Serious Play: Alden Nowlan, Leo Ferrari, Gwendolyn MacEwen, and their Flat Earth Society

by

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B.A., University of British Columbia, 2004
M.A., University of Calgary, 2015

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

This dissertation concerns the satirical Flat Earth Society (FES) founded at Fredericton, New Brunswick in November 1970. The essay's successive chapters examine the lives and literary works of three understudied authors who held leadership positions in this critically unserious, fringe society: FES Symposiarch Alden Nowlan; the Society's President Leo Ferrari; and its First Vice-President Gwendolyn MacEwen. Therefore, my project constitutes an act of recovery and reconstruction, bringing to light cultural work and literary connections that have largely faded from view. Chapters show how certain literary writings by Nowlan, Ferrari, or MacEwen directly or indirectly relate to their involvement with FES, making the Society an important part of their cultural work rather than a mere entertainment, distraction, or hoax. These authors represent the local/regional inception of FES (Nowlan), its international influences and reach (Ferrari), and its Canadian context (MacEwen). Organized according to three jointly literary and geo-political layers, and drawing on little-known archival documents, each chapter records statements from the Society's wider membership as they relate to Atlantic Canada, the international perspective, and Canada.

Despite its aberrant and oppositional spirit, FES appeared within an identifiable cultural context and participated in a countercultural tradition that continues to this day. The Society's surface lampoon embeds potent social critique and creative meaning. In other words, FES was not merely playful, nor merely serious, but interweaved these modes in a compelling way; the Society looks by turns intelligent and unintelligible, stupid and sophisticated. Further, it invited contributions from members and applicants: seldom-seen interpretations of "Planoterrestrialism" by individuals from many walks of life and now housed in archives at the University of New Brunswick and University of Calgary. The participatory, humorous, and poetic nature of FES means that its unusual brand of Flat Earthism cannot be tied to any singular ideology, place, or literary tradition. It operates as an enigmatic, errant, itinerant, and underground non-ideology. Planoterrestrial thought is reflected in the playful poetic styles of Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen: three Society members who were nonetheless serious authors and sincere in their role as cultural workers, their Flat Earth antics not excepted.

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Common Abbreviations

ANP#.#.#.#	= *Alden Nowlan Papers* accession, box, file, item (if any)
CP	= *Alden Nowlan: Collected Poems* (2017)
CRET	= The Committee to Re-establish the Trickster
FES/the Society	= The Flat Earth Society (est. 1970, Fredericton)
GMP #.#	= *Gwendolyn MacEwen Papers* box, file
IFERS	= The International Flat Earth Research Society (of England or America)
LFF #.#.#	= *Leo C. Ferrari Fonds* series, subseries, file
NSP/Spasm Band	= The Nihilist Spasm Band
RFF #.#.#	= *Raymond Fraser Fonds* series, sub-series (if any), file
Rhinos/the Party	= The Rhinoceros Party of Canada/*Parti Rhinocéros*
SP	= *Serious Play: Alden Nowlan, Leo Ferrari, Gwendolyn MacEwen, and their Flat Earth Society* (2021)
TEIF	= *The Earth Is Flat!* by Leo Ferrari (2019)
TRG	= The Toronto Research Group

Introduction: *Serious Play* in Context

Part One

A late-night party at the home of author Alden Nowlan in Fredericton, New Brunswick witnessed the launch of the—or rather a—Flat Earth Society on 8 November 1970. By making farcical declarations about the shape of our planet, the Society went on to attract media coverage and more than one-hundred dues-paying members, some of them well-known writers. The present dissertation presents three participating authors in the Fredericton-headquartered Flat Earth Society (hereafter, FES): its co-founder and Symposiarch Alden Nowlan (1933-83), co-founder and President Leo Ferrari (1927-2010), and Vice-President Gwendolyn MacEwen (1941-87). All three deserve more attention from readers and critics than they have received in the present century. Although they posed as cranks with their Flat Earther personas, their playful association of the 1970s was grounded in taking a principled stand against intellectual conformity. They used the idea of a Flat Earth in multiple ways: as an open-ended metaphor, to code cultural critique, and for broad satire, dark comedy, and imaginative exploration. Therefore, I argue that Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen's FES hijinks fall within the scope of their careers as serious authors, as shown through both pointed and subtle similarities across their FES writings and professional publications. François Le Lionnais, one-time regent of the *Collège de 'Pataphysique* and co-founder of the Oulipo (short for Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle) group of writers, anticipated this thesis. Writing in the 1960s, he claimed that "when they are the work of poets, entertainments, pranks, and hoaxes still fall within the domain of poetry" (Hugill 108). Stooping to take a close look at FES, then,

may prove to be a useful way to reclaim, revaluate, and promote the work of Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen, especially given contemporary curiosity about the persistence of Flat Earth ideas.

This introduction addresses in turn the dissertation's sources, structure, methods, limits, and, at greatest length, contexts. Sources range from rarely seen archival materials and Internet chat rooms to a television broadcast and award-winning poems. The dissertation's structure alternates critical surveys of the scattered and occasionally scant secondary sources on each author with chapters that bring together for critical discussion their published works, Flat Earth play, and testimonials of other Society members. This alternating presentation of secondary and primary sources sketches one broad context for recovering these writers and also reflects the labyrinthine FES, which was satirical but not only that. Comedic surfaces should not distract from its true nature and the cultural work it did: an interpretative community based in alienation, rebellion, and affirmation created a mutually supportive environment for its members' artistic and intellectual independence. Stated Flat Earth belief bound the Society to a subterranean existence, yet it managed to insinuate itself into powerful institutions like the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and government offices. Archived applications record imaginative exercises penned by persons writing from all corners of the public sphere. With varied tones and depths of engagement, they responded to FES calls for eccentric ideas about the Earth's shape and potential targets of Flat Earth satire. The renegade Society was participatory (not doctrinaire) and based on making knowingly false statements intended to unsettle assumed truths. For that reason, it would seem inappropriate to reduce this network to the constraints of a single-minded argument. FES fundamentally opposed singularity and

certainty. Composing a rationalist, theorizing account of its renegade "Planoterrestrialism" could quickly become an even more foolhardy enterprise than theirs. Therefore, this dissertation's own cultural work is focused mainly on documenting the activities of an overlooked group and attempting to revive appreciation for neglected writers by reading their literary work in relation to the serious play of FES. Tracing links between explicitly literary and confounding Flat Earth writings of Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen gives way to planoterrestrial writing by others. I also look to subterranean groups with and without direct ties to FES. Just as the Society had intents beyond promoting a Flat Earth, my dissertation knowingly overruns the edges of the case it makes, not least to make it clear that FES messaging was born of collaboration and belongs to a largely understudied tradition of pseudo-organizations like this one.

Sources

Guided by a Flat Earth Society map, the present essay navigates selections from Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen's published writings. Nowlan and MacEwen are remembered as accomplished poets, but they produced ample prose as well. Nowlan wrote as a journalist, historian, playwright, speechwriter, and author of short and long-form fiction. MacEwen's major prose works include four fiction titles, an identical record to Nowlan's.[1] She also published plays, a travel book, two children's books, and rewrote Arabic tales as well as ancient Greek comedy and tragedy. For reasons of space and critical coherence, this dissertation focuses on their poems at the expense of other genres,

[1] One could claim that each writer published two collections of short fiction and two novels, but some titles blur generic categories: namely, Nowlan's *fictional memoir* about *Various Persons* and MacEwen's linked stories in the *Noman* books.

while archived letters provide generic counterpoint to their widely available versifying. In contrast to Nowlan and MacEwen, Ferrari is obscure, and he serves in this account above all as a foil for re-evaluating the achievement of his fellow writers. He wrote mostly as an academic philosopher, specializing in the life and thought of Saint Augustine, while also addressing human rights and, at the end of his career, Alzheimer's disease. His poetry output is minor: two stapled rather than perfect-bound gatherings. The cover drawing for his second release, *Over the Edge!*, shows Ferrari in his FES guise, dangling from the edge of a flattened Earth. What Ferrari lacks in prestige as an author, however, he makes up for as a Planoterrestrialist. He did more to keep FES going than any other member and provides the most detailed account of its history and philosophy. Penned in the mid-1970s, his prose manuscript *The Earth is Flat! An Exposé of the Globularist Hoax* (2019) has become the only posthumous release of his writing to date (2021). This recent edition, co-edited by me, results from the present research project and shows the viability of using FES to resurface participating authors. Studying Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen through the lens of their Flat Earth hijinks highlights their oppositional thinking and dark comedy as well as their playful imaginations, which the trio deployed with a compelling blend of commonalities and discrepancies.

The lack of any continuous critical conversations about the three authors under investigation necessitated extended (though not exhaustive) reviews of the secondary literature on their work. These, I hope, will provide useful resources for future discussions. The kinds of secondary sources that I address vary considerably. Responsive to the relative abundance of critical engagement with his work, the survey of Nowlan's critics makes only scant use of book reviews, even those by noted scholars (Frye) and

poets (Purdy), or introductions to selected volumes (Lane and Crozier). It focuses instead on strictly academic writing: articles from literary periodicals and discussions found in scholarly monographs or critical essay collections. My focus on Nowlan's academic reception responds to the fact that his tenuous legacy seems stronger among non-professional readers than among critics. The review of Ferrari sources necessarily moves beyond the scholarly realm. Mentions of him are rare and widely dispersed, so they have been gathered from as far afield as Flat Earth forums online. Due to this broadened scope, his cameo in a David Adams Richards biography informs the review, whereas Nowlan's frequent appearances in the same book are not used—although the biography was written by a notable critic (Tony Tremblay) and published by Toronto University Press. Still a minor figure relative to her associate and contemporary Margaret Atwood, MacEwen has like Atwood had both scholarly and general readerships. Sources in this third literature review are thus academic, literary, and popular. Of the writers featured here, she may be most likely to see a resurgence. A rise in MacEwen Studies is encouraged by only looking to sources published this century and via a list of further reading in my bibliography. I document critics, writers, translators, and editors who maintain a flickering spotlight on this compelling writer. In any case, the reviews of responses to all three of these writers—Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen—use sources from prominent and out-of-the-way venues, so that my work can aid researchers with diverse interests. Because none has so far obtained a secure place in long-term cultural memory, I seek to probe and prove the literary strength and countercultural value of their underappreciated contributions.

To access information on FES and its place in writers' careers, physical research was conducted in the archives of two of its founders, Nowlan and Ferrari. The University of Calgary holds *The Alden Nowlan Papers*. Among its textual materials, two files are dedicated to the group (ANP 40.12.6-7). The first holds more than one-hundred letters from 1970 to 1981. The other contains public documents related to FES: newsletters and tractates as well as news clippings. My dissertation draws significantly from the former file (the letters). It also uses relevant but not always related texts held elsewhere in the collection. Nowlan is strongly associated with the Maritimes, where he resided throughout his five decades. So, scrutinizing his papers in a reading room with a westward view of the Rocky Mountains sometimes felt disorienting. But the relocation of his records can be seen positively; it confirms his importance as a writer not bound by region or regionality. Beyond reading the *Alden Nowlan Papers* in Calgary, I also conducted research in the *Richard Hatfield Fonds*, held by the Province of New Brunswick. Hatfield remains New Brunswick's longest-serving Premier. He was a friend and supporter of Nowlan—who wrote many of the Premier's speeches during his tenure (1970-87)—and likely a covert FES member. One item within Hatfield's archive is an inter-office memo composed by provincial employee John Williamson after Nowlan's death. Regarding "Alden Nowlan Papers and Recordings," he wrote the following in 1985:

> I am told that there is in Fredericton at the present time a large collection of oral tape recordings of Alden Nowlan as well as video tapes which may be heading west. I think the movement of these items outside New Brunswick should be halted by having our own institutions such as the Provincial Archives or UNB Archives given some resources to track down and obtain these materials. (Williamson)

The memo affirms that Nowlan was treasured at home. It also makes claims upon the author that do not respect his commensurate value to national or world literature. Nowlan expressed pleasure in exporting his archives to Alberta. In his 1982 "Talk given to The University of Calgary," he stated that he felt "delighted to have [his] papers deposited" there, a migration "that in a very small way militates against the self-destructive parochialism that is afflicting our country" (ANP 40.76.21). Unlike writers "content to be known as, say Moose Jaw poets, or Corner Brook, Newfoundland poets," he saw himself as "an Albertan as well as a Maritimer […] because so much of [him] has been deposited in the University of Calgary Library" (40.76.21). Ever defiant of categories, Nowlan here invents a trans-Canadian regionalism that complicates national identification. His death occurred little more than a year after this speech, a short space of time that lends extra weight to the suggestion that these archives constitute a second life for the author.

Ferrari's papers live in Fredericton. He resided there longer than anywhere else, including Australia, where he spent his first three decades. Whereas Nowlan's archive commits just two files to FES, the *Leo C. Ferrari Fonds* dedicates two of its four series and divides these into textual records and artifacts. Those second and third series are bookended by sections for academic tracts and research done on sabbaticals or for conferences. The collection gives little evidence of a personal history, unlike Nowlan's papers, which contain much personal writing. That much of Ferrari's archive records his planoterrestrial rather than scholarly career may seem ironic, because his archive is held by the University of New Brunswick and St. Thomas University, which share a campus and some resources. The latter was Ferrari's employer before, during, and after FES's active period. His archives have likely had more frequent visits from those pursuing his

Flat Earth than those seeking to learn about Ferrari the philosopher. That is due to the Society's cultish appeal and because his work on Augustine's *Confessions* has not been adopted by his peers. Preserved writings unrelated to FES inform my dissertation's account of Ferrari. No previous researcher has synthesized Ferrari's roles as philosopher, human rights promoter, memoirist, poet, and satirist. Within these pages, I can offer only a peek at the extensive FES materials held in Ferrari's archive. Thankfully, an online finding aid gives a snapshot of the *Leo C. Ferrari Fonds*. Staff who provide access to Ferrari's papers facilitated my visits to the archive and provided scans for items not seen during a research trip to Fredericton. Ferrari and Nowlan saved for posterity many pages and objects related to FES, because they knew their satirical play was important work too. My dissertation records their contributions and looks to FES writings by others, which their literary papers preserve half-a-century and counting after the project was first conceived.

A handful of MacEwen letters are held in Nowlan and Ferrari's archives. Each of these informs my treatment of her minor role in the Society. Restrictions on travel during 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, spoiled plans to conduct physical research in her University of Toronto archive. However, Natalya Rattan, an archivist at the Thomas Fisher Rare Books library, generously provided images for the few Flat Earth documents she located therein: tractates and several letters from Ferrari. Future research in the archive may uncover other items, such as responses to solicitations of interest MacEwen sent to friends. Letters that cite the Society may survive in collections preserved by her associates. Margaret Atwood provided Rosemary Sullivan with such a letter, resulting in a brief FES mention in her *Shadow Maker: A Life of Gwendolyn MacEwen* (SP 332). The

absence of a direct encounter with the *Gwendolyn MacEwen Papers* stands for a wider "archival discontent" resulting from exposure to FES documents: a historical record that informs but indicates the abundance of evidence yet unseen (Lewis). Future searches for FES letters will begin with examinations of the papers of MacEwen and Raymond Fraser, author and FES co-founder. Their archives have provided a small amount of evidence for this essay (via digital scans provided remotely) relative to the data drawn from Nowlan and Ferrari's papers.

The already-historic pandemic of 2020-2021 blocked access to MacEwen's archive and thwarted plans to conduct follow-up work in Calgary and Fredericton. As recorded in research notes and on archival photocopies, dates for some quoted missives are suspect or missing. Further, certain codes added to scans made by staff seem incorrect. Finding aids have helped repair some but not all gaps. Return trips to archives for checking quotes and metadata were halted by health measures enacted countrywide. For that reason, some letters are cited by year of composition, not an exact date. Undated status is ascribed to letters whose dates might be obtained, although not with ease given present constraints. Difficult choices caused by emergency measures in 2020 have been made to lower an ever-present risk: distributing inaccuracies. Reducing a citation's specificity seemed preferable to omitting data or requesting that library teams in Alberta, Ontario, and New Brunswick undertake verification work, teams already strained by a novel zoonotic virus and its countermeasures. This essay's bibliography cites archival accessions that provide many pieces of evidence, rather than listing scores of items. That move reduces the likelihood of presenting falsehoods, even though in-line citations use reference codes. Unexpected lack of access to archives as late-stage research sites

reinforced their ephemeral nature as well as their limited and sometimes unpredictable availability. These qualities emphasize rather than detract from their value. Library closures due to COVID-19 exposed the precarity of our access to informational sources, even those organized around concepts of openness and permanence. FES instructs that the Earth under our feet is uncertain; how much less reliable must be the social institutions on which our intellectual lives depend?

Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen provide counterexamples to the established canon of authors that Canadian literary studies typically promotes. Compared to published works, archives are relatively marginal sites for reading these writers. Within Nowlan's, Ferrari's, and MacEwen's papers, FES texts are sub-canonical relative to the wealth of letters with peers and publishers or drafts that record creative and editorial processes. In the case of Nowlan's and Ferrari's archives, documenting their own FES activities resulted in ample evidence for the planoterrestrial attestations of other members, many of whom have little to no cultural standing. In nested ways, then, I pursue the Society and associated writings as cultural artifacts that fall outside familiar narratives and expected hierarchies. Recent scholarship has challenged the authority of the archival industry by "unarchiving" literary history (Camlot and McLeod) and "unarresting" its documents from confinement (Morra). The archives examined here, however, show authority's disruption or dispersal can likewise occur within collections held by academic institutions. To their credit, two universities' professionally managed holdings made examining this ad-hoc Society possible—even though FES was captured/rescued from oblivion as part of a wider effort to preserve noted authors' careers. Set intents behind those acquisitions aside; FES applicants' letters found in archives at Calgary and

Fredericton insert generally unknown individuals into the historical record. Their Flat Earth letters are cared for by the same staff teams who safeguard the legacy of prominent figures and institutions.

There is not room here to show how deconstructing archives distracts from ways they are multiple and errant as they stand, rather than authoritative and exclusive. Briefly, one can contrast the meaning of "control" in Lara Millar's 2010 textbook on archival practice (46, 49, 50, 145)—a word she uses to refer to an archivist's care for her collection, care that improves service for users of all stripes—with the idea of archives as a force of dominance. The latter understanding was articulated by Foucault (1965) and Derrida (1996) in the last century and more recently extended to Canadian literary studies by Linda Morra, Catherine Bates, and others. There are dangers in viewing archives as transparent or imbued with natural rather than arbitrary power, of course, just as there are dangers in taking a poet's words at face value. An opposing risk results when we put too much faith in doubt, an error which could spawn a postmodern ideology that privileges critique over appreciation. Without taking up valid concerns regarding archives as oppressive spaces, I nonetheless consider Nowlan's, Ferrari's, and MacEwen's literary papers to be strong examples of collections that hold countercultural value, even while "controlled" (in Millar's sense) by prominent universities with ties to government. Before bringing rare texts to light in the forthcoming chapters, I can make here two slight comments regarding archival studies. First, it is desirable that digital infrastructures already enhancing Nowlan's, Ferrari's, and MacEwen's physical archives be enhanced. Despite their limits, university websites supported my research into the collections, especially after I lost physical access to them. My samples of FES letters may inspire

readers to make their own journeys through the material, research which could be done remotely in future. Second, I can point out that the reconstituted FES[2] operating today from Fogo Island, Newfoundland would benefit from an archivist's support. A curated collection would preserve a new era in the forgotten though still living history of Canada's Flat Earth Society. For some, an academic-archival context may seem inappropriate for a hyper-obscure, grassroots enterprise. For me, an underground Society positioned close to the edges of Canadian geography and culture requires as much care as more durable creative experiments receive.

Sources by and about Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen as well as their archives are complemented by sources that explore obscure groups and outsider ideas. These will be discussed in this introduction's final sections on contexts, since they provide analogues or counterexamples for FES and the approach taken here. The Society's unusual reach into its surrounding culture justifies the variety of sources used throughout these pages: literature, criticism, archives; interviews, magazine writing, films, websites. An introduction, three literature reviews, and three chapters all complete different kinds of work enabled by diverse resources.

Structure of Serious Play

Three geopolitical and geocultural layers break into thematic chapters: local/regional, national, and transnational. The dissertation's structure responds to the Society's cartographic or cosmogonic imagination, although the focus is on literature and culture rather than politics or place. The first chapter covers the group's beginning in Fredericton

[2] See the *Flat Earth Society* website, which has instructions for applicants.

and spread across Atlantic-Canada. Chapter two considers the Society's reach across national borders, in media and membership. Chapter three presents FES in its national context, via known writers and other members from central or western Canada. The group began as the Flat Earth Society of Fredericton, became the Flat Earth Society of Canada, and revised its moniker to the Flat Earth Society *tout court* in the wake of unexpected success. My interest here is not in an imaginatively flattened region/country/planet as such, but rather in its value as a lens through which to examine Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen as authors. Accordingly, chapters follow the Society passing from authorial hand to authorial hand rather than recounting the history of its growth from a local to national and international entity. My essay shuffles what might be the expected geopolitical organizing structure, so that the international chapter falls between the Society's regional and national layers. That order is apt for a treatment of authors who assumed FES roles in turn, each connected to the local/regional (Nowlan), transnational (Ferrari), or national (MacEwen) strata of the group. My a-typical sequence also recognizes that local, regional, and transnational concerns are always at work (and play) in Canadian literary studies. Each chapter presents a geographic theme and focuses on one writer, but these loci also serve as hubs for links with other places and people. Matters of Atlantic-Canadian identity point the way to Ireland; European members recall their time in New Brunswick; and MacEwen's Canadian settings include visions inherited from world myth. Further, work on these authors makes way for appearances by other Atlantic-Canadian, transnational, and Canadian members of FES.

All three chapters that focus on a single author (Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen in turn) are preceded by literature reviews regarding each writer's reception and legacy.

Few bibliographies for Nowlan or MacEwen studies exist, and those that do require updating. Ferrari's output received no broad documentation prior to my edition of his *The Earth is Flat! An Exposé of the Globularist Hoax* (2019). Extending that work, the review related to Ferrari brings together a greater number of sources than can be found elsewhere. All three surveys point out subtle links between my approach and the findings of others not concerned with FES. This arrangement of placing the critical overviews first allows the subsequent chapters to focus on the relations between the authors' known writings and their FES antics. Each author-focused chapter is a case study aimed at reviving interest in Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen via overlooked aspects of their careers. Their diverse range of literary and cultural activities could support many new directions for scholarship and publishing. For instance, more remains to be said about Nowlan as a journalist and speechwriter or about Ferrari's writing on human rights and his community organizing. Projects based on MacEwen's FES association would be well complemented by studies reflecting her proprietorship of Toronto's Trojan Horse Café and her campaign to rescue the city's stray cats. Towards this aim of reviving interest in authors whose contributions have been far from exhaustively discussed in previous appreciations and critiques, the literature reviews in this dissertation generally engage most fully with current sources.

Planoterrestrialism as Counter-methodology

This essay pursues some familiar tasks: closely reading specific texts; sketching biographical contexts to situate creative careers in lived histories; and using archives to complicate established understandings of authors or trace literary networks. If a single

lens directs this project, it is a kaleidoscopic one, in keeping with FES's unpredictable spirit. Given generic constraints, my dissertation cannot be satirical or poetic. But it can break with convention. I attempt no one definition of the group's meaning, adopt no fixed view of its importance. *Au contraire*, the Society is read within several distinct geopolitical contexts and presented through the voices of people with diverse and contrary perspectives. My title announces grounding in contradiction, signals that *Serious Play* has to some degree internalized the non-doctrine called Planoterrestrialism.[3] I use the term not to indicate literal belief in a Flat Earth but, instead, to point to a flexible and participatory non-ideology that uses the idea of a Flat Earth as a fertile metaphor, open on the far side. More ludic than dogmatic in outlook, figurative Planoterrestrialism might include skepticism about Earth's oblate-sphericity but, more interestingly, raises indefinite questions about objectivity and consensus. The term further enfolds responses to our planet as an otherworldly place, hence its up-take by a subset of poets. Surface layers of the satire continually give way to reveal hidden recesses formed more like poems than jokes.

