agency plays

in the maintenance of effective power relations, thereby clarifying the nature of those relations rather than simply depicting their effects – principally, the assertion of a heteronormative ideal – as the romances tended to do. As an introduction to chapters three and four, which present more sustained analyses of novels by Grove, Morley Callaghan, Sinclair Ross, and Elizabeth Smart, this chapter will begin to clarify how ‘realism’ came to contribute to English-Canadian literary and social history something other than – or, more specifically, something in addition to – innovative literary techniques.

In “The Subject and Power,” Michel Foucault posits that power relations render the human, subject, as well as subjecting, or subjugating, the human. In a relationship of power, he elaborates, we find the technology that “categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him” (130). In other words, “subjection in its material instance” is “a constitution of subjects” (Foucault, “Two Lectures” 97). But a technology of power cannot completely subjugate the individual who falls under its governance, for in such a case the operative relationship would cease being one of power and would become, instead, something else; for example, a physical relationship of constraint (as in slavery) or a contest between adversaries pursuing winning strategies. In fact, individual agency is necessary not only for power to show itself, but also for it to operate, which it does by acting on the actions of others. More specifically, a power relation is predicated on the freedom of subjects to choose one action out of many possibilities, and is manifest when the subjects choose, despite their freedom, an action

congruous with the power relationship. This element of will means that a power relation inevitably contains within itself the potential for ruptures in the power nexus:

It would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination that, by definition, are means of escape. Accordingly, every intensification of extensions of power relations intended to wholly suppress these points of insubordination can only bring the exercise of power up against its outer limits. It reaches its final term either in a type of action that reduces the other to total impotence (in which case victory over the adversary replaces the exercise of power) or by a confrontation with those whom one governs and their transformation into adversaries. (Foucault, "Subject" 143)

A paradox thus emerges: while the natural progression of a power relation tends toward absolute determination of a subject's conduct, the realization of this goal would dismantle the very power it sought to assert. Power is consequently most manifest when it is most strongly contested.

In the English-Canadian realist literary canon dating from the 1920s and 30s, this paradox of power takes the place of the tension between the representation and censure of adultery that marked many contemporary romances. In this respect and others, realist texts arguably represent another manifestation of 'literature in the second degree': as a class, they implicitly – and occasionally explicitly – display the problematics of romance, often by ironizing romantic tropes. They contain, at core, the same struggles as romances – the difficulties of interpersonal relationships, the relation between humans and nature, the search for selfhood – and cast that material in a new light, one neither tinted by rose-coloured glasses nor reduced to a "crude opposition of devils and angels" (Grove,

“Realism” 70). Further, they explore the materiality of relationships regularly stereotyped in romance, such as marriage and adultery, providing in the process a less sanctimonious and righteous moral, and a more sophisticated consideration of power and its institutionalization. The repeated assertion of a heterosexual marriage ideal common in romance is thus complicated in realism by an interrogation of the nature of such ideals and the power they command.

Combining a romanticist proclivity to depict sensational topics and transgressive subjects with a realist tendency to pose challenges to social norms, the works dating from the 1920s and 30s of such writers as Douglas Durkin, Madge MacBeth, Martha Ostenso, J. G. Sime, and Robert J. C. Stead present fictional studies of the power relations at play in the family as an institution and of how those dynamics are transformed when a subject withdraws from familial dynamics by, for example, embarking on an adulterous affair. Typically, after representing such a rupture in the family’s repressive power structure, these texts hedge their critique of heteronormative marriage by stressing the specificity of the dysfunctional family – the spouses were particularly ill-suited to each other, for instance – and conclude with a movement toward another marriage, the representation of which renders the conclusions of many of these novels incongruously and naively romantic. Despite the ultimate recourse to romance to resolve the complications of the power problematic, however, these texts raise questions about the heteronormative family that their tidy conclusions never fully address.

For example, in Robert Stead’s *Dennison Grant* (1920), power appears as a prerequisite to and an inextricable part of marital relations. Of the various suitors that seek Zen Wilson’s hand in marriage, it is Frank Transley, her father’s contractor, who is

ultimately victorious. Unlike Linder and Grant, who are too gentle and self-effacing to command authority, and unlike Drazk, whose ridiculous proposals and boisterous self-promotion hyperbolize rather than reflect confidence and power, Transley is “a master of men and of circumstances” (Stead, *Dennison* 1). His ability to act on the actions of others – which, according to Foucault, is the very definition of power – attracts the admiration of Zen’s father, Y.D, who sees in Transley’s domination over other men proof of his inherent superiority, and of Zen herself, who accepts her father’s view that “success,” which here is a synonym for power, “ha[s] to do with steers and land, with hay and money and men” (66). A man like Linder, on the other hand, who allows himself to be ruled by another, is lacking in the attributes deemed, by both Zen and her father, necessary in a husband.

Despite the expectations of Zen and Y.D., however, Transley’s status as “a leader of men” (6) makes him less than ideal as the head of a household. His need to remain in control of those around him means he is never able to surrender himself to another, never able to love another; indeed, he disparages love and its conventions, justifying his marriage proposal – to both Zen and himself – on the grounds that it is “a very practical matter” (144). His material considerations offer Zen the security she needs, in the form of the house he promises to provide for her, and the protection she desires, in the form of a powerful husband. Eventually, however, Zen comes to resent the way Transley had assumed control, “[sweeping] me off my feet; stamped[ing] me” (340), and she finds his desire to “see [her] make display” and to wish her “to be admired by other men” oppressive and inhuman (342). This is not to say that Zen is held captive. On the contrary, she has “accepted the buffetings of life; ... no one forced them upon her” (353), though her agency

in this respect only emphasizes the extent to which she subjects herself, as Transley subjects her, to his governance.

Lest we mistake the Transley marriage as unique in its structure of domination-subjection, the novel's conclusion suggests that even the marriage of the title character will show the effects of masculine power. In the closing lines of the book, for instance, Zen conveys a telephone message from one of Grant's colleagues who is "highly excited, and ... says have you Phyllis Bruce here" (388). Grant's reply is telling: "'Tell him I have, and I'm going to keep her'" (388). The life Grant imagines is one that legitimizes him as an agent of power – his anticipated authority over his wife grants him the right to "keep her" under his influence and in his possession, such that her duty will be to help him further his Big Idea (the novel is very clear on this point) and to bear his children. Rather than exploring Grant's assumptions, however, the text simply ends, giving Grant the final word in the assertion of a power that is naturalized by virtue of being taken for granted. Thus, though the projected marriage between Grant and Phyllis is supported by textual approval, it nevertheless – or consequently – appears as a relationship in which power relations are not seen as *working*, but simply as *being*.

In Douglas Durkin's *The Magpie* (1923), the depiction of spousal power relations is even more explicit, with the tensions between the protagonist, Craig Forrester, and his wife rendering the imbalance of power especially obvious. These tensions first appear shortly after the couple is married and soon find expression in a disagreement that encompasses everything from politics to the nuts and bolts of Craig's odds-and-ends box. Yet even when Marion voices her opinion, Craig fails to interpret her words as an assertion of her will:

He let his hands slip down from her shoulders to her elbows and drew her close to him.

“My old lady has been doing too much to-day, that’s what’s wrong with her. She’s dog tired—that’s what. Come, let’s forget the house and snuggle down in our big chair while I tell you what it’s like to be married to the sweetest girl I ever knew. Come on.”

He drew her gently toward the chair in which he had been sitting, but she resisted him and shook herself free from his arms. (107-8)

In a text that is stylistically hard and concise, this passage is conspicuously saccharine, with the prose style pointing to the kinds of strategies Craig employs in his attempt to defuse Marion’s dissent: he disempowers her, likening her to an “old lady”; he pathologizes her expression of disagreement, suggesting it is a symptom of fatigue and an indication that something is “wrong with her”; he implies that her disagreement with him is superficial and calls for forgetfulness rather than compromise; and he infantilizes her, inviting her to “snuggle” with him in their “big chair” and interpellating her as his “sweetest girl.” That his gestures of affection double as mechanisms of control becomes apparent when Marion refuses them, shaking herself free of an embrace that both holds and holds down, and rejecting his armchair solution to their problems as being “sentimental” – something neither efficacious in itself nor in accord with her present mood.

In Foucauldian terms, Marion’s resistance here foregrounds the way that, in its tensions, the Forrester marriage embodies the war-repression schema, with each contest between spouses effectively functioning as a battle in an ongoing war for dominance. Her final gesture of pushing Craig away thus symbolizes an assertion of will as well as a refusal

to be subjected by her husband. Indeed, after Marion turns from him and leaves the room, Craig himself seems to recognize in his expression of affection a strategy for supremacy that failed, and he removes his odds-and-ends box from the house in a gesture that both enacts and accepts his defeat.

But Craig's concession on this occasion is not enough to bring lasting peace to the marriage, for, as Foucault suggests, peace is simply the continuation of war by other means. Thus, as Craig becomes increasingly vehement in his radical politics, rejecting the beliefs of his wife, her friends, and her family, Marion turns increasingly to Claude Charnley in order to balance her husband's overt opposition to her way of life. For his part, Craig is astute enough to view his wife's invocation of the other man as a retaliatory strategy, yet is too blinded by his own passions to recognize the depth of her discontent. Instead, he consoles himself with the thought that Marion's need to "taunt him with references to Charnley" proves that she is "not cold" and, as a result, he finds in the warmth of her anger "an alleviating flavour of comedy" (189). His confidence in his wife's affection for him and his ability to find their disagreements comedic allows Craig to pursue his own course, despite his wife's protestations, such that even after she has exacted from him a consummate expression of devotion – "there's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you" (226) – he is able to plead conscience as a way of avoiding the one task she asks him to perform (apologizing to Blount and the business community for his outburst at the Fort Garry hotel). While repeatedly requiring his wife to disregard her own sense of propriety, Craig refuses to be governed by – or even to consider seriously – her will, suggesting the extent to which he perceives his relation to her as one of dominance, and hers to him as wilful subjection.

Madge MacBeth's *Shackles* (1926) and Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* represent domination in its superlative form. From the start of MacBeth's novel, the protagonist, Naomi Lennox, sees her husband for the tyrant he is. With his constant pretence of abnegation, his patronizing advice regarding household affairs, and his refusal to recognize the work involved in domestic economy, Arnold Lennox is at once the epitome of the dominating husband and the picture of gratified martyrdom. He sees in suffering a virtue and consequently imagines himself to be overtaxed and underpaid at work as well as inadequately appreciated at home, where he takes upon himself the seemingly impossible burden of converting his wife to his point of view, a task that she describes thus:

Arnold had tried to teach her that true happiness lay in a surrender of personal joy, especially when happiness of others might be promoted by such self-denial. Whether the others deserved it or not, was a matter of no concern. He was only happy when conscious of superogatory martyrdom, and it was characteristic of him to fear joy, for, according to his bleak philosophy, misery was the only school for perfecting human nature. (MacBeth 21-2)

While his lack of self-consciousness blinds him to the demands he makes of Naomi, his philosophy justifies even the greatest taxing of her time and patience.

As the ironic tone in the above passage suggests, however, Naomi contests her husband's subordinating measures. Though she silently lays aside the requirements of her own profession to tend to her husband's needs, she has few qualms about voicing her discontent when he makes the fulfillment of her tasks "unnecessarily difficult" (20), as when he refuses to remove his shirts before enlisting Naomi to mend them. Naomi's resistance to Arnold's whims and her complaints about him to her friends evince the

strength of her will while suggesting that she is not simply servile to her husband. It is power and not compulsion that underlines her compliance with his expectations, and a good part of Arthur's power derives from the legitimacy – the rightness – of his position. On one level, as Naomi reluctantly admits to herself, “Arnold had some justification. ... He was so often right” (23), but rather than “add to [her] peace of mind” (23), Naomi's recognition of this fact only exacerbates her situation, making it harder for her to oppose her husband – for to oppose the right is to privilege the wrong – without making it any easier to comply with his requests. On a broader level, Arthur commands rights by virtue of his relation to Naomi, a relation that she recognizes to be vital to social stability: “Family life may be old-fashioned,” she concedes, “but ... it's the hub around which nations revolve” (28). This acknowledgement on Naomi's part corresponds to Foucault's construal of the ‘right’ of legitimacy as an apparatus of power that governs the conduct of those both within and without its purview.⁷ *Shackles* thus constructs, at the same time as it contests, the patriarchal nature of the heteronormative family.

However excessive it might seem, MacBeth's portrayal of a husband's assertion of power over his wife in *Shackles* is, in fact, representative of the novel's social climate. During the opening decades of the twentieth century, faced with the “turmoil and disruption” of industrialization, urbanization, and increasingly visible extra-marital relations, the middle classes worked to defend and to ensure the survival of the traditional family structure that saw the husband in the role of sole provider, with all the privileges such a position entails (Snell 396). In addition to initiating many of the social reform activities described in chapter one, they turned to the state in an effort to preclude, for example, divorce legislation that would (they felt) necessarily weaken the stability of marriage as an institution in Canada.⁸

In a different but related context, agitation for more equitable relations between the sexes, represented by such movements as that for women's suffrage, was met with opposition.⁹

In the letter that serves as a preface to *Shackles*, MacBeth acknowledges that men are not solely responsible for the “fundamental divergences” (n.p.) that pose problems between husbands and wives. “I am not suggesting in the following pages that women are arch-angels,” she stresses, nor that “men [are] arch-demons.” Instead, she divides between husbands and wives the responsibility for the obstacles that hinder the realization of more equitable sex relations, identifying two gender-specific problems: first, the resistance of man who “cannot, at the root of him, resign gracefully his part as arbiter of human destiny.” And second, the ambivalence of woman, who, while “intellectually ... clamour[ing] for the new,” is “instinctively ... bound to the old order of things.” With specific reference to the case study presented by her novel, MacBeth resists placing sole culpability on Arnold, and she insists that, though “Arnold behaved very badly,” he is no worse than many a Canadian man: “Rare, indeed, is he who can disclaim a stealthy desire for an old-fashioned wife—and all that this term connotes.” Thus, though not one of the writers on whom Misao Dean focuses in *Practising Feminity*, MacBeth would seem also to support Dean's contention that, contrary to popular assumptions, “realistic depictions of women” do not in themselves “represent a political advance over romantic ones” (10), but rather convey “the desirability of the bourgeois domestic home and the ideology of the feminine self which supports it” (12)

Despite MacBeth's insistence that the target of her critique is not Arnold, specifically, but social mores in general, contemporary readers did not interpret her concession as exonerating Arthur fully enough. In one review, for example, Austin

Bothwell expresses vehement resistance to and resentment of the characters MacBeth presents:

Arnold Lennox is declared by his creator to be unique. He is. So dense, so selfish a man, one so lacking in understanding, may live. But where? ... This Arnold would seem to have been born in Canada, but I decline to believe he was born anywhere but in the fantasy of a fanatic feminist. ... There isn't a scrap of reality in *Shackles*. (308)

Beginning his tirade with a misrepresentation – for, as I have indicated, MacBeth stresses the representativeness of Arthur far more than his uniqueness – Bothwell here fallaciously uses the social commentary *Shackles* presents to belittle MacBeth's creative artistry, casting doubt on the legitimacy of the author, the novel, and the moral they present.

Contemporary readers were equally unwilling to accept that Caleb Gare, the dominant personality in *Wild Geese*, reflected a real aspect of Canadian life. Over the last thirty years, it has become a critical commonplace that *Wild Geese* arose out of Ostenso's experiences teaching in a farm community in northern Manitoba.¹⁰ While willing to acknowledge that "Residents of the area can still identify the farm and can name the characters on whom the novel is supposedly based" (Arnason, "Afterword" 303), however, recent critics seem less inclined to explore what that factual basis means in social terms, focusing instead on the significance of the prairie setting – its dust, its isolation, its wild geese – an avenue which, it must be said, has hitherto led to many insights into the text.¹¹ These approaches, however, have been less successful in elucidating the material relations that obtain in the Gare household and, indeed, the wider Oeland community. But from the time of the novel's publication, Ostenso emphasized the terrifying reality underlying the

characters she portrayed, stressing their basis in real life. In a 1926 interview published in the *New York Times*, for example, she defended herself against charges that her depiction of Caleb was in any way excessive: “People attack me for having created so melodramatic a character as the old man. As a matter of fact, he was even more brutal than I have pictured him” (Bromley 13).

Notwithstanding this moderation on Ostenso’s part, contemporary Canadian readers failed to see Caleb as a representative man. More broadly, they were unsure what to make of the novel as a whole. On its publication, *Wild Geese* was well received in Canada: it ranked among the top fifteen best-sellers for 1925, and the top nine for 1926 (Vipond “1919-1928”). Moreover, in 1928, a radio adaptation was broadcast on CFCA, the *Toronto Star*’s radio station, and a film adaptation hit Canadian theatres. Yet despite these signs of popularity, and despite the fact that the novel was awarded the Pictorial Review and Famous-Lasky Players \$13,500 prize for a best first novel also “suited to motion-picture reproduction” (Rev. *Wild Geese*, “Tyranny” 10), *Wild Geese* failed to inspire the critical attention granted less than three years later to Mazo de la Roche’s *Jalna*, which beat out fewer competitors (some 1,200 compared to 1,389) for a slightly lesser prize (\$10,000). The suggestion in the *Globe* that the prize-winning novel had already commanded too much space in the periodical press is contradicted by the conspicuous absence of articles and reviews concerning the novel – a critical void that W. E. MacLellan noted with frustration in April 1926. It would seem, then, that though they bought *Wild Geese*, and maybe even read it, Canadian readers and critics did not know what to say about it. They could not incorporate it into their epistemological frame because it resisted established reading praxes and challenged contemporary ideas about rural family life.

In this context, the tenor of the MacLellan piece raises important questions about the novel's reception: why was it necessary to foreground Ostenso's Canadianism; and why the insistence on the novel's realism? The answers to these questions point to a readership that refused to see the verisimilitude underlying Ostenso's portrayal of the Gare family. Among the paucity of reviews of *Wild Geese*, one, by Mazo de la Roche, specifically mentions Caleb's "tyranny" and the family's "subject[ion]."¹² But this review appears in an Eaton's advertisement for the novel and was presumably commissioned for commercial purposes; its critical value may be suspect insofar as the review may be seen to have exaggerated the more scandalous aspects of the novel in an attempt to pique potential readers' interest. Moreover, in light of de la Roche's romantic predilections, which she occasionally obscured behind realist pretensions, her verdict fails to carry the authority of such reviews as that which appeared in *The Globe*:

In our day and generation, when freedom has become so free that nobody feels it necessary to obey anything or anybody, a novel of tyranny has, at least, the merit of difference. ("Tyranny" 19)

At once implying that Caleb's absolute domination over his family is excessive and disparaging the new "freedom" that saw people thwarting authority, the reviewer for *The Globe* intimates that Ostenso's representation of Canadian familial dynamics is otherworldly and novel. Though apparently acceptable in the United States, where the novel won the award and where critics reviewed it more frequently and more favourably, the family tensions that Ostenso presents met with resistance from Canadian readers, most notably Frederick Philip Grove, who objected that Amelia "is held in submission by an impossible threat" and that the challenge Lind presents to Caleb's epistemology is typical

of “all the conventional reactions of the new woman which exist only in books” (*Letters* 25).¹³ The broader context would seem to suggest, however, that the problem was not that *Wild Geese* rang false, but rather that in “throbbing throughout with real action and real life” (MacLellan 19), it struck too strong a chord for the comfort of many conservative Canadian readers.

Taken on its own, the novel clearly encourages an interpretation of Caleb as a representative man, not a lone tyrant in a community of supportive husbands: in blackmailing his wife with the secret of her illegitimate child and in “bully[ing]” his children and Lind Archer, the teacher who resides with the family (9), Caleb is simply the most visible and most effective of the novel’s tyrants. Thorvald Thorvaldson, who “pride[s] himself upon being a Master” (Ostenso, *Wild* 94), is openly impressed by Caleb’s “subtle and sure” control over his wife (95), and so effective is the tyranny of the late Sandbo, that after treating his wife as “a dog under him” while alive (30), he continues to dominate her from the grave, being “in reality ... more alive now than he ever was” (76). Indeed, the social context Ostenso conceives extends beyond the parameters of her first novel, with the betrayed husband in *Prologue to Love*, for example, substituting control over the sexuality of his daughter for control over that of his late wife, and with the figure of the tyrannical patriarch reaching its zenith in *The Water Under the Earth*’s Matt Welland, who even more successfully than Caleb manages to bind wife and children to the land on which they work.

With the effects of power prevalent around them, characters such as Marion Forrester, Naomi Lennox, and Amelia Gare face limited options in their struggle to maintain (for

Marion) or regain (for Naomi and Amelia) personal autonomy. The prospect of an adulterous affair represents, for them, one of the only available means of shifting the marital balance of power in their favour, and even this strategy is only negatively efficacious, depending, as it does, on the effective removal of the subjects from not only their subjection, but also their marriages and familial roles. In other words, for these women, the option is not actually to reclaim power from their husbands, but rather, to move beyond their husbands' domination, empowering themselves by refusing to be disempowered.

For Amelia, this mode of escape is purely imaginary: her extra-marital affair predates her marriage to Caleb and comes to a close only with the premature death of her lover. Yet the memory of the affair and its symbolic continuance in the person of Mark Jordan, the posthumous "son of the only man she had ever loved" (Ostenso, *Wild* 105), provide Amelia with the will she needs to endure the hardships to which Caleb subjects her. In representing the part of Amelia that Caleb has never been able to conquer or corrupt, Mark and the memory of his father incite Caleb to greater cruelty and provide him with "the weapon" he uses against his wife (19), but they also "[gall] him with the reminder that the spirit of her ha[s] ever eluded him" (19). Though Amelia can retreat from her present suffering into her memory of past happiness, Caleb always feels "as the betrayed and cheated victim in a triangle" (124). Thus, fraught as the relationship is in the narrative present, Amelia's love affair pervades the novel and construes Caleb's tyranny as being as much about weakness as it is about strength.

In *The Magpie* and *Shackles*, the spectre of adultery takes on a more material form, appearing in the persons of Claude Charnley and Hugo Main, respectively, and thus

presents an even greater threat to marital stability than that posed by Amelia's past in *Wild Geese*. From early in the *MacBeth* novel, for example, when confronted with her husband's "restraining, disapproving, somewhat affronted" manners, Naomi searches for "a way out" of her suffocating existence (21), and throughout the novel, over and over again, that escape route is embodied in Naomi's lover, Hugo Main:

Her thoughts flew to Hugo. Naomi was not yet thoroughly convinced that she loved Hugo. It was conceivable that his attraction for her lay in a tacit promise of emotional release. She was so tired of repressing and suppressing natural impulses. (21)

This passage is characteristic of the novel as a whole in intimating Naomi's ambivalence toward the affair: she's not sure that she really loves Hugo; she's not sure whether she's attracted to *him* or to the idea of freedom that he represents; she's not even sure "Hugo's requirements, though immeasurably different from those of Arnold, would [not] clutch and fetter her with virtually the same chains as those she now wore" (95). Yet despite her uncertainty regarding the future her lover offers her, Naomi clearly looks to Hugo as a means of escaping Arnold's domination. Indeed, her thoughts 'fly' to him when she becomes overtired "of repressing and suppressing natural impulses." In calling to mind Ostenso's wild geese, instinctually flying north and south, the image of a wild bird flying 'naturally' toward Hugo anticipates Naomi's liberation from her husband-keeper and provides a metaphoric precedent for her flight. More materially, Naomi's affair compromises her marriage by making her increasingly conscious of Arnold's domination over her, by convincing her of her need for time and space in which to live and work, and by impressing upon her the feasibility of actually quitting her marriage.

For Amelia, the retreat into her past affair is imaginary, but nevertheless recognized and resented by Caleb. For Naomi, adultery represents a physical escape from marital confinement, though one that she keeps from her husband. In *The Magpie*, these two tendencies come together, and Marion emotionally and physically attaches herself to another man without deigning to hide her affair from her husband. Indeed, inasmuch as she asserts her power, she does so by “taunt[ing] [Craig] with references to Charnley” when he annoys her (Durkin 189), and she retaliates for his attacks on her friends and family by flaunting her preference for Charnley until “there isn’t one in the crowd who doesn’t know how little she cares for [Craig]” (275). Faced with a husband who seems intent on alienating himself – and her – for the sake of his convictions, Marion chooses to align herself with long-standing friends and, especially, with Charnley, the man who has always been Craig’s chief rival, rather than sharing in her husband’s estrangement. By subverting her marriage vows, she is able to maintain her social position amongst the Winnipeg elite after Craig’s political views have provoked the disregard and derision of those he has attempted to convert. At the same time, by embarking on a transgressive affair, Marion frees herself from other forms of social convention and duty, such that she and Charnley can abscond together to start a new life elsewhere after Charnley’s speculations lead to financial ruin. Though less than admirable in its evasion of responsibility, Marion’s final flight with Charnley takes the affair to its acme: not merely an escape from a disempowering relationship, adultery serves here as a means of reclaiming power, asserting autonomy, and, most importantly, making a clean break from the self that was subjected.

As Joan Sangster observes, “the asymmetrical power relations of the family” traditionally and consistently resulted in situations where men held the balance of power

(49). Granting that “society equates masculinity with control over others” (Sangster 49-50), the power exercised by the husbands in these novels – and especially by Caleb and Arnold, whose wives threaten their masculinity sexually (Amelia) and professionally (Naomi) – would seem to be inextricably bound up with gender. But sex is not the only form of differentiation in power relations. “Economic differences in the appropriation of wealth and goods” and “differing positions within the processes of production” also play a role (Foucault, “Subject” 140), as Ostenson’s *Waters Under the Earth* makes evident. In this novel, which comes closest among Ostenson’s subsequent works to the realism of *Wild Geese*, David Welland’s affair with Adeline Greenleaf brings together his family’s indebtedness to Adeline and his own emasculation within his family. Sexuality figures prominently, but is explicitly connected to positions of power: when David responds to Adeline’s summons to settle an outstanding coal bill, he is met with her attempts to transform his visit into a somewhat improper social call, as she “become[s] more and more pointed in her manner, as though he were making advances to her against which she was modestly protesting” (Ostenson, *Waters* 170). The pretence that construes David as the initiator of this affair affords him a power denied him in his family positions as husband to a shrewish wife, as eldest son to a tyrannical father, and as debtor to Adeline. Adeline’s relinquishing of control is, of course, illusory, and from the start David is struck by the “grotesque hilarity” of his situation (172). Yet while he recognizes that the affair signifies an extension of Adeline’s control over him and, through him, over his family, he also realizes that it requires him to keep a part of himself cordoned off from the rest of his family. Fraught though it is, this privacy helps David endure the exigencies of his family responsibilities, adding to his personal life an element of secrecy and glamour – and a sense

of humour – that serve as a retreat from the bickering and financial strain he endures at home.

The problem with such secrecy is that it can cut both ways. Two of the extra-marital affairs in J. G. Sime's *Sister Woman* (1919), for example, ultimately disempower the women as much as they empower them. For Hetty Grayson, the protagonist of "Alone," the "secrecy, which had made her laugh at first, the delicious secret between the two of them [her and her lover] that she had loved to play with like a toy" (Sime, "Alone" 18) becomes a source of frustration. She is anxious to be recognized as important to her lover, to be acknowledged as a legitimate part of his life, and her final gesture in the story – lying down beside her lover's corpse – represents her only genuinely autonomous action. The rest of the time, she is entrapped in the power of the secrecy in which she once delighted, subjected by the very silence she worked for years to preserve. For Hetty, then, the final assertion of autonomy and power marks a resistance against, not her lover, but the secrecy that delimited her relationship's potentiality.