When deployed by someone like Ferrari, who maintains an earnest pose while performing absurdly, the term Planoterrestrialism operates as self-reflexive puffery. It pretends to elevate a lowly worldview to the status of systemized belief: a science, religion, philosophy, or ideology. But the posturing honorific is laughable. It makes mockery of pretension, occult theories, and *isms* writ large. The term attracts me as

[3] Here, Planoterrestrialism and its analogues take capitals in noun but not adjective forms, as do counter-jargons related to Globularism. The phrase "Flat Earth" takes initial capitals, even when referents fall outside a planoterrestrial context (that is, a Fredericton-headquartered, imaginative use of Flat Earth ideas). Alternate uses include "Flat Earther": a term used with disdain to identify someone who expresses Flat Earth ideas. Those who use it may fail to detect motives based in skepticism or provocation. In the present essay, "Flat Earthism" refers to a rigid belief system based in religious fundamentalism or conspiracy theories.

cipher rather than theory. Planoterrestrialism is more tactical than methodological. It symbolizes the Society's enigmatic tangle of spoofing and sincerity. My essay wants to reflect that combination—which animates FES and contaminates this study—but must settle for a refraction. Criticism requires an earnest posture; creative writing does not. Neither format requires nor excludes dourness. But taking the critic's trade too seriously may be as risky for scholars as impudence—especially if one studies unrestrained subterranean groups with mythic and comic textures or the work of self-taught writers who resist the institutional domestication of literature, such as Nowlan and MacEwen. Ferrari worked at St. Thomas University for decades, but his FES promotions rebelled against the professional expectations and religious standards of its administrators. Never playing the fool outright, like a poet-Planoterrestrialist of the 1970s, I still betray sympathies with my subject's indefinite spirit. Exactitude and earnestness have been balanced by (not sacrificed to) multiplicity of mood and a measure of narrational exuberance. Efforts to expand the dissertation's mandate beyond rational argument resists expectations from the perspective of academia and not literary criticism itself. Authorities on writing have long urged the importance of creativity as a complement to and inoculation against reasoning. In 1886, writing in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Oscar Wilde included in his list of "books not to read at all […] all argumentative books, and all books that try to prove anything" (27). These words appear in the volume *The Artist as Critic*. Its title fuses normally opposing creative and critical modes of thought, promising readers playful seriousness.

Contemporary tracts have opened-up flexible space in academic writing by pushing against expected limits and topics. Heather Jessup's *This Is Not a Hoax* (2019)

validates the indeterminate stance adopted here. Studying hoaxes in Canadian visual art and literary publishing, she accommodates her ambiguous source material. An opening definition—hoaxes "tell lies in order to wake people up" (1)—is so broad that it could apply to forms of folklore, poetry, jokes, and propaganda, forms with stimulating or soporific effects. Specific descriptions too prove untenable. And so, Jessup follows scholars like Mark Kingswell through unmappable territory with an "accretive rather than taxonomical" approach (7). Definitions for hoaxes remain quasi-definitions; they are aggregating rather than exclusive understandings, open to disruptions and outliers. Her stance challenges academic norms. Jessup asks: "How can one learn about the slippery, sneaky, and unsettling nature of a hoax through written forms that are primarily linear, taxonomical, and didactic?" (4). FES is likewise "slippery" and "sneaky," refuses to hold still for analysis. Members persistently wrote in peculiar and coded ways. The Society's mosaic is made from their interpretations of Planoterrestrialism and scepticisms about consensus reality. Therefore, no definition of planoterrestrialist satire is offered here. It participates in a matrix of flexible terms: irony, spoof, goof, lampoon, stunt, send-up, takeoff, mockery, parody, wit, gag, joke, jest, caricature, ruse, prank, dark comedy, hijinks, and hoax. Broadly, FES humour unsettles fixed ideas: counterpoint to its entertainments. The challenge is not merely to spot the joke at work but to take that seriously, as appropriate in context. Rich meanings lurk below a surface lampoon, but those present converse demands: that we handle authentic meaning with equitable ambivalence. Otherwise, FES's game will not be worth its stakes. Jessup rejects linearity, taxonomy, didacticism. That enables rather than impairs her work. She appreciates the charm and challenge of hoaxes from Canadian writers Erin Mouré and David Solway

without losing track of when pranks do not go far enough or fail by being used to narrow ends. For Jessup, Solway spoiled his heteronymic experiment by using fabricated Greek poet Andreas Karavis as mere "mouthpiece" instead of encountered other (149). Mouré integrates her hoax personae, using multiple languages to explore identity creation and transformative difference. Sincere but unconventional, *This Is Not a Hoax*[4] fosters the kinds of reflection pranks aim to provoke. This unexpected book assured me that FES can be written about in a useful way without attempting to reduce it to an instance of a pre-existing critical category or to belabour its jokes by explaining them away.

To the enigmatic terms Planoterrestrialism and Planoterrestrialist, FES pranksters contrast villainous Globularism and Globularists. Most simply, the latter jargon set refers to firm belief that Earth is spherical (or oblately spherical) in shape. A mobile term, Globularist is code for anyone who uncritically receives scientific findings; blindly defers to other kinds of authority; foolishly displays self-satisfied certainty of opinion; sacrifices subjectivity and creativity to objectivity and conformity; or works as an unwitting or collaborating agent of advanced technocracy, deadening secularism, and human alienation from ourselves, each other, and the planet whereon we "live and move and have our being," to quote a Ferrarism appropriated from the Catholic catechism (*TEIF* 79, 88, 206, 254, 269).[5] Creating a mythological war between heroic Planoterrestrialists

[4] Her title references Magritte's famous painting on the betrayal of the image, with its caption "this is not a pipe." The phrase *This Is Not a Hoax* also parodies the expressions "this is not a drill" and "this is not a test," which relate to the activation of emergency procedures rather than their rehearsals. Jessup insists on the urgent need for ruses that disrupt settled patterns of thought. Hoaxes she studies and FES satire exist on a continuum, a hoax being satire that wears more convincing camouflage, so that its deception is better hidden in authenticity. If satires require a double-take, hoaxes may need a third or fourth look before true intents strike their one-time dupes.

[5] Ferrari invokes humanity's privileged position in Christianity while flipping the scripture. In Acts 17:28, "we live, and move, and have our being" in God the Father, not on Mother Earth (KJV). His references to Christianity are never quite secular or heretical, neither are they devout to the letter of Biblical authority.

and damnable Globularists would seem categorical, polemical, and counter to the open-ended spirit of Planoterrestrialism. None of the Society's critiques are direct attacks, however, but deeply shaded by irony and implicature. Conversely, sincere affirmation and fellowship shine through the hyperbolic tribalism permeating FES documents. Performances of zealotry are parodies of same. The us-versus-them battle of Planoterrestrialists versus Globularists repeats (or anticipates) and mocks real-world "culture wars" waged between liberals and conservatives, elites and populists, the hip/hippies and square/straights, bohemians and yuppies, protestors and police, or (more recently) the woke left and the alt-right. Only in the 1960s did these internal North American conflicts come to rival cold-war politics that set communist against capitalist countries. That development shifted rather than extinguished factionalism, hatred, and paranoia. Many Society members might have taken sides in entrenched political contests, but in the context of FES allegiances, they entered cultural battlegrounds armed with carnivalesque laughter. For them, humour's instability reliably safeguarded against totalizing worldviews. It is emblematic of Planoterrestrialism's paradoxes that fanatical registers seek to moderate ideological certainty. This dissertation and FES both distrust polemics and theory, while only the Society takes comic detours through those rhetorical terrains as part of a resistance strategy.

Over the past decade, North American culture wars have been complicated by anxieties encapsulated in a set of novel buzzwords: post-truth, fake news, infodemic, plannedemic, and coordinated inauthentic content. These indicate distrust of experts and social institutions as well as concerns about conspiracy theories and misinformation campaigns accelerated and exploited by digital communications technologies and the

corporations that control them. In that context, Flat Earth groups, some of them named societies, have simultaneously come to symbolize that distrust and serve as targets for derision or even suppression.[6] Reactions to Flat Earthers generally fall into two camps, outright dismissal or hardline Flat Earth*ism*: a biblically inspired or conspiracy-theory derived belief in a Flat Earth that is part and parcel of a range of ideas to be adopted wholly and unquestioningly, such as government control by secret cabals and anti-science views on vaccines and climate change. Taking cues from Planoterrestrialism, I avoid extremes of dismissal or obsession. Responses to Flat Earth ideas often lack mediating nuance between those poles. My study fills a gap by looking at a colourful group who proffered alternative views not for their own sake but toward surprisingly inventive ends. In the aggregate, promotions of Flat Earth and anti-globularist ideas were calls for tolerating difference, a deliberate provocation against conformity, certainty, and intellectual superiority. In its non-normative aspects, this dissertation metaphorically joins FES and those who promote marginalized perspectives, forgotten histories, and oddball networks that fall outside officially sanctioned culture. Before addressing the parallel work of selected countercultural scholars, I will briefly acknowledge some limits of my research project.

Present Limits and Future Directions

This essay takes creative writing that three FES members composed within and outside a planoterrestrial context as its primary ground of study. Those writers maintain only a

[6] In 2019, CBC Radio's current affairs program *The Current* discussed YouTube's decision to "tweak its algorithms" to reduce the likelihood that users would encounter videos promoting the idea of a Flat Earth. Usually a staunch defender of the polis and diversity, the host seemed genuinely pleased that corporate power and machine learning would unite to stamp out a growing Flat Earth menace ("Flat or round?").

small readership today, especially in the case of Ferrari, who will undoubtedly remain a minor figure. In terms of audience and critical attention, Nowlan and MacEwen fall short of many notable twentieth-century Canadian writers, but it is not obvious that they suffer by comparison to their peers. I seek to introduce these authors to new readers and to reacquaint them with others. Foregrounding the Society is a convenient means for attracting attention to a wide range of literary materials, given a current fad for Flat Earth concepts. Moreover, one sees in their FES personas fun-house reflections of Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen as poets and thinkers. Further studies could identify symbioses between literary publications and planoterrestrial positions of other members: Raymond Fraser, Elizabeth Brewster, and Al Pittman from Atlantic Canada; American Lawrence Block and Europe's Nicholas Catanoy; or Canadians like David McFadden, Farley Mowat, and John Newlove. In these pages, other members will appear as minor characters relative to a Nowlan-Ferrari-MacEwen trinity. Any anthologizing or critical work brought to bear on FES should account for statements by members not otherwise thought of as artists. In the present work, I have prioritized an exploration of active Society members (whether published authors or not) over reference to literary or critical traditions. Another kind of study could fruitfully connect FES to its cultural and historical contexts or to the thought of authoritative critics, such as the Maritimes' modernist-mythologist Northrop Frye, pomo-Toronto's Linda Hutcheon, or Russia's theorist of disruptive laughter and polyvocal fiction Mikhail Bakhtin. I focus instead on criticism that directly addresses Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen: relatively unmapped territory.

Because he co-founded FES in 1970, Raymond Fraser (1941-2018) is the writer most deserving of more attention than this dissertation grants. His role here is limited for

several reasons. For starters, he made less concerted efforts than Nowlan and Ferrari in service of the Society. He gave those men his proxy for votes to accept or deny applications (SP 142). His state of administrative remove mirrors his physical location away from Fredericton in the 1970s, while he travelled abroad and lived in Quebec, where he established the literary magazine *Intercourse* and formed the Montreal Story Tellers.[7] Further, Fraser's work has not aged as well as the writings of his confreres, Nowlan and Ferrari. Even his more successful novels (*romans-à-clef* such as 1978's *Bannonbridge Musicians* or 2009's *In Another Life*) repeat themes, characters, and plots that many contemporary readers will find uncompelling. Narrators are braggadocious men from the Miramichi who tell of their heroic capacity for alcohol; handiness as street fighters and sportsmen; insatiable lust for women and girls[8]; imperviousness to conformity; and proud defiance of conventional authorities: parents, police, priests. Despite aping a mundane machismo inherited from Jack Kerouac,[9] *Bannonbridge Musicians* was up for a 1978 Governor General's Literary Award and approvingly reviewed by William French in the *Globe and Mail.*[10] Equivalent endorsements would provoke backlash today. Fraser's audience is more likely to shrink than grow, but he remains a figure of esteem in his home province. His 2009 entry on the *New Brunswick*

[7] See Fraser's *When the Earth Was Flat* or J. R. Struthers' edited *The Montreal Story Tellers* (1985).

[8] *In Another Life*'s narrator recalls a liaison with a fifteen-year-old: "She didn't *sound* too young. If you didn't know [her age] you'd never have known" (108). Many readers would find such comments inappropriately flippant, immorally unashamed, and deserving of critique that never emerges within the novel.

[9] *In Another Life* makes its influences plain. Its protagonist-narrator reads Kerouac's *Maggie Cassidy* as a young man and feels affinity with its author: "a rebel, a vagabond, a poet of the open road" (98).

[10] French's description of the "rollicking story, well told" is used on the Lion's Head Press website to promote their 2014 re-issue of *The Bannonbridge Musicians* ("More Books").

Literary Encyclopedia regrets that academics have not "shed more light on Fraser's considerable […] contributions to Canadian and New Brunswick literature" (Faieta).

If Fraser's novels retain any importance, it must be for his efforts to reveal the plight of a subset of downtrodden northern New Brunswickers: the angry, sodden young men of the time and place of his youth. Yet he achieves this task without the grace, sly humour, and nuance that elevates writings on similar themes by two Maritime authors he knew well, Nowlan and David Adams Richards. Fraser's novels sometimes linger over physical depictions of women that are graphic, exploitative, and broadly insulting. See, for example, the sex worker seen through Harris' eyes in *Bannonbridge Musicians* (100). Derogatory racial epithets in the same book (12, 89) receive no complicating nuance or narrative consequence. For these reasons, however compellingly Fraser might have served as a FES co-founder and Chairman of its Board of Governors, knowledge of his satirical play within the Society is unlikely to rally critics to writings completed outside of that context. In any case, Fraser already memorialized FES with his writerly memoirs, titled *When The Earth Was Flat...* (11). The intellectual shadows of the Society's ludic experiment go largely unexplored therein, unfortunately. The book focuses on Fraser's more glancing encounters with better-known writers than his Flat Earth compatriots. His brief meeting with Leonard Cohen takes twelve pages to tell of; FES, in contrast, is treated on a single page. The book closes with an unrelated autobiographical tale of the author stubbornly drinking, brawling, and womanizing. Little changed in Fraser's persona, then, between the 1970s and 2000s.

Only making minor use of Fraser's FES activities, this dissertation likewise only touches on Atlantic Canada's culture and history as influences on the Society's cultural

form, or deformation. Future work could follow its roots into the Maritime provinces' traditions of radical conservatism and Red Tory politics (both tied to post-Confederation economic decline); or to their traditional Catholicism, Protestantism, Puritanism, Loyalism, sociability, and links to Ireland and Scotland, countries with their own contentious relations to Empire and habits of producing creative, political satires. Baiting FES spoofs might reasonably be defined, in the group's initial guise as the Flat Earth Society of Fredericton, as a play on expectations of people "from away": those who treasure a notion of Canada's eastern-most parts as backward places. Among the region's literary critics, Herb Wyile, Tony Tremblay, and Ian McKay have troubled stereotypes of the Maritimes as retrograde and promoted Atlantic-Canadian writers who resist them. Of them, McKay has the most favorable view of Nowlan.[11] In his *Quest of the Folk* (2009), he asserts that Nowlan "incompletely yet brilliantly caught the sense of this feeling": that "the romance of the rural Folk has run aground on the shoals of its own implausibility" (318). He attributes a "seminal moment" in the advance of Maritime identity consciousness (309) to Nowlan's 1973 novel *Various Persons Named Kevin O'Brien*. For McKay, it inspired more recent writers and movements that override regional stereotypes. These include "a powerful and dynamic environmental movement," "feminist critique of the Folk," "resistance" and "refusal" of Cape Breton's "intrusive tourism state," challenges to capitalism, and "George Elliott Clarke's brilliant poems on the rural black experience" (309). My dissertation's first chapter, authored by an outsider, focuses on Nowlan's poetry and the immediate FES territory that extends from Fredericton to Fogo

[11] Wyile's *Anne of Tim Hortons* (2011) has little to say about Nowlan but is discussed later in this essay (SP 178). Tremblay addresses him in his *Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature* entry: "Troping the Tropes: Atlantic Canada Writes Back" (2016).

Island. Regional traditions largely fall out-of-scope, however, partly because the Society's richly textured play quickly caught on across Canada and spread abroad. Regional events cross-resonate with national and worldwide traditions, but that dynamic is subsumed here by a fascination with FES members in and beyond Atlantic Canada as individual thinkers.

An unrelated Flat Earth Society's website records an exchange about the satirical group. Therein, a user by the name Miramichier states "someone should write a book about the gang" of "intellectuals and boozers" that formed around Nowlan in the 1970s. Writing in 2008, Miramichier proposes a study to address their "continuing influence on generations of New Brunswickers and more" (n. pag.). That call cannot be answered by my project. With a literary focus, this dissertation does not seek an exact place for FES in its wider society. A cultural historian could interpret the Society in relation to regional contexts, world events, or Canadian unity debates. In some ways, turning to letters written by aspiring FES members who were not literary authors straddles literary and cultural studies. Broad cultural currents are not a focus here, however, because iconic events such as NASA's moon landing and Canada's centennial have received rich historical contextualization by others and won secure footholds in cultural memory. I focus on an underappreciated subcultural network and three non-canonical writers. Although the present essay cannot offer a "true" cultural history of FES, my study does overlap with the work of critics who engage rarely considered thinkers and groups. The remainder of this introduction works to place my dissertation and FES within that intellectual context, by looking at related literary, subcultural, and Flat Earth scholarship.

Part Two: *Scholarly Context*

Culture from Below and Beyond

Documenting an overlooked interpretive community, this dissertation expands Canadian literary studies' coverage of networks that formed beyond the boundaries of the creative publishing industry. It also focuses on three writers with devalued or, in the case of Ferrari, bankrupt currency in the academic marketplace. Paul Martin's *Sanctioned Ignorance* (2013) gives evidence for, although not insights to explain, their limited representation. Martin tallies authors and books used in Canadian literature undergraduate courses taught through twenty-seven universities during the 1997-98 and 2007-08 academic years.[12] Nowlan's books appeared only once on those course lists (243). Ferrari's writing, predictably, did not appear. Surprisingly, neither did MacEwen's, even though she (like Nowlan) was prominent in the CanLit scene of her times. Martin's data does not preclude the possibility that Nowlan or MacEwen were discussed in university classrooms in the 1990s and 2000s; surely they were, if rarely. But his book indicates their recent marginality, especially compared to Margaret Atwood. Her books pop up ninety-four times on the reading lists Martin surveyed (236-37; 267-68). These imbalanced figures (1 [Nowlan]-0 [Ferrari]-0 [MacEwen]-94 [Atwood]) demonstrate the need to expand the ranks of authors deemed worth reading. Nowlan and MacEwen are notable for published writing and, to a much lesser extent, Flat Earth hijinks. Through FES, they creatively opposed the increasingly professionalized CanLit industry of the centennial period; risked reputation on provocation, a potentially bad bargain; blurred

[12] Martin continued this research project in 2017/18, but those results have yet to appear (Eso). If supported by future scholars, the *Sanctioned Ignorance* investigations into the teaching of Canadian literatures could become a multi-generational research project to rival *The Literary History of Canada* series begun in 1965.

lines between audience and artist; and promoted locality, region, and transnationalism at the expense of a newly fashionable Canadian nationalism. Following such leads, my work stands apart from Nick Mount's *Arrival*. Mount's recent book traces a convergence of historical conditions, metropolitan energies, and star writers driving the unifying triumphs of Canadian writing in the 1960s and early 1970s. I find interest, conversely and perversely, in FES as *departure*: an offshoot from Canadian literature's core texts and figures, from its coherence as a bounded body of writing. My dissertation participates, then, in a secondary subfield that studies culture from below, beside, and beyond established canons.

Canada's Flat Earth Society emerged at a time when countercultural activity was paradoxically becoming "mainstream" in North America. Participating to some degree in the protest energy of "the long 1960s," the Society cast powerful institutions as "enemies" of their loosely defined mission. One target for humour and intellectual challenge was the North American Space Agency (NASA), which had spread worldwide its 1969 photographs of the Earth from space and the moon. Sundry members used the Society's open-ended discourse to poke fun at or seriously critique Canada Post, academia, and utility companies, as will be shown. Staunch, oppositional perspectives were never free from irony, however. While decrying arbitrary authority and slavish conformity, the Society's farcical satire also implicitly sent up fringe groups on the cultural landscape as well as individuals who promote minority views absent rhetorical ambiguity or personal humility. Another in a string of targets: post-war elites who "deplore working-class [or 'populist'] movements for their bigotry, their refusal of modernity, and their borderline madness," in Thomas Frank's words (5). FES trolled for

that brand of political disdain by expressing bigotry against Globularists, decrying harms associated with modernity, and dancing on the borders of reason and folly. In short, they puckishly provoked the ire of those who would debase themselves with feelings of innate superiority. Accordingly, leaders of farcical underground networks with similar intents contacted FES. "El Presidente when awake" of "the World Apathy League," Moncton's Joe Clark wrote to Ferrari on "16 October A D 1979 (at last count)"; by that time, Clark had attracted two members, including his daughter (LFF 2.1.8). Although heading a much more obscure association than the Society to which he applied, Clark expressed parallel intent for his apathy: "we're meant to make people laugh. What could be more humanitarian than that?" (2.1.8). A comedic organizer with wider reach than Clark, John Holden wrote from "the Official North American Plate Headquarters" in Washington State when as President of the International Stop Continental Drift Society he applied to join FES. Holden urged Ferrari to "process [his] application to the Flat Earth Society as soon as possible," because "continents can drift on a flat earth as well as a spherical one," and delays might increase the geographical gap between these two naturally allied organizations (13 June 1977, LFF 2.1.9). The Apathy League and Stop Continental Drift Society have each left behind fainter historical traces than FES, perhaps because they did not use their offices to create oddball literary networks in support of their irreverent campaigns.

Scholars attending to subterranean groups and unusual thinkers often take unconventional approaches in their analyses. Jessup's work on hoaxes has been cited as one precedent for the present study. Her refusal to view peculiar particulars from a fixed position informs my layered investigations of FES, but I do not follow Jessup in giving

personal testimony (i.e., an autoethnography) about encounters with source material, nor in positing the potential for hoaxes to further decolonization.[13] Appearing in 2019, like Jessup's book, Rimstead and Beneventi's *Culture from Below* likewise coaxes subversive political effects out of literary materials. Subtitled *Contested Spaces, Counter-narratives, and Culture from Below in Canada and Québec*, the essay collection turns to authors with less visibility than Nowlan or MacEwen. It includes analyses of Kobo Abe, Rawi Hage, Assia Djebar, and Robert Majzels. Whereas FES's flattened ground is literally an imaginary world, *Culture from Below* discusses hyper-politicized, place-based conflicts: French-Canadian poverty, protests against Mega-Events like the Olympic Games, Indigeneity in Canada's armed forces, stereotypes of sex workers as criminals and victims, and a "war on the homeless" (Rimstead and Beneventi 7). These versions of "spatial conflict" and visions of "how space feels to those being contained, excluded, policed, or erased" (3) unfold within dire material contexts that can make farcical opposition groups like FES look silly (which they are) and trite (they are not). Conversely, continual returns to fictive accounts of injustice and combative response in *Culture from Below* show that creativity shapes the world we inherit and helps facilitate its redevelopment in turn. The editors see their essayists "inject[ing] a certain 'optimism' in reading practices" that listen to "new voices from below" and attend conflicts "often naturalized, forgotten, or unseen and unheard within Canadian literary and cultural studies" (4 and 9).[14] For some, opposing mainstream culture or scholarship could indicate

[13] A rare flaw in Jessup's book: claims for hoaxes as decolonial tools ought to raise instances of fabricated authorship producing political harm, such as anti-Semitic texts that circulate under false pretenses.

[14] The editors feel that branches of Canadian studies as well as scholarship in the Humanities more broadly are "generally behind the social sciences in the critique of social inequity" (Rimstead and Beneventi 4).

a negating because contrary stance. But the genre of outsider studies is hopeful in terms of practitioners' faith in the power of reclaiming ideas and figures from the brink of invisibility.

Johnathan Eburne's *Outsider Theory* (2018) provides *Intellectual Histories of Unorthodox Ideas*. Rather than probing dominance and resistance, he follows the circulation of ideas many would see as illegitimate subjects for critical inquiry: mystical revelations, amateur science, and occult theories. The critic turns to recognized figures like the Marquis de Sade, Marcus Garvey, and Sun Ra, who contributed to the Black Arts Movement through his use of Egyptian iconography and by creating "a thinking of magical thinking, a theory of outsider theory" (352). Obscure texts include Immanuel Velikovsky's attempts to "'disprove' gravity" with "his own hypothesis about planetary electromagnetism" (12) and maps drawn by inmates of psychiatric hospitals (269-304). Covering broad swaths of time, Eburne cites the 1970s as a time of heightened interest in oddity. FES (not mentioned) and other movements extended "antiestablishment politics of the civil rights and post-1968 era" (18). His book appeared at a timely moment as well, given that "post-truth" was the OED's "word of the year for 2016" (365). Yet a standard neglect of unusual thought remains in the scholarly realm. Eburne writes:

> It is not enough to lament the fallen state of knowledge in a 'post-truth' age. Rather, it is incumbent upon contemporary intellectuals and cultural workers to expand rather than restrict our horizons of study in order to consider the dynamic and often convoluted ways in which conceptual schemes form, adapt, persist, and change in meaning. I challenge the presumption that only the best ideas deserve remembrance and that bad thinking should be immediately disavowed. I propose instead that modern intellectual life owes as much to outlandish or otherwise idiosyncratic thinking as it does to the dominant concepts and ideologies […]. (7)

Here we have a micro-manifesto for an unnamed and unstable sub-field, one which takes up movements, figures, and texts that enter the world through sidelong routes only to flail

and grasp for elusive legitimacy. This call responds to the fact that "the humanities are only beginning to contend with their relationship to the margins of their practice" (xxii). Undefeated by limiting standards, scholars can expand the approaches and subjects of humanistic research, enhancing by challenging from within its cultural authority.

This dissertation's long look at a single group's cultural invasion in some ways fits with Eburne's broad historical work. FES "promised visionary flights, opened up underground currents of suppressed political intensity, [and] beckoned to countercultural forms of intellectual exchange," although it did not, as some groups have done, "yield[] nostalgic retroformulations justifying intolerance" (Eburne 2). Sources in *Outsider Theory* are outlandish, but they are products of strictly sincere rather than satirical intents. That sets them apart from the rebellious version of Planoterrestrialism rebroadcast throughout the present essay. A Canadian literary inclusion for Eburne's book (there are none) would be Bliss Carman's theosophy[15] rather than Nowlan's Flat Earth play. Ideas Eburne reads aloud are nonetheless opaque and provocative, prompting flexible approaches and distrust of polemics. Accounting for potential "truth effects" of errant or erroneous ideas, he develops an outsider's brand of theorizing. He remains speculative in tone, recognizing his subject's "asymmetrical entanglements" and the fact that "every theory risks sounding like a crackpot one" in world that offers little in the way of clarity (11 and 12). Smuggling renegade sources into scholarship, he opens the gate to "wildly" or "badly" formed thought (24). The resulting language sometimes betrays an infatuation with figuratively illicit subjects. He locates potent messages wrapped in "murmur and

[15] See Thomas Hodd's brief mentions of Carman's letters, edited by Desmond Pacey. Carman is chosen as representative of Canadian writers who engage outside theories, due to his proximity to Nowlan as a resident of Fredericton's Forest Hill Cemetery, where they are immediate, permanent neighbours.

stammer; void and fold; rupture and discontinuity; overcoding and nondiscourse" (10-11). Flirtations with poetics, or at least implicature, may seem out-of-step with critical prose. But in allowing language to spill over the bounds of argument, the author adheres to nonconformist sources and stays true to the Greek taproots of theory: *theoria*, a "provisional" mode of thought (12). Of outsider theory, Eburne writes that the "challenge is thus for us better to understand, as well as to exercise, the vicissitudes of intellectual circulation rather than striving to map out the firmest ground upon which to anchor our self-assurance" (13). This approach directs many kinds of studies but responds especially well to unclassifiable source material. It would be ridiculous to attempt clear-eyed analyses of the "Psychotic Maps" Eburne discusses or the Flat Earth pranks studied here.

Poetic glitches in Eburne's prose reveal enrapture with outsideness, as if the critic obtained a measure of "contact high" from looking into the smoke and mirrors of bizarre subcultural products. In a darkly flamboyant essay, Paul Mann takes up this intoxicating appeal. "Stupid Undergrounds" appears in his 1999 *Masocriticism* collection, whose title invokes the pain enjoyed by intellectual seekers. "Stupid Undergrounds" is a non-essay, a self-destructing deconstruction rife with postmodern doubt and Gen-Xy malcontention. Unusual from the outset, it opens with a list rather than a coherent statement:

> Apocalyptic cults and youth gangs, *collèges* and phalansteries, espionage networks trading in vaporous facts and networks of home shoppers for illicit goods; monastic, penological, mutant-biomorphic, and anarcho-terrorist cells; renegade churches, garage bands, dwarf communities, no-risk survivalist enclaves, unfunded quasiscientific research units, paranoid think tanks, unregistered political parties, subemployed workers' councils, endo-exile colonies, glossolaliac fan clubs, acned anorexic primal hordes; zombie revenants, neo-fakirs, defrocked priests and detoxing prophets, psychedelic snake-oil shills, masseurs of overdiagnosed symptoms, bitter excommunicants, faceless narcissists, ideological drag queens, mystical technophiles, subentrepreneurial dealers, derivative *dérivistes*, tireless archivists of phantom conspiracies, alien abductees, dupe factota, tardy primitives, vermin of abandoned factories, hermits,

> cranks, opportunists, users, connections, outriders, outpatients, wanna-bes, wanna-not-bes, hackers, thieves, squatters, parasites, saboteurs; wings, wards, warehouses, arcades, hells, hives, dens, burrows, lofts, flocks, swarms, viruses, tribes, movements, groupuscules, cenacles, isms, and the endlessly multiplied hybridization of variant combinations of all these, and more. (Mann 127)

In his opening salvo, Mann performs an obsessive's enthusiasm for the mutant category of "Stupid Undergrounds." Forecasting secret knowledges and hidden networks to be revealed, his paragraphic list will hook some readers. But it misdirects. Mann goes on to deflate our "stupid fascination with stupid undergrounds" (128): "regressive trap[s]" and "delusive utopia[s]" that they are (147). He calls out our inner intellectual masochists, who lust after lack of status, covet inversional access to shadow worlds where down points up. One tactic is to knock over existing models for thinking underground culture. He rejects "the old topography of center and margin" (128); "the mock-heroic rhetoric of cultural opposition (subversion, resistance, etc.)" and "the nouveau rhetoric of multiplicity (plurality, diversity, etc.)" (129); vertical mappings that trace a downward trajectory to "the foundation and everything that would erode it" (133); tropes of "poetic madness breaking out of the prison of reason" (135); the "psychotopography" of art as "the repressed of culture and thus […] a pathological site" and "therapeutic matrix" (141-42); the diurnal binary of day-job/side-gig (168-73); and even postmodernism's "fractal descent" (154), "nomadology and rhizomatics" (174-75). None capture the inverted use-value of undergrounds. None survive a critical scrutiny supercharged by Millenarian frenzy over a regenerative doomsday for "the whole dumb hollow of culture" (137). Yeah, Mann. How might one credibly account for incredible movements as anything but would-be rebellions against dominant order that are inevitably complicit with it? Steeped in fluidity, collision, and suspension, the essay never resolves the pesky problem of

"Stupid Undergrounds." Instead, it models a variable intellectual approach that widens the designation's application. Only some critics exploit "armchair" affiliations with oppositional communities (188). All belong to the "secret order of cynics" that, once branded, Mann cannot escape (190).

Richly pessimistic about studies of culture from below, Mann's essay is a key text in its genre: a classic of irrelevance! Jessup and Eburne dare to defy scholarly standards. Mann goes further, countering common approaches within the paradoxical mainstream of subcultural studies ("Kulture Krit" in his vandal's orthography [188]). He explores doubts about the sub-field's powers of recuperation. "We have witnessed so many spectacles of critical intelligence's dumb complicity in everything it claims to oppose that we no longer have the slightest confidence in it," he writes (134). Mann is pessimistic about critics[16] but charitable enough not to attack specific targets. Unless, of course, he takes aim at the reader. His opening paragraph stimulates but also trolls obscurity's intellectual allure. Its litany skims subterranean surfaces, dramatizing the shallowness of "stupid criticism" about "stupid undergrounds" (174). One observes occult movements "always in search for the next one, the true and proper identification, which never arrives, which the process itself realizes as unrealizable, until desire is distributed and dissipated across the entire field" (158). Hence, Mann's monumental paragraph of broken parts. He says it again: "manic codification of the inane" (136). The critic collates enticements that in the aggregate constitute a singular boredom, boredom with "continuous deferral to the promise of a greater imminent satisfaction that never occurs, until the velocity of

[16] His symbol for "the spectacle of the masocritic trying to give stupidity its due while thinking it through with all the proper rigor" is "the fabulous bird that flies in tighter and tighter circles until it disappears up its own asshole" (Mann 137). He uses the word "asshole" and not "cloaca," indicating a preference for figurative language and comic provocation over precise distinctions.

selection itself becomes the empty signifier of the Other" (159). Throughout, "Stupid Undergrounds" does not provide much detail on specific groups. Those discussed include fake religions headed by non-existent messiahs: Neoism, based on Canadian "total media artist" Monty Cantsin (156-57), and the Church of the SubGenius inspired by placeholder martyr J. R. Dobbs (158).[17] Mann lingers over zerowork proponents (168-69) and tattoos as "critical atavism" (177-81), while sporadically referencing punk rock and noise music. He deals directly with postmodern philosophers—Adorno, Barthes, Bataille, Baudrillard, Benjamin, Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Guattari, Laccan, and Žižek—although few would make first encounters with such names in "Stupid Undergrounds." The essay lacks a thesis but has its effects. One of these: interested readers will search out the bands, artists, and jokers that he names. They fall between canonicity and invisibility, just as Mann is too verbose, analytical, and citational for zine culture but too unruly, flippant, and nihilistic for Cultural Studies in its capitalized form.

With a literary focus on a single group, this dissertation only skirts the edges of the un-discipline of subcultural studies that Mann takes as his proper subject. Within that fuzzy rubric, my project relates most nearly to the sub-sub-school that considers (declared?) belief in a Flat Earth. Mann gestures toward that terrain. He does not include Flat Earthers in his catalogue of stupid undergrounds but does invoke "blank spaces at the edges of archaic, flat-earth maps" and creatures who "lurk past the edges of the world" (131) as symbols for the siren song of subcultures. He sees those old maps' "cartoonish monsters, hardly worthy of a child's nightmare" (131), as a way to think about worlds he

[17] Mann gives an address for those hoping to join the Church of the SubGenius, while stating uncertainty about "if it still exists" at our time of reading (290). He knows fake religions are unstable entities, relative to the products of prestigious university presses, even those that address bizarre subcultural groups.

calls “undergrounds” even while announcing suspicion over above/below dichotomies. Mann unrolls those old maps because they mark out spaces, “not merely marginal spaces,” reserved for “extracartographic reach that is preserved as a kind of threat” or “seduction, if you would rather, to the very adventure of marginality” (131). An irony underpins Mann’s sophisticated use of these maps as framed by margins-beyond-margins. In the same breath, he repeats a common (stupid?) misconception: that two-dimensional medieval maps depict a Flat Earth. Mann’s insight into “the adventure of marginality” could explain the recent return of Flat Earthers as cult figures. They stand for alterity and mystery, while their occult ideas suggest knowledge secreted even further off, beyond the limits of charted or chartable worlds. Even so, the ahistoricism of Mann’s point demonstrates the need for scholarship to undo notions that previous eras were ruled by ignorance. Chet Van Duzer unpacks meanings that attach to illustrated monsters inhabiting archaic maps, while Christine Garwood debunks a series of erroneous ideas about the long and tangled history of Flat Earth thinking.

Of all researchers operating in the nascent field of Flat Earth Studies, Garwood has made the most prominent contribution. Her 2007 *Flat Earth: History of an Infamous Idea* spans ancient Babylonia and 1970s New Brunswick. The book has been widely cited, partly due to its deep look at one *Infamous Idea*, partly because she breaks down stubborn myths. She obliterates the notion, repeated by Mann, that pre-Enlightenment Europeans thought of our Earth as flat. That misconception reveals a fragile presentism that falsely consigns our ancestors to relative dark ages (350-51). Paying close attention to specific Flat Earth movements that spread in England, America, and Canada in recent centuries ties her work to subcultural studies. But to expose myths common to

supposedly scientific worldviews, this historian turns to iconic figures as well. Columbus appears as the subject of Garwood's prologue, but not as the discoverer of Earth's rotundity (1-14). Despite later uses of his writing, Newton's cameo shows him to be no straightforward empiricist but a "Bible scholar, astrologer and alchemist" who "viewed science, philosophy and theology as inseparable components of one great whole" (28). He was, therefore, hardly scientific in the modern sense. Showing sympathy for occult beliefs, Garwood dedicates her book to nineteenth-century Flat Earther Samuel Birley Rowbotham ("Parallax"); evolutionary theorist Alfred Russel Wallace, who found novel means to demonstrate Earth's sphericity but was a poet, spiritualist, and opponent of vaccines; as well as twentieth-century pseudoscience expert Robert Schadewald, one of Ferrari's many correspondents. Garwood does little to challenge notions of a Flat Earth. That task became redundant, at least in western civilization, as early as the fifth century BC. Instead, she dismantles incorrect notions about this most *Infamous Idea*, including the presumption that all Flat Earth societies are strictly sincere or built squarely upon mere jokes.

Never validating notions of a Flat Earth, Garwood nonetheless gives earnest attention to groups that have supported or exploited that idea. She presents proponents of "the most renowned of erroneous concepts" as a "minority so much maligned and little understood" (350-51). This approach places her at odds with a growing strain in the would-be field of Flat Earth Studies. Recent articles investigate the growth of online Flat Earth commentary over the 2010s, but their authors tend to take Flat Earth ideas seriously only as a threat, not as an opportunity to reflect on how ideas develop and persist (*à la* Eburne) or how divergent theories shed light on default positions (*à la* Jessup). Recent

scholarship directed against Flat Earth campaigns include Landrum, *et al.*'s "Differential susceptibility to misleading flat earth arguments on youtube" in *Media Psychology* (2019); Shaheed Mohammed's "Conspiracy Theories and Flat-Earth Videos on YouTube" in *Social Media in Society* (2019); and John Paolillo's "The Flat Earth phenomenon on YouTube" (2018) in *First Monday*, a journal of Internet Studies. Some who assert countercultural rather than counter-countercultural theses use Flat Earths merely as symbols, not ideas. Claire Colebrook's pro-individualist "A Globe of One's Own: In Praise of the Flat Earth" (2012) uses the term only once, in its title. Dick Couprie, for his part, dives deeply into Flat Earth ideas. His *When the Earth Was Flat* (2018) compares ancient Greek and ancient Chinese cosmologies, systems that once dominated rather than decorated the zeitgeists of those societies.

To date, little has been written about Canada's Flat Earth Society of the 1970s. That is not surprising, because its pranking elements disqualify the endeavor as "true" Flat Earthism, while flirtations with disreputable theories invalidate FES for mainstream literary scholarship and Cultural Studies. Garwood has given the group its most extensive treatment from an outside perspective. Her *History of an Infamous Idea* includes a FES chapter titled "View from the Edge" (280-314). Therein, she appreciates the satirical bent of the far-flung Society and parses out serious social critique from its oddball humour. She acknowledges literary involvements of some members but never deals with specific texts created outside of a FES context. My dissertation supplements and expands Garwood's chapter by interpreting potent messages encoded in FES discourse and, further, by relating documents in the Society's archival legacy to published works by three members. Understudied FES materials merit sustained attention for their own

interest (which is significant) and for their relevance to uses of metaphor, philosophy, and humour in the visible outputs of Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen. Whereas President Ferrari takes centre stage in Garwood's narrative, he shares the spotlight here with Symposiarch Nowlan and First Vice-President MacEwen. They are more interesting as literary thinkers and writers than Ferrari, more a tinkerer as a poet than a craftsman. But he showed great commitment to the cause of Planoterrestrialism, at the risk of having himself *committed*.[18]

Garwood's FES chapter falls between treatments of two International Flat Earth Research societies that operated in England and the United States during the past century, each discussed in the introduction's next section. Those groups are counterexamples more than analogues for FES. They diverged from the mainstream, but their oppositional styles were more literal than literary. Aside from recording three Flat Earth societies, Garwood's book is useful for its history of the Flat Earth figure "Parallax," penname of England's Rowbothom (36-78). The historian holds open the door to doubts about whether he was an ideological polemicist, sly jester, or opportunist invading the newly reputable field of Victorian science. Possibly a provocation merely posing as a doctrine, his theory of Zetetic Astronomy[19] can be seen as planoterrestrial in the Frederictonian sense. The author's *nom de platitude*, Parallax, suggests the way the Earth (and perhaps

[18] Ferrari reports that one FES member was confined "to an asylum" for these reasons: "he let his hair grow long, preferred to live in a teeppee, and believed the Earth was flat." The author points to the 1972 *Saturday Night* article by Donald Cameron (another member), "Terry Crawford Meets the Mind Police," as evidence for the fact that the event actually occurred and was not a merely a dramatization of the abuse Flat Earthers must endure, being seen as "fools, nuts, or cranks" while living in a Globularist's world (*TEIF* 80).

[19] See Rowbotham's 1865 book *Zetetic Astronomy. Earth Not a Globe!* Readers can decide for themselves whether the work should be read as actual propaganda for a wrong-headed belief, as a creative experiment to test common sensibilities, or as a tongue-in-cheek performance that knowingly breaks with dominant truth claims.

even his writing) strikes the mind depends entirely on viewers' perspectives. To avoid traps laid by provocateurs or trolls, readers of such tracts should follow Garwood's lead by tempering disdain with caution, judgement with interest, and foreclosing ideology with openness to nuance. The lessons of her *Flat Earth* have not yet been integrated into the still-fledgling subfield of Flat Earth Studies. This historian of ideas ably shows it is often unwise to call others fools; better for us to live and let err.

Analogues and Counterexamples for FES: Local, International

The present essay stands at the intersection of Flat Earth Studies, literary studies, and subcultural scholarship that investigates the undisciplined subject of oddball networks that erect side-show stages in the public sphere. In this penultimate section of my introduction, consideration of oppositional, imaginative, and rarely considered networks will identify connections to and disparities with FES. Such comparisons clarify the Society's approach to countercultural expressions, building outsider networks, and resisting social or literary expectations. The discussion is organized into themes mirroring this dissertation's chapters. First, two groups from Fredericton are presented. Second, I consider several groups active beyond Canada's borders. Last, and at greatest length, I will address literary, musical, and political entities from across Canada that relate in obvious or subtle ways to FES.

The dissertation's first chapter will narrate the formation of a satirical Society at the Fredericton home of Alden Nowlan and his family. The residence was provided to them due to his affiliation from 1968 to 1983 with the University of New Brunswick, the property's owner. The Windsor Street home became an important site for many in New

Brunswick, to the point where it became known regionally as “Windsor Castle.” That colourful nickname pays sincere tribute to the small house as a meeting place, where Nowlan frequently held court. The nickname’s hyperbole pokes inversional fun at Fredericton’s remove from centres of power and the limited esteem Nowlan and his friends enjoyed outside of their literary circle. Further, “Windsor Castle” plays on Nowlan’s amateur expertise in European royal lineages, a passion that responded to the degrading poverty of his childhood. In the same year as FES began, the Windsor Castle epithet and all that stood behind it led to the creation of a farcical “Monarchy” in Fredericton. This was a hoax, or satirical club, launched after Nowlan reimagined his Scottish-born poetic mentee James Stewart (b. 1948) as a Stuart King in exile. A peerage quickly grew around that fantasy. Regular visitors received official titles and Letters Patent, concretizing the metaphor of the Windsor Street home as a castle. No discussions seen during my research comment on the irony of a Jacobite revival springing up in a “Castle” named after a street that derives its appellation from the Germanic/English/Sassenach Windsor-family line: logical adversaries to Scotland’s Royal House or its renegade pretenders. Of course, such historical divisions become blurred by the all-consuming metaphorical imagination and comic play that surrounded Nowlan’s fictional House of Poets.

Within the reconstructive Jacobite restoration that sprung up in Fredericton, FES Chancellor and UNB student-poet Stewart became known as His Royal Highness, “Defender of the faith,” and rightful heir to the throne of “England, Ireland, Scotland and France, High King of the Celts” (“Letters Patent,” 1976, LFF 3.14). Largely an in-group joke, the kingly title also referred to Stewart claiming in earnest descendance from an

original High Steward of Scotland: Robert, Duke of Albany and Earl of Fife, who lived from 1340 to 1420 (Fraser, *When the Earth Was Flat* 20). Another student writer, David Adams Richards was appointed Baron Bartibogue, Viscount of Burnt Church, Earl of Shiloh, Marquis of Matapedia, and Duke of Dungarvon (Tremblay, *Richards* 143), titles that recognize his familiarity with out-of-the-way places in New Brunswick. FES co-founder and Chairman Raymond Fraser became Duke of Northumberland (Cook 267) and First Lord of the Admiralty (Toner 261), while Ferrari, the philosophical-cum-religious authority, was made Archbishop of Canterbury and Duke of Sydney in tribute to his status as a theological philosophy expert and expatriated Australian (LFF 3.14). Royalizing aliases did not merely name or appoint persons to positions but "create[d]," as in metaphorically re-created, friends of the King and Nowlan (3.14). The latter became "His Serene Highness Ultan O'Nuallain, Prince of Fortara" (3.14) and Duke of Wexford (Toner 222): tributes to his Irish heritage. FES too used grandiose sobriquets, just as both groups employed lampoonist gestures of self-inflating affirmation as a ruse to at once celebrate and refuse marginal positions. The Monarchy relates to an aggrieved sense of Gaelic/Celtic identity that unites many in Atlantic Canada, a point of prideful difference from the standard Anglophilic, Protestant, and secular strains of Canadian nationalism. In part because of its Gaelic/Celtic/Catholic/aristocratic theme, the Monarchy remained a private club rather than a Society to which all comers might apply.

The Monarchy has been written about most extensively in "Royally Wronged," a 1976 *Weekend Magazine* cover story by Fraser and reproduced in his memoirs, *When the Earth Was Flat* (15-23). Therein, he shows that the participatory fantasy of a New Brunswick Royal House had the power to transform the "38-foot converted fishing boat"

where he lived into a military "fleet" and the "pint of Schooner beer" that christened it into "a bottle of champagne [smashed] against the ship's prow" (17). Ceremonious acts of imaginative transformation like this one extend the play that Nowlan, Fraser, Ferrari, and Stewart pursued in their poetries. The Monarchy and FES are child-like fabulations wrapped in formal costume. The former plays on notions of artistic nobility usurping cultural power from officialdom. Following Fraser's lead, Nowlan biographers Patrick Toner (221-22 and 261-63) and Greg Cook (240-44 and 267-68) address Fredericton's farcical House of Stuart/Stewart, but these three sources disagree. Fraser calls its King "James III," Toner "James IV." Fraser wrongly places the origin sometime in 1971 (18); Toner knows it formed in 1970 (221).[20] Future studies could specify particulars about the group. Facts are less important than the spirit of the upstart Monarchy (Cook's focus), although specifics of members and meanings would enable detailed comparison to FES. Both enterprises deserve investigation because they are fine examples of how Nowlan followed through on what might have been passing fancies and private jokes to create alternate worlds rich in ceremony, fraternity, and fun. Friend-groups often trade in nicknames based on formal titles. Few possess sealing wax to affix those formalities, as Stewart did in letters to his jesterly liegemen.[21]

The Monarchy shared one prominent member, David Adams Richards, with a more strictly literary group of writers in Fredericton, the Ice-House Gang. A revolving cast of amateur, professional, and academic authors, the Ice-House Gang held weekly

[20] A letter from Stewart to Nowlan, dated 11 June 1970, uses royal titles: casting "Lord and Lady Nowlan" and "Squire John" (their son) as his "Loyal Subjects" (ANP 40.28.45.27). The letter shows that it was the Monarchy that paved the way for FES and not vice-versa.