Phyllis Redmayne, in "An Irregular Union," similarly seeks to speak out against a silence that determines her actions. Though she recognizes that the secrecy of her affair had initially been necessary if she was to maintain her livelihood while loving her "bawss" (Sime, "Irregular" 78), as she grows ever more attached to the aptly-named Dick Radcliffe, financial independence seems less important, and the secrecy that makes the workplace affair possible becomes "horrible—hateful" to her (85). Forced by her unacknowledged position into a painful passivity while Radcliffe lies ill and inaccessible in a hospital, she longs for recognition, cognizant of the fact that, "[i]f she went up to the hospital and

demanded to be allowed to nurse her lover, it wouldn't advance her cause much" (85).

What she seeks is the legitimacy that comes from being a wife – a legitimacy that would preclude the freedom and excitement she currently enjoys but would also entitle her to be by the side of the man she loves.

The difficulties these two women face in *Sister Woman* reflect a contemporary social bias in favour of marriage that, Sangster explains, has long been codified in “the state's nation-building project” (15). Indeed, as Stead's *Dennison Grant* reveals, protection of the heterosexual nuclear family supersedes even the instituting of progressive social and economic policy despite the fact that such policies hold the potential to improve material conditions within the home and thereby curb domestic instability.¹⁴ In *Dennison Grant*, Grant's foreman, Linder, states the case most succinctly:

“Now it's not my job to say to you what's right and wrong, but the way it looks to me is this: what's the use of setting up a new code of morality about money which concerns, after all, only some of us, if you're going to knock down the things which concern all of us?” (364)

In subordinating Grant's “Big Idea” about economic restructuring to the greater challenge Grant plans to launch on the heteronormative family, Linder reveals his own prejudice about social responsibility and value, which ultimately reflects the text's prejudice as well. Objective relations – such as those that obtain in the realms of politics and economics – are of lesser social impact than the relations that govern familial life. Thus, whatever advance Grant might initiate through his progressive economic policies would in no way compensate for the social damage he would effect by embarking on an affair with Zen.

Given that sexual regulation was shaped by the paternalistic, classist, and sexist prejudices of Canadian courts and social service agencies until the 1960s and beyond, the sensitivity to unequal power dynamics that these early realist texts display evinces the sophisticated objective awareness writers had regarding the status quo and the extent to which such writers anticipated the kinds of social critiques that would come to influence subsequent commentary and legislation. Sime, Stead, MacBeth, Ostenso, Durkin – all were progressive enough to consider alternatives to the heterosexual marriage ideal, something that ‘official’ discourse was only able to do decades later. But as the Sime stories and *Dennison Grant* suggest, even those realist texts that launch challenges to the status quo never fully succeed in moving beyond the parameters of a heteronormative epistemology. Many, *Wild Geese* and *The Magpie* among them, ultimately lapse into faltering, comedic conclusions, more tentative than but otherwise reminiscent of those that characterized contemporary romances. *Shackles* goes further still, demonstrating how even acts of adultery, which by their nature undermine the very foundations on which marriage is built, can not only be absorbed into, but moreover can reinforce, traditional marital dynamics.

The main plot of *Wild Geese* contests the primacy of heterosexual marriage in maintaining familial and, more generally, social stability. The brief capitulation that brings the novel to its close provides well for the surviving members of the Gare family. Amelia becomes “quiet and serene”; Judith is “very happy” in the city; and Martin, the elder son, begins work on the new house he long wanted to build but could not on account of his father’s will (Ostenso, *Wild* 300). What’s more, the relationships between the Gares and the other families in the Oeland community improve considerably once Caleb’s death has brought an end to his tyranny. Only Ellen, the daughter who wanted to break free from her

father's mould but lacked the strength to do so, views these changes "morosely, with secret indignation" (Ostenso, *Wild* 300). At one time painfully complicit in the power structure that subjected her family and herself, Ellen is unable to recreate herself as a free agent. She thus remains to the end an unfortunate, one who neither knows what she wants nor wants what she has. Ironically, rather than implying that the new family structure is in any way dysfunctional, Ellen's weakness reveals a double critique of the original family dynamic: first, it sets in greater relief the freedom and contentment the rest of the family enjoys; and second, it reinforces the novel's previous suggestion regarding inappropriate familial authority. Like Sigri Sandbo, who continues living in the shadow of her domineering husband years after his death, Ellen would seem destined to remain the shrivelled specimen of humanity her father had made her.

The sub-plot involving Lind and Mark moves in a different direction and implies that the problems in the Gare household result from Caleb's abuse of authority, and not from the authority itself. As a result, it refocuses the novel in a way that moves it away from a generalized critique of the heteronormative family as inherently unequal, as inevitably paternalistic if not tyrannical, toward a more optimistic view, which sees the institution of marriage as being only as good – or bad – as individual couples make it. In contrast to the manipulation and brutality of Amelia's marriage to Caleb, the protected propriety that distinguishes the relationship between Lind and Mark augurs a more genteel, affectionate future, but one that will nevertheless conform to the same basic structure as that which obtained in the Gare union. Mark will be, as Caleb was, the head of the household; the dénouement is clear in this respect. Even before he elopes with Lind, for example, and while she shapes herself around his life, Mark stands "inevitably alone"

(Ostenso, *Wild* 301), coming to Lind only because of “the human need in him” (302) – a need that Caleb shared. Moreover, as Mark travels with Lind toward their new life together, he instinctively takes on the role of protector, responding to her involuntary shiver by “put[ting] his arm about her, drawing her bare head down beneath his lips” (302). At once protective and restrictive, his final gesture intimates that the text is more ambivalent about the possibility for genuine mutuality in a heterosexual marriage than the courtship of this couple had suggested. But if *Wild Geese* challenges heteronormativity on the level of subplot as well as main plot, it offers up nothing concrete in its stead.¹⁵

The Magpie recants more completely than *Wild Geese* the alternative to heteronormativity it presents, asserting the heterosexual marriage ideal through its anticipation of two successful marriages. Marion and Charnley, the sexually subversive lovers, disappear from the narrative, rejected by the novel’s central characters and alienated from narrative sympathy. The textual censure directed at them contrasts the textual approval of Jeanette Bawden and Amer, whose radical politics appeal to Craig and whose decision to marry earns them the support of more conventional men, such as Croker, Craig’s colleague at the Grain Exchange. The contrast between Marion and Martha Lane, Craig’s childhood sweetheart, confirms the heteronormative bias that first arises *vis-à-vis* the engagement of Jeanette and Amer. While Marion is glamorous, superficial, and materialistic, Martha is subdued, sensitive, and artistic; and while Marion pushes Craig to distinguish himself by speculating on the markets, Martha wishes to see him return to the stability of farm life. With contemporary social values such that “a tidy, thrifty, devoted wife” represented Canadian men’s “ideal woman” (Kent 17), Martha’s re-emergence in Craig’s life functions as an oasis in the desert of his barren marriage. When added to the

natural affinity between and similar ideologies of Martha and Craig, Martha's correspondence to social ideals indicates that she is a much better mate for Craig than was his first wife. Likewise, the similarities between Jeanette and Amer bode well for their marriage. Unlike the first Forrester marriage, these latter unions represent a coming together of equals and will, the novel suggests, succeed for that reason. By stressing compatibility in this way, however, and by banishing Marion from the narrative's conclusion, *The Magpie* is able to avoid considering seriously the failure of Craig's first marriage. The conclusion is, as a result, "curiously peaceful ... for a book so filled with outrage and the sense of ominous failure" (Moss, *Reader's* 97), and leaves unanswered questions concerning culpability and responsibility that the rest of the novel raises: is Craig wrong to marry a woman he admires more for her beauty than her beliefs? Why does the text construe Marion's resistance to her husband's convictions as worse than his disrespect of hers? How does Craig's affair with Martha avoid sliding into a 'two wrongs make a right' style morality?

In *Shackles*, MacBeth suggests that the answer to such questions lies in the inherent sexism of Canadian society in the early twentieth century, which saw, for example, a wife's infidelity as a much graver offence than a husband's.¹⁶ Although Naomi consciously balks at such double standards, she nevertheless suffers from her internalization of social mores, repeatedly reneging, as a result, on promises to abscond with her lover. Evinced a Foucauldian need to make confessions regarding her sexuality, she remains unwilling to leave her husband without providing him with justifications for her desertion:

Why did she not state her case, at least, and make an effort to obtain a greater degree of freedom and understanding? Was it because she had been

disciplined in the belief that a woman's mission is that of peacemaker, that family disturbances are not only vulgar, but wicked? Was it because she shrank from wounding Uncle Toby and incurring Arnold's cold displeasure? Was it inherited cowardice, a bequest from the cave-man's mate who respected the movements of her lord's strong arm, who watched her bearded brute with cunning and was quick to anticipate his pleasure? Was it woman's ineradicable desire to please, which is perhaps but a subtle form of fear? Partly, but not altogether. There was something more; something that all her logic and sense of justice were powerless to overcome; something that was never clearly revealed, but the grip of which was as relentless as instinct, itself. (MacBeth 55)

With the power that Naomi initially sees as being vested in Arnold here opening up to include an abstract "something" that she can neither identify nor name, this passage reveals the crisis of conscience Naomi experiences as she tries to demystify her wifely position. Arnold's abuse of his spousal rights – even his physical intimacy resembles rape more than love-making – proves, to Naomi's mind, insufficient justification for ending the marriage, for the idea of marriage, the backbone of the family, which is, in turn, the foundation on which society is built, commands an authority beyond that enjoyed by any individual, and above which no individual can appeal. MacBeth's use of free indirect discourse here distinguishes Naomi's views from the author's own, but Naomi's reservations regarding Hugo, to which the narrative adds credence, also shed doubt on how much an escape the fulfillment of Naomi's affair with Hugo would be. Austin Bothwell's conclusion about Naomi's hesitancy – that Hugo "must have felt like shooting her up when she made the

final, and fiftieth, decision to stay by her shackles. And she was asking for it” (308) – ultimately foreground the extent to which contemporary society accepted, and even endorsed, men’s mistreatment of women more than it belittles the gravity of the situation that Naomi faces.

For his part, Arnold has no such anxieties or ambivalences in the wake of his affair with the missionary, Hester Ashburn. Unlike Naomi, who fails ever to muster the courage she needs to make the requisite confessions, Arnold admits his guilt to Naomi in order to extenuate his “wrong-doing” and thereby fortify his courage and sense of self (314). Ironically, rather than liberating Naomi, Arnold’s adultery and confession of it only trap her more completely than before. Arnold refuses to acknowledge that her professed desire to leave him free to marry Hester is anything more than a hysterical response to the pain he has inflicted on her. With her own “sentimental maternalism” (322) precluding any frankness on her part that could be hurtful to her husband, and with his own endorsement of her as “more excellent than I” (323) interpellating her as a submissive, supporting wife, Naomi finds herself, in the end, more aware of the weaknesses in her character that make her a subordinate in a heteronormative social structure, but as unable to fortify herself against those weaknesses as she ever was. It would seem, then, that Naomi’s view at the end of the novel – that “Complete emancipation for women” will come only “when their own happiness is of greater moment than that of the men who have undertaken to protect them” (323, 324) – corresponds to MacBeth’s own: the problem is not so much that Naomi had the misfortune to marry a man who was at first tyrannical and then passive-aggressive, but rather, that she has internalized a patriarchal view of women from which she cannot liberate herself. The problem is not individualistic, but systemic.

By interrogating the inter-relation between power, marriage, and adultery, these early- and proto-realist texts are able to launch social critiques of contemporary marriage and gender expectations. While unable to imagine the world differently, to construct a viable alternative to current social mores, these early twentieth-century fictions nevertheless undertook the vital first steps in this process. Their interrogation and exposure of patriarchal family dynamics, their consideration of adultery as the simplest escape from those dynamics, and their ultimate suggestion that the social problems jeopardizing familial stability extend beyond the level of individual families created a critical discourse that resonates within, for example, contemporary changes to divorce legislation, and that, more directly, continued to evolve and develop in the works of such writers as Frederick Philip Grove and Morley Callaghan.

Notes

¹ The identification of the 1920s as the decade that witnessed the rise of realism in English-Canadian letters has become a critical commonplace. See, for example, E. L. Bobak's "Seeking 'Direct, Honest Realism: The Canadian Novel of the 1920's'"; Nancy W. Fraser's "The Development of Realism in Canadian Literature During the 1920's"; T. D. MacLulich's *Between Europe and America*, especially pages 87 to 116; and W. H. New's *A History of Canadian Literature*, especially pages 149 to 150.

² See the *Canadian Magazine's* April 1904 review of the novel, which asserts that *The Imperialist's* political realism lacks clarity and attributes that lack to Duncan's sex.

³ Although cautious about expressing admiration for their fellow Canadian writers, both Grove and Callaghan expressed open admiration for at least one of their predecessors: despite Grove's condescending mention, in a letter to his wife Catherine Grove, of Knister's 1928 review of *Our Daily Bread* (see *Letters* 192), Grove did select Knister's *My Star Predominant* as the winner of a writing competition held by Graphic Publishers in 1930. For his part, Callaghan found in Knister's "realist sharpness and clarity of expression" a style "congenial" with his own (Conron 21).

⁴ He was not the last to do so either. In his 1943 retrospective on literary developments during his lifetime, Stephen Leacock clearly differentiates between the ways style and content were seen to contribute to the realism of a text:

... a further difference comes up when we refer not to subject and characters of a story, but the way of writing it. It would be possible, in this sense, to write romantically of a very poor and simple people, as Dickens often did, or to write realistically of kings and castles as many writers try to do now. In this sense romantic writing means a way of telling a story in which the author's own feeling and sentiments blend with and colour the narrative. The realistic way of telling a story is to state the facts and not to weep or laugh over them, not to express approval or disapproval, but to leave that to the reader. ("Realism and Romance," 119)

⁵ See William Arthur Deacon's "The Canadian Novel Turns the Corner" for a contemporary account of Grove's importance.

⁶ See for example, T. D. MacLulich's *Between Europe and America: The Canadian Tradition in Fiction*, and W. H. New's *A History of Canadian Literature*.

⁷ See Foucault's "Two Lectures," especially pages 92-95.

⁸ See James Snell's "'The White Life for Two': The Defence of Marriage and Sexual Morality in Canada, 1890-1914," for a discussion of middle class agitation for a strong nuclear familial structure during this period.

⁹ See, for example, Yolanda Cohen's "Women's Suffrage and Democracy in Canada."

¹⁰ See, for example, Robert G. Lawrence's "The Geography of Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*," Anthony John Harding's "Martha Ostenso," and David Arnason's Afterword to the New Canadian Library edition of the novel.

¹¹ See Lawrence's "The Geography of Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*," Daniel S. Lenoski's "Martha Ostensos's *Wild Geese*: The Language of Silence," and, especially, Brian Johnson's "Unsettled Landscapes: Uncanny Discourses of Love in Ostenso's *Wild Geese*."

David Arnason comes closer to present concerns in "The Development of Prairie Realism," when he observes that "Judith and Caleb are the main characters in *Wild Geese*, and it is their portrayal and their complex psychologies that constitute the main base for the realism of the novel" (135), but his exploration of the novel's verisimilitude comprises a more psychological, less socially-oriented discussion.

¹² A second, which appeared in the *Toronto Daily Star*, refers to the novel's portrayal of "the tyrannies of farm-life" – not of the farmer's tyrannies – and dismisses Caleb's domination of his family as only so much "crawling ... skulking and scheming" (10).

¹³ Despite his strong objections to it, Grove graciously declined invitations to review *Wild Geese* rather than disseminate his negative view of it in public print (see Grove's *Letters* page 26).

¹⁴ See Sangster for a discussion of how class has impacted on issues of power, violence, and adultery in Canadian families during the period in question.

¹⁵ The conclusion to Ostenso's later novel, *Waters Under the Earth*, is similarly ambiguous. While David's youngest sister, Carlotta, rejects the proposals of her childhood sweetheart and defies her father's commands by setting off to visit an intransigent writer, the novel is unclear about whether her affair marks a defiant breach of propriety and convention, or anticipates the repetition of precedents set by other Welland sisters' affairs, which culminated in the crippling – both physical and emotional – of the young, willful women.

¹⁶ The 1925 *Marriage and Divorce Act* removed the sexual double standard which saw men able to sue wives for divorce on the grounds of adultery alone, while women had to sue on the grounds of adultery and something else, such as desertion or drunkenness.

3. “Making Whoopee Generally”:

Frederick Philip Grove and Morley Callaghan

In “The Development of Realism in Canadian Literature During the 1920s,” Nancy Fraser identifies Frederick Philip Grove as having been “in the forefront of those writers who demanded a greater use of realism in literature” (298). To suggest that Grove stood alone, however, would be to overstate his contribution to Canadian letters, as even Desmond Pacey, Grove’s first biographer and early admirer, considers the contributions Grove made to the development of “a new sense of reality [in] Canadian fiction” as equal to, but no greater than, those of Callaghan, or even Hugh MacLennan, whose first novel appeared in 1941 (186). Other writers whom T. D. MacLulich would add to this list include, among others, Martha Ostenso and Robert Stead (discussed in Chapter 2). Rather than as a pioneer blazing the trail to Canadian realism all on his own, then, this chapter will position Grove as a representative – even critical – member of a vanguard of Canadian writers working toward greater realism in Canadian literature and more rigorous interrogation of Canadian social norms. Its comparison of Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) and Morley Callaghan’s *Strange Fugitive* (1928) will clarify the role both authors played in developing not only Canadian realism but also a literary discourse of critique pertaining to marriage, sexuality, and infidelity in Canadian society. Ultimately, by situating these authors’ first novels within their larger bodies of work, this chapter will suggest that, while both Grove

and Callaghan recognized the increasing threat to heteronormativity that obtained in Canada during the interwar period, Grove remained conservatively and dogmatically critical of the social threat posed by adultery whereas Callaghan, while not justifying it, nevertheless consistently sought to understand whence it arose.

Isolated from the European culture with which he had been familiar as a younger man, Grove regularly presented himself as an exceptional figure in Canadian letters. Yet his self-conscious attempts to distance himself from other Canadian writers ironically belie his claims of independence by suggesting the extent to which he defined himself within a larger literary milieu of Canadian writers. *Settlers of the Marsh*, for example, appeared in the same year as Ostenso's award-winning novel, and, as several critics have noted, the similarities between the two extend beyond the shared publication date.¹ Grove, however, insisted on the differences between his work and Ostenso's. Faced with the commercial success of his young rival's novel and with his own "astoundingly unsuccessful" (Moss, *Sex* 13) one, Grove wasted no time before ungenerously (and unconvincingly) lambasting *Wild Geese*:

The petty 'sexiness' of many passages makes a mature person smile. One cannot avoid the suspicion that that sort of thing was sprinkled in as a spice or with an eye on the 'movies.' In fact, how could a young girl know anything of the fierce antagonisms that discharge themselves in sex? Nobody will accuse me of prudishness. What I object to is the incompetence, psychologic and artistic, in dealing with these things. (*Letters* 26)

In warning Austin Bothwell (to whom he was writing this letter) that Ostenso “will be spoiled by such praise as yours: else she might write *a book* 30 y[ea]rs hence” (*Letters* 26), Grove simultaneously supports his critique of the work and advances his own literary credentials by alluding to his ‘maturity’ and years of experience.

It would seem, moreover, that Bothwell deferred to Grove’s judgement: at a meeting of the Canadian Authors’ Association on October 10, 1925, Bothwell speaks “very highly” of *Wild Geese* and encourages Grove to read it; on November 14, 1925, Bothwell’s review of *Settlers of the Marsh* appears in the *Saskatoon Phoenix*, and opens with a comparison of *Settlers* and *Wild Geese* that suggests that Ostenso is even truer to the “rough pioneering neighborhood” than is Grove; Grove sends the letter quoted above to Bothwell on November 18, 1925; and less than one year later, Bothwell vituperatively dismisses *Shackles*, a novel in many ways reminiscent of Ostenso’s. Calling MacBeth’s novel “perverse” and “funny” (308), Bothwell suggestively echoes Grove’s condemnation of *Wild Geese* as “untrue and silly” (*Letters* 26), and his review of the former resonates with the same kind of *ad hominem* attacks that appear in Grove’s appraisal of the latter.

Other writers offended Grove’s standard of literariness as well. At a meeting of the Saskatchewan Branch of the Canadian Authors’ Association in June 1926, Grove “strained to admit that few among Canadian writers who have devoted themselves to writing with singleness of purpose have brought to their art both the requisite understanding of affairs of the spirit and skill and delight in expressing what is in their minds” (“Threshold” 233). He censured Canadian writers even more explicitly twelve years later in his “The Plight of Canadian Fiction? A Reply”; and a 1940 letter to Lorne Pierce of Ryerson Press exhibits his particular aversion to Mazo de la Roche. Given Grove’s view that “only trash wins a

prize” (*Letters* 26), his contempt for de la Roche is not surprising. Given his distinction between success and art, nor is his belittling of Arthur Stringer.² But Grove’s censure was not limited to ‘popular’ writers. In the same letter to Pierce in which he denigrates de la Roche, Grove dismisses Callaghan as well:

... my work did not grow out of the milieu of what was being done by others in Canada. I neither knew of it nor cared for it. That a few of them, of late, have sought me out is no matter. I have helped many; nobody has ever helped me. People like Callaghan or de la Roche have gone out of their way *not* to meet me. It is simple charity not to talk about them. ... (*Letters* 383)

While congruent with Grove’s project of distancing himself from his peers, his view of Callaghan here reveals more about Grove’s own professional insecurities and egotism than it does about Callaghan’s relation to his older colleague.

For despite Grove’s disparagement of him, Callaghan was a key player in the larger literary context of which Grove was also a part. Younger than Grove by some thirty years and influenced stylistically by his journalistic background, Callaghan led his urban-based contingent in the new guard alongside Grove, who only began to assume prominence as a writer and critic during his Canadian Clubs lecture tours in 1928 and 1929. Indeed, Callaghan arguably not only matched the standard set by his more pedantic elder, but surpassed it as well. His first novel, *Strange Fugitive*, displays a “startling” degree of innovation (Bobak 99) and stood on its own on its publication in 1928, whereas Grove’s first Canadian novel, *Settlers of the Marsh*, was part of a cluster of prairie realist novels appearing in the mid-1920s. By 1936, in singling out Callaghan and Grove (with Laura Goodman Salverson and Mazo de la Roche) as the key figures in the development of the

Canadian novel, William Arthur Deacon makes clear his opinion that the “Most spectacular advance among these four leaders has naturally been made by the youngest of them,” Morley Callaghan (“Canadian Novel” 38). And, ultimately, Callaghan achieved more fame internationally than Grove managed to realize at home. Of course, fame and influence are not synonymous, and by reading Grove’s works against Callaghan’s, I hope to provide a more complete account of early Canadian realism than that which a singular focus on either author could afford.

Superficially at least, there are more differences than similarities between these two authors. Despite his European origins and his adulterous affair with Elsa von Ploetz (Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven), after reinventing himself as a Canadian schoolteacher, Grove presented a persona that was comparatively stodgy and conservative. Callaghan, on the other hand, conveyed an image of rigour and cosmopolitanism. Grove was, to his mind at least, and except for the brief period in the late-twenties when the Association of Canadian Clubs commissioned him for a series of lectures, undervalued and underappreciated. Callaghan, on the contrary, enjoyed critical attention at home and abroad. Indeed, even the ground they share – both men complemented their creative fictions with critical commentary on Canadian literature and society – reveals as many differences as similarities between the two: while Grove engages and develops further the prairie realism of such predecessors as Laura Goodman Salverson and Robert Stead, Callaghan erects an *oeuvre* on the shoulders of such urban realists as Georgina Sime and Douglas Durkin. And while both authors consider Canadian letters in a broader, international context, Callaghan’s view is pragmatic and hopeful, while Grove’s is cynical and deprecatory.

Their companion pieces in the *University of Toronto Quarterly* encapsulate the differences between their critical views. The *Quarterly* debate began in January 1938, when Callaghan published “The Plight of Canadian Fiction,” prompting Grove to respond with “The Plight of Canadian Fiction? A Reply,” which appeared that July. Both articles express concern for the development of Canadian fiction and the challenges with which Canadian fiction writers had to contend, but whereas Callaghan identifies the paucity of Canadian publishers and the lack of “adventure of reading in our people” (161) as the key causes for the difficulties writers experience in Canada, Grove contends that Callaghan’s assessment “is much too lenient in its appraisal of the Canadian public; ... ignores the critic; and, finally, ... views the Canadian writer in far too rosy a light” (451). Grove goes so far as to exonerate the Canadian publishing industry – a surprising move considering Grove’s poor relations with his various publishers³ and his prior claim that the Canadian publisher “does not exist. ... [he] is usually just an agent for a British or American publishing house” (Perry 51). The inconsistency in his views regarding the Canadian publishing industry, and the resentment underlying his pointed contention that a writer who earns a living by his pen owes that living “not ... to the excellence, ... [but] to the weakness of his work” (464-5) suggests that Grove’s response to Callaghan’s article is as much an act of individualistic antagonism as an instance of intellectual repartee.

Given the differences between the two men, the centrality of adultery in their first novels provides insight into the cultural climate of Canada in the second half of the 1920s, as does the immediate reception of these texts.⁴ The publication of *Settlers of the Marsh* followed that of two earlier books by Grove: *Over Prairie Trails* (1922) and *The Turn of the Year*

(1923), both comprising nature and biographical sketches that convey Grove's perceptions of the Canadian prairies and his experiences with the difficulties and mysteries that they present. On the other hand, for Callaghan, "whose work so far [had] been known to few besides the readers of Parisian experimental magazines like this *Quarter and Transition*" (Chase 44), *Strange Fugitive* doubled as first novel and first book. Both novels appeared under the imprint of two publishing houses – New York's George H. Doran and Toronto's Ryerson Press for *Settlers of the Marsh*, and New York's Grosset & Dunlop and C. Scribner's sons for *Strange Fugitive* – and both received favourable reviews considering that their authors were relatively unknown.

Recurrent in these reviews were comparisons of Grove and Callaghan to well-established and highly-esteemed authors from the international literary community. Of these comparisons, Callaghan's resemblance to Ernest Hemingway – "a link established by Scribner's in their promotion of *Strange Fugitive*" (Morley, *Morley* 9) and reinforced by reviews like the one in *The New York Times* – has persisted the longest in cultural memory. Ironically, despite its longevity, the Callaghan-Hemingway connection provides less insight into Canadian reader reception than do other contemporary reviews because of its genesis in a publisher's marketing campaign. More instructive are the reviews of *Settlers of the Marsh*, which liken Grove to Sherwood Anderson (Bothwell 4), Henry David Thoreau (*The Ottawa Journal*), and Thomas Hardy (Phelps, Rhodenizer, and *Willisons Monthly*), and thereby claim a place for the Canadian writer on "a shelf for Hardy and Hamsun and certain others, because he is of their kind" (Phelps, 1925 "Rev" 112) and because, in *Settlers*, he has written a novel "no reader is ever likely to forget" (Rhodenizer 20). In other words, these comparisons of Callaghan and Grove to other writers function as a rhetorical device

that encourages readers to view Canadian authors on an equal footing with their more prominent international colleagues.

Granted, not all reviews were cosmopolitan in outlook, nor were they uncritical tributes. Concerns about morality, especially with respect to the representation of sexuality, recur in several reviews of *Settlers of the Marsh*, though none goes as far as the *Toronto Daily Star* review of *Jalna*, two years later, which describes de la Roche's novel as "a perverted study of family life" (7).⁵ Among the earliest of the *Settlers* reviews was S. Morgan-Powell's for *The Montreal Daily Star*, which concedes that "Some will feel he [Grove] has been too frank" in his handling of Niels's romantic and sexual relationships and which warns that "This is no book for children to read" (4). Similarly, George Bugnet, in his review for the *Canadian Author and Bookman*, admits that "Mr. Grove's book is not to be recommended for too young people" (203), and even Arthur Phelps, a close friend of Grove who "played a key role in securing the publication of *Settlers of the Marsh* by the Ryerson Press" (Grove, *Letters* 36 n.4), concedes in an early review of the novel that "In the matter of sex the book does not preserve the usual Anglo-Saxon delicacies" (112). In his review for the *Manitoba Free Press*, which was subsequently reprinted in *The Saturday Review of Literature*, Phelps presses the matter still further, citing, among other of the novel's weaknesses, the occurrence "in one or two places [of] an inartistic amount of detail in handling the sex elements of the book" (529).

Despite their shared concern, these reviewers ultimately contend that Grove's novel "is not immoral" (Bugnet 203), that "there is no unwholesomeness in it" (Phelps, 1925 "Rev" 112), and that its "stark directness and grim sincerity ... rob it of all offensiveness" (Morgan-Powell 7). George Bugnet justifies Grove's representation of

sexuality, at least in part, because he sees as its end result a “wholesome lesson” about human relationships. Others justify it on the grounds that, as a realist novel, *Settlers* simply reflects the material world, in which morality and sexuality play no small role – a position reminiscent of the one Grove himself espouses in “Realism in Literature,” where he laments that although “a third or perhaps a quarter” of “what a man or woman may get out of life depends on his [*sic*] sex relationships,” contemporary literature fails to provide guidance in “sex matters” (52).

The general consensus did not prevent less progressive readers from disputing the moral fibre – or the plausibility – of the characters Grove presents, and it is a peculiarity of Canadian literary history that, even though such resistance to the novel was rare, it shaped critical commentary on the novel in the years following its publication. At the time of *Settlers*’s publication, its principal detractor was G. V. Ferguson, whose objections encompass both language (the “unnatural dialogue”) and content (the “falsity” of the characters), and culminate in a condemnation of Grove’s treatment of Clara Vogel that reveals more about Ferguson’s own biases than it does about Grove’s novel:

Rejected by Ellen, Niels falls in love with Mrs. Vogel, a notorious character in the district ... who seduces him. To her unbounded amazement, as well as to the reader’s, he insists upon marriage, and the story moves swiftly on to its conclusion. (107)

In a highly-fraught manoeuvre, Ferguson here aligns readers and Clara by suggesting they respond to Niels’s proposal in similar ways and implies that Niels’s implausible innocence directs readerly sympathy toward the most morally suspect character in the novel, for Clara’s marriage to Niels occurs at the latter’s “insistence.” At the same time, however,

Ferguson also stresses the impropriety of sympathizing with Clara and the unlikelihood that such sympathy could arise:

Mr. Grove first presents Mrs. Vogel, before her marriage with Niels, accepted and honoured by the respectably married women of the district. He then sends her to Coventry. The inconsistency of woman is supposed to be their proudest privilege, but here is one instance in which they stand as steadfast as the rock of Gibraltar. They will not condone immorality. That is simply not done... (107-8)

One of the reviews that Grove may well have had in mind when he complained to Ryerson Press about the “singularly unintelligent” analyses of *Settlers* that he had read (Grove, *Letters* 29), Ferguson’s appraisal sheds light on contemporary expectations regarding the moral character and duties of women during the 1920s,⁶ and provides a context for Grove’s own 1931 admission, to a young admirer and acquaintance, “that it [*Settlers of the Marsh*] was not, perhaps, suitable reading for a girl of her age (She was 23)” (Eggleston, “Interlude” 102).

Although Ferguson’s view initially ran against the critical current, its arguments soon flooded the realm of Canadian letters, which was inundated with rumours that *Settlers* had been banned by the Winnipeg Public Library and with reviews and articles that paradoxically brought attention to the scandal in an effort to direct attention away from it.⁷ One such article, which characterizes the obscenity charges about the novel as the “reactions ... of a juvenile community unaccustomed to the frank treatment of certain important aspects of life,” proceeds to compare the reception of Grove’s work to that of

another practitioner of Canadian realism, noting that “the same reactions in a lesser degree followed the books of Canada’s other serious novelist, Morley Callaghan” (Sandwell 58).

Whether the reactions were, in fact, manifested to “a lesser degree” following the publication of *Strange Fugitive* is debatable. Certainly the early reviews were favourable, praising the novel for its “honesty and solidity” (Linscott 7); for its denial of “the glamorous atmosphere that the newspapers have led us to associate with bootlegging” (Chase 44); and for its Torontonion setting, which the *Toronto Star* reviewer described as “com[ing] nearer to what the author regards as real life than it does to fiction” (13). But the novel’s critical reception was far from unanimous. Looking back from his vantage point in 1951, Desmond Pacey indicts Callaghan for lacking in *Strange Fugitive* “the clear moral values which inform ... [Hemingway’s] best work” (212). And in the wake of the generally positive contemporary reception, H. Steinhauer launched an attack on *Strange Fugitive* comparable to that waged by Ferguson on *Settlers* seven years earlier. In his “Canadian Writers of Today” column in *The Canadian Forum*, for example, the former pulls no punches when he calls Callaghan’s realism into question:

He describes these animals [the gangsters, bootleggers, ladies of easy virtue, among others] ... toiling for their daily bread, frequenting restaurants and speakeasies where they can fill their bellies with food and bad drink, attending theatres and Church, making love to their own and other men’s wives, shooting each other for little or no reason, and making whoopee generally.

All this, Mr. Callaghan would have us believe, goes on in Toronto; ... Canada’s most virtuous city. In Toronto, where Communism has been

officially abolished and Law and Order and Orangemen reign supreme.

Where loose living is being perpetually pursued by the Old Dutch girls of

Propriety and Respectability, brandishing their clubs with ominous mien.

(177)

In the long term, objections like Steinhauer's were the exception, not the rule, and Callaghan's novel proved more "immune" to moral censure than did Grove's: in part because, as Sandwell suggests, Callaghan "had a large United States following" that was more accustomed to "the frank treatment" of contemporary concerns (58); in part, as well, because in the dissipation of its initial "furore" (Steinhauer 177), the novel was quickly obscured behind the appearance of Callaghan's major novels – many of which, unlike *Strange Fugitive*, have remained almost continuously in print since their initial publication. As a result, *Strange Fugitive* faded into a unique invisibility within Callaghan's *oeuvre*, remaining largely "unknown in his [Callaghan's] own country" until M. G. Hurtig released their edition in 1970 (Weaver vii).

Given that *Strange Fugitive*, on its publication, met with a warmer reception than did *Settlers of the Marsh*, the lingering obscurity into which it promptly fell ironically juxtaposes the prominence that posterity has accorded *Settlers of the Marsh*. First republished as part of McClelland and Stewart's New Canadian Library series in 1966, and then reissued in 1989; produced as a sound recording and in Braille by a number of agencies across the country since its 1966 induction into the NCL;⁸ and in press as a critical edition by Tecumseh Press in 2006, Grove's first Canadian novel has come to command a position of importance and influence within the realm of Canadian letters that Callaghan's has not achieved to this day.

Its longevity over the past fifty years and its explicit engagement with contemporary trends such as realism and literary morality render *Settlers of the Marsh* an apt representative of the state of Canadian letters in the second half of the 1920s. While venturing into greater sexual explicitness, however, Grove does not interrogate contemporary social mores as rigorously as such female compeers as Georgina Sime, Madge MacBeth, and Martha Ostenso. Unlike Naomi Lennox, who views adultery as a potential escape from an unhappy marriage, for example, Clara Vogel cheats on Niels not only as a means of enduring a loveless marriage, but also as a means of tormenting her husband, and thus appears as a mean, vindictive, and spiteful woman. Consequently, with the blame for the marriage breakdown clearly on Clara's shoulders, her eventual murder appears as a necessary precursor to the restoration of social order within the Marsh community and, by extension, as a moral, though criminal, act.⁹

Revealing a residual anxiety about sexual desire and the effects its literary representation could have on readers, *Settlers of the Marsh* characterizes Mrs. Vogel as both a woman with a predisposition toward sexual pleasure and a reader with a penchant for the risqué. From his initial introduction to her, Niels Lindstedt notices “a rather striking contrast” between “the gay widow” and the other women of the settlement (Grove 25, 26). Her status as a widow means that Clara is free to enjoy the financial and personal autonomy awarded to widows in a literary tradition dating back to the eighteenth century at least:¹⁰ she can move freely between the rural community where her farm is situated and the city where she can act on her desires – both in commercial and sexual terms – and, with the rent that she receives from her tenant, Rowlings, she commands the financial independence that

makes such movement possible. Her autonomous assertion of will and desire manifests itself in her physical appearance. While the other women Niels sees at the Lund place are “subdued, self-effacing, almost apologetic” (26), Clara is “remarkably pretty” in a snug, unseasonably lightweight dress, with a neckline that bares her décolletage. While the other women “look[...] neuter,” Clara exudes “something peculiarly feminine” (25), and that ineffable “something” is not lost on Niels: “It gather[s] into a general impression of attraction” and “rouse[s] ... the impulses of the man in him” (26).¹¹

Nor is Niels the only man in whom Clara arouses sexual desire. Indeed, the counterpart of her explicit social status as a widow is the tacit understanding that she is also the community whore. As such, she is denied the legitimacy necessary to validate her lifestyle as a viable alternative to wifely propriety and domesticity. Moreover, her dubious morality detracts attention from the difficulties she had encountered, largely financial in nature, on the death of her first husband – difficulties that may have motivated her to apply the sales skills she acquired when working in book and art stores in the city to the art of selling sexual pleasure – the only possible commodity at her command in the isolated farming district to which her first husband had brought her. The problem for Clara and for Niels stems from the latter’s inability to interpret his first sexual contact with Clara appropriately, which results in his insistence that the two marry, an action that, according to Axel Knönagel, signals Niels’s view of sexual activity as “a threat to the self” that can only be justified as “an integral element of the happiness which he hopes to find in a family life” (107).

Although sexually attractive to Niels, however, Clara in no way inspires his confidence. When she refuses to tend the garden, agreeing to keep house for him but not

to serve as unpaid help about the farm, Niels quickly concedes the point, worried that if he pushes the issue Clara will mention “the other woman,” Ellen Amundsen (152), to whom Niels, in his own mind at least, repeatedly and unfavourably compares his wife. Clara is thus left free to pass her days as she wishes, for Niels neither expects nor asks her to perform the tasks that, in his fantasies, he attaches to his ideal wife, nor does he offer her the companionship that similarly characterizes his recurrent dream of domestic bliss.

Those dreams themselves are instructive for what they reveal about Niels’s – and, I would contend, Grove’s – ideas about women and their place in society. The first vision occurs shortly after Niels arrives at the Amundsen farm, in the opening chapters of the novel:

... a vision took hold of Niels: of him and a woman, sitting of a mid-winter night by the light of a lamp and in front of a fire, with the pitter-patter of children’s feet sounding down from above: the eternal vision that has moved the world and that was to direct his fate. (34)

Children and heterosexual companionship characterize this and subsequent manifestations of Niels’s dream, except for the vision he has during the period when Clara usurps Ellen’s position at the forefront of Niels’s thoughts and attention. Then, there is “no pitter-patter of little children’s feet” nor does the couple sit “on opposite sides of a table in front of a fireplace” (59). Instead, following on memories of his mother, this vision presents Niels in a position of subservience or dependence, “crouching on a low stool in front of the woman’s seat; ... leaning his head on her” (59).

Even more explicitly than the former vision, this latter one makes clear the extent to which Niels is looking for a mother – either for his children or for himself – much more

than he is looking for a partner, and insofar as his search is thus biologically reductionist, it is also inherently sexist, echoing an idea of woman articulated most clearly by Arthur Schopenhauer, with whose works Grove was certainly familiar:¹²

... woman is not intended for great material or for great physical labour. She expiates the guilt of life not through activity but through suffering, through the pains of childbirth, caring for the child and subjection to the man, to whom she should be a patient and cheering companion. (Schopenhauer 80-1)

The novel's Canadian prairies setting makes the biological basis of Niels's search for a wife/mother even more apparent than this connection to Schopenhauer first suggests, for in the New World, the sexual division of labour does not tidily accord with that of Schopenhauer's European epistemology. As Misao Dean points out in *Practising Femininity*, for example, by the time Grove published *Settlers of the Marsh*, the female ideal in Canada had long involved "physical labour" – the kind of labour that Ellen performs and Clara shuns. As a result, Clara's sense of suffering and loneliness, which she tries to convey to Niels (Grove 153), does not compensate for her inactivity, nor does her affection for her husband (apparent enough early in the marriage) encourage him to seek in her a "cheering companion."

Indeed, ironically, after he has married Clara, Niels abandons his dream of female companionship rather than enacting it in his domestic life. Thus, even when a Sunday evening finds them together in the dining room, husband and wife inhabit different imaginative and subjective worlds, with Clara reading such novels as *Madame Bovary*, and with Niels reading practical histories or agricultural magazines. When Clara does lend

Niels Flaubert's adultery novel, his response to it evinces his enduring sexual immaturity as much as Clara's preference for such novels suggests her questionable moral code:

She had given it to him with a peculiar look in her eyes . . . After the first hundred pages or so he sat aghast. He had not read on. The story of this little doctor's wife amazed and terrified him. What might it be written for? . . . He tried an American novel. He laid it aside because it seemed silly. In vain he searched for something that might enlighten him as to his mentality, that dealt with problems that were his... (160)

Niels here reveals his incredulity that social problems such as spousal negligence and even adultery could be possible in the context of Canadian farm life. In the process, he echoes Chaddy MacKail's early denigration of adultery narratives in Stringer's *Prairie Wife* trilogy, and implicitly accepts the assumption, evident in such contemporary critical commentary as P. G. C. Campbell's *Queen's Quarterly* article, "Sex in Fiction," that sexual immorality, like the novels that present it, reflect European and American – but not Canadian – social mores.

Moreover, Niels's response to the novel arguably stems not only from his sexual naivety but also from a more general ignorance regarding social relations that that innocence effectively obscures. Just a few years after publishing *Settlers of the Marsh*, Grove embarked on a lecture tour in which he delivered some of the papers that were subsequently collected in the volume *It Needs to be Said*. In one of these, he clearly conveys his admiration of Flaubert as a realist, which in Grove's use of the term means that the French author "mirror[s], in his presentation, an emotional response to the outside world and to life which is, as nearly as such things can be, a universal response or at least capable

of becoming such” (63). Niels’s inability to relate to that “universal response” reflects his inability to participate fully and competently in the realm of human relationships. Thus, if his sexual naivety characterizes Niels as exceedingly innocent, the lack of husbandly responsibility that it engenders renders him as culpable as Clara in the breakdown of their marriage. However, as a whole, *Settlers of the Marsh* obscures Niels’s culpability, ultimately rewarding him for having eliminated the threat to heteronormativity that his wife posed to the community when he murdered her in cold blood, and subverting Grove’s own professed respect for and emulation of such liberal artists as Flaubert.

In Morley Callaghan’s *Strange Fugitive*, responsibility for the breakdown of the marriage is attached more explicitly to the husband, Harry Trotter, but for Callaghan, unlike for Grove, responsibility and blame are not synonymous concepts. Harry Trotter is responsible for the breakdown of his marriage to Vera insofar as he is the spouse who walks out of the marital home. He is the one who embarks on a series of affairs, and he is the one who, despite his desire to do so, remains incapable of returning home to his wife. The question of blame, on the other hand, is not as straightforward. Much more so than Grove, Callaghan recognizes that social individuals are necessarily shaped by the environment in which they live, and Harry Trotter’s infidelity and life of crime are prefaced by circumstances that are, in the strictest sense, beyond his control: his dismissal from his position as foreman in the lumberyard, his inability to secure a comparable position to replace the one he lost, and, before either of these, his enduring complex regarding his relationship with his late mother – a complex that shapes all of Harry’s interactions with women.

The difference between the two novels' morals arises notwithstanding some striking similarities between *Strange Fugitive* and *Settlers of the Marsh*. Harry and Vera's mutual attraction is, at least at first, entirely superficial, much like that of Niels and Clara before them: Harry "like[s] ... [Vera's] sensuous ways, and the steady, wistful look in her dark eyes" (9), and Vera "like[s] ... [Harry's] hard, lean legs and the deep wave in his fair hair" (10). Also like the Lindstedts', the Trotters' marriage is haunted by an 'other' – in this case, the Chicago poet Vera had loved before embarking on her relationship with Harry. Her relationship with the poet ends abruptly, after he is "arrested on a criminal seduction charge, and sent down for a year" (10), but, given Vera's nostalgic view of him, her memory of her first love inevitably colours her ideas about romance in general, and her relationship with Harry in particular: Vera tells Harry "all about the man in Chicago," crying when "she [comes] to the last part of the story" and she relives "Some of the feeling she had had for the young man ... when talking to Harry" (10). Even her naïve hope of converting the "boyishly wayward" poet into "a decent, respectable fellow" resurfaces in Vera's desire that Harry "leave the lumber-yard and get into something requiring more character and more ability than a knowledge of lumber" (10). While articulated more explicitly than the comparison between Clara and Ellen in *Settlers of the Marsh*, then, this comparison between the rightful spouse and first love similarly anticipates subsequent acts of infidelity on the part of the compared – and, by extension, emotionally betrayed – spouse.

As suggested above, however, Callaghan's consideration of context results in a moral positioning of infidelity and adultery that is more ambiguous than that which Grove presents in *Settlers of the Marsh*. This ambiguity arises *vis-à-vis* contradictory

contemporary social expectations regarding marriage and masculinity – expectations that Harry seems to sense though he can neither understand nor reconcile them. Although, as Peter Ward observes, Canada’s divorce rate in the interwar period remained among the lowest of the Western world, the divorce rate was rising quickly during the 1920s: “from about 50 divorces per year in the pre-war decade to approximately 600 by the mid-1920s” (Strange & Loo 105). The state, as a result, initiated various support programs designed “to encourage marriage, fit child-bearing, acceptable child-rearing practices, and, above all, the heterosexual nuclear family”; it also increased its efforts “to force fathers to maintain their wives and children” (Strange & Loo 104). As Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo suggest, however, the ‘support’ “came with strings attached” (104), and the state effectively used these programs to protect and police the nuclear family.

From the outset of the novel, unlike Niels, who imaginatively rehearses a rural version of the heterosexual ideal that the state was espousing at the time, Harry Trotter gives the impression of being a man struggling with society’s expectations. Lying in bed next to his wife, for example, “thinking he had loved her so much no other woman could ever give such satisfaction” and “sure his increasing interest in other women had a direct relation to Vera,” Harry “wishe[s] he had encouraged her to have children” (3). Unable to rationalize his restlessness in his marriage, Harry promptly invokes children as the missing link in his familial life, suggesting the extent to which he has internalized contemporary beliefs about heteronormativity.

But although sympathetic with Harry’s predicament, the novel’s narrative voice establishes a critical distance from him almost immediately. A few pages after Harry regrets the Trotters’ lack of children, the narrator offers an alternative explanation for their

marital problems. Vera, herself having internalized contemporary mores by the time the two reunite after high school, enters into a relationship with Harry not because of a strong affinity for or attachment to him, but rather because, some two years his senior, she recognizes that it is time “she should have her own life and not live in the ways of her mother and father” (9). That Vera’s mother “did not think much of Harry” or of his job “in the office of Pape’s lumberyard” only underlines the extent to which Vera initially views Harry more as a means of distinguishing herself from her parents than as a partner and potential father for her children. When coupled with her transference of the feelings from her first romance onto her second, Vera’s superficially practical motivation for dating – and eventually marrying – Harry gestures toward a fundamental weakness at the root of the Trotters’ relationship.

After they wed, this weakness manifests itself as a growing dissatisfaction with each other and the constraints their marriage impose upon them. Vera expresses an inclination to convert to Catholicism, confident she would “feel happier” within the stability and spirituality afforded by the Church (13). Harry, on the other hand, seeks the more glamorous and exciting pleasures of luxurious materialism and extra-marital sexuality. Ironically, even though Vera talks to Harry about her religious leanings and Harry is (for obvious reasons) unable to talk to Vera about his more worldly pursuits, Harry keeps his spouse in mind much more than she does him, and he does so especially when he most seems to be moving away from the domesticity and responsibility she represents. Thus, even when in the midst of his two principal affairs, the novel characterizes Harry as either explicitly thinking about Vera or subconsciously revealing the extent to which she has come to shape his self-perception and worldview.

His first affair, with Julie, not only issues from Harry's dissatisfaction with his married life but also suggests the extent to which his relationship with Vera has engendered within him feelings of inadequacy and inferiority in his roles as lover and provider. When Harry returns home from work intent on catching a ball game at the neighbourhood park, for example, Vera makes no secret of her disappointment in his decision, wishing they could go to the lake instead, yet refusing the olive branch Harry extends when he offers to change his plans to please her. Their interests collide again over the game of checkers: not the enthusiast that Harry is, she variously encourages him to play with someone else or belittles his passion for the game. For his part, after he loses his job, Harry finds a unique satisfaction from playing checkers: a skilful player, he inevitably beats his opponents and is thereby able to feel some of the control and authority he had once commanded in the lumberyard. When he gets home after being rejected by Isaac Pimblett, for instance, Harry finds satisfaction in beating Vera at checkers.¹³ Similarly, though Harry generally suffers from feelings of inferiority regarding his lack of education and professional training in relation to Stan Farrel, whom Vera respects as "a professional man" (24), it is when Harry plays against the "young lawyer with good prospects" (24) that he becomes "Farrel's superior" (82). That Harry goes so far as to drag Vera to the kitchen table, forcing her to play a game with him, evinces the tenacity with which Harry clings to the compensatory feelings checkers affords him and, more specifically, his need to reassert – in whatever way he can – his dominance over Vera as the man of the house.

With Julie Roberts, Harry feels no need to convey self-sufficiency or independence. He first meets her "at a time when too many evenings with Vera seemed dull, and he felt he ought to get interested in another woman" (16). Perceiving that, as a man, he should derive

some sense of conquest and excitement (or at least fulfillment) from his romantic affairs, Harry turns to a woman who is different from Vera in a number of ways. Even though Harry expects Julie not to be interested in him because he feels “uncomfortable” in her “arty” bookstore and thinks “she [is] probably a damn sight too sophisticated for him” (17), he quickly realizes that she is attracted to him. In contrast to Vera, whom he starts to find dull, “Julie puzzle[s] him, exciting him inwardly” (33). And unlike Vera, who resigns herself to Harry’s work in the lumberyard as a practical necessity, Julie “encourage[s] him to talk of the lumber business” (17). Moreover, while Vera expects Harry to anticipate her wishes and fulfill them, Julie “under[stands] that it was impracticable for him to take her out to shows” (17). That Harry, even after Julie has clearly demonstrated her interest in him, still suspects that “she [is] laughing at him” when he talks about his work, evinces the sense of derision he has internalized and come to expect from Vera, as does his sense, when he spends time with Julie, “of having made an astonishing discovery” (17). As unselfconscious as Harry is, the narrative context implies that the discovery to which Julie leads him is two-fold: not only is he still attractive to other women, but he also has qualities that he has forgotten through long familiarity with Vera, his principal sounding board.

Initially, Harry enjoys a similar freedom from responsibility with Anna, his second and longer-term mistress. He feels comfortable with Anna, whereas with Vera he is often on edge and with Julie he lacks prowess. The same free-spiritedness that first attracts Harry, however, later begins to irritate him. Consciously comparing Anna to Vera, Harry concludes that Vera had been entirely faithful to him whereas Anna is only faithful in “her thoughts” (186), “the woman part of her belonged to everybody on earth” (186). Her playfulness he comes to interpret as ignorance and, after the

animosity between Harry and the other bootleggers rises following Cosantino's death, he longs for "security and quiet possession" (236) – qualities he knows Anna cannot provide.

Harry's increasing dissatisfaction with Anna coincides with his growing doubt that eking out space for himself as one of the city's leading bootleggers must necessarily preclude domestic comfort and stability. Indeed, he first settles down with Anna because "He was growing tired of picking women up" and found the "habit" of "making love" to only Anna both "satisfying and no bother at all" (136). Moreover, as the novel unfolds, Harry is increasingly faced with the prevalence of the heteronormative family – its spectre haunts the bootlegging world even more persistently than it did the homosocial environment of the lumberyard. Whereas the crew working under Harry at Pape's never mentioned their home life at all, Joe Atkins, his truck driver in the bootlegging business, "talk[s] frequently of his wife and children" (139). Moreover, after Atkins is murdered, Harry yearns for Vera even more acutely than before: as he tells his partner, Jimmie Nash, "'it's hard to get used to being away from a person you've been with a couple of years. ... if I'm happy thinking about her, then I ought to go on thinking about her. It don't do me any harm'" (174, 175). After killing Cosantino, Harry re-enacts a similar pattern, "want[ing] to cry" when he sees pictures of Mrs. Cosantino in the paper the next morning, and yearning for a return to the security of family life.¹⁴

Harry's need to reconcile with Vera rises as the novel builds toward its climax. Realizing that Anna is unable to provide him with the support he needs, Harry visits Julie one more time. Rather than helping him gain perspective, however, that meeting leaves Harry "sorry to remember he had once thought her so mysteriously desirable" (201).

Recognizing that he is “sick of everybody almost” (201), Harry imaginatively returns again to the two key women in his life: first, his mother, and then his wife. As he nears his moment of crisis, Harry resolves to reconnect with Vera. By this point, however, his life has spiralled out of his control, and he is killed by his rival bootleggers before he is able “to make things right” with his wife (259). As he slips into unconsciousness, Harry sees only the wheels of the car that carries his killer away. His gestures toward reconciliation with Vera come too late, and Harry thus dies alone, physically and emotionally isolated from his wife and the feelings of safety and promise she had come to represent.

The tragedy associated with Harry’s isolation in death is attached not to his initial breach of his marriage vows but to his perpetual inability to resolve to return to Vera. Harry’s enduring attachment to and inner conflict about his wife mean that *Strange Fugitive*’s portrayal of marital breakdown, and the infidelity that results from it, has greater moral complexity than does that of *Settlers of the Marsh*. Rather than assume sole responsibility for the breakdown of the marriage, Harry maintains throughout the novel that “he *had* been happy with Vera. Until recently they had worked together beautifully. Now they annoyed each other. She opposed nearly all his ideas” (76, my emphasis).¹⁵ Harry’s rationalization of his decision to leave the marital home goes so far as to enable the illusion that, in leaving his wife, he is acting in her best interests:

“She’d be happier by herself,” he thought. He lay on his back imagining Vera living by herself with enough money so she would not have to work, going the orderly way of her life, having her own enthusiasms, possibly becoming a Catholic. Often she would think of him, and he would think of her, if away from her, and she would like thinking of him. Later on they might decide to

live together again but not out of necessity. She would find friends of her own. (87)

To a certain extent, the narrative would seem to support Harry's view, for although Vera falls outside the parameters of *Strange Fugitive's* narrative development after Harry leaves her, the novel nevertheless presents clues that she embarks on a life of her own.¹⁶

It would seem, then, that Callaghan manages to achieve a definite – if highly fraught – moral balance in his first novel. While allowing for a sympathetic reading of Harry's ongoing dilemma regarding his marriage, *Strange Fugitive* never endorses his conduct and, on the contrary, makes clear the degree to which Harry's indecision and rationalizations are predicated on a sexual double standard. The passage cited in the above paragraph, for example, continues as follows:

He wondered if she would allow a man to love her. He didn't like thinking of it. Perhaps they could come to some agreement that would permit him to go away for a time, then she would likely keep away from other fellows, though he knew she wouldn't hesitate to give herself to a fellow if in love with him.