[21] The claimant to the throne's official seal appears, for example, on an undated note Stewart sent to Nowlan that begins "SAVE ME A DROP OF 'THE HARD-STUFF'" (ANP 40.28.45.14). In this case, the capital letter J is set within magenta-coloured wax at the bottom of Stewart's page.

meetings from the late 1960s to early 1980s, reading aloud and workshopping work in-progress. Meetings took place at UNB's former icehouse, McCord Hall, near Windsor Castle. Only a few hundred meters separates these historic sites for Fredericton's writing community. In another sense, they stand worlds apart. Nowlan's home was a warm and Bacchanalian or Dionysian setting compared to the relatively chilly Apollonian House where the Gang met. Led in the 1970s by Robert Gibbs, Kent Thompson, and William and Nancy Bauer, Ice-House workshops addressed writerly choices and specific texts head-on. Tremblay records the anecdote of one participant using a blackboard to explain flaws in Richards' grammar (129). The former icehouse seems appropriately situated on the campus proper, whereas Windsor Castle is perched (physically, conceptually) on the border of UNB territory. Nowlan's home invited spontaneous carousing and freewheeling discussion, not workshopping. Student writers visited him there to seek counsel, but these meetings spilled over into friendships. Students who showed promise, like Stewart and Richards, became honoured guests at late-night Windsor Castle gatherings. They might have learned as much about living and drinking from UNB's Writer-in-Residence as they did about literary craft and professional development.

Nowlan participated in only a few Ice-House Gang meetings. In her *New Brunswick Literary Encyclopedia* entry, Monica Furnes records the group's founding by Dorothy Livesay (predecessor of Nowlan as UNB Writer-in-Residence) and its active period as 1967-83, exactly overlapping with Nowlan's Fredericton tenure. Furnes knows Nowlan "was not a member of the group," although he named the Ice-House Gang after its meeting place (n. pag.). Some sources mistakenly have him a regular member, one a

separate entry in the same *Encyclopedia* (Eidt).[22] Many agree that Richards was chief beneficiary of the Gang's tutelage. In his Richards biography, Tremblay asserts the "weekly meeting of Fredericton writers […] had more influence on Richards than almost anything else," providing him "the most literate and academic public he had yet encountered" (127-29). The Gang's elders encouraged him to switch from poetry to fiction (129), not advice he would have received at Windsor Castle. In fact, it was as "counterpoint to the adulation [he received] at McCord Hall that Richards sought out Alden Nowlan" (138). Tremblay sees Richards caught between the initial "gulf" and later "schism" that divided the more-spirited and more-sober writing cultures of Windsor Castle and McCord Hall (142). A relentlessly sincere New Brunswick author, Richards belonged to the Ice-House Gang and the Monarchy but not FES, which sheds light on the serious-silly continuum on which these entities might be plotted. Richards was, like Nowlan, "an odd combination of Royalist and libertarian" and a resident of the "social periphery" (139). However, only the senior writer exploited absurd impulses and flamboyant humour. The Ice-House Gang and Windsor Castle have sharp differences but are united in fostering Richards' growth and extending their legacies to the present-day. Tremblay credits the former with inspiring the New Brunswick Chapbook Series and the Maritime Writer's Workshop (128). Mary Novik reports that as late as 2019 Ross Leckie's creative writing students met in McCord Hall (n. pag.). He likely informed them of its history, which dates back to 1851. Nowlan's local influence is kept alive at the Alden Nowlan House, former grounds of Windsor Castle. There, UNB's Graduate

[22] Others include the "David Adams Richards" page on *Fog Lit* and the "Michael Pacey" entry on the website *Poetic Place Fredericton*. A print source that reproduces the same error is Linda-Ann Sturgeon's entry on Richards in the 1991 volume of *Profiles in Canadian Literature* (88).

Students Association has its offices and alehouse. Although changed, Fredericton's writerly work and literary party continue. No history of the Ice-House Gang or the Nowlan coterie would be complete without references to the contrastive other among these divided houses.

Similarly, no FES narrative can avoid two Flat Earth societies that pre- and post-date that founded in Fredericton. Prior to its formation in 1970, a Flat Earth Research Society emerged in Britain and later inspired an American offshoot. Evidence for those societies is available through Garwood's *Flat Earth* and through correspondence to/from their leaders preserved in Ferrari's archive. The U.K./U.S. societies may seem as outrageous as the Canadian manifestation of Flat Earth ideas, but they lacked FES's comedic verve and literary value. The International Flat Earth Research Society (IFERS) was founded by sign-painter Samuel Shenton of Dover in November 1956. Within a year, the Sputnik satellite launched into orbit, an epochal event that did not dampen Shenton's enthusiasms. A 1970 letter that Nowlan wrote to Raymond Fraser casts doubts on whether Shenton's Flat Earth beliefs were truly held (ANP 40.12.6.30). Another to F. R. Dalgleish says FES and "its English counterpart" each have "serious and satirical sides" (1971, ANP 40.12.6.51). Various attestants confirm, however, that Shenton's declared Flat Earthism was meant literally. Garwood describes his biblical literalism, alternative cosmology, conspiracy theory ideas, and championing of free thought. Another historian of unusual ideas, Geoffrey Kirby too sees Shenton's commitments as sincere. For him, the IFERS founder's skepticism about space exploration was a personal motivation and driver of notoriety (81-82). Kirby goes so far as to draft Shenton into the "aluminum foil

hat brigade" (231). That quip invokes and denigrates the depth of Shenton's fifteen-year campaign to promote a Flat Earth, tireless work only put to rest by his death.

In the early days of FES, neither its Plenipotentiary in London (Keath Fraser) nor Ferrari himself managed to establish contact with IFERS's founder. Ferrari wrote the following to Shenton, shortly after FES's founding:

> The reason for my correspondence is to attempt to find out more about your Society, as the idea of a flat earth interests me greatly. People are placing far too much blind faith in science these days and not enough in the evidence of their own senses. They have made a veritable god out of the new sciences. I am most interested in valiant efforts to resist this flood of blind faith aimed at idolizing science. In addition, the flatness of the earth is an evident truth derived immediately from basic experience. These are the more obvious reasons why I am interested in your society. (26 Nov. 1970, LFF 2.2.36-4)

Ferrari avoids the bombast, humour, and metaphorical indulgences characteristic of the tricky Planoterrestrialism he would go on to develop. He also declines to mention the upstart group then forming ambitious plans in Fredericton. Suggesting he saw Shenton's Flat Earthism as sincere, this would-be correspondent carefully appealed to the man by using religious language and expressing earnest disaffection with scientism. No response to Ferrari's missive arrived in Fredericton from Dover, in part because Shenton was by then suffering from health problems after a long, losing campaign. That silence occasioned jokes typical of FES humour, so conspicuously absent in Ferrari's letter. "We too have written several times to Mr. Samuel Shenton," Ferrari wrote to member R. G. Sim, "yet nary a reply. We conclude that either the supposed Society is a hoax, or else the Head has fallen off the Edge" (1975, LFF 2.1.6-2). Unbeknownst to the President, Shenton had died in March 1971, just as his own Society was gaining momentum.

Shenton resisted a dawning space age and continued Victorian England's occult legacy of Zetetic Astronomy, the hybrid Christian science and Flat Earth philosophy

developed by Rowbotham.[23] In turn, his Society spawned an American analogue headed by Charles Johnson, with the spin-off group employing the same name and motivations[24] as its predecessor. Pseudo-science expert Robert Schadewald, who later corresponded with Ferrari, reports on the transition in his December 1977 article for the inflight-magazine *TWA Ambassador*, titled "The Plane Truth":

> Because of the ridicule he suffered, Shenton became convinced that England was not the best place for a flat-Earth organization. So when he died in 1971, it was his last wish that leadership of the society and his precious library of flat-Earth books should pass to Johnson. (LFF 2.2.36-4 [43])

Based in Lancaster, California, Johnson re-launched IFERS in 1972 and was "thoroughly in earnest" according to Garwood (316). Kirby foregrounds his anti-authoritarianism over biblical literalism; Johnson's enemies included King George the III, NASA, and Disney, the company he thought filmed the supposed moon-landings' supposed footage (82) at "Meteor Crater, near Flagstaff, Arizona" (Garwood 344). Religious ideas abounded too, however. Johnson saw biblical narratives all working toward "a one-world, flat-Earth society, for honesty and decency and that sort of thing" (LFF 2.2.36-4 [43]). His views overlap, then, with FES rhetoric. The satirical Society exploits biblical references, conspiracy thinking, and anti-authoritarianism to convey their countercultural worldview. But these groups do not easily sit side-by-side.

From his home office in California, Johnson wrote several letters to Ferrari in New Brunswick, the first a friendly inquiry dated 5 June 1974. It states: "I have been

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[23] Rowbotham's occult, Christian science valorized knowledge gained first-hand, while applying a literal reading of scripture to preferred passages of the Bible that support a Flat Earth and a snug universe. Zetetic astronomy encourages us "to proceed only by inquiry," at the expense of preconception, hypothesis, and theory (Rowbotham 3). In that respect, it falls closer to creative Planoterrestrialism than ideology.

[24] Garwood describes Johnson's thought as an "interchange of right-wing fundamentalist teachings, countercultural criticism of the military-industrial complex, zetetic philosophy, apocalyptic visions and millenarian hopes for a New Age" (338).

given your name, as one interested in the fact that the earth is flat. Is this true? Looking forward to hearing from you" (LFF 2.1.6-2). The message is spare, while the stationery has elaborate clusters of texts, including a column of mottoes, a biblical quotation,[25] and attributions to predecessors of America's IFERS: Shenton's IFERS and the "Universal Zetetic Society of America and Great Britain" (2.1.6-2). In a 2 September 1976 letter, Johnson reports having read the *Saturday Review of the Sciences* article about Ferrari, but he seems not have read between its lines. He opens by expressing sympathy with Ferrari's Australian heritage, shared with his wife Marjory: "I have felt for several years Australia has a 'special' destiny." Further down the page, Johnson mistakenly says, "I feel sure at the core we cant [sic] be too far apart in aims." In a post-script, he wants to know of Ferrari, "are you C[hurch] of E[ngland] Lutheran or?" (LFF 2.2.12-2). FES's President responded by sending along some Society literature. The recipient responded angrily on 28 June 1977: "some explaining is due from you" (LFF 2.2.16). Direct access to FES had still not tipped him off to the satirical nature of the Society. Rather, he was upset with Ferrari for "causeing [sic] some confusion about who and what is the Flat Earth Society." In this letter, Johnson asserts that he and his wife "represent the direct line of the Flat Earth Society since 1888 and even long before!" He demands further examples of FES writings and asks: "Is St Thomas [University] Catholic? if so, Jesuit or?" and "Are you atheist to the God of the Bible?" (2.2.16). Another 1977 letter boils over with frustration at Ferrari's non-engagement with the American IFERS founder. Johnson writes that "since you have chosen to be written up as a Flat Earther, you OWE

[25] Namely: "WHERE WAS THOU WHEN I LAID THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARTH? DECLARE IT IF THOU HAST UNDERSTANDING … (Job 38:4)."

it to me, to give me some of your overall approach to the subject, your outlook" and closes, "i[f] you refuse to answer again, I will then Know for sure you are some kind of enemy of the Flat Earth Work" (LFF 2.2.36-4). He soon decided these Canadians were enemies and "idiot devils" (Garwood 332). Due to his dogmatism and demands, Johnson earned a spot in Ferrari's "hope he goes away" file (2.2.16), but never the response he felt he deserved.

FES and IFERS share important themes. Each participated in the countercultural and conspiracy-theory ethos of the post-war era, while simultaneously reaching back in time with their satirical/faithful use of Christian perspectives on the Earth as planiform and at the centre of a God-given universe (that is, given to humanity). FES's intent opposes that of IFERS, however. FES did not promote certainty about the shape of the Earth but, instead, championed subjective perception and critiqued official means of knowledge production. Its satire, undetectable to some, provided one example of the need to look below surfaces, to read between the lines. The Society used Flat Earth ideas to express disaffection with contemporary technology, declare resistance to expertise, and dramatize anti-conformity. For Shenton and Johnson's societies, a Flat Earth was central and literal. That concern had, nonetheless, concomitant implications that mirror FES's anti-conformity, distrust of modernity, and nostalgia for a romanticized past. Both FES and IFERS statements range from faithful to cynical. Surprisingly, the satirist camp may have had a leg up on these religious thinkers when it came to optimism about humanity. Ferrari's *The Earth Is Flat!* honours the creative imagination and innate courage of children whom he met through Flat Earth lecturing (SP 240). Shenton brought his lectures to school groups as well, but for different reasons. He promoted IFERS in

classrooms, “because young people were less likely to advance well-informed critiques of his ideas.” Shenton exploited young audiences as “useful opportunities to practice new material,” not seeing their potential for inspiring his own thought (Garwood 226). FES’s President sought out the ideas of tykes. His Society kept alive the playful child within. The satiric and artistic nature of FES sets them well apart from the doctrinaire IFERS institutions.

The stiff-necked ideology and hardline religiosity of the twin IFERSs make them uneven analogues for the farcical FES. With its riotous playfulness and imaginative experiment, the Society relates more nearly to the pataphysical tradition than to other Flat Earth movements. Pataphysics was instigated early in career of French writer Alfred Jarry (1873-1907), whose teachings re-emerged via the *Collège de ’Pataphysique*, founded in 1948 and kept underground by design. Direct links connect FES to Pataphysics, as do similarities of thought and style. Before addressing overlaps, let us consider the genesis of Pataphysics and a definition found in Jarry’s avant-garde fiction *The Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, pataphysician: a neo-scientific novel*, with reliance on Simon Watson Taylor’s English-language translation. This book contains bizarre adventures, outrageous characters, and outlandish landscapes as well as a primer on the ultimately irreducible “science” of Pataphysics.

Pataphysics began as a prank concept developed among a cadre of schoolboys, led by Jarry. They used it to mock their blowhard science teacher, M. Hébert. In his biography of Jarry, Alastair Brotchie relates the pedagogue’s “combination of ostentation and bluster,” mark of a “tragic incompetent” (3, 6). Hébert provoked the insolent ire of Jarry, who raised Pataphysics to goad his teacher into making elaborate, substance-less

answers. The concept's youthful and oppositional origins shaped the "freewheeling and adolescent" style of Jarry's so-called mature output, as described in Roger Shattuck's Introduction to *Faustroll* (ix). The novel took Pataphysics from private joke to cultural movement, from goof science to literary philosophy. *Faustroll* explores Jarry's provocative, imaginatively inflected *Faust*ian "science" that maintains a *troll*ingly serious posture. Shattuck lauds the "neo-scientific novel" for its unpredictable mix of "Science, symbolism, humour, and the occult" (xvi). FES too created a nebulous tangle, blurring lines between poetic metaphor and farcical prank, skepticism and faith. In Book Two of *Faustroll*, Jarry addresses the "Elements of Pataphysics" in these terms:

> […] pataphysics will be, above all, the science of the particular, despite the common opinion that the only science is that of the general. Pataphysics will examine the laws governing exceptions, and will explain the universe supplementary to this one; or, less ambitiously, will describe a universe which can be—and perhaps should be—envisaged in the place of the traditional one […]
>
> DEFINITION. Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments. (22)

The first extract from *Faustroll* rejects the generality of science's inevitably abstract "laws." Pataphysicians find truth in direct experience and particular interactions, not through replicable experiment or predictable patterns. Non-pataphysical sciences—at least of the positivistic kind—apply a one-size-fits-all approach to phenomena and the epistemology that grapples with them, as if the outlook and "the height of human beings should remain more or less constant and mutually equivalent," as Jarry goes on to say (23). For him, however accurate, postulates depend upon perceivers' "point of view" (22), making his science a subjective pursuit like Zetetic Astronomy. Pataphysics is the "science of the particular," so it relates to FES recording, through correspondence,

individual visions of place and planet, whether experienced or invented. In all, FES letters create a "universe supplementary to this one," where myriad takes on reality are valid as long as they defy the figurative Globularism that the Society strove to overturn (rhetorically). Members' fantasies attempted to solve the all-too-real problem of living in a homogenous and overly rational culture. Hence, the need for fun-loving intellectual mutants like FES members and the adherents of Pataphysics.

In the second part of Jarry's synopsis, quoted above, he mimics the rhetoric of scientific exposition while striving to provoke rethinking at the expense of route thinking. His science raises more questions than it settles. To repeat the reaction to Jarry's definition by a later Pataphysician, René Daumal: "these few words will require hundreds of volumes if they are to be properly understood" (7). Readers of Jarry's summary will struggle to align the dense sentence's "properties," in terms of content, with its surface text, or "lineaments." The definition is multi-layered, and each layer constitutes a "virtuality" of the others. Jarry hijacks exposition for purposes of divagation, prefers our spinning minds to any straight-forward meanings. More plainspoken than the non-definition of Pataphysics, FES satire also works on multiple levels. Its farce embeds sincere points. Geoplanarian insistence challenges human pretension to objectivity. Distant cousin to Planoterrestrialism, Pataphysics is the science of particularity and exception and, implicitly, of uncertainty and ambiguity. It deals with the "imaginary" and the "symbolic," just as FES trades in alternate worldbuilding and open-ended metaphors. Both movements combine the confident postures of science/ideology with the unpredictable maneuverings of poetics, rigor with absurdity, and authentic meaning with distorting or strange-making language.

FES and the *Collège de 'Pataphysique* trouble fault lines between science and poetics. They share direct links as well as playful/serious tactics. Author of *Rhinoceros* (1959), Romanian-born playwright Eugène Ionesco belonged to FES and served the *Collège* as a Transcendental Satrap. According to Andrew Hugill's *'Pataphysics: A Useless Guide* (2012), Ionesco treasured Pataphysics for its "anarchic qualities," called it an "elaborately constructed hoax" (5). He "acknowledged the (ir)relevance of pataphysics" (133), distilling it into "absolute indifference and irony; irony on a grand scale" (134). Reasons why he joined FES do not survive in associated archives, but his terms describe Planoterrestrialism well. Like the Society, the *Collège* used inflated titles to mock the ephemeral nature of its loose associations and resist its position on the margins of respectability. Titles include "Commandeur Requis of the Ordre de la Grande Gidouille," "Serenissimus Opitulator-General," and "Proveditor-General Propagator for the Islands and the Americas" (xvi, 38, 101).[26] These are merely decorative, since the *Collège* was conceptual, not practical. Its otherworldliness is signaled by those who held central roles. The fictional "Dr. Faustroll himself serves as the Immovable Curator of the Collège" (Rosenbak 19) and "its fourth Vice-Curator, His Magnificence Lutembi [is] an African crocodile" (Hugill 38).[27]

Pataphysics and Planoterrestrialism both use inflationary titles and both involved or even relied upon alcohol, chosen sacrament for their founders. A tippler to rival Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen together, Jarry developed fatal alcoholism. He lived only

[26] For more on the various ranks that make up the *Collège de 'Pataphysique*'s self-inflated hierarchy—namely Optimates, Proveditors, Curators, and Regents—see Hugill 120-22.

[27] Hugill's paragraph about the Vice-Curator specifies that the animal's title stood in need of correction to "*Her* Magnificence," since the reptile's sex had finally been determined (38).

until his mid-thirties, whereas Nowlan and MacEwen survived their addictions over longer periods. Shattuck gives a pataphysical description of Jarry's committed indulgence: "drink practiced as discipline" (vii). Ferrari punningly jokes that FES was founded during a night of "spirited discussion" (*TEIF* 233). His coyly coded phrase refers to the fact that alcohol was regularly imbibed alongside literary conversation at Nowlan's home. Pataphysical and planoterrestrialist thinking produces altered if not impaired states of mind. Those experiments in aberrational poetics and creative thinking are an analogue for literal intoxicants, such as alcohol. With his so-called science, Jarry attempted to capture a strange world in language approximating confident objectivity, like an inebriated monologist who wants to sound sober.

Jarry's outrageous but rigorous style later inspired avant-garde theatrics of Dada and Situationism. Today, those manifestations of countercultural artistry garner more interest than Pataphysics, however.[28] Another difference: Dadaists and Situationists play within the bounds of earnest anti-capitalism. Pataphysics was fantastic, not fanatic, "had little of the desire for universal adoption that was characteristic" of "existentialism, communism, and the rest" (Hugill 117). Its farce appealed to the Marx Brothers (more than Marxists), a renowned comedy troupe that belonged to the *Collège,* according Hugill's *Useless Guide* (268). To quote his dedication, "a pataphysical life" joins "deep erudition with a playful spirit" (n. pag.). In that sense, FES's creative use of knowledge and self-undermining impishness recalls the fluidity of Pataphysics. This artful science, like FES, is radical not in the political sense but for being *inutile*: revering irrelevance,

[28] Recent studies of the Situationist International include Löwy's *Morning star* (2009); Gray's *Leaving the 20th century* (2014); Stacey's *Constructed Situations* (2014); Wark's *The beach beneath the street* (2015); and Cooper's *The Situationist International in Britain* (2016).

posing playfully serious threats to western investitures in progress and status. For Ferrari, laughter was it. "We are that lone voice laughing out in that wilderness which is modern society," he wrote, while playing on Christian tropes (*TEIF* 71).[29] Laughter, note, is human expression that does not *make sense* in any dictate-able way. Precise senselessness (disjunction, paradox) often triggers laughter. Planoterrestrial laughter echoes Pataphysics, with its "effervescent puckish enjoyment of life" (Shattuck xi). Mirth alone can resist normalcy, although political anxiety is more often identified as a source of countercultural resistance. Creative in the first instance, FES and Pataphysics fend off elucidation with textual traces full of errancy and thaumaturgy. No literary study of FES pre-dates mine, but a prominent Canadian critic once braved the subject of Pataphysics.[30]

Christian Bök's status as a conceptual poet made him a good candidate for authoring a study of Pataphysics. His creative work often relies on constraints that involve scientific procedures, a practice inspired by France's Oulipo, one group of writers that emerged from within the *Collège de 'Pataphysique*. Bök's *'Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science* (2002) accords with the findings of Christopher Higgs, who cites Jarry as a forerunner of many oppositional strains of literature and philosophy, even though citations to his work seldom appear (Brightstupidconfetti).[31] Bök shows how Jarry's influence played out beyond his immediate coterie, tracing derivations of his deviant science from Italian Futurism and French Oulipianism through to Canadian

[29] Here, he cites Isaiah 40:3, John 1:23, and Mark 1:3: "vox clamantis in deserto," the voice of one *crying out* in the desert. Invoking Christian scripture while inserting transformative difference, Ferrari presents himself as inadequately pious to traditional Christianity and as an odd sort of heretical prophet: gleeful or mad rather than pained or forlorn. He seems to be much less than a prophet but something more than a clown.

[30] Another is yet emerging. Andrew McEwan has had some early success as an experimental poet. His excellent 2014 MA thesis addresses the influence of Pataphysics on bp Nichol's screenplays for the children's television program *Fraggle Rock*. The essay presages a fascinating critical career for McEwan.

[31] Higgs' case-study is Jarry's influence on Deleuze in a filmed lecture posted online by brightstupidconfetti.

”Pataphysics, so-spelled. Throughout, the critic calls Pataphysics postmodern, because it predicts and parallels a “transition in science from absolutism to relativism” (3). While appropriate to Bök’s study, classificatory terms (i.e., *isms*) do not feature prominently in the work of FES members or the Canadian Pataphysicists Bök admires: Christopher Dewdney, Steve McCaffery, and bp Nichol. Ideological language belongs to the classifying critics Bök derides, such as Robert Kroetsch, who is referenced only as a critic, not a creative writer (81-83). Experimental artists like Nichol use their own conceptual devices—such as the non-wares of his “*’Pataphysical Hardware Company*” (84-85)[32]—to foster alternatives to the more mundane goals of literature and criticism (e.g., realism, nationalism). Nichol and his peers operate as “Canadian Jarryites” for Bök (81). They use the spiraling registers of pataphysics rather than polemical and distancing postmodern theory. These misguiding concepts share mutability of outlook, even if the term “postmodern” designates that which would eschew classification and capture. Feral discourses, Pataphysics and Planoterrestrialism cannot be enclosed within secure meanings or political ends. Consider Jarry’s non-definitions of Pataphysics or the metaphorically textured storehouse of archived FES correspondence.