(87)

Highlighting both Harry's sexual jealousy and gesturing toward his sexual anxiety, this passage conveys Harry's internalization of the sexual double standard that was enshrined in Canadian legislation until the *Marriage and Divorce Act* of 1925.

The novel safeguards against interpretations of this double standard as a product of Harry's own hypocrisy by presenting a parallel scenario in which the wife cheats on her husband. When Anna describes the triangle involving her mother, her father, and her mother's current husband, Harry concedes that “there's nothing wrong with [Anna's] Ma

and Pa making love,” but immediately begins to wonder, ““where does the other guy, her husband, come in?”” (188). Though less scrupulous about the position into which his own affair relegates Anna’s husband, Harry’s question here suggests his assumption of fidelity on the part of wives. More broadly, by foregrounding the complicated nature of human relationships, this scene manages to contextualize human fallibility – to encourage understanding and forgiveness by acknowledging that humans face genuine dilemmas in their relationships – without compromising the novel’s broader moral.

This recognition of the complexity of human relationships and the fallibility of those who engage in them enables Callaghan to push his consideration of marital breakdown and adultery in *Strange Fugitive* farther than Grove pushes his in *Settlers of the Marsh*. He portrays Harry far more sympathetically than Grove portrays Clara and, in so doing, implies that everyone – from lumberyard foremen to housewives, from lawyers to bootleggers – is susceptible to the kinds of moral weaknesses Harry reveals. Although the principal adulterer dies in both *Settlers of the Marsh* and *Strange Fugitive*, as a whole, the latter novel is at once more forgiving and more relentless: whereas Niels is able to start afresh with Ellen after serving his prison term, Harry struggles throughout the entire novel with the consequences of his decision – and, to his mind, both the decision and its results are irrevocable. Thus, if Grove advocates a restoration of the heteronormative family at all costs, Callaghan focuses on the consequences of choosing badly: while holding out the hope that forgiveness is always possible, he illustrates nonetheless how remote that possibility can seem.

While part of a vanguard of realist writers who engaged directly and explicitly with contemporary social mores, both Grove and Callaghan, like the authors who anticipate them, ultimately delimit their consideration of adultery. Callaghan follows Grove's lead, for example, in shying away from stereotypically pure and innocent extra-marital lovers: although not the prostitute that Clara is, Julie and Anna are far from being naïve innocents prior to their involvement with Harry.¹⁷ Similarly, both authors focus their consideration of marital breakdown and infidelity on ill-matched couples, who come together for the most superficial of reasons, and while both return to notions of marital breakdown and infidelity in their later works, they consistently position their consideration of these issues in relation to unsavoury characters, unsatisfactory unions, or immoral influences from the outside world.

In Grove's *The Yoke of Life* (1930), for example, the return of Dick Jackson to the farming community creates a barrier between the protagonist, Len Sterner, and his childhood sweetheart, Lydia Hausman. Dick is, in his own father's words, "an apron-chaser and little else" (181), lacking the means to feed not only his wife but himself as well. With his "city clothes" and easy, "amusing" ways (169, 174), Dick proves too much of a challenge for Lydia, who eventually absconds with him to the city, finding herself impoverished, sickly, and abandoned before a year is out. Tellingly, though the adulterous Dick Jackson disappears from the novel after seducing Lydia, Lydia herself is made to suffer the consequences of her moral indiscretion: Len moves to the city, eventually discovers his fallen woman, and removes her to the country, where the two meet their demise in what amounts to a murder-suicide pact. Despite the deaths of the novel's two principals, *The Yoke of Life*, like *Settlers of the Marsh* before it, concludes with a restoration

of heteronormativity. The final paragraph conveys the birth of Len's youngest brother, also christened Leonard, "in commemoration of one who was dead and as a promise, perhaps, that he should have the opportunities which his older namesake had lacked" (354). Moreover, the final scene suggests that Kolm, stepfather of Len and father of the baby Leonard, has learned the errors of his way and is finally prepared to assume a protective and supportive, rather than merely proprietary role, as head of the Kolm/Stern household.

Similarly, in *Fruits of the Earth* (1933), the seduction of a young woman by a married man ultimately leads to a return to traditional social mores – not least on the part of an individual family, but on the part of an entire community as well. Moreover, as in *The Yoke of Life*, where the adulterous husband remains comparatively unscathed, so too does the adulterous McCrae meet a more mild punishment than that meted out to Clara in *Settlers of the Marsh*. Indeed, at least initially, the novel suggests that Frances Spalding, the young woman McCrae seduces, is more likely to face castigation than the adulterer himself. On receiving the first indication that his daughter may be keeping dubious company, Abe Spalding abdicates his responsibility for his daughter's well-being and renders his wife, Ruth, accountable for the girl's good character. Even while stepping back from the situation, however, Abe makes clear his unforgiving and absolute view of moral indiscretion:

"I want to say this, if a child of mine went wrong, in the sense in which the word is commonly used –" His look, as he swayed back against the frame of the door, had something erratic; and though he did not raise his voice, it assumed tone and pitch of an outbreak of primitive passion. "If that happened

. . . I'd rather see that child dead before me in her coffin!" (241, original ellipsis)

Horrified by this "revelation of [Abe's] inner nature" (241), and instructed by Abe's sister not to take action when she learns Frances is pregnant, Ruth struggles to deal with McCrae on her own.

Her attempt to obtain recourse through legal channels fails because McCrae is able to demonstrate "'knowledge of the girl's bad character'" (319), which, in the social context Grove presents, carries more weight than McCrae's equally dubious moral character, attested to by men like Nicoll and Dr. Vanbruijk, who tell Ruth that "McCrae, . . . though a married man, could not be trusted with any woman" (274; see also 333). Because Ruth is not able to deal with McCrae on her own, however, she turns to Abe, who reassumes responsibility for the district that bears his name, accepting his duty as moral and social leader by confronting the "gang" of ruffians that has compromised the morality of the community. By focusing his attention on the "gang" as a whole, Abe can simultaneously address the social threat posed by McCrae in particular. What he does not address, however, is the double standard that creates distinct classes of women, some more deserving of protection than others.

Finally, while Abe's acceptance of responsibility for the community's moral degradation situates the initial source of decay as internal to the district itself, the novel as a whole, like *Settlers of the Marsh* before it, stresses the extent to which corruption has infiltrated the rural community from without. The First World War is cited as one such influence and, as such, is presented as a first cause for problems ranging from a vague unsettled feeling to the moral fall of an entire generation of young women:

The war had unsettled men's minds. There was a tremendous new surge toward immediacy of results; there was general dissatisfaction. Irrespective of their economic ability, people craved things which they had never craved before. Democracy was interpreted as the right of everybody to everything that the stimulated inventive power of mankind in the mass could furnish in the way of conveniences and luxuries. Amusements became a necessity of daily life. A tendency to spend recklessly and to use credit on a scale hitherto unknown was linked with a pronounced weakness of the moral fibre. ... gramophones and similar knick-knacks made their appearance; young men wore flashy clothes, paying or owing from forty to a hundred dollars for a suit. Girls wore silk stockings, silk underwear, silk dresses; and nothing destroys modesty and sexual morality in a girl more quickly than the consciousness that suddenly she wears attractive *dessous*. (288-9)

The anxiety that Grove raises here regarding clothing rehearses a motif that had appeared in *Settlers of the Marsh* in relation to Clara Vogel, and in *The Yoke of Life* in relation to Lydia, for whom much of Dick Jackson's appeal is connected to his fashionable city ways. While Grove, in *Fruits of the Earth*, presents the connection between finery and morality in relation to the War, the anxiety he reveals was, in fact, part of a more general concern about female fashion – a concern that, Mariana Valverde suggests, was one of the key ingredients in a social purity movement that interpellated “The City as a Moral Problem” (129).

In *Two Generations* (1939), Grove repeats this maneuver of identifying moral decay as an external force that infiltrates Canadian rural life, impacting on it negatively in the process. Like *Fruits of the Earth*, *Two Generations* invites a critique of irresponsible

paternity, but also like its predecessor, it ultimately exonerates the despotic father figure while leaving Nancy Grant, the dancer from the big city, a morally suspect character. Nancy enters the Patterson family when she marries George, the second eldest son, and although the novel suggests that a genuine and reciprocal attachment exists between the young lovers, their marriage in many ways echoes that of Niels and Clara in *Settlers of the Marsh*. Like Clara, Nancy refuses to be a help-mate in the traditional sense, going even farther than Clara in rejecting domestic responsibilities. “I am no housekeeper,” she confesses to George’s mother on their first meeting. “I never could cook a meal, not even for myself. But I propose to earn enough money to keep the necessary help and perhaps a little more. George understands that” (119). Also like her forerunner, Nancy repeatedly goes to the city, alone, “on undefined errands” (131). After securing a position dancing for a theatre in New York, moreover, she lives away from her husband for months at a time. George’s sister, Alice, admires Nancy’s strong will and finds her independence inspirational, but most of the family – especially Mrs. Patterson – are unsure how to respond to this “alien bird” (169). That the family patriarch, Ralph, accepts Nancy ironically undermines rather than strengthens textual sympathy for the young woman, for his failure to understand or communicate with his children indicates his unreliability as a judge of character.

Lorraine McMullen observes that in Grove’s novels “male-female relationships which are dominated by sex are unhappy if not disastrous” (“Women” 74), but *Two Generations* suggests that male-female relationships dominated by love can be similarly perilous. Nancy justifies her unwillingness to perform the “usual” wifely duties on the grounds that she and George ““want to get married because we’re in love with each other;

and with no extraneous purpose in view” and insists “that, when two people are in love with each other, everything else is extraneous” (119). Although George is, from the outset, “fully aware of the terms of [their] bargain” (119), the fact remains that, when first discussing the terms of the marriage, “he had hardly been aware” of what that bargain implied (131).

When she first returns from New York, for example, Nancy makes George’s acknowledgement of her love for him the preface to her confession of infidelity.

“Darling!” she said in a voice that was barely audible. “My darling! Oh, I want you so! But, don’t you see, sweet? Just because I love you, and you alone, I have no choice; I must tell you . . .”

He went rigid. “What?”

She straightened and let go of him. “I haven’t been faithful to you,” she said in a voice that grew stony as she spoke. . . . “It means nothing,” she went on in the same toneless voice. “Nothing whatever.”

“What do you mean . . . It means nothing?”

“I mean just what I say. It has nothing to do with you, George. . . . If you’d been with me, it would never have happened. It couldn’t. You’re outside and above them all. You’re my ideal of a man. It’s you I love. I love no-one else. And when I went home with others, I was thinking only of you. There was the curiosity, of course, to see how this one or that one would behave. . . . But I was always thinking of you and how you’d take it.” (166-7)

By using her love for George to mitigate her repeated acts of adultery, Nancy ironically reveals that love, in and of itself, is not a sufficient basis for a happy or successful marriage.

Indeed, the practical details that she rejects as ‘extraneous’ to a loving marriage prove vital: domestic responsibility, “‘Founding a family’” (119), and respecting the social role of wife are, *Two Generations* suggests, necessary if not sufficient ingredients to a successful marriage. In lacking these, Nancy and George’s marriage lacks other key elements as well, not least of which is trust. The irrevocability of the breach between them becomes manifest when George worries about his wife’s return to New York: “What she had done in the past, he said, he could forgive; forgiveness could restore the present; but it could not make the future safe” (199). At the same time, he knows that he cannot accompany his wife without losing her admiration: since the farm is “the central fact in his attraction for her,” he cannot leave it without forfeiting the very thing about himself that his wife finds most appealing (199). Caught between an insecurity about his own attractiveness and an uncertainty about his wife’s future fidelity, George faces a genuine dilemma precisely because – unlike Niels – he loves his wife. Thus, following *Settlers of the Marsh* by some fifteen years, *Two Generations* clarifies the moral of the preceding novel, insisting upon the need to conform to heteronormativity if one is to experience a happy and fulfilling family life.

Like Grove, Callaghan repeatedly returns to the ideas of infidelity and family in subsequent works. Moreover, in his novella, “An Autumn Penitent” from *A Native Argosy* (1929), Callaghan comes closer to Grove’s model than in any of his other works. A familial love triangle lies at the heart of the story and culminates in a murder-suicide pact that anticipates that of Lydia and Len in Grove’s *The Yoke of Life*. The triangle comprises Joe and Lottie Harding and their sixteen-year-old niece, Ellen, who is living with them while attending high school. From the opening chapters, the narrator provides clues that Joe’s interest in Ellen is not what it should be: he prefers his niece’s company to that of his

wife (165); he reveals excessive jealousy for the young men Ellen sees (166); and during an evangelical meeting that he attends with his wife, he fantasizes about the evening he spent with Ellen on the beach (169). Unlike Harry Trotter, Joe Harding makes no pretences about loving or respecting his wife, and, indeed, it is Ellen who expresses feelings of guilt regarding her covert relationship with her uncle:

Once, with quiet simplicity, she told Joe Lottie had been wronged and they should do all in their power to please her. Joe had agreed with her but had at the same time laughed easily, intimating the incident was old and was after all a silly incident, and since it had passed without trouble there was no use thinking or talking about it. (190)

Although Joe is “glad he had been able to talk so clearly to Ellen, ... he hadn’t quite convinced her” to accept his nonchalant approach to the affair (190), and from this point, Ellen increasingly avoids Joe and seeks out Lottie’s company. Indeed, after discovering that she is pregnant, Ellen says nothing at all to Joe, choosing instead to confide in and confess to her Aunt Lottie.

For her part, Lottie directs her anger at her niece, reserving her sadness for ““My Joe, my Joe”” (215). However, unlike *The Yoke of Life*, which endorses Len’s direction of anger toward the third party instead of his unfaithful partner, “An Autumn Penitent” is critical of Lottie’s decision. While Ellen desperately tries to placate her aunt, apologizing profusely and agreeing to do whatever her aunt wishes, Joe is at the hotel, drinking and philandering. This contrast alone pushes textual sympathy in favour of the young woman, but the respective fates that the two lovers meet also call into question Lottie’s apportioning of blame: whereas Ellen is ultimately – and unwillingly – pulled into the river by her aunt

as Lottie jumps off a bridge, Joe becomes a born-again martyr in the town, participating in the baptism at the river for which his wife and niece had been preparing. The change of heart that the community applauds in Joe is fictitious, however. As he admits to a friend following the baptism, he does not expect things to be any different after his religious rebirth, nor does he want them to be. The novella ends with Joe self-consciously making himself a cup of strong tea – “Lottie had always liked weak tea” (258) – and looking forward to being “quite comfortable in the village” (259).

Despite remaining unscathed within the narrative itself, Joe Harding commands less textual sympathy than Harry Trotter does in *Strange Fugitive* and significantly less than that afforded to Grove’s Dick Jackson. Unlike *The Yoke of Life*, where the adulterous husband simply falls out of the narrative altogether, “An Autumn Penitent” ends with Joe Harding congratulating himself on joining the congregation that will afford him the “feeling of security” he had come to value now “that he was growing old” (259). While raising questions of fairness and justice, the novella provides no easy answers. Indeed, the contrition and suffering embodied in Ellen highlight the moral complexity such questions imply. Though immediately earning Leo Kennedy’s praise as “a good story, and a fair example of Mr. Callaghan’s hard-boiled prose” (45), in the perspective hindsight affords “An Autumn Penitent” appears not so much “hard-boiled” as realistically representational. In the stead of Kennedy’s critical review, therefore, I would privilege Maxwell Perkins’s assessment, conveyed in private correspondence to Callaghan in 1931:

In almost all your writing your characters were the common run of people – people who have not had the chance to develop much, intellectually or emotionally. This has led many readers, even some reviewers, to regard you

as a “hard-boiled” writer. But there were reviewers, and some readers, not so utterly dumb: they saw that a very unusual delicacy of perception was one of your most marked and most distinguishing qualities, and that it was expressed with corresponding subtlety in your writing. (74-5)

Thus, despite – or perhaps because of – the extent to which the story’s conclusion works against a straightforward sense of justice, the sensitivity to which Perkins alludes is evident even in such an early work as “An Autumn Penitent,” where Callaghan interrogates the nuances and intricacies of the predicaments he identifies as burgeoning social problems.

Callaghan’s next adultery story, “No Man’s Meat” (1931), comes much nearer to a “hard-boiled” style than either of his first two examinations of the motif.¹⁸ Published privately in Paris in 1931, this short story reveals the influence of Callaghan’s and Grove’s lost generation colleagues, especially Ernest Hemingway, whom Callaghan first met in 1923 while working for the *Toronto Star*. Devoid of the same kind of subtleties that characterize “An Autumn Penitent” or Callaghan’s subsequent adultery works, such as *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, “No Man’s Meat” presents a triangle comprising Bert and Teresa Beddoes and Jean Allen, the “adventurous” woman whose visit to their cottage serves as the narrative’s central event. Before Jean arrives, Bert looks forward to seeing her again, “already feeling very close” to the “beautiful woman” with “many fine stories to tell” (3), and after Jean wagers and loses her “virtue” to Bert in a game of craps, he becomes “excited and nervous, knowing that he wanted to sleep with her” (17). In presenting Jean – the principal threat to the Beddoes’ heteronormativity – as an enticing outsider, Callaghan employs the same strategy used repeatedly by Grove. Indeed, he goes even further than Grove in characterizing the Beddoes themselves as ‘outsiders’ in the rural community

where they live: “the rougher fellows” in the dancehall, where on his wife’s instruction Bert brings Jean to “Try and amuse her” (17) before taking her to bed, all identify Bert as “The city man who lived in the cabin by the lake and did nothing at all to earn a living” (20).

Although fulfilling the terms of the wager becomes a point of honour for Jean, to whom the “notion of being ‘a good sport’ had always been important” (17), and although Bert promptly dismisses the repercussions such fulfillment could have on his marriage on the grounds that “the feeling between them [Bert and Teresa] was beyond a trifling emotion” (17), the two fail to consummate their pact. Instead, Teresa takes Bert’s place in Jean’s bedroom, consoling the crying divorcée who, after leaving her husband for a young woman, “can hardly stand to be touched by a man” (29). Thus, while failing to interrogate the consequences adultery might have in the context of this morally progressive and worldly family, Callaghan invokes homosexuality as another threat to heteronormativity. Indeed, in the story’s conclusion, he collapses these two discrete threats into one as Bert learns that his wife has left the cabin with Jean, whom she loves, and “could not come back for a long time” (30).

Having been cavalier about the possibility of his own sexual congress with Jean, Bert reads his wife’s letter “almost casually” (30). In the final paragraph, however, his agitation becomes manifest:

So accustomed was he to a steady calmness that he walked very slowly toward the cabin, shaking his head jerkily. The strong sun was shining brilliantly on the smooth lake, lighting up the desolate face of the big solid

rock. Further around the lake the sun was just touching the top of the hill of the dark tall first-growth pines, the best in the whole country. (31)

Suggesting – and critiquing – the sexual double standard that characterized much of Canadian society (and some Canadian literature) during the 1920s, Bert’s hypocritical distress functions as a correlative to Joe Harding’s nonchalance in “An Autumn Penitent.” Teresa Beddoes, for her part, assumes that Bert will be as tolerant of her affair as she would have been of his dalliance. The narrative exonerates neither Bert nor Teresa, but, in introducing the issue of sexual orientation, creates a context in which extenuating circumstances help to explain, without justifying, the breach of fidelity. In this latter respect, “No Man’s Meat” is characteristic of the way Callaghan treats adultery in his other works, and echoes the particular strategy he employs in *Strange Fugitive*.

In *They Shall Inherit the Earth* (1935), Callaghan also provides a context that helps to render understandable the adulterous dalliance of Andrew Aikenhead, the novel’s principal patriarch. Unlike “An Autumn Penitent” and “No Man’s Meat,” which focus sharply on adultery and its consequences, *They Shall Inherit the Earth* is primarily about a long-standing conflict between Andrew and his prodigal son, Michael. The conflict itself is the result, however, of Andrew’s marriage to Marthe, his second wife, and when Michael agrees to visit the Aikenhead cottage for one final family trip, his animosity towards his father expands to include his step-brother, Dave, as well. The son of Andrew’s second wife, Dave comes to symbolize not only Andrew’s betrayal of his first family, but also a more general threat to heteronormativity. In the narrative present, for example, he discourages Sheila, Andrew’s daughter, from getting married on the grounds that her mother was “mad” (309), and thereby incites Michael’s anger. Indeed, even after Dave has

drowned in the lake, having jumped overboard to flee from Michael's reprisals, he continues to put pressure on the Aikenhead family, ultimately precipitating the destruction of Andrew's second family as well.

In the aftermath of the accident, a full account of the early – and adulterous – period of Andrew and Marthe's relationship comes to the fore, but the narrative suggests long before then the desperate and secretly transgressive nature of their early intercourse:

Marthe had fine shoulders and her skin was soft and milky, and she looked like a woman who would never grow old, and at that time Andrew Aikenhead's wife was sick, and he was lonely and unhappy. He got into the habit of coming to see Marthe in her flat. When his wife finally died, and he asked Marthe to marry him, she felt for the first time that she was close to some security for herself and her son. (19)

More respectable and family-oriented than any of the adulterers preceding him in Callaghan's *oeuvre*, Andrew Aikenhead represents a type of every man – tired of attending to his ailing wife, desperate for genuine companionship, he seeks a relationship outside of his marital home. That his wife is ill and dying, while in some respects making his betrayal of her all the worse, also symbolizes the ailing state of the Aikenhead marriage. Bed-ridden and melancholic, his wife is simply unable to fulfill her wifely duties – unable even to mother her own children, as Sheila's subsequent, acute anxieties regarding childbearing and post-partum depression reveal. Sheila's fears about becoming a mother in her own right thus serve as a third-party verification of Andrew's recollections regarding his home life. While not exonerating his behaviour, his wife's illness certainly goes some way towards explaining why an otherwise faithful father might turn his back on his marriage vows.

Among the most sympathetic of Callaghan's adulterers, Andrew also suffers the most. For instance, following the death of her son, Marthe turns on Andrew as she blames him for Dave's death:

“I don't belong here. I won't live here. I never should have come here. I wanted Dave to have a chance to get on, that was why I came. I knew you could give him such a chance, but that's gone and I don't want anything you ever gave me. I wish I could give it back to you. I wish I could give back every little joy I ever shared with you. I want to be alone. ... I'm through, that's all.” (99)

In the wake of the disaster, Andrew is charged with Dave's murder and dismissed from his position in the advertising company where he works. Neither his abandonment by Marthe nor his taking the fall – in Michael's place – for the death of her son is enough, however, for him to win back Michael's sympathy. Indeed, it is not until the end of the novel, when, a father in his own right and overwhelmed with feelings of guilt, Michael is able to face his father and beg forgiveness. The mutual recognition of fallibility that follows marks the first and crucial step in the restoration of family ties and heteronormativity – a restoration that, the conclusion suggests, will be all the more worthwhile for being so difficult to achieve.

Though in the same vein as Callaghan's earlier work, *They Shall Inherit the Earth* marks a definite movement toward the domestication of the phenomenon of adultery. The textual sympathy allotted to Andrew Aikenhead finds no correlative in a parallel animosity toward Marthe, who, as the second wife, is never accepted by Andrew's friends and suffers her own tragic loss in the death of her son. Moreover, in presenting the adulterous husband as a

generally conscientious person, Callaghan works against more conservative strategies, such as those employed by Grove, which insistently present the adulterous threat as ‘other’ to the Canadian family. Nevertheless, much of the sympathy Andrew inspires issues from the real problems he faces in his first marriage. In this respect, *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, like Callaghan’s and Grove’s earlier works, ultimately limits its consideration of adultery to a marriage that is undeniably unsatisfactory. Not merely a reflection of social reality, the narrow focus of this adultery novel, like that of its precedents, functions rhetorically to detract from the genuinely critical view of contemporary marriage these works present and to keep the adulterous threat an arm’s length away from ‘healthy’ heteronormative Canadian families. It was not until 1945, with the appearance of Smart’s *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, that a Canadian writer would privilege the adulterous affair over what, for all intents and purposes, appears to be a solid and supportive union.

Notes

¹ See, for example, John Moss’s *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel*, Dick Harrison’s *Unmanned Country*, and T.D. MacLulich’s *Between Europe and America*.

Contemporary readers in the 1920s also saw similarities between the two, as witnessed by a number of reviews of *Settlers of the Marsh*; for example, those appearing in *The Winnipeg Tribune* (November 21, 1925, by W. T. Allison), *Willisons Monthly* (February 1926), and *The Ottawa Journal*, respectively.

² See the opening chapter of *It Needs to be Said...*

³ See Margaret Stobie’s *Frederick Philip Grove*, especially chapter 11, for an account of these strained relations.

⁴ While *Settlers of the Marsh* is Grove’s first Canadian novel, he had published novels in Europe as Felix Paul Greve. However, because at the time of its publication it was the only novel readers identified with Grove, I refer to *Settlers* simply as Grove’s first novel.

⁵ Unfortunately, the *Toronto Star*, which claimed to have the largest circulation in Canada at the time, did not publish a review of *Settlers of the Marsh*.

⁶ As Baksh and Algoo-Baksh note, those expectations were conservatively patriarchal: throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, “marriage remained the dominant institution in women’s lives,” and even the more progressive women fully expected “that they would eventually marry and be supported by a man” (88).

⁷ See, for example, Wilfrid Eggleston’s “A Peak Glinting in the Sun.” Rumors that *Settlers* had been banned were so central to the novel’s legacy that they remained unchallenged until 1973, when Margaret Stobie conclusively proved them false in her monograph on Grove.

⁸ In the 1970s, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) produced a six-volume Braille edition of the work, which was followed by a 1976 sound recording produced in Vancouver by Crane Library, a 1982 sound recording produced in Toronto by the CNIB, a 1986 sound recording produced in Halifax by the Community Tape Resource Library, and a 1994 sound recording produced in Winnipeg by Manitoba Education and Training.

⁹ Other critics have argued that culpability is shared between husband and wife. Ronald Sutherland, for example, claims that “Grove does not characterize her [Clara] in an unsympathetic manner—here, as elsewhere in his works, he seems to have a soft spot for loose women. For the impossible marriage Niels is presented as equally to blame with Clara; as she rightfully points out to him during one argument, he has wronged her by offering marriage on moral grounds rather than because he wanted her for his wife” (*Grove* 49).

¹⁰ In “The Widow’s Might: Law and the Widow in British Fiction, 1689-1792,” for example, Sydney Stoyan argues that a “widow’s post-marital existence generates two fundamental concerns: either controlled female liberty of a sustained widowhood, or the potential for a second marriage to re-allocate property. The widow’s standing is premised upon a husband’s death, and thus she is to men a sly affront, a living *memento mori*. Finally, the widow induces sexual mistrust. Carnally awakened by marriage, she is assumed to be insatiable” (3).

¹¹ See Elizabeth Potvin for a thorough analysis of the correlation between appearance – especially clothing – and sexuality throughout Grove’s *oeuvre*.

¹² For discussions of Schoepenhauer’s influence on Grove, see Gaby Divay’s “Influences of English and French Decadents in Germany: Felix Paul Greve as Translator of Oscar Wilde, Gide, & H.G. Wells” and Robin Mathews’s “F. P. Grove: An Important Version of The Master of the Mill Discovered.”

For a discussion of anti-feminist currents running throughout Grove’s *oeuvre*, see *Sex Role, Education, and Grove’s Novels* by Ishmael Baksh and Stella Algoo-Baksh.

¹³ Notably, Isaac courts Harry for the Party until he learns that he is married. It is Harry’s relationship to Vera that, in Isaac’s view, stands in the way of Harry’s success.

¹⁴ That in the repetition of this pattern Harry’s thoughts turn to his mother, in addition to his wife, evinces the degree to which the two women have become symbolically conflated in Harry’s mind.

¹⁵ Elsewhere, Harry identifies the problem as a mutual and perpetual edginess: “They simply weren’t getting on together. It wasn’t her fault, it wasn’t his fault. He wanted to be away from her though he loved her” (87)

¹⁶ For example, when Harry returns to their neighbourhood at Christmas, expecting to visit Vera, he becomes unreasonably “angry at Vera” because she is not at home, where he expects her to be (153).

¹⁷ An older “war widow who had been to France and lived for two years in Paris” (16), Julie is essentially polygamous in her relationship with Harry, warning him when she expects another caller to be arriving. For her part, Anna is legally married throughout the novel, and even if, as Stan Farrel suspects, “She probably never did a thing” until after seeking a divorce (35), there are countless men “fooling around her” when she and Harry first meet (33). Indeed, even after moving into Harry’s apartment, Anna continues having “adventures” with other men, passing them off as too “unimportant” either to confess to or – much to Harry’s consternation – to hide from him (183).

¹⁸ Despite remaining on the margins of Callaghan’s *oeuvre*, “No Man’s Meat” has received some critical commentary. See Patricia Morley’s *Morley Callaghan*, pages 20-22, which focuses on the novella’s erotic symbolism, and her “Morley Callaghan: Magician and Illusionist,” page 63, which identifies it as an early indication of the literary directions Callaghan would pursue later in his career. For a discussion of how the novella fits in larger literary or social contexts, see Fraser Sutherland’s *The Style of Innocence*, page 55, which likens Callaghan’s novella to Ernest Hemingway’s “Mr. and Mrs. Elliott”; and Brandon Conron’s *Morley Callaghan*, pages 65-69, which suggests that Callaghan’s inspiration for story came from his life experiences as part of the 1929 Left Bank group in Paris.

4. “Adroit Piece[s] of Home-wrecking”:

As For Me and My House and *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*

The 1940s mark a turning point in the trajectory of the representation of adultery in Canadian literary history. The appearance of two very different novels – Sinclair Ross’s *As For Me and My House* (1941) and Elizabeth Smart’s *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (1945) – called the spectre of adultery out from the margins of narrative focus, where it had largely remained for the first decades of the twentieth century, and positioned it in the center of character, thematic, and plot development. These works are, as a result, arguably the first Canadian texts to conform precisely to Bill Overton’s definition of the adultery novel as “any novel in which one or more adulterous liaisons *are central* to its concerns as identified by its actions, themes and structure” (Overton 5, my emphasis). While earlier texts, such as de la Roche’s *Jalna* novels, Stringer’s *Prairie Wife* Trilogy, Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh*, and Callaghan’s *Strange Fugitive*, all contain adultery as *a* theme, Ross’s and Smart’s texts are unique in presenting adultery as *the* leading theme, as the narrative element that both motivates and complicates all subsequent plot and character development. Moreover, at least with the Smart text, this decade also saw Canadian letters raise the issue of adultery *vis-à-vis* a marriage that, in itself, appears solid and unmarred by the insecurities, unhappiness, and neuroses that characterize the marriages of such literary forerunners as Niels and Clara Lindstedt, and Harry and Vera Trotter.

Given the intervening social upheaval associated with the Second World War, it is not surprising – perhaps even inevitable – that some key thematic and stylistic differences would distinguish the works of Ross and Smart from those of their predecessors. Certainly within the popular periodicals of the day, freelance writers, such as Ann Foster, were re-evaluating the gravity of adultery during the post-war period and even positing that, in the context of marital discord and divorce debates, “too much emphasis has been placed” on infidelity in recent years (31). Nevertheless, the critical reception of *As For Me and My House* was reminiscent of the ambivalence that greeted earlier adultery narratives, and *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, the more transgressive of the two texts, prompted no critical reception in Canada whatsoever. The tepid response these works engendered provides an early indication that, despite changes in the ways the popular press construed adultery, the Canadian public was not yet willing or able to concede *en masse* the fraught nature of the relation between marital stability on the one hand and tolerance for infidelity on the other.

In *Sinclair Ross's As For Me and My House: Five Decades of Criticism*, David Stouck draws a clear line between the novel's American and Canadian reception, identifying the former as ultimately condemning the novel for its “gloomy nature” and the latter as “hail[ing]” it “as an important work of fiction” (5), and this distinction is both credible and useful, as far as it goes. Closer attention to the variations in response amongst Canadian reviewers, however, complicates the binary that Stouck establishes and provides additional insight into Canadian readers' resistance to this pivotal work in Canadian literary history. For example, following the lead of Marianne Hauser's review of the novel in the

New York Times Review of Books, which identifies Mrs. Bentley's "strong, simple persistence" as what "saves him [Philip] at the end" (25), several Canadian reviewers express support for Mrs. Bentley's "undying love, absolute loyalty, and unfailing devotion" to her unfaithful husband (A.M. 199). In his review of the novel for the *Globe and Mail*, for example, William Arthur Deacon cites "The sympathy of the wife for the husband and her exceptional understanding of his moods" as the salvation of both the Bentley marriage and the novel itself, claiming that without the wife's graces, the novel would promptly lapse into "the gross and the bitter" (9). But rather than as an endorsement of the kind of permissiveness and forgiveness that Ann Foster was calling for in her *Saturday Night* column, these critics construe Mrs. Bentley's pure devotion as evidence of the traditional morality of the novel, with Deacon classifying it as a "wholesome book" (9) and with even as forward-looking a critic as Robertson Davies foregrounding the "restraint" with which Ross "treat[s] a sexual theme" in a manoeuvre that recalls the critical exoneration of Grove's depiction of sexuality some fifteen years earlier.

The focus on Mrs. Bentley's character – as opposed to the dynamics surrounding the affair – has long preoccupied critics and readers of the novel. Roy Daniells' infamous description of Mrs. Bentley as "pure gold and wholly credible" (37) in his 1957 introduction to the *New Canadian Library* edition of the novel, for example, incited a prolonged and often heated debate about the nature of her 'personality.' Many critics adopted a position in keeping with that of Wilfred Cude, who observed in 1973 that "Mrs Bentley is a very believable human being: and one of the characteristics that renders her believable is her tendency to misunderstand events that concern her greatly" (77 in Stouck). Others, like John Moss in *Patterns of Isolation*, posit that although Mrs. Bentley's

unreliability may result from her innate humanity, she is a less than admirable specimen of the humanity she represents: cynical, arrogant, and even “mean of spirit” (150).¹

The insights these character evaluations have provided are illuminating, but they also indicate a long-standing critical reluctance to address more historically oriented questions regarding the way Ross’s novel challenged and responded to contemporary beliefs about marriage and fidelity. As the immediate focus on Mrs. Bentley’s devotion suggests, far from emerging some fifteen years after the first appearance of *As For Me and My House*, the debate about Mrs. Bentley’s character extends back to the months following the publication of Ross’s first novel. Arguably, even in this longer history, Roy Daniells still assumes the role of provocateur, and he does so in a comparatively populist medium: a CBC Radio review of the novel that aired in November 1941. In this review, expressing more ambivalence about Mrs. Bentley than his 1957 introduction might suggest, Daniells poses the question “whether a woman as clear-sighted as Mrs Bentley, with as much understanding of herself and her husband as she possessed, could not have done more to make him love her” (23). Simultaneously commending Mrs. Bentley’s virtues and holding her responsible for her husband’s inability to love her, Daniells positions Mrs. Bentley as a somewhat fallen angel in the house. More subtly, however, and perhaps despite himself, he also gives voice to the possibility that, as Ann Foster was to proclaim five years later, the “‘Other’ Man or Woman Is Not Always Cause” of marital breakdown. In other words, Daniells here suggests, however tentatively, that responsibility for the Bentleys’ marital problems lies not (exclusively) with Philip, the adulterer, but with Mrs. Bentley (as well), who is unable to respond to her husband’s needs.

Some six months later, J. R. MacGillivray would seem to suggest that the problem is that Mrs. Bentley does *too much* to make Philip love her: “Such feminine devotion” as Mrs. Bentley portrays, he says, “is fearful and wonderful, and may repel the reader as much as it did the Rev. Philip Bentley” (301). While alleviating Mrs. Bentley of the burden of making her husband love her, MacGillivray nevertheless holds her responsible for the lack of affection and companionship that plagues the Bentley marriage. Thus, although readers such as the reviewer for the *Winnipeg Free Press* found it hard to sympathize with Philip, who clearly does “not make an amiable husband” (G. B. 19), Mrs. Bentley’s elusive motives and actions presented their own difficulties for the novel’s Canadian audience. Far from appearing as an innocent victim of infidelity, like Niels Lindstedt or Vera Trotter, or as a hard-working, long-suffering and wronged wife in the vein of Stringer’s Chaddie MacKail, a character with whom biographical evidence suggests Ross would have been most familiar,² Mrs. Bentley appears as a morally ambiguous figure, at once inhabiting the center and the margins of the tale she tells.

The pervasive focus on Mrs. Bentley’s character is not the only approach to the novel that has detracted from the adultery plot that consistently preoccupies the protagonist and, as a result, dominates the novel as a whole. Indeed, some readers simply ignored the novel’s dynamic narrative of domestic conflict and its ensuing adultery, identifying in its stead Philip’s static creative difficulties as the novel’s central concern. The *Queen’s Quarterly* review, for example, claims that the novel’s “main trouble” is the fact “that the husband is an artist who has talent but cannot make his pictures live” (199). Less temperate is J. R. MacGillivray’s assertion that “the central theme” of the novel is “his [Philip’s] black hatred of himself and his clerical office,” and that Ross’s handling of the subject is

“exaggerated to a pathological degree” (301). This judgment is problematic not only insofar as it obscures the distance between Mrs. Bentley, who is exaggerative and possibly neurotic, and Ross, whose medium requires that he filter his description of all other characters through Mrs. Bentley’s eyes, but also insofar as it results from a misreading of the novel’s genuine emphasis. *As For Me and My House* is not a *künstlerroman*. It does not depict Mrs. Bentley’s development as either a writer or a pianist, and although critics such as David Stouck (in “The Mirror and the Lamp”) and David Williams have suggested that *As for Me and My House* is a study of Philip’s artistic development, “rather than the story of a young artist, it is the story of a man of thirty-five who has not succeeded in achieving his youthful ambition” (McMullen, *Sinclair Ross* 63). Consequently, to read the novel as if it were a *künstlerroman* is, as MacGillivray’s early censure suggests, to be disappointed.

Despite such resistance to the novel’s principal concern, however, the reception of *As For Me and My House* also indicates an increased willingness to engage with those cornerstones of Canadian social mores: marriage and fidelity. The reviewer for the *Winnipeg Free Press*, for example, writes that “Although Philip’s internal conflict may have been the author’s basis for the book, the reader’s interest is aroused to a greater extent by the undercurrent of domestic conflict” (G.B. 19), and Robertson Davies unambiguously identifies the “chief theme of the book” as “a love affair that went wrong” (4). Even the more conservative reviewers recognize that Ross “reveal[s] a fresh and critical interest in Canadian society, which has not been common in the past” (MacGillivray 298), a sentiment that William Arthur Deacon echoes in his praise for the way the novel bridges the gap between life and letters:

In social significance no less than because of uncompromisingly sincere craftsmanship, the novel attains a certain importance in Canada. Mr Ross has something to say. ... He is interpreting contemporary Canadian life earnestly and skilfully, and in so doing is performing the most useful function of a writer. (9)

E. K. Brown, writing for the *Canadian Forum*, similarly concludes that, with *As For Me and My House*, Ross “has contrived with amazing success ... to write a book which is ... a realistic representation of a community and a way of living” (124). Thus, while not explicitly endorsing the particular moral exploration Ross undertakes, these critics mark a clear advance over Ferguson and Steinhauer, who some dozen years earlier rejected *Settlers of the Marsh* and *Strange Fugitive* on the grounds that their “realist” accounts of contemporary moral behaviour had no factual correlative in Canadian society.

For Elizabeth Smart’s first novel, the reviews were fewer and less favourable. The *Times Literary Supplement* complained that despite displaying “considerable skill in expression,” the novel’s “actual incidents ... are of little importance,” and its heroine suffers from a “self-absorption ... so intense that it produces a revulsion of feeling in the reader and leaves the impression that the author has wasted a great deal of poignancy on a trivial and undeserving subject” (497). Cyril Connolly’s review in *Horizon* is similarly ambivalent: he categorizes the love triangle Smart presents as unexceptional, but notes that the heroine of this “violent and adroit piece of home-wrecking” garners unique sympathy because she suffers on a par with “the wife.” In terms of style, he condemns the frequent “lapse[s] ... into bathos” and the “magnificent humourlessness” that “blinds her [Smart] to the moral situation and also to all general comic or ironical attitudes to what is not, after all,

a very uncommon predicament,” but also sees in the “deep candour in suffering” an “intensity” that “is full of promise and belongs to our time” (288).

The most straightforwardly positive response appeared in *The Sunday Times*. Brief though it was, this review called *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* “an exciting and original book. . . . recommended, not only for its passionate sensuous use of language, but [also] as a moving soliloquy on love and the contemporary world” (497?). Ironically, it also prompted the earliest known Canadian response to the novel, that of Louie Smart, Elizabeth’s mother, who was far from impressed with her daughter’s literary venture. After receiving the review that Elizabeth, pleased with the success it augured, had sent her, Louie condemned the book, describing it in a letter to one of her other daughters as “the ‘erotomania’ of an undisciplined young woman who was a disciple of Henry Miller,” and proclaiming that “she had burnt her copy” (*By Heart* 229).³ Nor did Louie stop with her own critique of the novel. As Sullivan reports, she launched a full-scale offensive to ban her daughter’s novel from Canadian book shelves:

Louie had learned that six copies of the book had been seen at Murphy-Gamble’s, a local dry-goods store in Ottawa; she immediately rushed down, bought, and burned those books also. . . . She then approached her friends in External Affairs and requested them to ensure that the book would not be imported into Canada. . . . Whether it was officially banned will never be certain, but for decades the book was effectively kept out of Canada. (*By Heart* 229)

The success of Louie’s efforts is evidenced by the fact that no Canadian periodicals ran a review until some thirty years after the 1945 publication of the novel.⁴

Unlike Ross, who enjoyed a belated but nevertheless positive and widespread reappraisal of his novel after its republication in 1957, after her book was republished in 1966, Smart had to contend with a rehearsal of some of the complaints that greeted the book some twenty years earlier. For example, the same year that Adele Freedman identified the novel in the *Canadian Forum* as a “Vibrant Sleeper,” timeless in its thematic concern and noteworthy both for the way the narrator expresses her experience – “in lush biblical cadences and a feeling for imagery that is positively Elizabethan –” and for the moral upon which she insists – “Love is as strong as death” (37) – saw the publication of Anita Krumins’s scathing review, “A Paeon to Pain.” Unhappy with both the style and message of *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, Krumins described the “allusive framework” as “astonishing both in its scope and in its audacity” and condemned the work’s “celebration of weakness, its glorification of a succumbing to misery, its cheapening of human suffering and emotion with mawkish self-pity” (85, 86). Thus, despite a cult following, even in the late 1970s, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* was a long way from commanding the respect and recognition awarded by the Canadian literary establishment to *As For Me and My House*.

A second indication that the Canadian public was reluctant to embrace the explicit exploration of adultery these texts present is evinced by their publication histories. Although McClelland & Stewart did market *As For Me and My House* under their imprint after its publication by New York’s Reynal & Hitchcock, both Smart and Ross had to find publishers abroad. With the help of Max Becker, a New York agent, Ross turned his eye to the American publishing industry, where he was hoping to break into a more lucrative market than Canada afforded. In this pursuit Ross was only partially successful: the

“independently wealthy” Eugene Reynal accepted the manuscript within only two days of receiving it, but he also expressed some early reservation about the novel’s potential for commercial success. In a letter to Ross dating from November 1940, Reynal simultaneously conveys his enthusiasm about the prospect of bringing *As for Me and My House* into print and advises Ross against giving up his job at the bank, which, speaking for the publishing house as whole, Reynal says “does not seem to us a wise decision at the moment” (Stouck, *As For Sinclair Ross* 105). Though likely discouraging to an ambitious writer hoping to be able to turn to his craft on a full time basis, Reynal’s advice would prove to be prudent in the first few weeks following the novel’s appearance on February 14, 1941. With “almost no U.S. sales” by the month’s end, and with “very few copies” selling in Canada, where the novel was reviewed more favourably, the \$270 Ross received in advance royalties was all the writer would collect for his first published novel until its republication in McClelland and Stewart’s New Canadian Library series more than fifteen years later (Stouck, *As For Sinclair Ross* 108, 109).

Smart’s immediate success was even more meagre. Finding in Editions Poetry’s Tambimuttu a sympathetic reader and editor for her work, Smart was rewarded with publication by the small, avant-garde publishing house. With Editions Poetry also bringing out works by Lawrence Durrell, Edith Sitwell, and Dylan Thomas, among others, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* might have had an auspicious beginning. Certainly, Tambimuttu’s ventures were well respected among Modernist literati, with T. S. Eliot, for example, describing *Poetry*, the London journal Tambimuttu co-founded and edited as the periodical correlative of the “monographic imprint” Editions Poetry, as the “only” place where “I can consistently expect to find new poets who matter.”⁵ Yet despite the

possibilities associated with appearing under one of Tambimuttu's imprints, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* failed to make an impact on its appearance in August 1945. As Rosemary Sullivan reports, "It was wartime, only two thousand copies were printed, and, because of paper rationing, the text was squeezed into fifty-eight tightly packed pages" (227-8). The modest packaging and print run were reflected in the paltry proceeds Smart received for her work: a mere twenty-five-pound advance, her receipt of which remains doubtful (Sullivan, *By Heart* 227). The fact that the rent Smart had to pay for the Chelsea basement apartment she acquired in October 1945, was also twenty-five pounds (Sullivan, *By Heart* 229) puts the real value of her advance for *By Grand Central Station* into perspective.

Smart's novel also fared more poorly than Ross's in its longer publication history. *As For Me and My House* was the fourth title published as part of McClelland and Stewart's New Canadian Library series in 1957, and has subsequently remained continuously in print, with eight reprints in the NCL series by 1971, and with subsequent printings including a new introduction by Lorraine McMullen in 1982, and an afterword by Robert Kroetsch in 1989. In 1978, David Stouck released a reprint of the 1970 McClelland and Stewart version, based on the 1957 edition, with the University of Nebraska Press; in 1993, R. Spafford in Regina printed *It's an Immense Night Out There: Selected Passages from As For Me and My House*; in 1994, Saskatoon's Fifth House publishers released a special limited edition of the novel; and 1998 saw Manitoba Education and Training release a large-print edition, geared for a grade twelve audience. A French translation appeared in 1981, and countless sound recordings and editions for the visually-impaired have appeared since 1974. By contrast, the first republication of *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down*

Wept was belated, not appearing until London's Panther publishing house and New York's Popular Library both released an edition in 1966. It was not until 1980 that the novel would be distributed by a Canadian branch of Granada Publishing, and not until 1982 that Deneau Publishers in Ottawa would release the first Canadian edition.

As For Me and My House and *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* did not enjoy the best-seller status that would suggest an immediate and deeply felt resonance with contemporary readers. Nor did their authors follow the lead of earlier writers, such as Grove and Callaghan, who promptly produced as sequels to their initial adultery studies a series of works that persistently – if subtly – rehearsed and revised representations of the infidelity motif and that garnered their writers a wider and more appreciative audience. It need not follow, however, that these works address less persuasively or resonantly the concerns of contemporary Canadian readers. Rather, resistance to *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, and particularly to *As For Me and My House*, which was readily available in Canada on its initial publication in 1941, may point to the extent to which these works genuinely spoke to – and provoked discomfort in – contemporary readers. Louie Smart's rejection of *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* as embarrassing "erotomania" and Kate Ross's scorn for Mrs. Bentley's long-suffering, which says as much about her personal experience with a taciturn husband as it does about her critical acumen (Stouck, *As For Sinclair Ross* 118), provide some justification for pursuing this interpretation of the novels' reception history in order to shed fresh light on the role they play in Canadian literary history.⁶

Although they are the first Canadian novels to focus explicitly and primarily on adulterous relations, *As For Me and My House* and *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* are, as has been shown, part of a longer tradition of Canadian adultery narratives that extends back to the opening decades of the twentieth century. Many of those earlier novels enjoyed wide popularity in spite of – or perhaps because of – their transgressive and salacious subtexts. As we have also seen, however, those earlier adultery narratives invariably created some distance between readers and the fictional adulterers – whether by defusing the adulterous threat by stopping short of genuine adultery, by casting as adulterers the social outsiders and morally suspect individuals, or by ameliorating the unrest resulting from the adulterous threat by concluding with a resounding return to heteronormativity. In contrast, both Ross's and Smart's novels effectively close the gap dividing reader and adulterer, resulting in accounts of adultery that, while fictional, nevertheless hit much closer to home than their predecessors.

Genre plays a key role in conveying intimately to readers the adulterous spectre that these texts present. In both cases, contemporary readers noted the way the authors play with form in developing their narratives. With respect to *As For Me and My House*, for example, J. R. MacGillivray commends Ross for stepping outside the bound of the traditional realist narrative:

I have taken occasion before to say that Canadian novelists do not seem to be interested in the technique of their art and are almost never experimental. It is pleasant, therefore, to find a new writer who tries a different, if far from original, method, and carries it off so well. (301)

The *Canadian Forum* review also mentions Ross's use of genre, praising it because "Most of the weaknesses and dangers of the diary form have been avoided" (Brown 124), but also criticizing Ross's susceptibility to repetition, "the major danger" of the diary format (Brown 124). Similarly ambivalent is Daniells in his CBC Radio review, when he says that Ross's "use of the diary form, and particularly a diary written by a woman, ... is open to serious question" (23), as it precludes not only "the long continuous narrative chapters of the traditional novel" but "also the liveliness and lifelike quality in dialogue upon which so many novelists rely" (23). On the other hand, Daniells also concedes that "by his single point of view ... he has gained concentration and a powerful, relentless drive along a single line" (23).

What Daniells and his compeers failed to recognize is that the diary novel substitutes for "the liveliness and lifelike quality in dialogue" a lifelikeness of its own. As Lorna Martens points out,

the diary novel presents the possibility of something approaching the collapse of the communicative triangle [between narrated world, narrator, and fictive reader] as it is found in fiction. For the diarist does not have to bridge a gap between his writing self and his "subject" – his younger, temporally distant, different self – as does the autobiographer; nor are his utterances circumscribed by the presence of an addressee whose character and relationship to the narrator are apt to influence the content and color the tone of his communications as are those of the letter writer. (5)

While Martens admits that "The interior monologue and stream-of-consciousness technique come even closer to collapsing the distance between narrator and the narrated world than

the diary,” she stresses that these strategies also “place the reader under the strain of suspending his disbelief. The reader is implicitly asked to accept the convention that the thoughts got on paper somehow and not to inquire about the scribe” (5, 6). The diary form, on the other hand, “is mimetic of what could be a real situation” (6). To formulate it differently, “the diary strategy favors a conception of the real as the artless” insofar as it “purport[s] to give the truth of a real, not an invented, consciousness” (Abbott 18). Finally, as H. Porter Abbott observes, diary fiction lends itself to increased intimacy between reader and narrative subject insofar as “We are restricted to a document that emanates from *inside* the story. We sit at and read what the diarist describes himself as sitting at, writing, and often, as we are, reading himself” (24). Thus, the diary novel positions the reader closer to the narrator and narrative world than any other fictional format.

Historically, the critical dismissal of Mrs. Bentley as an unreliable narrator has worked against an appreciation of the intimacy among reader, narrator, and narrative subject that the diary form engenders. Indeed, discussing Mrs. Bentley’s dubious credibility, Lorraine McMullen states, “There is an ironic gap between the narrator and the reader as the reader attempts to establish the accuracy of Mrs. Bentley’s assumptions and of her interpretations of others’ behavior, and, indeed, of her own motives and actions” (*Sinclair Ross* 44). To refute the critical consensus regarding Mrs. Bentley’s unreliability would be fool-hardy, but to limit all further discussion of the novel to the parameters prescribed by that debate is to preclude fresh approaches to and insights into one of Canada’s foremost literary achievements. The latter danger is especially to be avoided in light of Ross’s repeated defence of Mrs. Bentley’s credibility (“deep down,” according to Keath Fraser, Ross “never believed Mrs. Bentley was ‘unreliable’ or ‘manipulative’ in the

way she'd been portrayed" [27]), which, while not the final word on the subject, is nevertheless uniquely authoritative.

The present analysis will, as a result, put the question of Mrs. Bentley's reliability aside, focusing instead on the way Ross's text both entices readers into the fictional town of Horizon and projects the novel's social microcosm onto readers' material worlds through the intimate connection that the diary makes among reader, narrator, and narrator subject. One of the characteristic details that Abbott identifies with the mimetic function of the diary novel is the diarist's justification for writing in the first place, and Ross handles this element with subtlety and skill. At no point does Mrs. Bentley explicitly explain why she is keeping a diary, yet her reasons for wiling away her time writing are evident to readers: with a husband who constantly withdraws into his office, with her self-censorship of her musical expression of creativity, and with no intimate friends in whom to confide, Mrs. Bentley turns to pen and paper as a way of expressing herself and releasing pent up emotions and frustrations. The sincerity of her diary entries – for even if they do not represent reliable transcriptions of the events unfolding around her, they do represent her interpretations of and responses to those events – contributes to what Abbott calls “the illusion of genuine revelation” (21) and creates an intimacy between Mrs. Bentley and Ross's readers – an intimacy that many readers have used to bulwark accusations regarding her pettiness and manipulative nature. Ironically, the very fact that Mrs. Bentley's diary entries reveal the negative sides of her character only increases their currency as sincere windows into Mrs. Bentley's psyche and life. As a fictional construct, then, Mrs. Bentley's diary is a narrative vehicle imbued with honesty and familiarity insofar as it conveys her

experiences as a childless mother, with a reticent husband, in a self-important dustbowl town.

The most intense of those experiences issues from the adulterous affair that comprises the novel's principal crisis. Not so much an anomaly as a repetition of a triangular dynamic that recurs throughout the novel, the affair is the culmination of various triads that obscure the genuine divide that separates husband and wife. For example, Philip makes much of Mrs. Bentley's relationship with Paul, the local schoolteacher, but to Mrs. Bentley's mind – the mind through which the narrative is conveyed – a much more significant precedent is the triangular dynamic comprising Mrs. Bentley, Philip, and Steve. Because it is different in kind from the adulterous triangle, this familial dynamic both anticipates and contrasts with that which subsequently obtains among Mrs. Bentley, Philip, and Judith, thereby demonstrating key differences in the way Mrs. Bentley responds to these discrete challenging relationships. Ironically, these differences render Mrs. Bentley more sympathetic in relation to Steve than to Judith, for although her ambivalence toward the boy broaches petty immaturity and her discovery of the intercourse between Judith and Philip clearly positions her in the role of betrayed spouse, Mrs. Bentley articulates a more thorough self-analysis in the former case than the latter.