Analogues and Counterexamples for FES: Canadian

Important Canadian literary networks formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s: the Association for Canadian and Quebec Literatures, the League of Canadian Poets, and the

[32] Bök playfully describes the kinds of products Nichol imagined: “Irrational institutes such as these are as ephemeral as a toy balloon with the word ‘thought’ written upon it. The owner of such ”Pataphysical Hardware might dramatize the act of ”pataphysics itself by inserting the inflated balloon into a headband, literally producing a comic-strip thought bubble that is in turn destroyed through the use of an accompanying ‘thought suppressant’—a pin […] an allegorical destruction of reason” (85).

Writers' Union of Canada. These entities had practical and nationalist mandates very different from those of FES, which gathered people together in a deliberately impractical exchange of ideas. In 1974, Nowlan expressed disappointment with bureaucratic organizations supporting Canadian literature, writing to FES poet David McFadden: "We now have the Canadian Authors Association, the League of Canadian Poets and the Writers' Union of Canada—all of them devoted, as far as I can see, to blather" (ANP 40.18.32.12). He encouraged McFadden to use a League meeting at Fredericton "as a means of getting [his] expenses paid" for a visit with "some of the Flat Earth Society executive" (40.18.32.12). Talks that would take place at a meeting of Planoterrestrialists might well qualify as "blather" from the perspective of more professionally oriented writers than Nowlan or McFadden. Because the Society's prime mover preferred his one-man "League of Canadian Nowlans"[33] over the literary associations to which he nonetheless belonged, his Society should be discussed with regards to oddball writers' networks in Canada, rather than strictly professional ones.[34] Vancouver's TISH and the Toronto Research Group (TRG) are well-known examples of writerly collectives active in the 1960s and 70s, each dead set against received literary standards. TISH and TRG are better counterexamples than analogues for FES, though, because they developed shared poetics among small groups of authors associated with metropolitan centres and the avant-garde. In other words, their urban literary opposition sometimes sought

[33] The phrase appears in a 1973 letter Nowlan wrote to FES poet Elizabeth Brewster. In it, he complains that reading tours organized by the League of Canadian Poets were less profitable, due to "illogical" systems, than what could be managed independently (ANP 40.3.23.60).

[34] Nowlan's archive preserves hundreds of letters, reports, newsletters, forms, and governing documents related to such institutions, especially the League of Canadian Poets (163 items spanning 1969 to 1983 [ANP Inventory 87-88]) and the Writers Union of Canada (164 items spanning 1973 to 1982 [170-71]).

concomitant social effects, whereas FES's itinerant social dissent resulted in a forgotten textual legacy of indeterminable value.

In the early 1960s, Vancouver's budding TISH poets grouped together in the shadow of the Black Mountain school, cast over their city via older American poets Robert Duncan and Warren Tallman. TISH's founders were George Bowering, Frank Davey, and Fred Wah. They have more stature in Canadian literary studies than Nowlan or MacEwen, partly because they continued to write for decades after Nowlan and MacEwen's careers were cut short by untimely deaths, partly because of their employment in English departments. The TISH coterie expanded to include Judith Copithorne, David Dawson, Gladys Hindmarch, Lionel Kearns, Daphne Marlatt, and Jamie Reid. The University of British Columbia brought these western writers together, just as UNB/STU anchored Nowlan and Ferrari to Fredericton. Unlike FES, which spread beyond New Brunswick's borders, TISH was a tight nexus of British Columbians. Its poets soon became editors, publishing 45 issues of their eponymous poetry magazine. It presented poetry in the Black Mountain vein and expositions on a novel, west-coastal poetic.[35] Those magazines contrast, then, with FES squibs, all primarily humorous rather than poetic or theoretical. FES led to an alternative corpus for the more familiar writings of the Society's leaders. *TISH: a poetry newsletter* launched the careers of Bowering, Davey, and Wah.

Naming themselves after an anagram for "shit," TISH announced an iconoclastic attitude toward constrictive professional norms. Sandra Djwa writes of the name as "both

[35] In 2008, Lance La Rocque published an article that makes ample use of TISH's editorial commentary, titled "The Other Side of Utopia: The Opacity of Perception in the Poetry of the First Run of Tish, 1961-63."

juvenile nose-thumbing and the neo-romanticism of a poetic stance where everything that lives is holy." She explicates the "Tish poetic," marked by "an insistence on individual response and freedom from convention" (Djwa 452). Attitudes of nose-thumbing, neo-romantic reverence, and creative individualism can be found in FES files too. However, as noted above, the fact that TISH writers and their critics identify a particular poetic at work sets these projects at odds. The Society hosted poets but did not result in a school of writing. Its authors (Nowlan, Ferrari, MacEwen; John Newlove, Patrick Lane, David McFadden) did not develop a web of in-group influence shaping their work outside of FES. If they had, under Nowlan's leadership a planoterrestrial poetic would look dramatically different from TISH's postmodern experiments. Committed to plainspoken though imaginative writing, Nowlan disliked the "pretentious stuff that comes out of Vancouver." He described TISH writing as "full of windy abstractions and superfluous definite articles and parentheses" (letter to Raymond Fraser, 1966, ANP 40.12.23.3).[36] TISH attempted to turn away from the genteel English literary tradition, selecting as guides the rough localism and natural voice of star American poet William Carlos Williams and the Black Mountain constellation illuminated by his example. That path set them against traditions of eastern and central Canada as well, regions that dominated Canadian literatures, economics, and politics prior to the 1960s. TISH writers may have appreciated Nowlan's unapproving Maritime response, then. According to Djwa, the group was "messianic" about asserting west coast identity (452) and leveled censure against "their eastern rivals" (453) such as Acorn, Layton, and Purdy. FES, conversely,

[36] Nowlan opposed theoretical exposition in a letter to Al Purdy, saying "an article by Frank Davey" in *Evidence* "actually made [him] physically sick"; "what this country needs more than anything else," he continued, "is a little judicious assassination of pseudo-intellectual phonies" (1967, ANP 40.26.13.17). Few authors provoked Nowlan's ire for their work rather than their personalities to the extent that Davey did.

promoted an embrace of one's senses and one's own place rather than loyalty to any particular part of the world.

Lara Tomaszewska describes one aspect of "Tish poetics" as an attempt to create a "'pacific nation'" in defiance of "national borders," "political alignments," and "patriotism" (62). For her, TISH "transgressed and offended Canadian nationalism" because "their locus did not refer to national identity but to inner space" (62 and 63). FES likewise valued subjectivity and sought to diminish external social forces that limit creativity. Flat and globular Earths symbolize those assertions and detractions. Yet, dividing FES from TISH, the former embraced Canada without forsaking the local. Later, it embraced internationalism without discrediting Canada. International embrace—marked by the Flat Earth Society of Canada becoming the Flat Earth Society *tout court*—seems to strengthen and broaden a Canadian cultural enterprise, rather than dilute its potency. Outside her work as the Society's Vice-President, MacEwen was an imaginative cartographer of Toronto, Canada, and mythic realms imported from across the world. She exemplifies simultaneous belonging to place, country, and planet.

FES was traditional in comparison to TISH with respect to these groups' different approaches to literature and belonging. A relation with a difference: whereas FES promoted sensory knowledge as a fundamental principle (SP 150), TISH drew upon the doctrine of "proprioception" promoted by the American poet Charles Olson. The latter term is appropriated from science and denotes the body's reflexive awareness of itself and its changing location in space. Both literary movements foregrounded embodiment, then, but not in analogous ways. FES and its poets set out to recall primal connections to the senses, partly as an antidote to technological life and ideological thinking. For their

part, TISH writers used advanced theoretical terms to deepen our understanding of poetry as a physical art form. One of the forefathers of TISH, Tallman wrote in his essay "Wonder Merchants" that Olson's doctrine of Projective Verse, an inspiration for TISH, fostered an evolution "leading poetry out of an [outdated] age of perception and into [a postmodern] age of proprioception" (60). This literary philosophy, accompanied by unusual use of layout and orthography in the TISH poetic, demonstrates the group's avant-garde approach to cultural production. Hunger for fresh ideas and experimental methods lent energy to the group, helped them expand what they saw as a "staid, politically conservative, parochial tradition" in Canadian literature, an industry (like most others) "resistant to experimentation" (Bradley). Uniting around an outsider position proved more successful for TISH writers than for Canada's planoterrestrialist poets. Bowering (2002-04) and Wah (2011-13) went on to become national Poets Laureate, with Bowering serving as the inaugural laureate for the program. FES poets still active in the twenty-first century, such as Lane and McFadden, never assumed that high office. Peter Auxier and Dan McLeod, two editor-publishers of the once-fledgling *TISH* newsletter, went on to co-found the *Georgia Straight*, which became an important Vancouver newsmagazine about culture and entertainment in that city (McLeod 13).

No literary scholar has given concentrated attention to FES, but TISH has been richly documented and analyzed. Reflections of its influences and influence began to appear in the 1970s, while FES was still developing. In 1975, the first nineteen issues of *TISH* were gathered by Davey. In 1976, C. H. Gervais released *The Writing Life, Historical and Critical Views of the Tish Movement* and Keith Richardson published *Poetry and the Colonized Mind: Tish*, arguing that American literary influences equated

to absorption of American political principles. Douglas Barbour compiled views of "Tishtory" in 1991's *Beyond Tish*. Sources continued to appear in the present century, testifying to a strong place for TISH in the Canadian canon. Gregory Betts and Christian Bök's 2019 essay collection *Avant Canada: Poets, Prophets, Revolutionaries* includes an article by Michael Roberson. He sees TISH as a forerunner for the Kootenay School and language poetry. The title of the book to which he contributes speaks to the utopian aspirations of avant-garde art, so out of keeping with the sardonic, skeptical FES spirit. Histories have been recently published by TISH founders: Davey's *When Tish Happens: The Unlikely Story of Canada's "Most Influential Literary Magazine"* (2011) and Wah's *Permissions: TISH Poetics 1963 Thereafter—* (2014). These emphasize the idealism of the group's strivings: for a novel poetic, for collectivity. Yet, I would argue that TISH's sense of collective was not as socially radical, nor enacted, as that of FES—even though the experimentalism of participating TISH poets obviously exceeds that of FES authors. Readers of TISH's *Newsletter* did not become members, whereas the authors behind FES invited many individuals, only a few being literary peers, into the fold. In asking applicants to record motivations for wanting to join with the Society and to probe their subjectivities, FES made creative writers of its audience. The Society was created by authors and non-authors, making this belletristic network highly unusual and deserving of richer documentation and interpretation than what currently exists.

Following up on the success of *TISH*, Davey founded the periodical *Open Letter* in 1965 with some of his TISH counterparts. The journal lasted until 2013, with Davey remaining at the editorial helm until it ceased publication. After relocating to Toronto in the early 1970s, he published some early "reports" of The Toronto Research Group in his

journal, TRG being a duo whose studious absurdity evolved from and overran the unruliness of TISH. Lasting from 1973 to 1982, TRG was an intimate collaboration of sometime-Pataphysicists bp Nichol and Steve McCaffery. Between them, the pair balanced creative exuberance (led by Nichol) with literary-theoretical insight (McCaffery's principal interest). According to Bradley Buchanan, McCaffery "moved to Canada [from England] in part to work with Nichol, whose sound and concrete poetry, as well as his lower-case, fragmentary style, were earning him international fame as an avant-garde figure" (161). Nichol's "mixture of populist jocularity and intellectual ambition" (161) complemented McCaffery's penchant for "technical, academic," and "scholarly language," as Nichol described it (*Rational Geomancy* 10). Their association resulted in a series of prose research reports that embed creative works by the authors, supplied as practical applications of eccentric theories. The reports combine standard and unexpected elements, scholarly rigors and mockeries of scholarly pretension. Humour and visual poetry work to "stretch the formal parameters of the expository essay," an undertaking made explicit by McCaffery in his introduction to 1992's *Rational Geomancy* (10): an anthology of reports edited ten years after TRG ended and after Nichol's untimely death in 1988. TRG reminded the esteemed critic Marjorie Perloff "just how much fun the reception of French poststructuralist theory could be, [in the years] before idolatry and ossification set in" (n. pag.). Given the "fun" of McCaffery and Nichol's work, from outrageous experiments with visual poetry to a penchant for absurd humour, the flat and flavourless name Toronto Research Group seems to be a conspicuous understatement, an anonymizing joke of its own.

Nichol and McCaffery advanced TISH's postmodernism by studying ways that our "inherited […] linguistic framework" ultimately "determines the type of reality we perceive" (*Rational Geomancy* 27). For them, constraints imposed by language extend to "the mechanics of the page" and the "bound book format," "falsifying element[s]" demanding resistance (Buchanan 163-65). The group also falls closer to TISH than to FES in developing experimental aesthetics. They go farther than TISH, however, in bringing into literary writing at the linguistic level the kinds of challenges that more socially oriented writers would bring in on the grounds of gender, class, region, and race. TRG resists limits imposed by an environment of language rather than by socialization toward Globularism, conformity, or commercialism. Like TISH before them, but unlike FES authors, McCaffery and Nichol make one's language and its tools, rather than one's unruly mind or lived experience, the immediate ground of study and exploration.

TRG's first report concerned translation processes. It offers ways to free our minds and writing from linguistic imposition. With reference to the occult practice of geomancy, they proposed creative rather than notational translating, based on "realign[ing]" the "energy currents" found "between already existing phenomen[a]," such as a text's "auditory and rhythmic structures": "geomantic translation" (McCaffery and Nichol 32).[37] That term is followed by an experiment wherein the authors translate strings of vowels into a visual poem made only of open and close parentheses. The result, a "post-semiotic" poetry (34). Nichol's 1967 "bi-lingual poem" is presented as further proof for the success of "writing" freed from syntax and alphabet. A labyrinthine

[37] The anthology's title concept of *Rational Geomancy* is articulated later in the reports as "acceptance of a multiplicity of means and ways to reorganize those energy patterns we perceive in literature" (153)

structure made only of hand-drawn cuboids seen from different perspectives, the poem's legend designates those viewed from above as "french," those viewed from below as "english" (34). The poem is laughter-inducing but also philosophically resonant, given its wordless response to the centennial year of a country struggling to make French and English lineages cohere. "bilingual poem" operates equally in Canada's two official languages because it avoids them. The report closes on a note that undermines its scholarly format. Under the heading "SOME FOOTNOTES MAYBE," TRG refuses thorough citation. "Sources of quotes seem irrelevant" (43), they state, partly because much of the data given was invented by the critics/creators themselves.

The theoretical debates and literary concepts at work in TRG reports stand apart from Planoterrestrialism's more accessible modes of creativity. Although, TRG's artistic appropriation of scientific registers and deployment of humour makes it at least a distant relative of FES. A decade into their collaboration, Nichol and McCaffery edited an issue of *Open Letter* on Canadian "Pataphysics, another venue in which they provoked thought, challenged traditional literature, and promoted playful wit to serious effect. TRG is likely as eccentric as FES, but the former built a greater cultural legacy, having become the subject of academic articles (like Wershler-Henry's "Technologies of Dictation: Typewriting and the Toronto Research Group"); book chapters (Voyce's "Poetic of the Eternal Network"[38] or M. Nichols' "A/Politics of Contemporary Anglo-Poetries: The Toronto Research Group and the Kootenay School of Writing"); a concentrated study,

[38] Using TRG as a case study in *Poetic Community: Avant-Garde Activism and Cold War Culture*, Voyce unpacks the group's deployment of poetic collaboration and creative translation as a means to defy notions of romantic genius and sole ownership of texts, ideas, and by extension property or products. FES too complicates notions of ownership by offering a participatory platform upon which contributors could challenge and expand the non-ideology of Planoterrestrialism.

Jaeger's *ABC of Reading TRG*; and a detailed interview about the group's intellectual history between Jaeger and McCaffery (*Open Letter,* 1998). Given rich documentation, TRG ranks somewhere between TISH's canonicity and FES neglect. The key text will likely remain *Rational Geomancy*, which ably combines experimental poems with detailed exposition of literary thought. Rarely do anthologies so thoroughly integrate primary sources with intellectual contexts. *Rational Geomancy* provides an example for the kind of book that could be arranged to preserve writings that orbit FES, both Society publications and letters that give insight into Planoterrestrialism's myriad interpretations.

Canada has produced few literary networks whose oddity and obscurity rival that of FES. One contender, at least in being surprisingly understudied in scholarship: Tomson Highway, Daniel David Moses, and Lenore Keeshig-Tobias united as the Committee to Re-Establish the Trickster over a "couple of years" in the late 1980s.[39] They spread humour with sincere intent by offering "lectures and workshops, even put out a couple issues of a little magazine dedicated to the idea that the Trickster was emblematic of a different world view" (Moses, *Pursued* 42). Moses' tale of the group's beginning describes their motivating philosophy, defines the need for the Committee in these terms:

> It's not like you can change the truth, take the strangeness out of it, at least in a democracy.
>
> And why would you want to manage the truth that way, anyway?
>
> Variety seems to be more than the spice of life.
>
> It seems, in a democracy, it would be the main course.
>
> So why not shift your fiction more strangely toward the truth?
>
> That's all we wanted to accomplish.

[39] Moses may have had TRG in mind when writing this slight against an unspecified target: "So I have seen what we are all doing, that it is good and worthy of attention. Having seen another *group* of writers in the city getting attention just because they are a *group*, I decide we too should organize, and I invite my colleagues, Lenore and Tomson to a meeting" (emphasis added; "The Trickster's Laugh" 107).

> To open up a space for a little bit of the strange but true about us. (43)

Offsetting the moderate phrase "that's all we wanted," the statement pairs modesty with grand plans for our understandings of thought, discourse, and reality. On those grounds if no further, the Committee's Trickster-ish play resembles Planoterrestrialism. According to Moses' elaborating comments, he and his colleagues explored their central symbol to assert strangeness as strength. The Trickster, like FES's Flat Earth, became an "emblem" for a "different world view," one deployed with "rich irony" by creative writers (43). In a short space, Moses' reflection interweaves neatly with colourful threads in FES's fraying tapestry: metaphor's truth-bending effect, diversity as the "main course" of our democratic repast, and appreciation for eccentricities of those freed from standards or stereotypes. The Committee fostered Indigenous pride, but it reportedly designed its moniker and the acronym CRET so that the founders could call themselves "CRETins" (qtd. in Fee 60). This bit of name-gaming exemplifies Highway, Keeshig-Tobias, and Moses' defiant affirmations being set askew by cheeky self-debasement. CRET-ins resemble FES-ers in that way, just as each project's pre-technological symbols coaxed readers "beyond the scientific attention span" with ploys and with comedic, enchanting artistry (Moses, *Pursued* 43).

Both FES and CRET dwindled in the 1980s, leaving little evidence to mark their final stages. When asked about the Committee's original purpose and eventual dissolution in a 2003 interview with Mark Shackleton and Hartmut Lutz, printed more than a decade after CRET's last publication, co-founder Highway stated: "well, the title said it all. […] I don't know what happened to it" (76). The identifiable launch and unlocatable end of CRET matches the well-documented beginning and slow dissolution

of FES, a fate not exclusive to underground organizations, which run perpetually short on resources. At any rate, beginnings are more momentous than endings, which are usually unravellings rather than closures, whispers and not bangs. CRET remains accessible to print readers today, because its leaders distributed D.I.Y. publications in support of their mission. Making references to these, Deanna Reder and Linda Morra's 2010 essay collection *Troubling Tricksters* also reproduces the cover and an article from the first issue (there were only two) of *The Magazine to Re-establish the Trickster*. In her "Let's Be Our Own Tricksters, Eh?" Keeshig-Tobias calls for better representation for First Nations writers in Canada and details shortcomings of the *status quo ante* (317-18). Her title promotes First Nations sovereignty, but its final tag "Eh?" claims independent space within, not apart from, Canadian cultural contexts. Her involvement in CRET, then, relates to her work "as the founding-chair of the Racial Minority Writers' Committee of the Writer's Union of Canada." In that role, she advocated for racialized authors on behalf of a national professional association. Jeanette Armstrong and Lally Grauer present these two aspects of Keeshig-Tobias' career side-by-side when introducing her in their anthology *Native Poetry in Canada* (136-37). CRET and FES are important to and divergences from Canadian literature but, despite points of similarity, cultural differences between FES (largely white and anglophone) and the (pan-Indigenous) triad behind CRET make direct comparisons awkward or even inappropriate. Moses, Highway, and Keeshing-Tobias united in a struggle to overcome prejudices leveled against First Nations, whereas FES disrupted broad societal tendencies toward conformity of thought. Although the Committee's use of the Trickster combines mythic play with social critique,

a strained cultural divide limits the portability of the figure known "as Coyote or Weesageechak or Nanabush, as Raven or Glooscap" (Moses, *Pursued* 43).

FES resembles two understudied groups from outside the literary arena, whose work from the 1960s and 70s continues today. Ontario's Nihilist Spasm Band (NSB) and Quebec's *Parti Rhinocéros* both invaded Canadian culture from below, if in quite different ways and to quite different ends. The Rhinoceros Party made satirical pronouncements on civic issues, while NSB pioneered noise music with chaotic rhythms, a-melodic tonal qualities, and homemade instruments. The Band's D.I.Y. format and rough-cut, amateur style earned them the honorifics "godfathers of noise" and "uncles of punk" (Novak 125 and Asher n. pag.). Those alt-honorifics signal that NSB's anarchist minstrels used music as cultural interference rather than entertainment. "Cultural interference" could describe FES too. But, like TRG, the band participates in avant-garde art with its extreme, genre-defying experiments. Accordingly, they captured the interest of TISH founder Davey. In an article on sound poetry titled "Not Just Representation," he stated that "the internationally celebrated Nihilist Spasm Band […] seeks to avoid both meaning and music" (137). Davey also records an NSB tradition: that the band "has sponsored a pataphysically annual No Music Festival" for decades (137). He means, presumably, that those whimsical picnics occur erratically, not on the same date every year. Invoking Pataphysics adds shades of inspired irreverence to his brief comments. Celebrated as a continuation of avant-garde legacies and forerunner of noise and punk, NSB is lauded by David Novak as a singular formation. He describes the band as "a world unto itself" in his book on *Japanoise* (125). Given roots in London, Ontario, contributions to Canadian arts, and its cult status abroad (most notably in Japan), NSB

can be seen through local/regional, Canadian, and international lenses, a layering that the present essay applies to the multi-faceted FES.

NSB was created by artists and friends in London in the mid-1960s. The most well-known, Greg Curnoe (1936 - 1992), was friend to FES poet David McFadden and illustrated his *Animal Spirits: Stories to Live By* (1983). In launching the band, Curnoe went from accomplished visual artist to brilliantly incompetent musician. Still operative at this time of writing (2021), the band has been made up of revolving members whose body of work has long survived Curnoe. The first comprehensible lyric on *No Record* (1968), their second of twenty-one albums[40] and counting, screams the opening track's title: "DESTROY THE NATIONS!" (Allied Records). This line levels the idea of nation-states, just as FES more modestly sought to place all countries on the same footing. Political tones are countered by Flat Earth humour, on the one hand, trumpeted through kitchy kazoos or distorted by creatively fashioned non-instruments on the other. Aligned with FES in spirit, NSB launched their sound in defiance of a Canadian cultural industry arguably dedicated to professionalism over fun. One Spasm lyric reproduced in Zev Asher's documentary about the band runs: "No Canada. A cold country: home of the restrained, the shriveled, the worried" (*What About Me?*). Like the band's words, its sound defies homogenizing standards that shape or deform local and national cultures. The city of London was seen by FES applicant W. P. Green as a staid location requiring enlivening by unusual groups. He wrote to Ferrari with appreciation for the touch of "madness" the President brought to CBC via the program *Take 30* (SP 151). "Living here

[40] See the band's official website, its "Discography" section, for details of their substantial output: http://www.nonsb.ca/.

in London makes it almost a necessity for yours truly to indulge in such carrying-ons," he wrote before saying: "I have other close friends who are also slightly but harmlessly demented." Green sets the harmless dementedness (or provocative bemusement) of FES beside the "dogmatic sanity" he found "requisite" in London and at the city's prestigious University (undated, ANP 40.12.6.91).