This propensity toward self-reflection functions, in the diary novel genre as a whole and especially in relation to Mrs. Bentley, as a more reliable index of moral character than do the particular events that the diary records. The reason for this connection between self-reflection and sympathy is historical: next to the travel diary, which in the English-speaking world dates back to the fifteenth century with a significant increase in popularity during the eighteenth, the Protestant diary of self-reflection emerged historically as the

most common manifestation of the genre. By the 1660s, diary-keeping had become “a standard spiritual exercise in Puritan circles” and over the course of the eighteenth century, with other Protestant sects similarly adopting diary-keeping as a spiritual exercise, the practice increasingly became associated with “vigilant self-observation, designed to protect the Christian from falling into sin” (Martens 55). Gradually, secular diaries supplanted the primacy of Protestant diaries, but they became, in the process, much more introspective than their initial appearance as travelogues might have suggested. Indeed, with their confessional tenor, these secular diaries even incorporated self-analysis as one of their primary characteristics (Martens 55-6). Superficial as it is, Mrs. Bentley’s association with Protestantism would suggest her diary-keeping participates in the tradition of spiritual diaries.⁷ In any event, it is Mrs. Bentley’s self-analysis that renders her diary a source of sympathy when it could otherwise appear as a symptom of narcissism because it is through her self-doubt and struggle to understand her place in her world that she most effectively reveals her humanity.

The most objective measure of Mrs. Bentley’s comparative degrees of self-analysis is the frequency with which she writes in her diary, and, as suggested above, of all the triangular relationships in which she participates, Mrs. Bentley provides the fullest account of the one involving Steve. Even though Steve is part of the Bentleys’ lives for only a fraction of the narrative time (about three of the thirteen months that the Bentleys stay in Horizon), Mrs. Bentley’s diary entries dating from this period comprise a full half the length of the novel. During this time, Mrs. Bentley persists in her diary writing despite the fact that Steve’s entry into their lives results in rapid and significant changes to their daily lives and to Mrs. Bentley’s domestic responsibilities: Paul first mentions Steve to the

Bentleys on April 27, and they meet the boy on May 2; by May 13, Philip is bringing Steve along when he visits his country parishioners; on May 19, after the disappearance of Steve's father, Mrs. Bentley suggests she and Philip adopt the boy; on May 20, Steve moves into the Bentley house, bringing with him a twelve-year-old boy's hearty appetite and costly necessities and desires (the new clothes, the stray dog, the horse); on July 5, the Bentleys and Steve leave Horizon for their holiday at the ranch; they return two weeks later; and on August 5, Steve leaves Horizon and the Bentleys for good when the priests remove him from their house, to take him to a Catholic orphanage some "two-days' journey" away (Ross 152).

Mrs. Bentley's diary entries during this time are frank in their expression of the protagonist's insecurities and emotional ambivalence. After witnessing Philip's reaction to the boy on first meeting him, for example, Mrs. Bentley records her perception of Steve as "an ominously good-looking boy" and describes the awkwardness that she had felt vis-à-vis Philip's intense response to him (54, 55). On May 13, after Philip has chosen Steve instead of Mrs. Bentley to be his companion on a day-trip to the country, Mrs. Bentley wonders whether she feigned a headache because she could perceive Philip's reluctance to bring her along, as she initially thought, or whether her actions stemmed from some other, less conscious reluctance to witness Philip and Steve together. Similarly, she retrospectively questions the justice of her having (temporarily) enticed Steve away from Philip through her piano-playing (63), and after the two take a second trip into the country without her, Mrs. Bentley painfully reflects, "I'm wrong when I feel that I've lost him [Philip] to Steve. He was never really mine to lose to anyone" (85). Simultaneously recognizing her own need for Philip despite his apparent independence from her, however, Mrs. Bentley also

records in her diary her attempt to maintain a façade of normalcy after the two return home. Even though she can acknowledge that her “scheming” (82) never succeeds the way she intends, her pride and fear of driving Philip even further away from her both prevent Mrs. Bentley from confessing her true feelings to her husband and get in the way of forming a genuine relationship with the son for whom she waited so long.

Mrs. Bentley’s awareness of the tensions and contradictions that characterize her response to the connection she perceives between Philip and Steve contrasts sharply with her blindness regarding the relationship between Philip and Judith. Whereas her diary entries about Steve position him as the catalyst for her disillusionment without being the actual cause of the distance between herself and her husband, her comments about Judith – particularly the refrain, “She was there, that was all” (163; see also 166, 167, 170-1, 171, and 186) – evince her denial that Philip could find a meaningful relationship with another woman. Moreover, the frequency of her diary entries during the affair decreases from an average of three a week, which represents the regularity with which she wrote while Steve was a part of their lives, to an average of once every eight or nine days. This comparative paucity of diary entries suggests Mrs. Bentley’s reluctance to allow herself time for reflection about what made the adultery possible, whether she should confront Philip with the knowledge she has, and how that knowledge affects her relationship with her husband. If, as a result of this lack of self-analysis, her behaviour in regard to the adulterous triangle is erratic, selfish, and indeed, at times, mean-spirited, Mrs. Bentley’s unwillingness or inability to transcribe her feelings and actions in her diary also attests to how profoundly her awareness of her husband’s affair has shaken her sense of self and altered her life: even

a routine exercise like writing in a diary demands more of Mrs. Bentley than she is able to give.

The extent to which Mrs. Bentley cuts short her reflections on the affair further attests to the pain and bewilderment she feels. While the earlier entries, despite their spontaneity and variation from day to day, individually have a structural impetus that moves toward a resolution, the entries that follow the affair end more abruptly, as if Mrs. Bentley leaves off writing prematurely in order to avoid following her thoughts to their logical conclusions. For example, the entry from August 14, which relates Mrs. Bentley's discovery of Judith and Philip's intercourse, begins with an account of the facts as they unfolded, then describes Mrs. Bentley's rising fears, and finally moves toward a passage of free direct discourse in which Mrs. Bentley tries to uncover the origins of the affair. The problem she faces is that she cannot conceive of a palatable version of the adultery story: she either faces the possibility that she does not matter to her husband at all or must accept having been duped by the young, lost woman with whom she felt an immediate sympathy. With her thoughts spinning in circles rather than moving forward, Mrs. Bentley brings her diary entry for the day to an abrupt halt:

I must stop this, though. ... Somehow I must believe in them, both of them.
Because I need him still. This isn't the end. I have to go on, try to win him
again. He's hurt me as I didn't know I could be hurt, but still I need him. It's
like a finger pointing. It steadies me a little. If only it were morning,
something to do again. (164)

Abrupt though it is, the conclusion to this entry conveys Mrs. Bentley's desperation to find an alternative to self-reflection. Moreover, as the closing sentence suggests will be the

case, the alternative to self-analysis upon which Mrs. Bentley decides is a submersion in meaningless distractions and busy work, including a return to the piano, which she had “been neglecting ... lately” (167), and a renewed commitment to securing the thousand dollars she imagines will free them from their Main Street lives.

Despite the irregularity with which she writes and her unwillingness to allow her thoughts about the affair to run their course, many of the entries Mrs. Bentley does write during this period indicate that some self-analysis is taking place, albeit tentatively and defensively. In her entry for September 11, for instance, in contemplating her desire to hold on to Philip, Mrs. Bentley recognizes the hypocrisy of her position, but cannot see a way around it:

Dog in the manger that I am I can stand him indifferent to me, cold and self-sufficient as he so often is, but I can't stand the thought of him with anybody else. I try to be steady and rational and civilized, but it's no use. I just remember listening at the door that night, then leaving them, and slipping back to bed. (171)

Like de la Roche's Piers Whiteoak, who is haunted by visions of his wife's infidelity, Mrs. Bentley cannot let go of the memory of her husband's affair. Nor, however, can she let go of her marriage because, despite her worries that it has degenerated into a sham, she knows it has become the sole source of her sense of selfhood, belonging, and meaning. In this moment of unique (and self-deprecatory) insight, Mrs. Bentley even concedes that the thousand dollars she has been distracting herself with gathering “isn't nearly so important as I'm pretending to believe. Not so far as I'm concerned, anyway. It will make him think more of himself maybe, but it won't make him think any more of me” (171).

Sparse though they are, the diary entries that follow Mrs. Bentley's disillusionment about Judith and Philip map an emotional trajectory that inverts the progression of Mrs. Bentley's development in relation to Steve. Whereas with Steve Mrs. Bentley moves away from insecurity and obsessive anxiety toward an acceptance of sorts, with Judith she becomes increasingly unsettled. Initially, the mere removal of Judith from the Bentley house is enough to restore to Mrs. Bentley some peace of mind. In the weeks that follow, however, seeing Judith in church or on the street or hearing someone in the community mention her name is enough to return Mrs. Bentley to a state of desperation. In the months that follow, this desperation turns to paranoia as Mrs. Bentley grows suspicious about Philip's activities whenever he is away from the house. Consequently, in the dead of winter, she goes so far as to stalk him when he is called away for long evening vigils at the bed of a dying parishioner, but even when her spying fails to justify her fears, her anxiety persists and her jealousy remains intact. Just two weeks after the snowstorm incident, for example, Mrs. Bentley convinces herself that a brief discussion between Judith and Philip in the street makes him "unbearable" all day, though she is the one who flees from the house, "glad of the cold, because it [doesn't] give [her] time to think or brood" (183).

Once again, the conclusion to the day's entry sheds insight into why Mrs. Bentley does not want to spend time reflecting on her life:

I don't know what the outcome's going to be. I'm not so sure of either him or myself as I pretend. Sometimes I wonder should I speak up and put her in her place once and for all. It's all very well going on this way, but where's it getting me? Have I really anything to lose? I feel old and spent tonight. It's a bigger strain than I admit; at last it's beginning to tell. I wake

up at night muttering to myself, and then for fear he'll hear me lie awake till morning. At the table, or even when there are callers, I catch myself staring into space, answering at random. I dread the nights, I dread getting up to start another day. There's no escape. I feel as if I were slowly turning to lead.

(184)

The uncertainty, the fear, the withdrawal from the world into a depressive isolation cumulatively suggest that Mrs. Bentley's moments of reflection no longer fulfil the role of "vigilant self-observation, designed to protect the Christian from falling into sin" (Martens 55), but simply lead her toward despair. The expression of those fears and uncertainties in free direct discourse functions, like the diary novel genre as a whole, to bring readers into Mrs. Bentley's mind and from that vantage point to feel sympathy for her predicament.

The dilemma Mrs. Bentley faces grows more complicated after December 11, when she discovers that Judith is pregnant. In addition to providing alternative explanations for Philip's "unbearable" behaviour after talking to Judith October 29 (183), and his "strange and gloomy" mood the week before the Ladies Aid production (189), the fact of Judith's pregnancy also means Mrs. Bentley has a much harder time trying to forget about her and her affair with Philip. Indeed, the pregnancy becomes a new source for anxiety, and Mrs. Bentley sends Judith a Christmas present, tells Philip to visit her, and with mixed feelings buys oranges for him to deliver to her: on one hand, these apparent gestures of kindness are passive-aggressive, enabling Mrs. Bentley to strike out at the woman who has slept with her husband without having to do anything overtly hurtful or mean; on the other, they are manipulative in their thoughtfulness, reminding Judith that Mrs. Bentley has been a friend to her and thereby pressuring her to keep her silence "for my sake" (199). When she takes

the time to reflect on her behaviour, however, Mrs. Bentley regrets these petty actions, confessing, for example, to “hating myself for the little gift I sent her yesterday [for Christmas]. I did it deliberately to hurt her, and I’m sorry now” (193), and acknowledging, moreover, that although “it’s hard to be fair” when “you’re the wife at a time like this[, ...] I can’t believe that there’s anything very treacherous about her. I might have done a lot worse had she been the wife” (199). Fleeting though they are, these moments of self-analysis and recognition indicate that Mrs. Bentley retains some fellow-feeling for Judith, and her ability to sympathize, however ambivalently, with the woman who betrayed her trust so intimately fosters textual sympathy for the narrator herself.

Ironically, Mrs. Bentley’s sympathy for Judith leads her to denigrate the girl just as she is prone to belittle herself. For example, her entry for April 10 – which follows Judith’s death by two days, Mrs. West’s delivery of the premature baby to the parsonage by one day, and her own telegraph to Philip apprising him of both death and birth by a few hours – contains Mrs. Bentley’s most callous confession:

For me it’s easier this way. It’s what I’ve secretly been hoping for all along. I’m glad she’s gone – glad – for her sake as much as ours. What was there ahead of her now anyway? If I lost Philip what would there be ahead of me? (212)

Though it opens with Mrs. Bentley’s selfish recognition that Judith’s death has conveniently simplified her own situation, this passage ends with her assumption that the two women are fundamentally similar: because Mrs. Bentley cannot imagine her own life without Philip and because she still feels a perverse kind of sympathy for Judith, she cannot imagine a tenable future without Philip for her rival anymore than she can imagine one for

herself. Additionally, the suggestion of sympathy and similarity within these final lines marks Mrs. Bentley's retreat from the self-gratified and heartless acknowledgement of her own selfish nature that begins the passage. In other words, in probing the darkest depths of her consciousness, Mrs. Bentley uncovers a side of herself that she is not prepared to face, and so, rather than struggling to overcome or reconcile herself to that particular persona, she turns outward again, distracting herself by directing her attention once more to Judith's hapless relationship with Philip.

After this point, Mrs. Bentley never again assumes as introspective a tone in her diary entries, of which in fact there are only two, divided by a full month of narrative time. Not simply a consequence of her busy-ness with the baby, and certainly not an indication that she has moved beyond her insecurities, jealousies, and dependency on Philip toward greater self-actualization, the shift in the nature of her writing from reflection to description and her abrupt abandonment of diary-writing both imply that Mrs. Bentley has reached a crisis point. Once it has led her to self-revelations that work against her view of herself as being more sympathetic and, at heart, more sincere than the other Main Street Matrons, Mrs. Bentley abandons her self-analysis.

This moment of crisis in the novel's generic strategy finds its correlative in the novel's narrative strategy when Mrs. Bentley confronts Philip about the paternity of Judith's baby. After a violent wind storm blows down Horizon's false fronts, and in response to Philip's most scathing accusations regarding her relationship with Paul, Mrs. Bentley tears down a false front of her own: "I ran to the bedroom door, flung it open, and showed him the baby," she writes on April 13. "'Your baby!' I cried. 'Yours -'" (214). Just as her most profound moment of self-analysis leads her to a recognition of her

selfishness from which she retreats, however, so too does this revelation to Philip frighten her into running away, albeit temporarily. Additionally, on her return to the house, Mrs. Bentley is unwilling or unable to discuss matters more thoroughly with Philip and instead sends him to bed, accepting his pretence of sleep when she follows him an hour later. Thus, rather than remaining in a vulnerable position, Mrs. Bentley facilitates the rebuilding of a false front between herself and Philip, suggesting that she is not (yet) able to face him in the absence of their customary defences.

The ambiguity of the novel's last line – “That's right, Philip, I want it so” (216) – which many critics have observed might suggest Mrs. Bentley's unwillingness ever to put Philip's infidelity behind them,⁸ suggests that the adulterous affair has become, by the novel's conclusion, the symbolic embodiment of the false fronts that have divided husband and wife from the beginning of the narrative. As such, it attaches to the affair a prominence that directs attention away from the Bentleys' long-standing marital problems. In its entirety, however, the novel is clear in its insistence that those problems do exist. Indeed, Mrs. Bentley herself repeatedly acknowledges them prior to her moments of crisis, and in this respect *As For Me and My House* follows in the tradition of such works as *Strange Fugitive* and *Settlers of the Marsh*, presenting adultery not as a social ill in itself but rather as a symptom of more systemic problems in Canadian marriages.

By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept, on the other hand, breaks past the parameters of this tradition. There are no textual clues to suggest that the marriage between the narrator's lover and his wife contains fundamental communication problems, nor is there any indication that husband and wife do not feel genuine affection, even love, for each other. Smart's novel is reminiscent of Ross's, however, insofar as its genre fosters an

intimacy between the narrator and readers. Just as contemporary reviewers noted Ross's use of the diary novel, so too did Smart's reviewers appreciate her innovative use of genre, with Cyril Connolly, for example, describing her work as "an interesting prose experiment, in which the authoress makes use of a flowing disjointed cursive prose poetry to narrate an unhappy love affair" (288), and George Barker identifying it, with some authority given that his affair with Smart was both the initial inspiration for the book and the most enduring of all her romantic relationships, as "something much rarer than a poem or a novel: it is ... the first true native prose poem in English" (Smart, *Autobiographies* 72). Subsequent critics have similarly struggled to categorize *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, with Brigid Brophy calling it "poetic prose" (7); Michael Brian Oliver borrowing Smart's own term, "concentrated prose" (108); and Cy-Thea Sand first employing the term "prose piece" before calling it simply a "novel" (11), a term David Lobdell also uses, albeit in a carefully-qualified context.

In *Daily Modernisms: The Literary Diaries of Virginia Woolf, Antonia White, Elizabeth Smart, and Anaïs Nin*, Elizabeth Podnieks's analysis of the ways Smart's *oeuvre* blurs the boundaries between personal diaries and professional writing sheds light on the difficulty of ascribing a generic label to *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*. Underlying and informing her literary analysis is Podnieks's insistence that diaries, like novels, are constructs insofar as "the diarist's ability to impose structure" is "not unlike the autobiographer's and novelist's" (36):

The fact that diarists may write more than one entry in a single sitting, coupled with their likely habit of rereading entries, makes it possible for them

to impose not only closure but also narrative continuity and thematic pattern.

(36)

Moreover, Podnieks challenges the notion that autobiographical writings simply record, rather than shaping, the life in question. In the process, she draws on the work of Paul De Man, who, as she observes, similarly argues that “the self within autobiographies is textual rather than referential” (41), and whose central question from “Autobiography as De-facement” she cites in full:

“We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer does is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all aspects, by the resources of his medium?”⁹

That Smart would, within a year of the publication of her cult classic, draft a cabaret song that parodies the intensity of *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* indicates that – while autobiographical – her novel is also a construct, representing a persona rather than an entire self.¹⁰

Just as Smart’s work “shatter[s] the safely constructed boundaries between fiction and reality” (Sullivan, *By Heart* 331), so too does it confound the distinction between prose and poetry. Following Podnieks’s lead, however, I would contend that Smart’s generic playfulness in this respect is vital to the development of her central concern in *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, for the very definition of adultery is predicated on a

transgression of the boundaries of the social contract of marriage. That form and content are interconnected in this way is signalled by the novel's opening lines:

I am standing on a corner in Monterey, waiting for the bus to come in, and all the muscles of my will are holding my terror to face the moment I most desire.
(Smart 17)

The narrator here implies that her position is doubly marginal: physically, she is “on a corner,” an intersection, a border-space, rather than a particular street; and temporally, she is caught between the moment that is and “the moment [she] most desire[s].” As recent socio-political developments have made increasingly clear, however, border spaces are virtually uninhabitable. Sites where a clear identity is vital – for the crossing of borders demands unambiguous and appropriate self-identification – borderlands are paradoxically also sites where identity is most contested, most continuously in flux. For the narrator who, as the lover of a married man, has no legitimate identity, persistent relegation to social margins becomes a source of distress and anxiety as she realizes that there is no acceptable language in which she can describe her position or define herself. At the same time, unless and until she is willing to forsake her beloved, she cannot cease in her efforts to eke out a space for herself and to express why that space matters.

More than a simple reflection of *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept's* preoccupation with the social boundaries the narrator crosses, the generic confusion that results from Smart's conflation of autobiography and fiction, and of poetry and prose, provides clues to reading her novel. By confounding generic distinctions, Smart suggests their arbitrariness; by implying that generic borders are arbitrary, she raises the question of whether other boundaries – such as social ones – might not be as well. Further, in addition

to conveying the narrator's struggle to find a language in which to articulate her (adulterous) experience, the style she employs has a rhetorical function: like Mrs. Bentley's diary entries, which close the gap between readers, narrator, and narrative subject, the first-person present-tense narrative style of Smart's novel brings readers into an intimate relation with her narrator, effacing, in the process, the objective distance that divides readers and narrators in third-person omniscient accounts. This intimacy means that, as McMullen's designation of *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* as the first feminist Canadian adultery novel ("Canadian Heloise" 76) suggests, Smart's novel presents the first instance in Canadian literary history of a Canadian writer challenging readers to sympathize with an adulterous woman.

The story that Smart's narrator tells also works to increase readerly sympathy because it details the practical and emotional difficulties with which the narrator must contend. Prominent among the practical trials the narrator faces is her arrest when she tries to cross the California-Arizona border with her lover. Presumably, the authorities hold and interrogate the narrator under the auspices of the Mann Act, an "archaic act" (Sullivan, *By Heart* 164) originally created to assist in the apprehension of gangsters – "if you couldn't prove their wicked act," Smart wryly notes elsewhere, "you could catch them for crossing a state line with the intention of committing fornication in the next state" (*Autobiographies* 47). Of crucial relevance to the present analysis is the importance of borders in the Act – "You could fornicate in any state, but not cross a state line for the purpose" (Smart, *Autobiographies* 47) – which in *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* is translated into the inspector's question to the narrator: "Were you intending to commit fornication in Arizona?" (Smart 47). Finding incomprehensible the inspector's reduction of

her relationship with her beloved to the sordid f-word, “fornication,” the narrator protests against his legalistic interrogation by formulating (unspoken) responses derived from the Biblical book of *Songs*:

What relation is this man to you? (My beloved is mine and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies.)

How long have you know [*sic*] him? (I am my beloved’s and my beloved in mine: he feedeth among the lilies.) ... (Smart 47)

That she is not able to articulate these responses aloud, and that the inspector dismisses “the girl” as “a religious maniac” (49) after she has called out to her lover, “Behold thou art fair my beloved, behold thou art fair” (47), underscores the narrator’s inability to find a language in which to express the true nature of her adulterous relationship.

Her inability to articulate an acceptable identity contrasts with her lover’s ability to fall back on his legitimate social role as husband and has a material correlative in the different treatment the two lovers receive. Whereas the lover, as husband, is free to return to his wife in California, the narrator is detained at the border. The double standard implicit in this discrepancy appears explicitly in the inspector’s aforementioned reduction of the affair to “fornication.” Unlike the broader term, adultery, which would inculcate the lover as well as the narrator, “fornication” refers specifically to an act committed by an unmarried person with a married one and thereby places full responsibility for the impropriety of the adulterous relationship onto the narrator’s shoulders. Ironically, the construction of the narrator as sole culprit of wrong-doing works to sway textual sympathy in her favour insofar as it highlights the hypocrisy from which the narrator suffers.

In addition to these practical challenges, the narrator faces social ostracization, with a “parade of unbelievers” accusing her of impropriety and stigmatizing her affair as taboo (Smart 61). From the narrator’s perspective, however, even worse than “the leering police thugs, the insinuations of Mrs. Wurtle,” and the advice of self-righteous “matrons” (61) is the response of her rational father. Although less aggressive, his attitude is also more disappointing because she “had hoped for more” than an antagonistic confrontation in his office, “with his desk massively symbolic between us” (61). As both the site where the father upholds his conservative values and laws on a daily basis and the embodiment of those values and laws, the desk marks the bounds of the social propriety that the narrator has transgressed in a manner he is unwilling or unable to condone. Little wonder that in the wake of this parade of condemnation the narrator remarks, “how sympathetic the frozen Chaudiere Falls seem under the December sky, compared with these inflexible faces” (62). The geographical reference is particularly appropriate, for unlike the “unbelievers” who position themselves firmly on one side of a border, the Chaudiere Falls, on the Ottawa River, themselves function as a border between Ottawa and Gatineau, between Ontario and Quebec. Like the narrator, who exists in the context of her adulterous affair as a boundary between the husband, whom she loves, and the wife, for whom she often feels sympathy, the Falls exist not on one side or the other, but on the cusp where the two sides converge.

But as the name Chaudiere suggests, such a space is uninhabitable: it is a site of turbulence, of transformation – the site at which water boils over into steam. Similarly, in her attempt to maintain her position between husband and wife, the narrator finds herself brought to her own boiling, or breaking, point: “I can’t take it, so I lie on the hotel bed dissolving into chemicals whose adventure will pursue time to her extinguishment” (Smart

84). With her self in flux, the narrator seeks the stability that identity can provide and discovers, again, that she is wanting in this respect:

Perhaps I am his hope. But then she is his present. And if then she is his present, I am not his present. Therefore, I am not. ... I have not been in love but in despair these last ten days. And without love I am lost more fatally than he can have any idea of. ... I die again and again. (86)

Her attempt here to identify herself as her lover's hope fails because it means, as the narrator herself recognizes, that she occupies a temporal position between the present fact and the potential future. There is no surety in her position regarding the future; no place at all for her in the present. Without a place – a grounded identity – in the present, the narrator finds that she cannot *be*; hence, her claim, “I am not.” Just as waterfalls represent a paradox – while themselves a geographical constant, the water molecules that comprise them are constantly fluctuating – so too is the narrator's repeated ‘dying’ a kind of dynamic stasis. Thus, while the narrator attempts to hold her ground in the midst of chaotic turbulence, the core of her self – love – transforms itself into despair.

Unable to find a language in which to express her social position in relation to her beloved and her world, the narrator ultimately realizes that “There is nowhere and never a time” (Smart 88) for experiences such as hers. While there is a “language of love,” albeit an “uninterpreted,” “inarticulate” one that nobody understands (110), there is no language of adulterous love at all – understandable or otherwise. The border between heteronormative and adulterous/transgressive relationships is simply too pronounced and too heavily policed. As a result, although *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* invites scepticism about the legitimacy of such social borders as those that define marital

relations, although it sympathetically presents the dilemma of a woman caught between what society insists is right and a love that she intuitively feels is true, its emphasis on the narrator's suffering means it necessarily stops short of an endorsement of her behaviour. It raises vital social questions; it humanizes the adulterous other, but it stops short of envisioning a world in which that other can justify her affair. As the narrator so poignantly asks her readers, "What was my defence but one small word which I dared not utter?" (61). Yet as Smart's narrative and biography both attest, without that daring, without that language, an "other woman" has no way to articulate the self-identity she requires if she is to survive on the social margins to which her adultery banishes her.

These pivotal novels by Ross and Smart present, perhaps more sympathetically than any others, problems inherent within Canadian marriages and the ways that adultery can provide a form of escape from a domestic sphere that, in *As For Me and My House*, Ross characterizes as "colorless and glum" and "oppressed and chilled" (34). In the years following the publication of these two texts, and especially after the passing of *The Divorce Act* in 1968, such transgressive forms of escape would inspire at most a qualified understanding, and more often than not simply lead characters further away from the comfort or passion they were seeking.

Notes

¹ Other critics to contest Daniells's description of Mrs. Bentley include Evelyn J. Hinz and John J. Teunissen, in "Who's the Father of Mrs Bentley's Child?: *As For Me and My House* and the Conventions of Dramatic Monologue"; Ken Mitchell, in *Sinclair Ross: A Reader's Guide* (see especially pages 28-9); Lorraine

McMullen, in *Sinclair Ross*, especially pages 42-73; and D. M. R. Bentley's "Psychoanalytical Notes upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides): Mrs. Bentley in Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*." For a recuperative analysis of Mrs. Bentley's character, see Helen Buss's "Who are you, Mrs Bentley?: Feminist Re-vision and Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*" and Anne Compton's "'As If I Really Mattered': The Narrator of Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*."