NSB performed at establishment art venues as well as underground ones, just as FES snuck its way from the fringe and into academic units, military bases, and government offices, as will be shown. NSB intersected with officialdom by travelling to France's 1969 *Paris Biennale des Jeunes* as delegates selected by Canada's National Gallery and Department of External Affairs. The forgotten history of their European trip is revived by Katie Cholette in her 2012 article "Derision, Nonsense, and Carnival in the Work of Greg Curnoe." She includes the words of Curnoe's bandmates. Responding to charges that NSB had been corrupted by government interests in 1969, bass player Hugh McIntyre overturned that interpretation, stating: "Slowly, and reluctantly, I have been forced to the conclusion that the Nihilist Spasm Band has co-opted the Government of Canada. But we didn't mean to. Honest" (Cholette 61). In his cheeky Nihilist guise, McIntyre cannot accept hierarchies that place his band below or within state-sponsored culture. That poise shares in the same mocking wit that leads FES/NSB to produce work that will be "despised," "not understood," or cause "disgust" (Asher) by and for those with delicate palettes. NSB felt at home in venues like Toronto's anarchic Rochdale College, where they performed in the late 1960s (Asher). The College's *de facto* President Dennis Lee saw FES members MacEwen and Newlove as the ideal writing faculty for his anti-school, as recorded by Rosemary Sullivan in her MacEwen biography

Shadow Maker (218). Neither poet took a teaching role there, perhaps because both had developed personas too anti-institutional even for a non-institution. Curnoe too was a misfit. Cholette writes he used "humoristic strategies" and "aspects of the carnivalesque to systematically undermine and challenge the art establishment" with results that were "satirical, political, ridiculous, facetious, disrespectful, insulting, nonsensical, and divisive" as well as "fun" (53). Her descriptors relay seriousness and play, place Curnoe and his band in league with FES, even though NSB's cacophony overtakes the mild abrasiveness of Flat Earth jests.

The Rhinoceros Party (Rhinos/the Party, hereafter) began in Quebec in 1963 and has run candidates in ridings across Canada. The Party is known for farcical ideas, which satirize both the policies and the practices of the official federal political parties. Over six decades, it campaigned to repeal the law of gravity, relocate Canada's capital and Buckingham Palace to Quebec, and abolish all laws as a means to prevent crime. These jokes demand to be taken seriously, like FES's outlandish proposal to build a fence around the planet's perimeter (SP 305). Because the *Parti Rhinocéros* rhetorically fused solemnity and absurdity, Hugill found it merited a mention in his *Useless Guide* to Pataphysics (54). The three movements are alike in exploiting comedically-oriented symbols to critique culture and politics: i.e., a Flat Earth, a pachyderm, or pataphysical spirals painted over Ubu's rotund gut by Jarry, *le fou Breton saoûl*. In that, the Rhino Party is "*totémique*" not "*idéologique*," ambiguous not doctrinaire (Jalbert 51). Inspired by the victory of a rhinoceros write-in mayoral candidate in São Paulo in 1958[41], the

[41] See "Cacareco the Rhinoceros" on the *Museum of Hoaxes* website. It quotes one Brazilian voter's reason for supporting an animal over the human mayoral candidates: "Better to elect a rhino than an ass" (n. pag.).

Party appointed Cornelius the First, a resident of Montreal's Granby zoo, as its leader. The decision recalls the reptilian figurehead of the pataphysical *Collège* and, in a more serious vein, anticipates transhumanism—although the satirical nature of the Party meant that the animal was both raised up (as in promoted) and used as a figure of fun in a negative way. For example, one Party official said Cornelius was transposed into a political role to express "disgust" and "disrespect" for politicians (*Cabinet*). The Rhinos *qua* rhinos may have intended a nod to Ionesco as well, the absentee FES member who used the same animal in his famous play to symbolize brute apathy and indifference to creeping totalitarianism, attitudes which the Party's leaders felt held back Quebec's national consciousness. Rhino absurdity has earned a place in countercultural history. But insufficient attention has been paid to its critiques, less attention than poignant commentaries on bureaucratic politics and Quebec sovereignty merit. Not coincidentally, the Party launched the same year as the *Front de libération du Québec* (FLQ). The groups' histories intertwine, as Martin Jalbert shows in *Jacques Ferron, Éminence de la Grande Corne du Parti Rhinocéros* (2003).[42]

The Party's founders were Quebec nationalists: author and medical doctor Jacques Ferron, his brother Paul (a doctor), lawyer Robert Cliche (their brother-in-law), and journalist Robert Millet (Jalbert 10). They hit on the idea during an intimate party, as FES would do seven years later and one province to the east. Rhinos who ran for office include writer Gaston Miron and singer Michel Rivard who, like Ferron, ran against Pierre Elliott Trudeau; they contested his Montreal seat in 1972, 1980, and 1979,

[42] Jalbert gathers disparate interviews, newsletters, and press releases from the Rhinos and evidence for their reception. He gives rich context through notes and commentary and a Party chronology (1963-93). An earlier source compiled Rhinoceros documents absent contextualization: *Le parti rhinocéros programmé* (1974).

respectively (Docevski). Ferron led the Party as its *porte-parole* and the only member active from the 1960s to 80s (Jalbert 10). In a film about his writing and medical work rather than political stunts, Ferron said his Party mirrored the FLQ, provided "a way of not being violent, using other means of protest" in aid of revolution (*Cabinet*). Of the "Not So Quiet Revolution," David Leahy wrote for the Oxford Press *Handbook of Canadian Literature* that as a "neo-nationalist countercultural movement" the Party is "ignored in standard accounts of the Quiet Revolution" (417). He overlays the FLQ and Rhinos but does not connect the Party to Ferron the author, even while reading "ludic" and "transgressive" effects of his stories (407). The same magnetism draws voters, if few scholars, to his defiant political project. Ferron's fiction reveals "nostalgia for an idealized pastoral past and a contrary painful need and desire for major social change," both "a traditional sense of rootedness in the land" and "disenchantment with the dark side of modernity" (408). Mixing optimism, commitment to place[43], and alienation, Ferron might have joined FES, were he not already rollicking in the muck of his own satire when it began.

The Rhino Party is famed for playfulness, less-so for its serious side. Introducing the first English-language selection of Ferron's short stories, translator Betty Bednarski cites the Party, drawing links between it and Ferron's fiction. She only hints at militant politics behind the organization, though, calling it a "practical joke aimed at pointing out the futility of federal elections, and in whose pranks and antics can be seen the fantasy, the humour and the sense of the absurd which are very much present in the work of

[43] Ferron's geographical imagination informs his fiction. He used potentially planoterrestrial language when describing the river near his childhood home as carrying "un commencement du monde, un bout du monde" within it (a beginning of the world, an end of the world); as a child, he sought out the river's "secret" (*Cabinet*), displaying awareness of wisdom embedded in land.

Jacques Ferron, the writer" (Bednarski ii). Indirectness about politics can be attributed to her concentrated literary concerns.[44] She sees Ferron's fiction working to "crystallize our uncertainties," a phrase appropriate to his Party and FES (iii). More surprising than Bednarski avoiding Rhino politics is their light treatment in *Electoral Guerrilla Theatre* (2005). Therein, L. M. Bogad ascribes "Soft Satire" to the Party, defined as "humorous send-ups of the political system that just about anyone can laugh at without feeling insulted" (31). "Soft" means "light-hearted." Sharp Satire is "specific, contentious ideological critique of a system that [candidates] feel marginalizes and excludes them" (31-32). Agents of Sharp Satire are "guerrillas" who "use the rituals of registration and/or canvassing, collecting ballot signatures, public speaking, or other politicians' activities to alienate and mock the whole ritual and their specific targets" (32). Running candidates in elections with some success,[45] the Party operated in both of Bogad's categories, given surface lampooning and direct dealings with opponents of Quebec sovereignty. Bogad does not mention *Indépendantisme*. Further, he undercuts the Party's true commitments with the erroneous claim that they "hastily disbanded after attracting a large chunk of the national vote in Canada" (31). In fact, blows came from on-high. In 1993, federal reforms required individuals to pay $1000 to become candidates in a federal election. Jalbert says the measure responded to Rhino success and resulted the Party's demise (188). Canada

[44] The translator might have paused to consider the black humour of Ferron's writing. A fine example appears in "How the Old Man Died." After the title character calls from his death bed for a chamber pot, he then says "to[o] late, I'll go on the other side" and promptly dies (Ferron 14). The fact that these words are spoken to a priest would seem especially provocative in the French-Catholic context of the author's milieu.

[45] Votes for Rhino candidates are tallied by Jalbert. James Marshall too rates the Party's success in *What Does Green Mean?* He states that in 1984, debut election year for Canada's Green Party, it won "more votes than minor parties like "Libertarian, Social Credit, Communist, and Commonwealth of Canada parties […but] fewer overall than the Rhinoceros Party of Canada, a parody protest party whose leader was a real rhinoceros from the Toronto [actually Montreal] zoo, and whose primary campaign slogan was 'a promise to keep none of our promises.' Which they did" (Marshall 123).

again modified electoral laws in the 2000s, after the Party re-emerged. Changes barred interference groups that, in Justice Robert Blair's words, "have little intention of engaging in true electoral competition or in the political discourse of the day," groups which "are interested only in satirizing the political process" (Katz 596). He invoked the Rhinos by name in his 2007 decision and dismissed satires broadly by assuming comedic groups do not make "true" contributions to political discourse. Altering laws to prevent the hijacking of supposedly legitimate politics for the purpose of critiquing those selfsame systems will seem to many an anti-democratic use of the courts.

That nominally democratic systems would exclude one kind of voice from the public square seems in itself to prove the need for Rhino provocations. A 1984 letter to the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* supports pluralism in governance and, further, privileges the Rhinos over federal Conservative, Liberal, and New Democratic parties. Under the title "Platform of My Choice," Dr. Morton S. Rapp of Willowdale, Ontario describes the latter set as "minor parties," inverting an expected hierarchy and calling the former "Canada's only important party" (1182). He regrets that his Association did not circulate the Rhino platforms on health along with those of the Conservatives-Liberals-NDP. Rapp, therefore, improvises his own proposals for how to administer health care in a Rhino-like fashion, absurd measures that are "no less important, and certainly easier to decipher, than those of the minor parties" (1182). He switches centre for margin in this letter-to-the-editor-cum-shell-game, just as McIntyre claimed NSB co-opted the Canadian government when selected as its foreign delegate. FES sought to increase respect for non-standard perspectives. The Monarchy put forward an unknown New Brunswick poet as a claimant to the British throne. Founders of CRETinism fought for

space in a stubbornly colonial and unceremonious post-CanLit writing scene. These groups all felt concerned for the rights of excluded parties and practices. They chose humour as a means to accrue as well as to satirize cultural power, because paths to positions of high visibility are often narrowed by those who control public discourse.

Le Parti Rhinocéros launched by Ferron and his circle lasted from 1963 to 1993. It was revived in 2006 by humourist François Gourd, testifying to the original group's subversive impact on an earlier generation. That revival fulfilled the prophecy of André Béliveau, who wrote in a 1964 issue of *Le Magazine Maclean* that Ferron's Party would go beyond its creators, because they did not seek to keep their creation in a cage (Jalbert 130).[46] "Until 2010, the [reconstituted] Party called themselves neorhino" before reverting to the original name, as Howard Chai wrote for the news network *604 Now* (2019). At the time of writing (2021), the Party continues to make proposals that mock mainstream politics. They gained widespread media coverage for a prank in the 2019 federal election. They ran a candidate with the name Maxime Bernier in the same riding as another Maxime Bernier, leader of the newly formed and ultra-conservative People's Party of Canada (see Bianca Bharti's *National Post* article). In the Beauce riding of south-eastern Quebec, the PPC's incumbent received a quarter of all ballots cast and was bested only by the Conservative successor. The Rhino Party entrant came in last place ("Canada Votes"). Yet one wonders whether targeted mockery by the Rhinos added to the failure of the PPC's Bernier. Satirical groups have effects that are difficult to

[46] Béliveau's original statement reads: "Il est presque certain, maintenant, qu'il échappera à ses créateurs. Ces derniers ne tiennent d'ailleurs pas tellement à le garder en cage" (Jalbert 130).

measure, so the Party's tactical derision may have had more of an impact than the official results will show.[47]

Present-day Rhinoceros activities demonstrate that subversive invasions of culture from below in the tumultuous 1960s and 70s still have resonance today. Canada's Flat Earth Society has likewise been reconstituted in the twenty-first century, led since 2003 from a remote post on Fogo Island by visual artist and creative museum curator Kay Burns as well as her counterpart, the fictional entity Dr. Iris Taylor, recently reported missing (SP 176). Active for the past seventeen years, this regenerated Flat Earth Society has endured over a longer period than the lifespan of the earlier group. The new iteration of FES promotes playfully serious and seriously playful critiques of knowledge production and intellectual consensus, continuing the original mission. The Society's messages are newly relevant in an era of post-truth, fake news, and infodemics. Our concerns over misinformation and the ability of computer intelligences to outwit our ability to filter data show that FES was not only reacting in a timely way to their technological and globalizing conjuncture of 1970s. Revivals of FES and the Rhinos in the early 2000s result from and can inspire appreciation for fringe movements of earlier periods. These revivals should foster the creation of new groups that adopt eccentric mandates, because they prove that cultural obscurity does not equate to invisibility, that unusual creations can take on a vibrant life of their own, and that unlikely participatory movements might well be taken up and repurposed by future generations.

[47] The Rhino's Bernier received 1072 votes, which may seem inconsequential compared to the 22, 817 votes cast for the winner. The Rhinos do and do not take themselves seriously, yet they came close to earning equal support to the Greens, a party that today has significant national infrastructure. Green Party candidate Josiane Fortin won 1, 415 votes ("Canada Votes").

Alden Nowlan's Critics: a Literature Review

This first of three literature reviews begins by addressing twentieth-century criticism on Alden Nowlan's writing, with a focus on academic sources. These sources generally elaborate one or more of three dominant themes. First, scholarly readings of the last century responded to Nowlan's poetry and fiction in terms of how they represent life in the Maritime provinces. Some critics viewed his commitment to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick settings as an asset, while others saw it diminishing his importance. Favourable or not, many sources emphasize this aspect of his writing. Second, twentieth-century readers responded to the texture and development of the author's voice, finding layers of simplicity and/or complexity detracting from or contributing to his appeal. Lastly, many studies made use of his personal life, often as supplement to rather than entry point for critical reflection. Region, register, and biography recur in twentieth-century Nowlan scholarship, with few signs of alternative approaches. The millennial period marked a turning point. In the year 2000, Patrick Toner wrote that academic studies of Nowlan had reached a "dead end" (13). In 2003, W. J. Keith attempted a "clearing [of] the ground" with his "Critical Reassessment" (9). Since then, critics have found new ways to read Nowlan, as the present review goes on to demonstrate. Twenty-first-century sources foreground Nowlan's eccentricity, recover lesser-known works, and update his relevance by applying theory to his poetics or inserting Nowlan's now-historical cultural commentary into present-day issues. Attempts to renew the author are undermined by certain reviewers of *Alden Nowlan: Collected Poems* (2017) who express concerns over Nowlan's outdated poetics and outmoded views.

The present dissertation's Nowlan chapter will continues interests in region, register, and biography that have preoccupied other critics. It presents him as emblematic of FES's initiating group in Atlantic-Canada; appreciates his signature plainspokenness as well as his rich metaphorical textures; and understands his hardscrabble beginnings and social role in Fredericton as contexts for the Society he co-founded in 1970. None of these themes zero-in on the author's importance, however. His attachment to Atlantic-Canada does not impair levels of national or world-wide belonging expressed through FES and his creative writing. Direct style complicates his voice, because Nowlan embeds surprising metaphors (such as his Flat Earth) within a matter-of-fact presentation. Finally, Nowlan's biography is invoked to promote his cultural work beyond authorship, rather than to mythologize him as a larger-than-life celebrity writer. Although contiguous with twentieth-century criticism, my dissertation adds to available sources by approaching his work from a new angle. FES offers a timely means of returning to Nowlan, given a recent rise in Flat Earth discourse. The Society is unusual, even subversive, and so it can help revive Nowlan for readers interested in writing from the edges of literary production. Scholars writing on the periphery of Nowlan's reception demonstrate that his eclectic body of work can support diverse and unexpected readings. FES is a fine example of seldom-considered contributions that this author made during a regrettably short career.

Three Trends in Twentieth-Century Nowlan Studies

On Maritime Regionalism

From the start of his career, Nowlan attracted national reviewers. None could deny the young writer's potency, but some suggested he would have limited appeal as a regionalist

poet. Detractions rallied supporters, many from the Maritime provinces, like Michael Brian Oliver, who published four essays on Nowlan.[48] At the outset of "The Presence of Ice" (1976), Oliver declared Nowlan could "no longer [be] considered, by even the least perceptive critic, to be a 'regional' writer" (n. pag.). He rebuked those who used book reviewing as an excuse to perform cosmopolitan condescension toward people from out-of-the-way places. For him, "Nowlan's portrayal of the Maritimes" had "caused critics from Upper Canada to label him a regionalist and a freak," with only Eli Mandel named as an example (n. pag.). Oliver denies Nowlan's regionalism insofar as the term operates as code for denying him national stature based on a supposedly narrow ground of study. He nonetheless emphases Nowlan as a documenter of the Maritimes, which necessitates a focus on his early career.[49] Oliver accords national significance to Nowlan's reversals of romantic archetypes about "bounty and beauty" in his part of the country (n. pag.). The "regionalist" category has since been recognized not just as code but a "curse," as the editor of *Studies in Canadian Literature* Cynthia Sugars writes in her 2011 book review, titled "Monumental in Their Own Right" (n. pag.).[50] Oliver's article appeared in the first volume of that journal, helping to mature Nowlan's reception in parallel with the growth of Canadian literary studies. For decades, specialist readers made Nowlan's treatment of the Maritimes central to their readings, while usually only invoking "regionalism" by name to recall commentary of the 1960s. Oliver's "Presence of Ice" introduces issues of

[48] See "Dread of The Self" (1976), *Poet's Progress* (1978), and "Alden Nowlan and his Works" (1993).

[49] Early volumes depicted rural Nova Scotia and small-town New Brunswick with intense realism. Commitment to these environments wavered in the late 1960s, when poems began to reflect dreamworlds, travel, Irish heritage, history, and world literature with increased frequency.

[50] The subject is a biography of David Adams Richards, one-time student of Nowlan (who Sugars mentions).

Maritime representations. His other contributions to Nowlan studies are not discussed here but are reflected in many Nowlan sources.

In the 1980s, Barrie Davies and Janice Kulyk Keefer each turned to Nowlan's fiction to demonstrate his strained relationship to the Maritimes. For them, the title character of his novel *Various Persons Named Kevin O'Brien* represents a central tension in Nowlan's fiction: between creative individual and social expectations. Davies titled his 1986 article for *Studies in Canadian Literature* "Dulce vs. *Utile*: The Kevin O'Brien Syndrome in New Brunswick Literature." He describes an amusing symptom of the serious syndrome in this way: "I'm-lucky-only-a-bird-shit-on-my-head,-after-all-Marsyas-got-flayed-alive" (Davies 161). In other words, a confining brand of stoicism obtains in industrial communities, where ingrained poverty and dangerous labour make complaints over common difficulties seem trivial or unmanly. For Davies, Kevin O'Brien speaks to the suffering of individuals who do not fit within a mandated and enforced Maritime masculinity. In rural New Brunswick, the "imaginative intelligence [of] *homo ludens*/*femina ludens*" is "estranged, hobbled, or crippled" by the values of "isolated communities" too busy "struggling for survival" to engage pleasure or art (162). Davies seems unconcerned that *Various Persons* is set in Nova Scotia; it was written in New Brunswick, and Maritime literature is his true subject. Sensitive Kevin O'Brien suffers "radical marginalization, a deep spiritual and aesthetic alienation from provincial society" (166). Ironically, alienation from his region is seen as traditionally regional. Davies views Nowlan's project as a battle against single-mindedness in the environment from which he sprang, a battle between "the beautiful" and "the useful" (163). This conflict informs Nowlan's Flat Earth Society too. Much of its fun extends from the fundamental

uselessness of Planoterrestrialism, a wayward pseudo-ideology that affirms Davies' interpretation of Nowlan's larger artistic project.

Davies presents certain conflicts between sensitive individuals and social norms as specific to the Maritimes. Even so, he links his "Kevin O'Brien Syndrome" identified with one part of Canada to "puritanism" and "a lack of audacity" in national culture; in this, he follows a longstanding tradition maintained by critics E. K. Brown, Frye, and Atwood (Davies 161). Davies spends more time tracing Nowlan's Maritime lineage than relating him to wider contexts, however. He sees A. G. Baily, Francis Beavan, Charles Bruce, Ernest Buckler, Fred Cogswell, and C. G. D. Roberts as Atlantic-Canadian forerunners for Nowlan. He names David Adams Richards as Nowlan's most prominent heir. These writers all present "illustrations of the *machismo* values of the lumber and fishing camp, and of the paralysis of the artist figure" (163). Discussing Nowlan in *Under Eastern Eyes* (1987), a study of Maritime literature, Janice Kulyk Keefer explores the same tensions taken up by Davies. She writes of "the brutalizing of human relationships" in Nowlan's fiction, wherein one reads of "sensitive and open consciousness pitted against the crude, closed mentality of place" (Keefer 166). In her view, poverty makes people servile and eager to conform. Citing the same forerunners for Nowlan's fiction as Davies, she likewise names Richards as its inheritor. For Keefer, Nowlan and other writers dramatize the fact that "it is not so much the existence as the acceptance of impoverishment" that produces "painful stagnation" and a "conservative ethos" (38 and 39). Children are shown to be emblematic figures for Nowlan. They hold "the child's birthright of wonder, terror, and delight not yet extinguished by the stupidity and bleakness of the adult world" (166). Oliver earlier pointed out that a legacy of idyllic

pictures of the Maritimes (via Roberts and Carman) necessitated exposing economic and emotional constraints. Davies and Keefer describe struggles between misfit loners and stifling conformity underwriting Nowlan's prose. His Flat Earth Society responded to impoverished imagination in those whom members termed Globularists, as opposed to financial poverty and its attendant constraints. Nonetheless, the liberating-creativity-versus-limiting-conformity dynamic informed the author's playful Planoterrestrialism and his fiction writing alike.

Stewart Donovan reflects on the rural settings of Nowlan's early life and later work but places him in a world literature context, rather than a Canadian lineage. "Surviving Shared Worlds: the Parish and the Province. Alden Nowlan and Patrick Kavanagh" appeared in the 1996 *Down East* essay collection. To date, it represents the only sustained comparison of Nowlan to another writer.[51] Its author was born on Cape Breton Island, educated at University College Dublin, and returned to Canada to teach at Fredericton's St. Thomas University. He embodies the links he draws, then, between Nova Scotia/New Brunswick and Ireland via poets Nowlan and Kavanagh. These writers share "affinities not only of temperament and background, but of knowledge and vision as well" (Donovan 197). Both "came from poor rural backgrounds," had education cut short, worked as laborers then as journalists, and became "self-taught, experiential and visionary poets" (197). Writing "as a rooted, working class Maritimer," Nowlan spoke to others in his part of the world, but he also composed "songs for the dispossessed,

[51] "D.H. Lawrence—Some Canadian Connections" (1995-96) has Nowlan, Layton, and Purdy descending from Lawrence's neo-romanticism. John Nause selects Nowlan's poem "Greatness" as "a fine and eloquent poetic utterance of the 'insurgent naked throb of the instant moment'" promoted by Lawrence (122). Both writers rode "the rails of traditional verse" before attempting "the relatively uncharted pathways of a free verse which was elemental and rare" (123). They share commonalities of development and literary vision.

especially for those who have lost their childhood" (205). He explores not a universal experience, precisely, but one that occurs the world over. "He can be considered a poet of place," Donovan writes, "if by place we mean the country in and around the human heart" (205). "On the edge of that private country," one encounters Nowlan's identification with Irishness, which leads him to champion "the victims rather than the victors of history" (205). The Kavanagh comparison leverages Nowlan's commitment to place but overleaps any attempt to nationalize his writings. Donovan hears unlimited resonances for Nowlan's work: made for a global, not merely Canadian, audience. The article closes with an image of Nowlan's grave, marked by a Celtic cross he ordered during a trip to Ireland. It inscribes an honorific name traditional to his ancestral clan: "O Nuallin Mor," meaning "the big Nowlan" (205-06). The inscription marks "the life-long cultural and spiritual affinity that [he] had with the real and imaginary homelands of Patrick Kavanagh," for Donovan (206). He casts Nowlan in unique light, on local and international stages, as a keeper of Irish lore. This sets a precedent for my dissertation, which follows FES from local inception and regional growth to international recognition.

Another article exploring the regional theme takes an odd approach to the subject and introduces the issue next to be discussed, Nowlan's literary voice. Paul Milton's 1998 *Studies in Canadian Literature* article, "*Various Persons Named Kevin O'Brien:* Nowlan's Novel Response to the Critics," interprets the 1973 novel only partly as a creative memoir.[52] He sees it too as interjecting into debates about Nowlan's status as a Maritime writer. Some voices in *Various Persons* are native to rural Nova Scotia; others belong to external urban discourses, for Milton. He summarizes the "regionalist"

[52] Similar findings are in Milton's "The Psalmist and the Sawmill: Alden Nowlan's Kevin O'Briens" (1995).

controversy sparked by Nowlan's early poetry. The critic quotes reviewers who saw him as a rural poet of limited importance (Mandel, Alex Lucas, and Miriam Waddington) and Maritimers who argued for Nowlan's national relevance (Robert Cockburn, Michael Brian Oliver, and Peter Pacey). Milton identifies three camps among them:

> There are those who see Nowlan's identification with the concerns and the particular identity of the Maritimes as a limiting factor, equating regionalism with parochialism. There are those who defend Nowlan's regionalism as an entirely valid approach to literary expression. Then there is a third group that justifies Nowlan's regional writings as being expressive of universal truths in a particular geographical and historical frame. ("Response to the Critics" 36-37)

Milton quotes Nowlan as a participant in this debate, drawing on interviews. The author resisted any disparaging view of his work as merely regional. He said that while feeling "sensitive to praise and dispraise," he "didn't let it affect [his] writing" (qtd. on 42). Yet Milton sees *Various Persons* as not only affected but motivated by and responding directly to critics. For Keefer, by contrast, Nowlan's novel uses varying registers to "interrogat[e] his own relation to literacy, that power which has both rescued and alienated him from 'his own'" (167). She foregrounds Nowlan's relationships to literacy and homeplace, which were already complex before any reviewers had had their say.

Milton's view of *Various Persons* as a response to critics seems reductive, but Milton also pays tribute to its sophistication. He presents a theoretical, international context for the book, invoking Bakhtin's theory of the novel to show that *Various Persons* is a complex, polyvocal fiction. It contrasts with Nowlan's poetry, wherein the author operates as a "conservative stylist" according to Milton ("Response to the Critics" 42). He locates an artful combination of personal-regional and critical-urban registers in *Various Persons*, a tension that supposedly responds to metropolitan reviewers who had

denigrated Nowlan's poems. Milton's approach is creative. It may have helped usher in a new era of Nowlan studies (which soon moved beyond regionalism/voice/biography) even if Milton's article seems equally innovative and misguided. Nowlan composed a personal (if fictionalized) reflection on his formative period and evolving relationship to his homeplace. Milton shows that Nowlan's fiction repays attentive reading, but his claim that the book constitutes a rebuttal to criticism overestimates concern for reception. He assumes the novel's learned registers and critical perspectives belong to city-dwellers, not to those who come from rural areas. Herb Wyile expresses fatigue with such assumptions, writing "that the cosmopolitanism of Atlantic-Canadian writing should come as a surprise […] reflects the extent to which the region has been constructed as insular, primitive, effectively lost in time" (26). The present essay follows Wyile rather than Milton on this point. Accessible and sophisticated layers of Nowlan's voice should be understood as integrated rather than opposing. They do not correspond to intra- and extra-regional influences.

Matters of Voice

This dissertation continues a tradition of placing Nowlan within a regional context, while viewing the Maritimes as bridged ground rather than sites of enclosing borders. My dissertation takes up another common theme in Nowlan Studies: his writerly style, which provokes praise and dispraise from critics. Some have mistaken an uncomplicated surface for the limit of his craft rather than a veneer. But sympathetic readers see him as lucid, not facile. John Metcalf derided Nowlan's stories as "folksy," and reduced the "warm, wise, and philosophical" pose of his poetry to "cracker-barrel philosophy" fit for

Reader's Digest (122). Hinting at amateurish provincialism, Metcalf's critique repeats the cosmopolitan disdain for Maritime writing that Oliver and Wyile oppose. In a 1968 book review, Al Purdy saw Nowlan as "oddly naïve, perhaps verging on the sentimental" (363). Complaints about Nowlan's easeful manner often refer to his mature period, but as early as 1958 Northrop Frye found that the opening poem of *The Rose and the Puritan* fell "a little on the hackneyed side" (Keith 13). Assessments that look past immediate presentation include a brief reading by Louis Dudek, who recognizes the author's knowingly dynamic voice, one that pairs "mocking simplicity" with "blatant directness" (288). Introducing their selected volume, Patrick Lane and Lorna Crozier pay tribute to the immediacy Nowlan achieves, writing that "he speaks so clearly and directly that he might be sitting at your kitchen table, glass in hand" (xii). In the critical tradition, Roy Neil Graves finds him "craftily suppressing a wealth of wit beneath a casual-looking surface," a response to those who would "take Nowlan at face value" (107 and 110). Fusing directness with complexity has won Nowlan many of his devoted readers. His colloquial voice may have also reduced his stature in the field of literary studies, given increasing interest in poetic experiment and contemporary theory from academic readers.

In 1970, Keath Fraser published his "Notes on Alden Nowlan" in *Canadian Literature*. His article expanded the author's reception within the journal, previously limited to book reviews. Fraser identifies strong examples of Nowlan's work, while also pointing to instances where he fails to complicate an "unashamed simplicity" ("Notes" 50). When the author succeeds, according to Fraser, his "stark and unpretentious" style is offset by unexpected undertones or subtle ironies (42). Fraser begins by positioning Nowlan in a Maritime lineage, noting that he overturns "the ideal landscapes of Roberts

and Carman, his literary ancestors," whose pastoral romanticism "he avoids and de-mythologizes" (41). Fraser then discusses biographical contexts for Nowlan's writerly voice. Anticipating Davies and Keefer, the critic acknowledges that having suffered "the threat of piecemeal living" (42) and having endured intolerance for "imaginative encounter[s]" with "alien sensibilities" shaped this writer's work (43). The result: an unromantic and "*universal regionalism*" that knows "both Eden and Tantramar are gone" from the world (44). Moving on to assess the effects of Nowlan's style, Fraser's essay combines all three themes that directed twentieth-century readings of Nowlan.

For Fraser, the transparency of Nowlan's surface presentation succeeds when the writing is "simple but electric" ("Notes" 44). It "lacks as much voltage" when simplicity "forfeit[s] neat contours of structure and perception" (45). At worst, poems suffer from "banality"; many could have been "left alone or written up in prose" (45). "Partnership" and "Bear" are unsuccessful verses. In "Partnership," no turn reveals new "apprehension" that would "jar [the poem's speaker] from an adolescent and debilitating naïveté" (47). "Bear" has a "bathetic" ending that leaves the poem's promise unfulfilled (45). Poems whose imagery and tonal layering "accelerate sufficiently to spurt past the banal and overtake the significant" (46) include "A Night Hawk Fell With a Sound Like a Shudder" and "Comparison." "Night Hawk…" succeeds due to "unexpected growth" on the part of its juvenile speaker (46). "Comparison" depicts "a world close to the earth" (49) but exposes, in seemingly calm tones, the "ironic violence" of farm life (50). Fraser approves complicating elements of Nowlan's plainspokenness, while regretting poems whose surface "flatness" remains untroubled by submerged currents (44). Sometimes artful but never quite sophisticated for Fraser, Nowlans' direct style and local subject matter can

"remind a country often reluctant to acknowledge them, of the perspective of its heritage and the roots of its contemporaneity" (51). As poet and possibly as Planoterrestrialist, Nowlan can be understood as a throwback, as a creator of "an unhip, thoroughly non-academic world" decorated with subtle "splashes of exquisite insight" (50). Fraser uncovers a contemporary function for Nowlan, one tied to his retrograde position in a culture that values innovation over traditionalism. FES too makes progressive use of an outlook many would see as exceedingly backward.

Fraser's title "Notes on Alden Nowlan" does not promise a focused argument or thorough explication of his basic premise. He does not pick apart the author's technical choices to specify exactly how the writing advances or fails. But these "Notes" include lengthy quotations that amount to a healthy sampling of Nowlan's craft, ranging from *The Rose and the Puritan* (1958) to *Bread, Wine and Salt* (1967). Fraser credits Nowlan with a development toward "adroit control" over that period ("Notes" 44). Later in the same issue of *Canadian Literature* with the article, Fraser reviews Nowlan's *The Mysterious Naked Man* (1969). Here, he encounters "an even roomier accomplishment in terms of the grace and strength of his colloquial voice" than earlier books had achieved ("Existence" 87).[53] Shedding a habit of relaying "facile epiphany," this collection also displays a growing interest in "irrationality" and "surrealism," each complementary to "the fluidity of Nowlan's colloquialism" (87). At his best, Nowlan transcends surface banality to explore "grotesque normality," blurring lines between the expected and the uncanny (88). In the title poem, "witnesses who cannot describe" the mysterious naked

[53] The issue's Table of Contents attributes the Nowlan article to Keath Fraser and the review to "Keath Frazer" (n. pag.), but these names identify the same critic. The review is signed by "Keath Fraser" on page 88.

man's "appearance to the police" are in fact more "inscrutable" than the nude fugitive who brought them into the spotlight of unusual incident (88). Reversing expectations, and riffing on the familiar fable of The Emperor's New Clothes, Nowlan develops a seemingly simple bit of reportage into a satire of how society views outsiders. After a long apprenticeship, culminating in the year before he founded FES, Nowlan finally secured a balanced position between brute "existence" and the "sonorous art" of poetry (88), according to Fraser.

In 1974, Michael Ustick critiqued the dynamic that generates Nowlan's literary voice with "Repression: The Poetry of Alden Nowlan" (1974). Like Fraser's article, it appeared in *Canadian Literature* and described a tension required for Nowlan's work to truly shine. Fraser found Nowlan succeeding when surfaces and depths operated in tandem. Ustick claims the poet relies on a balance between repressive and liberating forces. He argues that "the suffering born of repression (of more than one kind) and a divided mind characterize[d] his voice" up to that point (43). Constraints in Nowlan's life include his parents (43); "thoughts of the ultimate 'repression,' the grave" (45); "the repression of brutality and hatred […] and the repression of poverty" (45); sexual guilt (47); and "loneliness, purposelessness, misunderstanding" (48). Against these barriers, Nowlan launched a life-affirming artistic project. The poet creates a "peculiarly dichotomous poetic landscape," wherein "energy, freedom, spontaneity, fertility, sexual love, sensuous nature, laughter and life" are beset but not defeated by "bondage, regimentation, sterility, virginity, domestic-urban desiccation, tears and death" (44). These divided descriptors relate to the contest between Planoterrestrialism and Globularism that Nowlan and his FES allies were still defining when Ustick's article

appeared. His term "regimented monotony" can apply to blind acceptance of a spherical Earth, while the counterforce of "sensuous nature" inspires individually determined relationships to the planet (45). A repression/liberation binary is sometimes "implicit," sometimes "overt," but "when the dialectic is absent, the poetry suffers appreciably by comparison" (48). Nowlan's poetry collections of the 1970s contained much "'personal, confessional poetry'"[54] that, for this critic, "lack[s] the steadying influence of a taught framework of ideas." As a result, "his poetic language sometimes tends to become rather shabby" (48). Ustick sees Nowlan's career as partly entropic, then, rather than a true maturation.

Fraser and Ustick study separate organizing tensions: one thematic, the other stylistic. One critic marks a decline in Nowlan's voice, the other traces his progress. Another difference: Ustick pays greater attention than Fraser to poetic technique. "Beginnings" concerns the poet's conception. It wins Ustick's praise, because physical joy and puritan guilt constitute the poem's "ruling dichotomy" (43). Those opposing responses to sexual intimacy are bookended by the verb "'making' (the main verb of the first and last clauses)," a dual reference to an emotionally fraught act of love and the resulting son's composition (43). For Ustick, the poem's "closed form" is "appropriate to the 'stifling' nature of the subject matter" (44). "Beginnings" blends a "very nearly constant" iambic pentameter with "contrasting elements" found in alternating lines, which depict gratification and shame by turns (44). Thus, fixity and difference fuse to create a "most impressive and polished work of art" (44). In "And He Wept Aloud, So That the Egyptians Heard It," "Nowlan's persona is being tyrannized" by literal flies,

[54] The description comes from Gary Geddes and Phyllis Bruce's 1970 anthology *15 Canadian Poets* (p. 285).

figurative devils; in a typical gesture, the speaker "strikes out in some way against the 'numbers and persistence' of the repressive force […] and his revolt ultimately fails" (45 and 46). Although this attack proves ineffectual, the attempt shows spirit: a refusal to become inured to the presence of flies, symbol of poverty in the poem. Similarly, although FES had failure built into its design (it could never rise above the scale of a minor movement), one can think of its efforts as valiant and affirming precisely because of the overwhelming dominance of figurative Globularism in all its manifestations.

Ustick addresses unsuccessful poems as well. In "July 15," "'nothing is happening' metaphysically" for the speaker, and "nothing is happening poetically either" (48). "Britain Street" is more social document than poem (45). "For Claudine Because I Love Her" fails to rise above "the world's many unremarkable 'sad memory' poems," because it relays an "isolated experience" with a narrow emotional bandwidth of lonesome tenderness (48). These verses lack the contest between restraint and freedom that according to Ustick fuels Nowlan's power. His artistry requires a "poetic 'irritant' or stimulus" to provoke "its counterforces" within him (48). Even so, the critic approves so-called "'black' poems," such as "The Execution." Its "chilling vision of doom […] in a murderous world" is as one-sided as Nowlan's gentle poems (49). Ustick does not demonstrate a generative tension, but finds the poem "admirable especially for its parable-like economy" (49). His assessment concludes with a breakthrough poem that provides hope for future growth. "The Mysterious Naked Man" transcends the dialectic at the heart of this article. Here, "society (the voice of moral authority) is no longer repressive, but only laughable"; neither does the speaker grant society "the dignity of being a reactionary life-symbol" (49). Thus, Nowlan "manages to detach himself from his

obsessions and rise above them" but only "for a moment." "If one were morbid enough to look beyond the pleasant satire," Ustick writes, "one might discover a vision of contemporary life which is almost as pessimistic as" that found in Nowlan's "black poems" (49). The combination of "pleasant satire" and "pessimistic" views recalls Fraser's praise. "The Mysterious Naked Man" combines lightness and darkness, surface and depth. The present project studies Nowlan's FES for its seriousness and play, its biting critique and farcical humour. In that way, I continue Fraser's and Ustick's separate interpretations, although assessment of quality is not among the critical tasks pursued in these pages.

Marilyn Baxter advanced the discussion of Nowlan's voice playing out within the pages of *Canadian Literature* with her article "Wholly Drunk or Wholly Sober?" It appeared in a 1976 issue dedicated to Maritime literature, which includes poems and prose by Nowlan himself. Analyzing poems from the late 1960s and early 1970s, Baxter locates a dichotomy within Nowlan's poetry that resembles Ustick's interpretation. But for her, metaphorical drunkenness and figurative sobriety coexist within Nowlan's persona and the mind of his speakers, rather than signaling internal drives and external forces. Baxter views the theme of multiple selves as a development in Nowlan's career, one that began with *The Mysterious Naked Man* (1969) and heightened across *Between Tears and Laughter* (1971) and *I'm a Stranger Here Myself* (1974). "The 'I' self is no longer single but multiple" in these collections, Baxter writes, compared to poems published in *Bread, Wine and Salt* and earlier, where "the self is essentially a single, homogeneous entity" (41). On one side of the critic's "controlling metaphor," voices sound metaphorically "drunk": i.e., "relaxed, receptive, subjectively involved," "rather

naively compassionate," and "visionary" (108 and 110). Such moods can be equated back to Ustick's liberating impulses or forward to planoterrestrial subjectivity. The other half of human experience stems from consciousnesses that are "alert, critical, objective" and "unnecessarily harsh" (108). These symbolically sober voices pair loosely with the repressive forces Ustick saw as external to Nowlan's persona. They could also stand in for our inner Globularists, with their belief in objectivity and penchant for conformity.

Baxter traces manifestations of the drunk/sober duality through a selection of poems. Refreshingly, the critic does not attach Nowlan to Atlantic-Canadian traditions, whereas other critics in this issue of *Canadian Literature* repeatedly define Maritime writing or declare it undefinable. Neither does Baxter make a direct correlation between the writer and the man. She treats divided personalities as a compelling feature of the writing, absent specific assumptions about its creator. When discussing the poem "Dear Leo," she does not pause to identify the addressee as Leo Ferrari, maintaining focus on the theme of divided selves. Unlike the two earlier articles on Nowlan from the same journal, "Wholly Drunk or Wholly Sober?" does not work to assess the poet's quality. Baxter's theme speaks to Nowlan's complexity and development, but she does not offer explicit praise or critique poems that fail to impress. She may have Fraser and Ustick in mind as counterexamples to her work when writing: "it is tempting to try and measure the success" of Nowlan's poetry "on the basis of whether or not the 'wholly drunk' self and the 'wholly sober' self have each been given an equal voice, but such an analysis would be arbitrary and self-indulgent" (109). Fraser and Ustick defined operating principles for Nowlan's artistry and then weighed various works according to fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of those criteria. Baxter takes a modest but not unconfident approach, stating

that "the terms 'wholly drunk' and 'wholly sober' do seem to suggest a new terminology that may be used to define certain aspects of the human condition that appear to haunt the poet's imagination" (108). The phrase "new terminology" may suggest that she seeks to add to Fraser's surface-depth pairing or to expand the repression-liberation dichotomy explored by Ustick. My own work adds figurative Planoterrestrialism and Globularism to dynamics that can guide interpretations of the author's varied output.

In 1978, Elizabeth Bieman's "Wrestling with Nowlan's Angel" appeared in *Canadian Poetry*. Her article recalls Fraser's 1970 assessment, insofar as Bieman finds layers of simplicity and complexity at work in Nowlan's retelling of Jacob's biblical encounter with a divine messenger: "Anatomy of Angels" (1961). Regarding the poem's literary presentation, the critic appreciates its "tricks," "novelties and reversals," and "complex meaning," all "learned" attributes that play off "this poet's protestations of unprofessional status." While reveling in the complexity of Nowlan's densely allusive poem, she acknowledges its contrasting airiness by calling it a "little comedy" and a "*jeu d'esprit*," both terms that in context might be read as intentional understatements (n. pag.). Bieman pushes beyond matters of style in her study, ultimately illuminating the liberating spiritual messages of Nowlan. For him, "poetic and prophetic roles come very close" (n. pag.). Detailing rich biblical allusions in "Anatomy of Angels" as well as intertextual play with John Donne, the critic shows Nowlan resisting "the hierarchical thinking that informs Donne's language" and overturning biblical authority through play. His carefully chosen vocabulary disrupts canonical Christian thought "whimsically and ultimately seriously." For Bieman, the poem "generat[es] quite enough fun to justify its own existence. Yet [it] prods the reader further to contemplate" profundities (n. pag.).

Her take on Nowlan's craft overlaps with my interpretation of FES as a playfully serious entity. I owe a debt to Bieman, as she was the first to introduce the subject of spirituality into Nowlan studies. Specialists today can regret that Bieman did not extend her interest in Nowlan's poetic engagement with religious thinking beyond a single, early poem.

Bieman's reading of "Anatomy of Angels" is rarely cited, partly due to having appeared in a minor journal. Even so, her brief interpretation informed a recent work by Samuel Tongue, *Between Biblical Criticism and Poetic Rewriting* (2014) discussed below (SP 98). Tongue's scholarly mode is explicitly postmodern, so he appreciates Bieman's interest in the poem's non- "hierarchical thinking" and its view of "sacredness" as a "mysterious otherness" (n. pag.). Vocabularies of critical literary theory were still nascent at the time of her writing, although feminism had gained new currency in the 1970s. Bieman finds Nowlan's poem usefully recasting the Bible's traditionally male divine messenger as a richly embodied woman. With respect to gender, "Air and Angels" by Donne "depends heavily upon the hierarchical image-language of an earlier time"; Nowlan's poem "is neither hierarchical nor obviously patriarchal" and "primitive dimensions of the action paradoxically are those that should gladden even a radically feminist reader" (n. pag.). Attention to the poem's alterity puts Bieman's reading ahead of her time, as Tongue's recent interest in it suggests. The latter critic is a postmodern and religious thinker with "ministerial training for the Anglican Church" ("Samuel Tongue"). Thus, he likely found sympathy with Bieman's dual emphasis on Nowlan's affirming spiritualism and deconstruction of canonical thought. For Bieman, the poem and the original narrative of Jacob's wrestling match remind readers that "the sacred may be manifested in the most physical of encounters." She writes that "primitive man, like

Jacob, was always at home with such a realization," while "modern man has been recovering—rarely wisely and often frenetically—vestiges of that older faith," a recovery achieved "more often in myth and poetry than in the biblically-rooted churches" (n. pag.). Mythic, poetic, and comic—as well as foolish and frenetic—FES participates in the recovery Bieman describes. FES discourse sometimes agonizes over modern alienation from ancestral knowledge, even if partly lampooning that nostalgia. Another overlap: the present study explores the "very modern, and very primitive, affirmation of the power of generative encounter" revealed in Nowlan's metaphors that link the supposedly mundane world to a world beyond (n. pag.). Few critics have so boldly articulated the potency of the author's voice and message as has Bieman, and for that reason she merits more prominence in Nowlan Studies than the limited circulation of her article indicates.

Biographical Interpretations

Excepting only Baxter, critics discussed above deal directly with Nowlan's biography. Their interpretations do not often require an understanding of the writer's life, however, so biographical information usually deepens rather than grounds understandings of individual scholars. Virginia Scott is the critic represented here whose biographical approach to Nowlan draws the most specific links between personal background and published oeuvre. "'Down Shore': Alden Nowlan's Poetry of the Late Sixties" appeared in the *American Review of Canadian Studies* in 1992. Therein, Scott gives a detailed reading of Nowlan's *Bread, Wine and Salt* (1967) and *The Mysterious Naked Man* (1969), charting how his dramatic experiences of the 1960s informed the themes and prosody of what she calls the poet's "middle period" (37). Scott believes that previous

commentators had given a narrow view of Nowlan by focusing on his early work. She explores how forming a family of his own, experiencing urban environments, and a battle with cancer all advanced the "whimsy," "tenderness," "intimacy and immediacy" of Nowlan's literary voice (35). In this way, she uses biography to view developments in the author's writing directly, whereas biographical interest sometimes distracts from rather than serves analytical reading in other sources.

Scott's title metaphor "Down Shore," as in Nowlan's poem from which it borrows, "asserts that the poet has moved farther along in both his emotional and spiritual maturity" over the 1960s (28). Tonal developments are seen through close readings that, taken together, give the reader a proxy experience of flipping through *Bread, Wine and Salt* and *The Mysterious Naked Man*, collections that for Scott represent a turning point in the poet's life and career. Changes in character come clear in the poem "I, Icarus." Opening his "transitional volume" *Bread, Wine and Salt,* it uses the theme of self-propelled flight and the technique of first-person narration to mark the fact that "Nowlan had departed from his earlier style," which relied on realism and third-person perspective (25). The critic believes the collection takes flight from a previously constrained existence. She links an "absence of weightiness in the prosody" to the fact that Nowlan felt newly "freed from heavy heartedness" that had anchored him to a painful past (26). Collections of the late 1960s put a "spotlight [on] Nowlan's new personal situation as husband and father" with family poems that exhibited a level of intimacy lacking in the early writing (27). Nowlan's hospitalization for cancer surgeries also fueled writerly development. An "attenuation" of narrowing line lengths in the poem "Morning After the Third Operation," for Scott, "humorously invokes the likelihood of dying. As a strategy,

the humour relieves the pain" (29). Elsewhere, "the metaphor of public nakedness" relates to Nowlan's vulnerability as a patient, but it can also reflect "Nowlan's sense of his own increased visibility after receiving the Governor General's Award in 1968," she writes (31). Difficult and rewarding experiences both lent confidence to the writer, whose "new prosody and narrative voice" of the late 1960s explored a "more personal and informal style" that Scott sees as a positive turn in the writer's career (31).