² In *As For Sinclair Ross*, David Stouck reports that, along with his mother, Ross has read Stringer's novels "and rather liked them" (97). See Colin Hill's "As for Me and My Blueprint: Sinclair Ross's Debt to Arthur Stringer" for an analysis of the similarities between the *Prairie Wife* Trilogy and *As For Me and My House*.

³ Louie Smart's hostile response to *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* had a counterpart in Kate Ross's earlier rejection of *As For Me and My House*: "Mrs Bentley's devotion would not have stood up to Philip's aloofness and lack of response for so many years," Ross reports his mother as saying. "Two or three [years], at the most, and then she would have lost patience and told him off" (Stouck, *As For Sinclair Ross* 118).

⁴ Neither the *New York Times* nor the leading Canadian newspapers of the day – the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* – contained notice of Smart's novel, nor is it indexed in either of the two principle book review bibliographies for the period in question: the *Book Review Digest* and *The Canadian Periodical Index*.

⁵ For a brief overview of Editions Poetry see Northwestern University's McCormick Library of Special Collections' "Guide to the Tambimuttu Archive."

⁶ Keath Fraser's *As For Me and My Body: Memoir of Sinclair Ross* also connects Kate Ross's dismissal of Mrs. Bentley as unrealistic to her own personal experiences as an independent woman who had left a difficult marriage; see especially pages 51-2.

⁷ In *Sinclair Ross & Ernest Buckler*, Robert D. Chambers mentions in passing that "Ross may have been influenced in adopting this [diary] technique by an old Puritan custom, in which the day's activities are recalled, evaluated, and then entered in a journal – a daily index, as it were, of the Christian soul's progress towards grace" (26).

⁸ See, for example, Paul Comeau's "Sinclair Ross's Pioneer Fiction," especially page 181; Lorraine McMullen's *Sinclair Ross*, especially page 72; George Woodcock's *Introducing Sinclair Ross's As for Me and My House*, especially page 62; and Paul Denham's "Narrative Technique in Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*," which concedes the ambiguity of the novel's conclusion before censuring it for "call[ing] upon the by now somewhat mouldy conventions of the sentimental tradition to provide a means of neatly resolving the action" (124).

⁹ Page 920 of Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-facement," *Modern Language Notes* volume 94 (1979), pages 919-30, cited by Podnieks on page 41 of *Daily Modernism*.

¹⁰ The opening lines of the song read as follows:

By Grand Central Station I saw [*sic*] down and wept
Because of the date that you never kept
By Grand Central Station I sat down and said
Being in love is worse than being dead. (Sullivan, *By Heart* 232)

There is some controversy about the original composition date of "Grand Central Station Blues." Although Rosemary Sullivan dates the initial version to 1946, Podnieks suggests that it was a much later work, dating from 1978.

5. “Drift[ing] Toward Hollywood Morals”:

Representations of Adultery After 1950

If the proximity between adultery narrative and readers that was encouraged by *As for Me and My House* and *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* marked a mid-century change in the way English-Canadian literature represented adultery, the latter half of the century effected its own literary evolution – one that continued the fraught process of presenting adultery as a ubiquitous social phenomenon while increasingly questioning the extent to which sexual infidelity could be held responsible for marital breakdown and its effects. In this respect, Canadian fiction writers were participating in a larger cultural debate regarding the sanctity of marriage, as Canadian society in general began reassessing the relation among morality, marriage, adultery, and divorce. Although in the mid-1940s, such social commentators as *Saturday Night*'s W. R. Inge still singled out adultery as the great social evil, insisting that although divorce is bad, adultery is even worse (“Feminine” 23), and that anyone who would commit adultery is “a cad, who ought to be excluded from decent society” (“World” 16), as the decade unfolded a gradual shift in focus and values occurred, with popular Canadian magazines such as *Maclean's* publishing articles on “How to Keep Your Mate,” and challenging readers with surveys that sought to determine whether they were good spouses (Adams 20). That shift only became more apparent throughout the second half of the century.

In Canadian judicature, this change in sentiment appeared, for example, in a decision of Chief Justice Adamson of Manitoba, who in 1945 had ruled, as Queen's Counsel W. Kent Power later reported, that "to make an isolated act of adultery the sole and only ground for divorce is wrong in principle and vicious in practice" (4). In his column "Throw Out Our Cruel Divorce Law," which appeared as an instalment in *Maclean's* "For the Sake of Argument" series, Power argued that any law that privileges adultery as the prominent ground for divorce "emphasizes the physical side of marriage to the point of ignoring all other phases of it" (4). Consequently, he judged contemporary Canadian divorce law to be "indecent, antiquated, unrealistic and inadequate; it is barbarously cruel and unjust in that it affords practically no barrier to the unscrupulous but prevents conscientious couples from obtaining the freedom they deserve" (46). The extent to which both Justice Adamson and Counsel Power were anticipating as well as participating in social change is evinced by Wilfrid Eggleston's account of the Parliamentary debates from the 1950 spring sitting. "The debate of divorce initiated by David A. Croll, MP for Spadina," Eggleston reports, "did not get very far" ("Divorce" 3). Although Croll's proposal was not to effect any immediate changes to the divorce law but simply to appoint "a special committee to consider enlarging the grounds: 'to include desertion of more than three years; gross cruelty; incurable mental disease after five years, and legal presumption of death,'" the ensuing discussion "[went] off at a highly emotional tangent": "Members saw in Mr. Croll's proposal a menace to the sanctity of the marriage contract, the thin edge of Communism, drift toward Hollywood morals, and so on" (Eggleston, "Divorce" 3).

Despite such instances of reactionary rhetoric, the objections that Power raised in 1956 became increasingly prevalent in the years leading up to the 1968 amendments to Canadian divorce law. One of the leading forums for progressive discussions in this respect was the populist magazine, particularly *Maclean's*. In the spring of 1958, for example, *Maclean's* published as part of its "For the Sake of Argument" series H. L. Cartwright's "Grounds For Divorce: Two Years Apart," which argued against the purely physical grounds for divorce contemplated by Canadian jurisprudence at the time.¹ Similarly, in 1961, Reverend Ray Goodall called for a disqualification of adultery as a grounds for divorce because "our obsession with sexual fidelity (or infidelity)" disregards other aspects of marital life (both productive and damaging ones, as the case may be) and thereby obscures the "commonest" cause of marriage breakdown: "simple selfishness and lack of kindness" (8). While conceding that "extramarital relations are a breach of the marriage vow and a falling away from the ideal of marriage" (37), Goodall insisted that adulterous affairs "are symptoms of something amiss within the marriage, but ... not in themselves the reason for whatever is amiss" (37). Three years later, Reverend R. C. Plant would push the matter even further, proclaiming that "Protestant Churches Should Ignore a Wicked Law – and Grant Their Own Divorces" as a way to accommodate the 30,000 to 50,000 wives living in a state of desertion without recourse to legal divorce and to combat "the squalid charade of common-law marriages and divorces obtained through perjury and phony correspondents" (56).

The by-line of Alan Edmonds's 1967 article, "What Easier Divorce Will Do to Canada," – "to start with, it could make life happier for more than 50,000 couples" (1) – reflects the stylistic range of articles about adultery and divorce that *Maclean's* was

publishing. Far from including only serious opinion-pieces and polemics, the periodical also ran more playful articles. Nevertheless, underlying even the latter sort of columns was the argument that, by retaining adultery as a sole ground for divorce, Canadian legislative bodies were failing to maintain the sanctity of marriage and, in fact, were inadvertently undermining their own authority and that of the values they sought to protect. While obeying the letter of the rigid law, such articles suggested, social commentators, unhappy couples, and their lawyers increasingly disregarded its intent, as they jumped through its loopholes. In the fall of 1960, for example, *Maclean's* ran a light-hearted story by Catherine Jones that effectively comprised a 'how to' list for faithful but unhappy couples seeking a divorce: first they must find a lawyer to launch the divorce proceedings and to coach them on how to keep at bay allegations of perjury and collusion; then they must enlist the services of an other woman, whose job is to appear *in flagrante delicto* with the husband at some convenient time and location; and finally they must find a married couple who is willing to discover and testify about the (fictitious) affair. More satiric was novelist Arthur Hailey's January 5, 1963, response to the antiquated divorce laws that made the adultery rigmarole necessary by instructing the "Thousands of troubled Canadians whose lives are blighted by our tragi-comic marriage and divorce laws ... to subvert the law where they can [i.e., by continuing 'the time-acknowledged custom of collusion and staged adultery'] and, where they cannot, to ignore the law entirely" (24).

Of course, *Maclean's* was not alone in calling for a reevaluation of Canadian divorce law and the role adultery should play in that context. J. B. McGeachy tackled the issue in the *Financial Post*, where he criticized extant divorce law not only for disregarding the diverse internal reasons for marital breakdown and for requiring divorce proceedings to be

adversarial, with one party in the wrong, and the other – the victim – in the right, but also for failing to reflect the realities of Canadian married life:

Though it can wreck a marriage, adultery is not the only or even the main cause of domestic ructions. There are happy households in which both spouses philander. Some impeccably faithful couples live in discord.

Countless unions have survived sexual infidelities. But wedded bliss remains impossible if one of the parties gets regularly drunk and beats the family, runs away and never comes back or is locked up indefinitely in jail or mental home. (7)

For its part, *Saturday Night* ran articles such as J. D. Morton's "Let's Make Adultery a Legal Fiction," which observed that "divorces have been, and are being, obtained ... on *manufactured evidence of adultery*" (36). He argued, moreover, that until legislation caught up to social opinion on the matter of divorce, courts should accept adultery as a legal fiction so that divorce cases could proceed more expeditiously (36).²

The 1968 *Divorce Act*, the first federal divorce legislation in Canada, effected significant changes to the ways divorces could be obtained in Canada. Whereas until that time adultery was the only grounds for divorce throughout most of Canada, the new law "introduced the concept of permanent marriage breakdown as a ground for divorce" and added additional fault-based grounds, the most important of which (after adultery) were "cruelty and desertion" (Douglas ¶4). But although the changes to Canadian law lessened the prominence of adultery in marital breakdown, infidelity persisted as a focal point in popular discourse, as the most common ground in divorce proceedings,³ and even, as a

Canadian Welfare article by Patrick Playfair suggests, as a scapegoat for a myriad of social ills:

Half a million Canadians are lying in beds other than those they originally made for themselves in marriage. ... [W]ith such a percentage of the population in adulterous liaisons, no wonder we're having problems. (4)

Writing before the *Divorce Act* was ratified, Playfair was perhaps hoping that easier access to divorce would effectively decrease instances of adultery. The persistence of adultery from the 1970s on, however, suggests that the two were (and are) not causally connected.

Since the phenomenon of adultery persisted after changes to Canadian legislation made it easier for dissatisfied spouses to leave their marriages, magazine articles increasingly sought to uncover the reasons why spouses – and especially husbands – cheat on their partners. While some, like Betty Jane Wylie's "The Joy of Fidelity," saw little practical or emotional advantage to embarking on an adulterous affair, others, like Joel Block's "Why Do Married People Cheat?" acknowledged that "The root causes of infidelity lie deep in the psyches of you and your spouse" and stressed moreover that "Understanding them may save your marriage" (49). Following the earlier trajectory that objected to adultery as sole grounds for divorce on the basis that, as Cartwright observed, "It is taking a rather low view of marriage to say that sexual intercourse is the one thing that matters" (44), a recurrent motif in many of these articles is the notion that adultery itself does not – and should not – spell the end of a marriage. As Block pointed out,

Most of us have inflated sexual behavior to unrealistic proportions. For one thing, we equate sex with intimacy. This is true sometimes, but certainly not always; sex is frequently not intimate, and intimacy often does not include

sex. Moreover, infidelity, loosely defined as a breach of trust, may occur in many nonsexual aspects of a relationship but it is primarily the sexual that distresses us. (92)

Merle Shain's "The Unfaithful Husband" advanced a similar position, although some of the advice it offered to betrayed wives seems, in retrospect, dubious and even sexist, especially insofar as it placed exclusively on the betrayed wife the burden for "modifying her marriage so that it can become a better marriage, and hence be less threatened from the outside" (91).⁴

Though Block and Shain turned inward to uncover the reasons why spouses embark on adulterous affairs, others, like Michele Landsberg, turned outward. Implicitly contesting positions such as *Playfair's*, which constructed adultery as contributing to more general social ills, Landsberg interpreted the prevalence of adultery in Canadian society as a result of various media and social pressures. Characterizing middle-aged men as particularly susceptible to these pressures, Landsberg offered a profile of what she termed the "would-be swinger": largely professionals, these men grew up in the staid society of the 1950s and now feel that they're missing out on a happening culture as represented in the media; their wives, who had been their equals when they first wed, no longer are so as a result of the husbands' upward mobility. As a result of their conservative upbringing, however, these men are not comfortable leaving their marriage altogether, so they compromise by maintaining their home life but having exciting young girlfriends on the side.

Ironically, while holding media representations responsible for enticing men away from their marriages, Landsberg participates in such discourse, constructing the modern

workplace – into which, after the 1960s feminist revolution, women were starting to make inroads – as a Mecca for the would-be philanderer:

Many wives of the would-be swingers fail to realize that their husbands are subjected to almost constant seduction at work, surrounded by women who can afford to dress more provocatively than any housewife, and quite unconcerned about whether a man is married or not. (60)

With the invocation of the vamp, the single woman eager to prey on a man regardless of his marital status, Landsberg shifts responsibility for the affair away from the cheating husband, toward the scheming mistress, creating a triangular dynamic that pits two women against each other while simultaneously vying for the attention of the man who has brought them together.

Chatelaine, the periodical that published the Landsberg piece, did work toward a complication of the image of other woman as a type of *femme fatale*. For example, it followed its “How to Hold Your Man” profile about a wife winning back the affections of her husband after an affair with a companion piece, “How to Survive as the Other Woman.” Nevertheless, the image of the mistress as a sexual predator, embodied in the closing decades of the twentieth century in such personalities as Camilla Parker Bowles, Monica Lewinsky, and Divine Brown (the prostitute who enticed Hugh Grant away from Elizabeth Hurley), was widely embraced by the popular imagination both abroad and, as Jane O’Hara’s cover story for *Maclean’s* evinced, in Canada as well. Indeed, the stereotype of the other woman as a vamp had its correlative in Canadian novels as well, with writers as diverse as Ethel Wilson, Joan Barfoot, and Audrey Thomas employing the trope in *Hetty Dorval* (1947), *Dancing in the Dark* (1982), and *Intertidal Life* (1984), respectively.⁵

Tellingly, although the adulterous other in Wilson's novel is afforded more narrative space and sympathy than her correlatives in either of the two later novels – she is the titular character and her sensuous appeal is conveyed to readers through the fascination of the young protagonist, Frankie Burnaby, whom she entices and keeps in her thrall throughout much of the narrative – her incorrigibility precludes even the kind of complicated sympathy that Smart's narrator inspires. The later novels, told through the perspectives of the betrayed wives, provide readers with even less reason to sympathize with or understand the appeal of the mistresses. In *Dancing in the Dark*, the mistress remains nameless and stereotypical – a much younger woman who conveniently works as the husband's secretary; and, in Anne-Marie, *Intertidal Life* does not so much characterize a type of the other woman as provide a caricature of her. After barging in on her rival while she is entertaining, the protagonist, Alice, confronts her indirectly, by first accosting the man who is her partner for the evening:

“Are you somebody's husband?”

The room was absolutely still.

“As a matter of fact, he said, I am.”

“I thought so,” Alice said. “Anne-Marie only fancies husbands. She really likes them. She eats them up, don't you, you bitch.” (77)

Although the novel contains as an intertext Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, which Alice herself recommends to one of her daughters, it fails to consider the perspective of the adulterous parties in the love triangle. Instead, Anne-Marie appears as an archetypal vamp, and Peter, the unfaithful husband, as a dope-smoking middle-aged man struggling to regain a sense of youthful virility.

In general, however, Canadian novels dating from this period resisted such stereotyping and provided instead more nuanced and less sensational representations of adultery and adulterous lovers. In Richard B. Wright's *The Teacher's Daughter* (1982), for example, the other woman, Jan Harper, is a plain, thirty-six-year-old high school teacher who lives in a basement apartment in her mother's house and worries about whether she drinks too much. As "a married man who's an ex-con" (62), her lover, James Hicks is a somewhat more scandalous personality, although his exoticism – and, indeed, the adulterous nature of the affair – is deflated both insofar as he embarks on his affair with Jan after his wife, Gail, has "r[u]n off with some truck driver" (64) and insofar as he is needy, unemployable, and desperate to improve himself as a result of his lack of education. Indeed, he is attracted to Jan not in any sexual or emotional way, but rather because he believes that she can coach him into becoming the man he thinks he wants to be. His motivation in this respect means that he holds on to Jan tenaciously: he assaults her at least once, fights with her repeatedly, and even vandalizes her house after she tries to end their relationship. At the same time as he professes a desire to settle down with Jan, however, he refuses to take the steps necessary to obtain the divorce that would allow him to legitimize his relationship with her. The result is that Jan remains suspended in a kind of limbo that is characteristic of many literary affairs.

Also reducing the intensity of the principal affair in *The Teacher's Daughter* is the presence of several secondary adulterous triangles. Unlike Edna Cormick, who in *Dancing in the Dark* is very much isolated as a betrayed wife, in Wright's novel the spectre of adultery appears over and over again. Even Jan's affair with James is preceded not only by his wife's prior adultery, but also by Jan's earlier affair with Travers, another married man.

That previous affair, moreover, had its own precedents, as Jan discovers when Mrs. Travers calls her up to antagonize her:

“You think you’re the first?” shrilled Mrs. T. “You’re not even the twenty-first, Mizz Harper. “You’re just a little bit of recreation for him right now. In the end he always comes back to me and the girls.” (80)

Although the encounter with his wife initially increases her sympathy for the man – “Vivan Travers radiated energetic hostility. Probably a compulsive type. ... No wonder poor Travers needed to relax now and again” (81) – she is later forced to empathize with the wife’s frustration at her continual betrayal. When she sees Travers with yet another woman she is immediately outraged even though her affair with him is long over and, as she tries to tell herself, “He didn’t promise anything” despite having said “he was through with roaming around” (245).

The multiplicity of affairs that the novel presents means that it can also represent diverse responses to adultery. Jan’s colleague and friend, Liz Barton, had been an unwitting participant in a love triangle, albeit as the betrayed wife rather than as the mistress. Instead of directing her anger outward as Mrs. Travers had done, however, Liz internalizes it and accepts responsibility for having failed to be the wife her husband had needed. She focuses in particular on her recent weight gain, assuming that it had caused her husband to become “bored with me in bed” (244). That her confession to Jan in this respect is followed by a pause and a looking away suggests that Liz is still hurt by what she interprets as her husband’s superficiality, but construing the affair as a purely physical matter has its benefits as well. Instead of confronting the possibility that her husband has fallen in love with another woman, Liz focuses on the sordid details: “The perfume that

lingers, the strands of hair, the scratches on the shoulder blades. ... All the stuff you see on the soapers” (244). If her husband has derived any emotional benefit from his affair – if he is more confident, more positive, more engaged with life – she fails to notice. By characterizing her husband as a superficial womanizer, she is able to mitigate her loss and to accept, without regret, her decision to force him to leave the family home. She still suffers, feeling contrition for having driven a wedge between her daughter and her husband in addition to guilt for having let herself go over the course of her marriage, but unlike Mrs. Travers, who is “venomous” and embittered (80), Liz manages to retain throughout her ordeal a sense of dignity and balance.

As Liz’s pejorative reference to “the stuff you see on the soapers” suggests (244), the rising prevalence of adultery during the closing decades of the twentieth century had as its correlative a diminished willingness to construe the adulterous affair as a genuinely companionate relationship of the sort Renny and Alayne share in de la Roche’s *Whiteoak Chronicles* or as the kind of intensely passionate intimacy that arises between Smart’s narrator and her beloved. While narratives dating from these years typically provide some rationalization for why the unfaithful spouse embarks on the affair, the affairs themselves are too troubled, sordid, or banal to represent a genuine threat to heteronormativity; indeed, they rarely even justify the inconvenience they create in their participants’ lives. For example, although David Blewett has argued that, in Margaret Laurence’s *The Diviners* (1974), Morag Gunn’s “decision to leave her husband and then to have a child by Jules ... is seen as right because it is a defiant, and deeply-felt assertion of ... being true to oneself” (184), his reading fails to account for the basely sexual nature of the affair. If Brooke fails as a husband insofar as he remains unable to relinquish what Jill Franks calls “his

infantilization of Morag and his assumption of the role of authority” (10), Jules fails as both a father – he is more absent from than present in Pique’s life – and a lover, surfacing in Morag’s life only sporadically and, when he does appear, initiating a renewal of their former intimacy with such self-gratifying sweet nothings as “Ride my stallion, Morag” (Laurence, *Diviners* 365).

Moreover, in valorizing the affair as liberating, Blewett necessarily disregards the “great deal of emotional pain” that “an adulterous act can cause third parties (spouses, children, friends, and relatives)” (Shrage 48). When Morag admits her adultery to Brooke, for example, she is “totally unprepared for the cry which comes from his throat” (299), but even though she knows that “the pain is real,” she also self-consciously registers that “there is something melodramatic, to her ears, in what he is saying” (299). That melodrama casts Brooke and Morag into the role of each other’s antagonist and, as a result, the emotional fallout from the affair endures long past the initial confession: when in Vancouver, Morag writes “painfully, to Brooke” (317), and when Brooke visits her there he flaunts his wife, and Morag flaunts Pique in turn, because “[t]hey have had to hurt one another, evidently, this one last time” (359). Similarly, when Mac MacAindra learns about the afternoon his wife, Stacey, had spent with his friend Buckle Fennick in *The Fire-Dwellers*, the look in his face – “misshapen with a private grief” (Laurence, *Fire-Dwellers* 149) – inspires Stacey’s own suffering as she struggles to reconcile her conflicting emotions of hating Mac for believing she consummated the affair when she did not and of needing “to comfort” him in order to mitigate what hurt she has caused (149). While this incident is not enough to prevent Stacey from embarking on a genuinely adulterous affair later in the narrative, that affair ultimately effects her much like Mac’s earlier affair with a co-worker had affected

him: both return to their marriage and their family with renewed commitment to making those relationships work.

For Leola Staunton née Cruikshank in Robertson Davies *Fifth Business* (1970), on the other hand, marriage and family life dissolve upon discovery of her husband's affair. Rather than producing narrative sympathy for the wronged wife the way that Barfoot's *Dancing in the Dark* or Thomas's *Intertidal Life* would do some ten years afterward, however, Davies's novel reflects the burgeoning cynicism regarding marriage and love that was reflected at the time in magazines. While the women in the later novels believe implicitly that their marriages should endure till death parts them from their spouses – and while Barfoot's protagonist has so internalized that notion that her discovery of her husband's infidelity is followed by her automaton murdering of him – Davies foregrounds a more pragmatic side to married life. At no point does the narrative portray Boy Staunton as being smitten by Leola. He marries her because she represents the best that Deptford has to offer and, perhaps, as a way of asserting his dominance over Dunstan Ramsay, his "lifelong friend and enemy" (Davies, *Fifth Business* 1) whom he believes is still in love with his girl.

The clichéd beginnings of Boy's relationship with Leola – the most eligible bachelor in town proposes to the most beautiful woman he has seen – have their correlative in the banality of the marriage's demise. A textbook example of Landsberg's "would-be swinger," Boy Staunton outgrows his wife as he rises in prominence and accumulates a level of affluence unheard of in Deptford. No longer viewing Leola as his equal, he alternately neglects and bullies her, to both of which behaviours she submits abjectly. Moreover, seeing no reason to limit his sexual appetite to a wife "who just lies there like a damned sandbag" (214), he regularly leaves the marital bed for greener pastures, where he

can have “intercourse often” and have it be “all sorts of things – intense, passionate, cruel, witty, challenging – ” (214). If Boy embarks on his affairs for all the usual and, perhaps, the worst reasons, so too does Leola’s disillusionment follow in the usual order of things: she discovers his infidelity “by the classic mishap of finding a revealing note in his pocket,” prompting Dustan Ramsay to note wryly that “the Stauntons rarely escaped cliché in any of the essential matters of life” (214). Leola’s subsequent histrionics and attempted suicide only highlight how stereotypical both she and Boy had become in their respective roles.

Davies’s use of a stereotypical adulterous triangle differs from that of Audrey Thomas, who resorts to the vamp stereotype in order to generate sympathy for her comparatively thoughtful and realistic protagonist, or of Joan Barfoot, who employs the stereotype so that she can focus exclusively on the progressive insanity of the wife. Sympathy for Leola never enters the picture: not even Dunstan Ramsay, who had yearned for her when he was a boy and who repeatedly stands up for her against Boy’s criticisms, has felt “anything but pity” for her for “at least ten years” (219). Moreover, the marriage is too farcical to inspire any sense of tragedy in the wake of Leola’s discovery. Although it constitutes neither a central narrative development nor a crisis that catalyzes changes in the novel’s characters, Boy’s adultery nonetheless has a dual function: it contrasts the mythological importance of Mary Dempster’s adultery with the tramp who later resurfaces as Surgeoner and it contributes to the novel’s construction of Boy Staunton as an egocentric and despicable character.

The key difference between Boy’s philandering and Mary’s intercourse with the tramp lies in the motivation underlying the respective acts. For Boy, his adulterous affairs are about self-gratification; he anticipates the suffering Leola would feel if she discovered

his infidelity, but dismisses the extent of his betrayal by convincing himself – as he subsequently assures her – that her “situation is perfectly secure” (218). He construes the security he offers her as a license not to obey any of his other marital duties, following his assurance with a warning: “if you think I intend to be tied down to this sort of thing’ – and he gestures toward the drawing-room, which was, I must say, a dismal toy-littered waste of wealthy, frumpish domesticity – ‘you can think again’” (218). The infidelity is a way for him both to satisfy his own sexual desires and to assert his independence and will. For Mary Dempster, on the other hand, the affair, if it can even be called such, is entirely selfless. She gives herself without any thought of consequences to herself or her standing in Deptford simply because “He was very civil, ’Masa. And he wanted it so badly” (49). Ironically, whereas Mary’s conduct provokes outrage from the Deptford matrons, including Dunstan’s mother, who hitherto had felt a special tenderness toward the young, simple minister’s wife, Boy’s affairs provoke no censure whatsoever – not even from his wife, who attempts suicide the night she learns of them.

Although reflective of the sexual double standard that had historically (and, until 1925 in Canada, legally) construed a woman’s adultery as worse than a man’s, the point the novel makes here has little to do with the adulterers’ respective genders. Instead, *Fifth Business*’s contrast in this respect effectively critiques the superficiality of contemporary social morality, in which appearances matter more than substance. Unlike Boy, who goes through the motions of being a husband – primarily by providing financially for his family – Mary fails as a wife: she is too girlish in appearance to fulfill Deptford’s expectation of how a wife should look, she leaves it to her husband to draw the water from their well “when this was fully understood to be woman’s work” (22), and she knows neither how to

cook nor to clean house. Moreover, her “feckless generosity” (24) leads her to give away rotten vegetables from her garden and trinkets from the parsonage that, as the church ladies promptly point out, are not hers to give. By the time of the tramp episode, most of Deptford has already ostracized Mary, having “[grown] tired of pitying the Baptist parson and his wife” (25). With neither wealth nor influence over the community, Mary falls an easy target to their further denigration of her whereas Boy remains virtually invulnerable – not as a result of a stronger moral or ethical character, but rather because of the power he commands as a successful businessman with political connections.

As a result, in Dunstan’s mind at least, Boy is culpable in ways that Mary is not. His philandering thus represents only another instance of his inability to feel sympathy for others or to take responsibility for the consequences of his actions. In this respect, too, what Davies does is not original: as early as 1905, D. C. Scott in his *Untitled Novel* used adultery as a way of further underlining Purcell Shortreed and Adrienne Godchere’s villainous characters, and as already mentioned, the adultery of Marion Forrester née Nason in Durkin’s *The Magpie* and of Clara Vogel in Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh* functions in a similar way. It is a manoeuvre, moreover, on which writers continued to rely during the closing decades of the twentieth century, with Michael Ondaatje, for example, attributing adultery to only the most despicable character *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987) presents: Ambrose Small, the “bare-knuckled capitalis[t]” whom the narrator likens both to a “jackal” and “a hawk who hovered over the whole province, swooping down for the kill, buying up every field of wealth, and eating the profit in mid-air” (57).

What is unique in Davies’s portrayal of Boy Staunton is the suggestion that his sexual immorality – or amorality, as the case may be – really doesn’t matter. Boy’s

ultimate demise, orchestrated by Paul Dempster's reincarnated self as the magician Magnus Eisengrim, is his punishment for his callous disregard of his involvement in Mary Dempster's fall from grace; it is in no way connected to his various marital infidelities. Moreover, inasmuch as the Deptford trilogy indicates that Boy was under hypnosis at the time of his death, it implies that even in death he would not have been made to suffer any crisis of conscience whatsoever. At the same time, however, while Boy's absolute egocentrism immunizes him against pangs of remorse or regret, it also precludes him from achieving the level of self-actualization toward which his son, David, strives in *The Manticore*, or the kind of self-realization Dunstan Ramsay achieves through his intervening angels: Mary Dempster, Diana, and Liesl. Boy's lack of morality – at once his blessing and his curse – thus appears as a character flaw – one which is not tragic but merely pathetic and suggestive of the sense of waste an empty life evokes.

To identify this sense of pathos as characteristic of English-Canadian representations of adultery in the closing decades of the twentieth century is, perhaps, to be somewhat reductionist. Certainly *Dancing in the Dark* and *Intertidal Life* attach to their adulterous affairs an intensity that resists classification as pathos. *The Diviners* suggests, in the affair Morag has with Dan MacRaith, that even adulterous relationships can be positive, within carefully policed bounds, as does Bonnie Burnard's *A Good House* (1999) through, among others, Daphne Chamber's affair with Murray McFarlane. In Nino Ricci's *Lives of the Saints* (1990), the death of Cristina Innocente after she gives birth to her adulterous lover's child is nothing short of tragic, as is the death of Elizabeth McKelvey on resuming her affair with Adam Goldsmith in Matt Cohen's *Elizabeth and After* (1999). Indeed, with adultery ubiquitous in English-Canadian letters dating from this time, one could cite almost

as many texts that contest a connection between adultery and pathos as those that support it. Nevertheless, the prominence of such representations of adultery in English-Canadian letters of this time demands critical attention – particularly since such depictions recur in the works of English-Canada’s most prominent writers at the end of the century: Mordecai Richler and Margaret Atwood.

Richler and Atwood dominated the Canadian literary scene during the closing decades of the twentieth century. During that time, they collectively won four Governor’s General awards and two Giller Prizes; their work earned a place on the Man Booker shortlist six times (with Atwood winning the prize in 2000 for *The Blind Assassin*), and screen adaptations of their novels received both a Genie and an Academy award. Moreover, their market successes were equalled by their recognition by the Canadian academy: they received honorary degrees from countless universities, their works regularly appeared on course syllabi, and they were (and remain) the subject of hundreds of scholarly monographs, theses, and articles. Such pre-eminence suggests that these writers addressed issues of concern to their readers and did so in ways that resonated deeply with their audience. Adultery was one such concern that both Richler and Atwood persistently subject to their scrutiny: from its initial incarnation in their first published novels, *The Acrobats* (1954) and *The Edible Woman* (1969) respectively, marital infidelity has been a constant in their *oeuvres*. Remarkably, given the temporal scope of their writing, their views of adultery remained consistent: far from presenting it as an exotic outlet from the banalities of daily life, Richler and Atwood consistently depict adultery as a trap in its own right rather than as an escape from the confines of married life.

While committing adultery provides a modicum of freedom and autonomy for wives in earlier representations of the subject, such as Grove's depiction of Clara Vogel's affairs in *Settlers of the Marsh* or Laurence's initial depiction of Julie Kazlik Fennick's affair with Dennis in *The Fire-Dwellers* and further development of it in *The Diviners* (an affair that ultimately precipitates her divorce, leaving her free to start her life over again with a gentler, more compassionate man), in Richler's and Atwood's canon, infidelity fails to provide adulterers with either the excitement or the validation they seem to be seeking. Richler's *The Acrobats* acknowledges more explicitly than any of his subsequent novels the enticements adultery offers; in this instance, an escape from an unhappy marriage and freedom from conservative sexual morality. For the protagonist, Barney Larkin, visiting the local brothel while on vacation in Spain offers a kind of sexual liberation. He justifies his experimentation by invoking a sexist double standard that at once privileges and denigrates the prostitutes he visits: "You know it's okay with a whore," he says. "You can horse around a bit. With your wife it's a different story. I mean a guy feels kind of dirty" (107). In its implicit assumption of the virgin-whore binary and its equation of "wife" with a conventional and "whore" with a playful sexuality, Barney's position is both self-gratifying and naive, for any identification of his wife, Jessie, as sexually conservative is contradicted by her own history of infidelity that, as she confesses to one of her suitors, has prompted Barney to bring her to Spain in the first place.

For her part, Jessie comes across as both unfaithful and ungenerous: after his family disowns him for having married a Gentile, Barney finds himself held in contempt by the woman on whom he had staked his future. Rather than taking advantage of the vacation and new locale to rekindle romance with her husband, she immediately taunts him with the

prospect of her entering a new affair with a “cute” Spaniard and mocks him further with her look of “knowing disgust – an emotion that was the flux of a degenerated intimacy; an intimacy of smelly socks, after-dinner burping, sleeping noises, soiled underwear, and dental odours” (11). Moreover, she, too, entertains her own double standards. When Barney returns to their hotel room to discover Jessie and her latest lover *in flagrante delicto*, for example, she preempts any accusations he might make with one of her own:

“Did you get to the brothel last night, honey-bunny? Regardless of the fact that you are the father of two small children, regardless of the fact that you might have contacted some dreadful disease and infected me.” (179)

While reminding her husband of his familial responsibilities (and his failure to fulfil them appropriately), Jessie seems defensively unaware of her own shortcomings. Ironically, however, it is during this moment of crisis that sympathy shifts somewhat in Jessie’s favour. Hitherto a faithless femme fatale, Jessie redeems herself by rejecting Barney’s offer of presents and a return to the routine of a loveless home life.

Ultimately, however, their adulterous affairs provide no panacea for the bitterness and resentment that mark the Larkins’ relation to each other and the world. After his trips to the brothel fail to revive his sense of virility, for instance, Barney waxes nostalgic about traditional family structures, in which ““you married a woman and she was yours and she loved you”” (159). Jessie, on the contrary, looks to the future; “tired of” the games she and Barney play and “too old” for the “toys” he buys her every time they reconcile, she resolves to build a future in which she can love and be loved. Just as Barney has to modify his traditional view of marriage with the fact that “guys always fool around with each other’s wives” (160) if he is to reach a more mature understanding of marriage and commitment, so

too must Jessie confront the tension between her desire to be loved on the one hand and her casual intercourse – “‘It mean[s] nothing’” – with “half-forgotten” men on the other (179).

In his bleak depiction of a marriage gone wrong, however, Richler highlights the unwillingness of both spouses to recognize their own shortcomings. If Jessie’s husband is “an unloved man” (179), so too are her lovers, like the Spaniard André, for despite her attempts to “remember[...] him tenderly” and “to protect him” (179), she rationalizes the affair in the basest of ways: “‘We were both drunk’” (179). Unlikely to find love where she cannot offer any, Jessie seems predisposed to flounder through a string of disappointing affairs, always looking to the next one to provide her the validation she seeks. Barney similarly curtails his chance at happiness by holding fast to outdated views of women even when experience has shown him how unrealistic his ideals are. Genuinely befuddled, he never recognizes that his solicitation of illicit sex in the brothel is as much a transgression of his marriage vows as Jessie’s dalliance with other men, nor does he consider that adultery might signify more than a transgression of “other people’s property” (159). Their inability to accept and change the role they play in their own unhappiness sentences the Larkins to a life of sadness. While in no way suggesting that a change of heart in either could rekindle affection or restore functionality in their marriage, *The Acrobats* presents their various affairs as equally bleak, empty, and meaningless.

A Choice of Enemies (1957) also depicts adultery as an inadequate compensation for post-marriage disillusionment. Like *The Acrobats*, this novel does not pretend that marital life is easy or even satisfactory; on the contrary, it asserts that “All marriages end the same. After five years – bickering, little affairs on the side, a resentful tolerance, no more desire.” While the bleak portrait of marriage that Richler presents in his novels dating from the

1950s may be connected to his rapidly deteriorating marriage with his first wife, Cathy Boudreau, his early sense of adultery as equally disillusioning is, in the context of his personal life, even more poignant, juxtaposed as it was to “his growing obsession with Florence Mann” (Posner 103), the woman who would become his second – and well loved – wife. But Richler was no naif; over time he increasingly registered in his novels his recognition that even solid marriages are susceptible to infidelities. Thus it is, for example, that Jake Hersh in *St. Urbain's Horseman* (1971) construes his marital contentment as a troublesome, “onerous ... burden of responsibility” (297) that alienates him from his philandering colleagues and eventually leads them to dismiss him as a “bore” (199), and Barney Panofsky in *Barney's Version* (1997) forfeits the happiness he enjoys in his third marriage in order to show up a younger, more attractive man by having a one-night stand with Lorraine Peabody.

The problem Richler's adulterers encounter over and over again is that their affairs fail to gratify them in any significant way. The inconveniences Jake Hersh's peers encounter with their mistresses, for example, far outweigh either the benefits they obtain from their affairs or the boredom of their marriages:

Cy Levi soon began to find dieting a severe punishment. Lou Caplan was suddenly embarrassed that he snored and slept with his mouth open. Farber was ashamed of being seen in his truss yet frightened of going without it. Undressing, Bob Cohen hastily stuffed his underwear in his trouser pocket, just in case there was a brown stain, which would offend a young girl. Al Levine, ever mindful to take a digitalis pill before, pretending he was popping something groovy. Myer Gross confessed, “It's embarrassing at my age to get

up in the morning and lock the bathroom door before I rinse my dental plate.

But I don't dare let her see me without my teeth." (299)

Repeatedly disappointed as they find in their affairs neither unconditional love nor validation of their manhood (for it is difficult to feel confidently virile when worrying about underwear smears), these men fail to recognize that the fickleness of their lovers might even outdo their own faithlessness toward their wives.

Margaret Atwood similarly construes adulterous affairs as disillusioning – not only for the adulterous spouse, but also for the other woman whose experiences and perspectives she endeavours to represent. In *Life Before Man* (1979), for example, Elizabeth's and Nate's various affairs fail to better their lives in any material way. Indeed, Elizabeth's reflections on her dead lover reveal that her affair was more restrictive and controlling than her marriage had ever been. Nate similarly begins to feel confined in his relationship with Martha when she grows increasingly antagonistic in her attempts to make him understand that, for her, their affair feels "Like a backstairs romance with the kitchen help" (34). Thus, inadvertently, Martha drives Nate away precisely when she tries hardest to draw him nearer. Already distanced from her, rather than sympathize with her predicament, he merely reflects on the peculiarity of her metaphor – "Who has backstairs any more?" – and then decides that the relationship is no longer working for him: "If I console her, she'll say I'm a hypocrite. ... If I don't, I'm a prick. Out now while there's time" (34, 35).

Nate's other mistress, Lesje, experiences similar difficulty in her struggle to define her self and her role in the adulterous dynamic. Part of the problem she faces is social: just as Offred, in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), recalls the pre-Gilead disapproval her friend Moira expressed about Offred's clandestine affair with Luke, who was married when their

relationship began, so too does Lesje anticipate similar censure from her friends and her mother, prompting her not to confess her predicament to them. Moreover, the compressed narrative time of *Life Before Man* compared with the temporal scope of *The Handmaid's Tale* means that Lesje is never able to get enough distance from her affair to reflect on it objectively as her counterpart in the later novel does. Thus, while Offred experiences a change in her view of adultery, moving from a “rationaliz[ation]” of her affair with Luke in the narrative past by insisting she “was in love” (171), to a judgment of the Commander’s analogous rationalization in the narrative present as “too banal to be true” (158), Lesje cannot recognize how her affair with Nate is simply a repetition of “The same old thing” (*Handmaid's* 158), nor can she acknowledge the ways her role in the adulterous triangle is “absurd as well as ... ignominious” (*Handmaid's* 163).

Lesje’s naïveté in this respect also contributes to the problem she faces. Her belief that her position is not “seedy [...] Or even tacky” because she “doesn’t feel tacky” (*Life* 124) and that she isn’t “play[ing] Other woman in some conventional, boring triangle” because “She doesn’t feel like an other woman; she isn’t wheedling or devious, she doesn’t wear negligées or paint her toenails” (127) means that she remains unaware of the unique vulnerability of her position. That vulnerability becomes all too apparent, however, when her common-law partner, William, rapes her after Elizabeth informs him of the affair. Elizabeth’s comparative power over her emerges further when Elizabeth and Nate discuss using his affair with Lesje as the grounds for their divorce. While Nate does consider how Lesje might feel, he unilaterally concludes that she will be equally unhappy in either scenario: “Opt for a quick adultery case and Lesje will resent being dragged into it. ... But wait three years [with the grounds of marital breakdown] and she’ll resent that, too” (259).

That Lesje herself is never asked for her opinion suggests how much an outsider she is. Indeed, more so than either spouse, Lesje finds herself in an untenable position that complicates her life more than it contributes to it.

Nevertheless, it is in *Lady Oracle* that Atwood presents most explicitly the disappointment to which adulterous affairs lead. Just as Joan reinvents herself in her relationship with Arthur, self-consciously playing the part of an evicted “political refugee” when she first moves in with him and performing the part of a “bad cook” with relish once they are married (223), so too does she express an alternate side of herself in her affair with the Royal Porcupine. Moreover, in addition to allowing her to express herself differently, the affair allows her to nurture another part of herself. With complete fulfilment a hand’s breadth away, Joan initially believes that she has landed on the perfect solution to the contradictory impulses women have – instead of expecting “mysterious cloaks” and “help with the dishes” from the same man, she “kept Arthur in our apartment and the strangers in their castles and mansions, where they belonged” (229). What she comes to discover, though, is that “every Heathcliff [is] a Linton in disguise” (287), that even behind the image of the be-caped and be-caned con-creator artist lies an ordinary man with an ordinary name (Chuck Brewer), ordinary needs, and “the chin of a junior accountant” (289).

As Richler and Atwood represent it, however, adultery is not simply disappointing and dissatisfying: it is inconvenient and, at times, damaging as well. In *The Acrobats*, Jessie’s reference to “some dreadful disease” speaks to one of the physical dangers of extramarital promiscuity, and in *Cocksure*, Mortimer objects to his wife’s affair with Ziggy Spicehandler not least on the grounds of hygiene: he simply cannot stomach the thought of “that lotioned manicured hand slipping down toward [Ziggy’s] genital area, discovering the

moldy underwear, Ziggy crawling with crabs and high as an overripe Camembert” (172). For Bob Landis in *A Choice of Enemies*, not even a forthright articulation of how little his affair with Sally means to him – “You know that I’ve got a wife, baby, and that this is just for kicks” (67) – protects him from personal complications. On the contrary, he gets more “kicks” than he bargained for when Sally becomes pregnant and, in a desperate attempt to win him over to the idea of children, tries to manipulate him into seeing things her way with a half-hearted suicide attempt that proves fatal. For Jake in *St. Urbain’s Horseman*, even the appearance of adulterous transgression is enough to disrupt his life, expose him to charges of obscenity, and compromise his marriage insofar as Nancy never quite conquers her suspicion that her husband’s role in the Harry-Ingrid affair had been more proactive than he admits.

In *Lady Oracle*, the complications ensuing from Joan’s adulterous affair outdo even those Jake faces: oscillating between the fears that the Royal Porcupine is stalking her and Arthur is planning her demise, she fakes her death and flees to Terremoto, where she grows increasingly nostalgic about her past relationship with her husband. Yet Joan’s predicament is a humorous one. Elsewhere in her *oeuvre* Atwood explores in a more sober vein the difficulties that emerge from adulterous liaisons. The narrator in *Surfacing*, for example, is compelled to abort her foetus after she is impregnated by a married man who “show[s] [her] snapshots of his wife and children, his reasons, his stuffed and mounted family” and then tells her to “be mature” (149). Her struggle in the narrative present is a struggle to accept and reconcile herself to the abortion, but the process of doing so also requires her to come to terms with how little she had meant to her lover. In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Offred is left with an uncertain future after the Commander’s wife

discovers the affair and arranges for her removal from the household, and in *The Robber Bride* (1993), Tony, Charis, and Roz all struggle to piece their lives back together in the wake of Zenia's seduction of their husbands.

Nowhere in Atwood's body of work, however, do the consequences of a character's adultery wreak more havoc on the lives touched by the affair than in *The Blind Assassin* (2000). The legacy of infidelity that Iris and her sister Laura inherit from their father ultimately impacts not only on their childhood home, but their adult lives as well. Ironically, when they are children, "both [their] mother and [their] father were more respected in town because of it [their father's philandering]" (79). When the girls mature into young women, however, their contact with adultery leads to painful complications with few social benefits. While Iris's affair with Alex Thomas engages her imaginatively, if not intellectually, and provides more meaningful companionship and more satisfying sexual experiences than she finds in her marriage to Richard, it also blinds her to the abuse her sister is enduring under her husband's hand. In retrospect, Iris seems to realize the importance of clues she had overlooked at the time: Richard's preference for "conquest to cooperation, in every area of life" (371), his "increasingly" rough "nighttime activities" with her that left bruises on her body (371); and his desire "to get Laura under his thumb," to get "her neck under his foot" (381). In the narrative present, however, Iris is so worried Laura might rival her for Alex's affections that she fails to see her sister for who she is.

The distance that emerges between the women not only makes it impossible for Laura to confide in Iris, but also makes Iris forget that her younger sister may be vulnerable to her power-mongering husband. As a result, she blithely assumes that Laura would win "any contest of wills" between them because "she [Laura] doesn't have a price, ... there's

nothing he has that she wants” (381). Iris never considers that just as Richard had been instrumental in the death of her father, so too might he wield power – or at least appear to wield power – over Alex Thomas, who is Laura’s as well as Iris’s beloved. Iris’s myopia in this respect, deriving from jealous anxiety and its resulting distance, creates a situation in which it is possible for Richard to molest, rape, and impregnate Laura while keeping Iris in the dark. Moreover, it is her possessiveness of Alex that underlies the cruelty of her final meeting with Laura: despite knowing about Laura’s long-standing attachment to Alex, Iris ruthlessly tells her sister that ““whatever it was you did, it didn’t save Alex. ... He was killed in the war, six months ago”” (488). Indeed, she does not stop herself even after seeing how deeply her words have cut Laura:

“I got the telegram,” I said. “They sent it to me. He listed me as next of kin.” ... “It was very indiscreet of him. He shouldn’t have done that, considering Richard. But he didn’t have any family, and we’d been lovers, you see – in secret, for quite a long time – and who else did he have?” (488)

Given that this passage immediately follows Laura’s disclosure about her enduring attempts to safe-guard Alex, Iris’s ‘confession’ here effectively writes Laura out of the story of Alex’s life: negating her importance to him entirely, Iris secures a minor victory over her rival, but also precipitates Laura’s final flight and suicide.

By the end of the novel, Iris is left utterly alone. Having pieced together the gritty details of Laura’s life after her death, she is compelled to leave Richard. Moreover, after finding herself unable to maintain the silence she had promised to keep, she arranges to have the embedded novel, “The Blind Assassin,” published posthumously as it were, under Laura’s name. This act prompts the wrath of Richard and the ire of his sister, Winifred,

who orchestrates the removal of Iris's daughter from her custody. Even her childhood confidante and caretaker, Rennie, withdraws from Iris, whom she holds responsible for Laura's death. Ultimately, however, Iris's adultery narrative is one of pathos rather than tragedy. There is no one point at which she falls – no tragic flaw that leads to her suffering.

In this respect, Iris Chase Griffen resembles many of the adulterers that appear in Atwood's and Richler's fictions. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, for example, although held responsible for the affair by Serena Joy, Offred is more a victim than a free agent in her relationship with the Commander, and Joan's story in *Lady Oracle* is simply too ridiculous to be tragic. Similarly, in Richler's novels the adulterers are just not heroic enough to be seen as suffering a tragic fall. Barney and Jessie Larkin in *The Acrobats* stumble through life from the beginning of the novel to its end; Noah Adler's affair with Miriam Hall in *Son of a Smaller Hero* (1955) degenerates into sadness and bickering without making a tragic – or any – impact on his life; and the first wives who stand on the sidelines heckling their faithless husbands while they play ball in *St. Urbain's Horseman* are too clichéd to evoke any sense of tragedy whatsoever. There is sadness, yes; a bitterness, too, but neither the affairs nor their consequences inspire a profound change in any of the parties involved.

While particularly prominent in the works of Atwood and Richler, the representation of adultery as pathetic becomes increasingly prevalent as the century comes to a close, appearing in works as diverse as Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978), Robertson Davies's *Murder & Walking Spirits* (1991), and Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992), among others. Although arguably reactionary, this late-century literary reappraisal of adultery is not as surprising or idiosyncratic as it might at first seem.

The 1968 and 1985 amendments to Canadian divorce legislation ultimately lessened the importance and, by extension, the acceptability of adulterous affairs. No longer the sole or even the most prominent ground for divorce, and with expeditious and no-fault divorces easier to obtain than ever before, adultery ceased to be justifiable as a means of escape from an unsatisfactory marriage. In this context, insofar as it is possible to interpret the disillusionment *fin-de-siècle* novels associate with adultery as indicative of a fundamentally pro-fidelity position, English-Canadian literature dating from the closing decades of the twentieth century can be seen as responding to external pressure on the institution of marriage by trying to strengthen it from within.

Notes

¹ That Cartwright's argument was contested by Raymond Chaput in "The Christian Doctrine of Indissolubility" further attests to how contentious these issues were at the time and how widespread the debate became.

² Legal fictions allow courts to change the way a law is applied without changing the law itself; for example, instead of requiring proof of a certain action, simply taking for granted that it occurred in a particular jurisdiction just to get the parties before the courts, where their case can then be heard (Morton 36).

³ In June 1969, Douglas Marshall reported in *Macleans* that "An expert in the Justice department [has] concede[d] that adultery, the ground still cited in about 70 percent of the cases, remains the fastest and simplest way to win a divorce" (73).

⁴ Elsewhere, Shain cited an expert as saying that a husband who has had an intimate and companionate relationship with his wife for twenty-five years "is not likely to leave her, so it is probably better [for her] to tolerate the affair and not acknowledge she noticed. Raising hell with him won't make her look more attractive to him, and if she forces him to give it up he may feel embittered and trapped" (58). She also reported that "a wife can reap benefits too from an affair her husband has. It sounds heretical but it can be true. If it makes him feel more manly and youthful she will likely find him a happier man to live with" (90).

⁵ Hugh MacLennan also draws on the vamp stereotype in his portrayal of Norah Blackwell, the surgical nurse who entices Jerome Martell to join her in a politically-motivated trip to Spain in *The Watch that Ends the Night* (1959). Unlike Hetty Dorval or even Anne-Marie in *Intertidal Life*, however, Norah is simply one

stereotypical character among others who are also larger-than-life, and her character consequently commands less attention and holds less importance to both the betrayed wife and the narrative as a whole.

Epilogue

In *Culture Wars*, James Davison Hunter identifies the “realignment of public culture” as the result of “competing moral visions” (107). Within this construct, periods of dominance by proponents of ‘orthodoxy’ are succeeded by the ascendancy of ‘progressivist’ visionaries, which are subsequently supplanted by times of orthodoxy once more. Drawing on a specifically Canadian context, Gary Kinsman observes a similar trend in our own structures of sexual regulation, citing, for example, post-war closures of daycares as an ideological decision designed to encourage women who had been enticed to work outside the home during the war years to return to the domestic sphere.

While this ebb and flow between conservative and progressive facets of Canadian society likely contributed to the return to a more traditional valuing of marriage in literature in the closing decades of the twentieth century, I would contend that this reaction was also specifically connected to changes in Canadian divorce legislation – particularly to the grounds on which divorces could be obtained. Whereas progressively-minded novelists in the early decades of the century could present adultery as a potentially liberating escape from domestic disappointment or even abuse, analogous depictions became much less convincing once a liberalization of divorce proceedings made ‘escape’ possible without the necessity of resorting to infidelity. More broadly, it may be that in a post-modernist world, where intentionality and personal identity are subject to deconstruction, the stability afforded by marriage has become all the more attractive and even sacrosanct.

In this context, the recent passing of Bill C-38, while viewed among more conventionally-minded Canadians as posing a threat to the sanctity of marriage, can be seen rather as highlighting the enduring importance of marriage as a social institution in Canada. The *Civil Marriage Act* itself invites such an interpretation, with part of its preamble explaining the amendments it was proposing on the grounds that

... marriage is a fundamental institution in Canadian society and the Parliament of Canada has a responsibility to support that institution because it strengthens commitment in relationships and represents the foundation of family life for many Canadians[.] (¶10)

Moreover, in making parties to same-sex marriages eligible for all forms of benefits previously available only to heterosexuals, the *Act* also makes such parties subject to the correlative responsibilities and duties insofar as the passage of Bill C-38 effected amendments to both the *Divorce Act* and Bill C-23, the *Modernization of Benefits and Obligations Act*.¹

English-Canadian novels from the early twenty-first century suggest that, at least for the present, this privileging of marriage will remain intact. In Alan Cumyn's *Losing It* (2001), Bob Sterling's affair with one of his students leads to public disgrace after photographs surface on the internet and to a collapse of his private life symbolized in his burnt house, crumbling apart. In Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), despite having "much worse things on his conscience," Jimmy-Snowman "blame[s]" his father and Ramona for his mother's anger (80), for her leaving, and for his constant discomfort in his own home as a child. And in Richard B. Wright's *Adultery* (2004), Daniel Fielding's spontaneous affair when he is out of the country on business leads to murder, a criminal

investigation, and punishment. In their insistence on the pain and complications that follow from adulterous affairs, these novels follow the trajectory first established in the closing decades of the twentieth century, in the works of such writers as Atwood and Richler. How long this trend will continue and the extent to which it will be inflected by the increasing legitimization of alternative lifestyles are avenues available for future exploration. If the present study is a prologue to that future, then our fiction should continue to express Canadian attitudes toward adultery as reliably, engagingly, and entertainingly as it has since the beginning of the preceding century.

Note

¹ Throughout most of the twentieth century, for example, 'adultery' was a specifically heterosexual offence. As Mendes da Costa points out, with adultery defined in neither the *Divorce Act* nor "in the prior provincial divorce laws," courts had to turn to case law for a definition of the offence, and particularly to *Orford v. Orford*, in which Justice Orde characterized it "as voluntary sexual intercourse by a married person with another person of the opposite sex, other than his or her spouse" (da Costa 423). With the passage of Bill C-38, however, comes legal justification for expanding the definition of adultery to include extramarital same-sex intercourse as well.

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