The critic identifies the last poem in *The Mysterious Naked Man* as one that marks the healing the poet had gone through prior to the book's release. "Chance Encounter" concerns the separation of a moose from her calf on a rural roadway. Here, "Nowlan repeats patterns in his own life," recalling the motherly absence that impaired his childhood (36). Scott writes that "the poem is among the freest prosodically of any Nowlan published in the late sixties," as seen in "the last thirty-one lines [that form] one sentence with no end line full stops" (36). Such expansiveness of voice implies Nowlan had outgrown the pain inherited from a traumatic past, through facing death and through forming a loving family. Seldom do critics link Nowlan's life to his writerly choices in so direct a manner. Scott sees not only the poetry but Nowlan scholarship itself maturing. Writing in the 1990s, she stated that "the assessment of Nowlan's entire career as a writer ha[d] begun," and she ends by pointing to posthumous publications that had expanded opportunities for further study. Scott gestures toward writing that reflects "another period in Nowlan's life and art that started when he moved to Fredericton in 1968" (37). My dissertation considers that period, when Nowlan launched FES from a position of newly won prominence in social and literary circles.

My study sees Nowlan's biography as a context for FES, one example of his artistic practice and community building. Here, his hardscrabble beginnings are skimmed over, having been covered elsewhere. Robert Gibbs united biographical interest with literary analysis in "Various Persons Named Alden Nowlan, a bio-critical essay" (1992). Fred Cogswell's "Alden Nowlan As Regional Atavist" (1986)[55] is a literary eulogy for his friend. It honours the man's character and reproduces Cogswell's sestina about Nowlan's funeral (211-12). The poem describes its author and others as "friends who felt the self you were inside / Meant more to them than any of your words" (211). Extracts of Nowlan poems appear, often without added comment. Cogswell feels "copious quotations […] will shine their own light" (206), even though no human artifact (including something made of words) can speak for itself. A preponderance of biographical interest in Nowlan's reception is exemplified by the fact that the only book-length studies to date are Toner and Cook's biographies.[56] In 1997, *Pottersfield Portfolio* gathered "Reminiscences" by Brian Bartlett, Dave Butler, Louis Cormier, Leo Ferrari, and Raymond and Sharon Fraser, edited by Ian Coldford. Personal testimonies continued to appear in the early 2000s. John Drew's "Canadian Identity: a Brief Memoir of Alden Nowlan" (2003) references Nowlan's stays in hospital and his height without quoting relevant writings (54). Nowlan poems celebrate friendship, but memoirs of encounter by his associates may have done little to bolster his legacy. In recent decades, a new

[55] The article continued Cogswell's practical support of Nowlan's career during the poet's lifetime. In *The Fiddlehead Moment* (2019), Tony Tremblay details the importance of Cogswell in the development New Brunswick literature. For his support of Nowlan specifically, see pages 200-03.

[56] Oliver's *Poet's Progress* (1978) does not approach the standard scholarly monograph in terms of length and reproduces previously available commentary, such as that put forward in "The Presence of Ice."

generation of readers who never met the author have made individual public journeys through his books.

New Directions in Nowlan Studies

Twentieth-century academic commentary on Nowlan tended to recycle matters of Maritime regionalism; assess the author's voice as sub-literary or disguised in plain-speaking registers; and investigate his biographical experience. In his biography of the author, published in the year 2000, Toner writes that "Nowlan was one of those for whom the process of weaving a life took on a life of its own" (10). This truism can justify biographical interpretations, because the author composed creative reflections on his formative and on-going experiences. But Toner reveals the dangers of biography as well. Too often, "Nowlan's readers accepted that what he was writing [about himself] was the truth," even though authors are "paid to tell lies" (11). This biographer saw academic criticism of Nowlan's work as woefully limited, only in part by a tendency to take personal representations on literal terms. He reports that the few valuable sources come from "creative writers rather than academics and critics," naming scholar-poets Oliver and Gibbs as examples (13). Only Keefer's *Under Eastern Eyes* is named as a key (strictly) academic source. Toner describes the paucity of critical studies in these terms: "Though there are occasional MA theses and scholarly articles that appear at regular intervals from the early 1970s until today, they are indifferent in quality and lead to a dead end" (13). He did not expound upon the limits of academic reception up to that point. He might have agreed with my assessment: that critical approaches tended to repeat each other rather than accumulate or diversify. Recent scholars have recognized

the need for fresh discussions of Nowlan's writing. British critic W. J. Keith soon seconded Toner's call for new directions, even though he himself did not hit upon an innovative approach.

In 2003, Keith published "The Poetry of Alden Nowlan: a Critical Reassessment." It addresses previous critics, editorial work, and Nowlan's output, from which he draws out a handful of essential poems. He regrets Nowlan's relative absence from literary studies. That absence poses a "paradox," because "all serious readers of Canadian poetry […] are aware of the quality of his writing" and university "students respond with enthusiasm when confronted with his verse."[57] Despite that recognition and resonance, Nowlan "is often excluded from university courses in favour of supposedly more sophisticated but far less rewarding poets" (Keith 9). Previous critics "tended to concentrate on his regionalism" and "the relative merits of his earlier (mainly regular) and later (mainly irregular) verse" without producing "a closer appreciation of his finest poetic achievements" (9 and 12). Maritime critics discussed issues of regionalism with "suspicious defensiveness," while outsiders "can sometimes be uninformed and condescending" (12). The topic had been so extensively covered that Keith wished "to waste no more ink upon it" but added that "Nowlan clearly *is* a regionalist," one who "transcend[s] the limits of [his] regionalism" (12). Keith grants "national and even international significance" to Nowlan's better poems, placing him alongside Hardy, Frost, E. Bronte, and Faulkner, whose transnational audiences respond to their treatment of locality (12). For Keith, Nowlan's critics form "two main camps: the traditionalists,"

[57] Writing in 2010, Peskin, Allen, and Wells-Jopling recorded success with using Nowlan's poetry in high-school classrooms, especially in developing students' understanding of symbolism (503-04).

who prefer formal, early verses and "supporters of so-called 'free verse'" of later years (12). The critic sees his own position as innovative. Seeking "fully achieved poems," he can "find examples in both the early and late volumes," in both metrical and open forms (12). Keith cites no commentators on this topic and departs from findings in the present review. Critics like Ustick saw Nowlan relying on tensions based on thematic rather than formal properties and located strong and unprofitable poems across his career. Keith might have found more profitable sources to work from; he hit on only two "genuinely useful" pieces of criticism: Louis Dudek's 1969 reading of two poems and the "brief comment" by John Metcalf already quoted (12 and 13 in Keith).[58] Nonetheless, Keith's article showed what a large amount of work remained to be done in the would-be field of Nowlan Studies.

By 2003, the critic had several selected editions of Nowlan's poetry to consider. Keith writes that he "has been lovingly edited" by personal associates but regrets that "the editions are generally flawed" and unfit "for scholarly purposes" (9). That summary is diplomatic, because Keith goes on to catalogue numerous shortcomings found in editions edited by Robert Gibbs and Lane and Crozier. Unusual choices, omissions, and egregious errors justify his claim that "some serious bibliographical work on Nowlan is desperately needed" (11). That work is now underway with Eric Swanick, a retired archivist now compiling an exhaustive bibliography (Eso). Keith's assessment identifies admirable and unfulfilled poems from across Nowlan's career. Many of his findings resemble comments from the twentieth century. He finds the later work overly prosaic,

[58] His slight group of "genuinely useful" sources needs expanding, because Keith repeats findings of critics he seems unaware of. He describes the decision to open *Bread, Wine and Salt* with "I, Icarus" as a gesture to "signal a new poetic departure" (21) without citing Virginia Scott's comments to the same effect. He discusses Nowlan "splitting himself in two" (22) without invoking Marilyn Baxter's work on that subject.

whereas early verses had "an admirably consistent technical standard" (16). Late poems are "uneven," because Nowlan sometimes published the "embarrassing" products of "the dubious freedoms of free verse" (29 and 30). However, Keith finds intricate conceptual structures replacing metrical ones in the best of Nowlan's mature work as well as an increasing "range of subject, tone, and approach" (28). Like other commentators, he hears "versification [that] seems easy and effortless" (characteristic "unpretentiousness") masking literary craft (23 and 24). In select verses, "lighthearted charm" surrounds a "serious core" of technique and meaning (24). If any readers of the mature production missed that "there is more to Nowlan's achievement than friendly gentility," they had missed his "tonal variety," "multiple levels of significance," "verbal sophistication," and "precision" (20 and 21). Keith's appreciation is as variable as Nowlan's career, since "each poem must be approached on its own terms," and the critic demonstrates, above all, Nowlan's "remarkable range" (21). Many readers may find this article does more important work, then, in attempting to reset standards for the author's critical reception and editorial preservation than it does when arguing for or against specific poems.

Several years after Keith's "Critical Reassessment" appeared, a theoretical framework was brought to bear on Nowlan's poetry for the first time.[59] Theory became a dominant strain of literary criticism prior to the year 2000 but had been slow to reach Nowlan Studies, perhaps because many mistook the author's surface "unpretentiousness"

[59] Gabriele Helms used an ecocritical lens in a 1995 article on a cluster of writers, ecocriticism being a critical school rather than a theory. She presented Nowlan's particular "ecolect" via "St. John River," a poem with "awareness of environmental destruction and human compliance in it" that does not name "agents" responsible for pollution (149). Comments about "St. John River" revealing "the superficial and often dangerously delusive nature of our perceptions" could further interpretations of links between Nowlan's poems and FES, but Helms gives only a brief discussion. Her work did not usher in a new era of Nowlan Studies, since (affirming Keith's reason for Nowlan's academic absence) Helms prefers the "more complex" and "self-reflexive" writing of Anne Campbell and Fred Wah to that of Nowlan and Pat Lowther (151).

for lack of sophistication. Born in Nova Scotia and going on to teach university students in the Netherlands, Ernestine Lahey united her research interests in literary-linguistics, discourse analysis, and Text World Theory in two articles that study Milton Acorn, Nowlan, and Al Purdy. They are "(Re)thinking world-building: Locating the text-worlds of Canadian lyric poetry" (2006) and "Megametaphorical Mappings and the Landscapes of Canadian Poetry" (2007). These expose Nowlan to new audiences, appearing in the specialist venues *Journal of Literary Semantics* and *Contemporary Stylistics*, respectively. Lahey finds poetry's treatment of location and metaphor disrupting assumed hierarchies within previous formulations of Text World Theory (hereafter, TWT). The standard framework assumes three independent levels of discourse: discourse worlds, where texts are produced and read; text worlds, defined by the limits of a given text's invented reality; and sub-worlds: differing places, time frames, or perspectives co-existing within a text. TWT grants textual constructions the status of "worlds," so that fictional characters must be thought of as "sentient beings" (Lahey, "(Re)thinking" 146). By disrupting habits of valuing the phenomenal realm far above the textual domain, TWT aligns with postmodern epistemology. Lahey pushes its hierarchy dissolution further by correcting assumptions made by Paul Werth (formulator of the theory) about boundaries that separate discourse, textual, and sub-textual worlds. World-building tactics and land-based metaphors of poets pose problems to TWT's apparent neatness.

In "(Re)thinking world-building," Lahey watches three poets denote and animate setting. In their text-worlds, Acorn, Nowlan, and Purdy blur distinctions between the world-building and function-advancing processes outlined by Werth, who explicated his theory "primarily in relation to realist narrative texts" ("(Re)thinking" 147). The

difference between these effects "is comparable to the traditional distinction between narrative setting and plot," background and foreground, noun and verb (147-48). In Nowlan's "Canadian January Night," "Broad Street," and "St. John River," noun-phrase titles identify text-world settings with "real-world counterpart locations" (148-49). In that, they do world-building work. Titles also paratextually address discourse-world participants (readers) and activate or advance built-worlds within the body text. Nowlan's "They Go Off to Seek Their Fortunes" includes an epigraph that references Toronto. Epigraphs too can "be processed at the discourse-world level" (likely a "default position") or at "the text-world level" (152). Lahey's test-case poets establish settings by using other types of specific nouns—or at least "*exclude* certain types of locations" outside of Canada (154). "Subordinate examples of the basic level TREE" serve this function when Nowlan references "spruce," "balsam fir," "cedar," and "maple" (154). When applied to "pussywillows," his verb-phrase "*blossoming*" identifies a text-world's season and delimits location, despite Werth's belief that verbs perform function-advancing and not world-building effects: the action of nouns (160). TWT states that settings "tend to be explicitly mentioned linguistically" and "at the start of a new discourse," but Lahey shows poets reveal location through "inference," "gradually," or "late in the discourse, if at all" (158 and 160). "Divisions between linguistic elements in terms of […] discourse processes are not nearly so strict" as TWT makes it seem (162). Poets prove too slippery for its systems, so the critic demands "continued and careful scrutiny of the theory" (162). Her analysis seems simplistic from a literary perspective, perhaps, but paying close attention to technical matters within a theoretical framework brought new energy to Nowlan Studies, even though Lahey quotes no Nowlan critics

here, drawing instead from linguistic scholars. Her article has diagrams to guide readers (150-51), a feature that shows her argument is direct and complex. It requires diagrams and can be diagramed.

In Lahey's "Megametaphorical" article, landscape metaphors from Acorn, Nowlan, and Purdy further trouble the rigidity of TWT. For them, settings do not serve "merely as backdrops against which the stories of literary texts are enacted," a common assumption that requires rethinking in Canadian literary contexts ("Megametaphorical" 158). TWT provides "an ideal analytical framework for careful examination" of how "background spaces against which a text's foregrounded elements" are cued and made "meaningful" in their own right (158). Lahey uncovers "four key metaphorical patterns" ("megametaphors" for Werth) in the writings of Nowlan and his peers; they are "EXTERNAL [landscape] AS INTERNAL [state]," "LANDSCAPE AS CHARACTER," "CHARACTER AS LANDSCAPE," and "POEM AS LANDSCAPE" (159). Each of these metaphorically maps "the relationship between the represented poetic landscape and some other aspect [of] the poetic text-world" (159). Regarding the first category, Nowlan presents "metaphors linking landscape and mind directly," whereas Acorn and Purdy often use bodily images as intermediaries between external and inner worlds (161). Frequently, "HOMETOWN IS CHILDHOOD" in Nowlan poems such as "You can't get there from here," "The Mosherville Road," "What colour is Manitoba?" and "Sleeping out" (161). Regarding the first of these, Lahey unpacks the seemingly simple title, showing that "the deictics 'there' and 'here' must be understood as at once spatial, temporal, and psychological" (161): a dense layering of coordinates. His "Cornflowers" contains a LANDSCAPE AS PERSON metaphor, because the flowers are "not yet /

aware they will die soon" (162). Only one part of the text world is personified, but Lahey knows metaphors often add up, "lending sentience to landscape" through the aggregate of metaphors at play (162). In "A song to be whispered," Nowlan writes "your body consists of so many provinces," enacting a CHARACTER AS LANDSCAPE metaphor that implicitly references Canada (162). Metaphors that see POEM AS LANDSCAPE (mapping "the text-world landscape" onto "*the poem itself*" [165]) present a particular challenge to TWT's division between discourse- and text-world-level interpretations.

Nowlan's "Sleeping out" uses this final type of megametaphor. It states, "here / where there is no / defense against / the night / I am no longer / afraid of / the dark" (qtd. in "Megametaphorical" 166). On the surface referring to "the poetic persona's lack of fear about sleeping outdoors," the word "'here' also refers to the poem" itself (166). Lahey draws from biographical research by Oliver, Toner, and Brian Guns[60] to bolster that interpretation. "Although Nowlan may have been embarrassed about his writing" in some circumstances, she writes, "he was not embarrassed in it" (166). Nowlan presents his poem as a place, as Acorn and Purdy are shown to do, and that action poses a problem for TWT. According to theoretical orthodoxy, there should be no "'upward access' from the sub-world or text-world levels to the level of the discourse world"; "the poetic persona [should not have] access to that text" in which they speak (167). Lahey's solution makes novel use of "transworld identity." In TWT, the term "refers to a mapping between entities in two different worlds" operating as "counterparts of one another" (167). Although the concept is normally applied to "places or characters," Lahey conceives of a given poem that exists in the discourse world mirrored by a "counterpart poem" living in

[60] His documentary for the National Film Board, titled Alden Nowlan: *The Mysterious Naked Man* (2004).

that poem's text-world (167). Her article sets out to add to criticism on landscape images in Canadian poetry by explicating "the precise manner in which these literary landscapes are linguistically determined" (157). Yet her prime contribution is to TWT, not Nowlan scholarship or Canadian literary studies. Her work on transworld movement could extend to Nowlan's alternate personae, his counterpart selves. These include "Nowlan" speakers in poems and other entities he brought to life, like FES's Symposiarch. That character transcended textual realities to invade a shared culture. His Society made the leap from "a private joke" to a "national event," just as the poet's home had a street address as well as a counterpart reality as a mythic Castle (letter to Ray Fraser, 1976, *ANP* 40.12.24.91).

Like Lahey, Samuel Tongue brought fresh energy but not concentrated attention to Nowlan Studies. His *Between Biblical Criticism and Poetic Rewriting* (2014) applies postmodern literary analysis to creative representations of narratives from the Book of Genesis. He too finds poets troubling formulated (in this case theological) systems. When turning to Nowlan's "Anatomy of Angels," Tongue acknowledges Bieman's view that the poem rebels against the patriarchal authority of the Church and of John Donne (195). He repeats that work, while framing the poem's disruptive approach to an authoritative text within postmodern theory. "Anatomy of Angels" stands "ready to play with connotations rather than settle on denotations," thus performing a deconstructive and "intertextual reading, filtering many other representamens through [its] tight mesh" (191). When making his "angel" richly physical and female, Nowlan is "soliciting *différance*" (195) as Bieman had pointed out in unaccented terms. Girdle serpent wrapped seductively around her torso, Nowlan's angel "has come from 'outside' the biblical canon's permissions"; more precisely, she "haunts the terms of the 'literality'" of Jacob's

story and recuperates "goddesses [that] have been written out of the theological backdrop," such as Ishtar (196). Nowlan's poetic figure anticipated feminist scholarship that developed in the half-century separating the poem's publication from Tongue's analysis. His act of rewriting cannot completely depart from tradition, because the "poem and biblical text are both host and guest to one another, *at the same time*"; in other words, "they are both caught in sustaining *and* dismantling one another in [Derridean] hostipitality" (197). Tongue's italics indicate a dizzying simultaneity articulated by postmodern theorists whom he draws on: principally Derrida and de Certeau. "*Alterity* frames this engagement," since Nowlan's poem "is located at the contact points of literary and theological/biblical canons, stranger/friend, invitation/visitation, hospitality/hostility." These pairings remain "undecidable," with "Anatomy of Angels" operating on the boundaries rather than from either side of these dividing lines (200). Poets who Tongue studies counter the rigidity of "biblical studies, built as it has been on concepts of historical realism and criticism that necessarily eschews poetic writing" (166). Marginalized in theology, poetry's place is not necessarily a weak one. For Tongue, "poetry as outsider, stranger to the critical centre, is actually a useful paradoxical position from which to operate" (166). FES is another example of creative-critical discourse liberated and strengthened by its willfully marginal position.

The same year as Tongue's book appeared, Andrew Moore published "Alden Nowlan Explains the Internet" (2014) in the *Antigonish Review*. It renews the author but not by applying contemporary theory. Rather, Moore uses a Nowlan poem to illuminate "one of the most troublesome social problems of our day": the social pressures youth face online (124). His humourous title plays on ideas of Nowlan as traditional, a throwback to

earlier times, while asserting his enduring relevance. Nowlan's "The Broadcaster's Poem" shows that "technology mediates human interactions" (123). For the poem's speaker, radio creates "an urge to say something offensive and secret," to make a "confessional" of his "radio booth." Despite dramatic changes in technology since its appearance, the poem has "prescient" messages for those whose private and public lives have merged online (124). Moore sees social media enticing sexual, racist, or bullying language from teens. To stress the severity of online harassment, he remembers two young people who committed suicide in British Columbia (2012) and Nova Scotia (2013) (126-27). Online behaviours increasing vulnerability can look like "problems of character, parenting, and education," but they often stem from "technology's capacity to pressure users into" making "intimate and worrying disclosures" (125). Moore draws on education specialists and media critics (such as Marshall McLuhan [126]) rather than previous Nowlan critics. Eschewing literary analysis, he promotes "The Broadcaster's Poem" as a warning against communication technology's tendency to tilt utterances toward "scandal and censure," although young readers may consider "anxiety about radio […] quaint, or even archaic" (124). Lahey, Tongue, and Moore all use Nowlan to discuss other concerns. They help diversify if not deepen the still-growing body of Nowlan scholarship.

Before these critics found new uses for Nowlan's poems, David Creelman included his novels in 2003's *Setting in the East*. Its discussion concerns authorial biography and regional identity, so his first contribution to Nowlan Studies was anchored to the previous century (to Davies and Keefer in particular). In 2015, Creelman helped diversify Nowlan criticism with his *Journal of Canadian Studies* article "Refashioning

Mi'kmaw Narratives into Maritime Fictions." This was the first close look at a minor work[61] and advanced Nowlan Studies by turning to his treatment of First Nations narratives. 1983's *Nine Micmac Legends* compiled material from the 1960s. Nowlan based his Mi'kmaq narratives on adaptations by nineteenth-century missionary Silas Rand. Creelman credits Nowlan for avoiding "some of the most egregious colonizing impulses of [his] literary predecessors": their "sentimental, polarizing, and hierarchical discourses" ("Refashioning" 164). Despite his projections from outside Indigenous worldviews, *Nine Micmac Legends* is cross-culturally "sympathetic" and, like much of Nowlan's writing, aligned with "the potentially chaotic side of the spiritual realm" (165). Creelman fits the adaptations to Nowlan's wider output and to "the emerging pluralism and lack of philosophical continuity in his own age" (165). Personal impositions can be located, however. Nowlan sometimes makes "small groups or single individuals" heroic, where Rand had "whole communities" battling in unison (165). Nowlan selected stories with "characters who are longing for answers, uneasy with their place in the world, or aware that their victories are tentative at best" (165). Renegade heroics, alienation, and uncertainty are part of Nowlan's modernist aesthetic for Creelman. They also relate to his poetically planoterrestrial disposition. Nowlan's prose collection approaches recent work on Indigenous writing, insofar as among authors that Creelman discusses he "is most able to question the colonial assumptions that have governed [his] literary territory" and "comes closest to admitting that his own understanding and perspective is provisional" (166). In 2016, some of his "legends" were appended to Ulrich and Gill's "The Tricksters

[61] Nowlan's history of Campobello Island is referred to in Paul Craven's 2014 book *Petty Justice*, but only for the purposes of correcting three minor errors in Nowlan's historical narrative (42, 63, and 99).

Speak: Klooscap and Wesakechak, Indigenous Law, and the New Brunswick Land Use Negotiation" (2016). No context situated these stories, so it failed to advance Nowlan scholarship but did promote ongoing relevance for writing from the fringes of his output.

Secondary Nowlan sources from the 2010s took surprising directions, none more so than Shane Neilson's 2016 article for *Hektoen International: A Journal of Medical Humanities*. His "Alden Nowlan, the schizotypal poet" appears in the online journal's psychiatry section rather than among its literary offerings. It represents an extreme case of interest in Nowlan as personality rather than poet.[62] Commenting briefly on only one poem, the critic posthumously diagnoses the author with Schizotypal Personality Disorder. Neilson admits his is an exercise in "DSM-V-inspired diagnostic folly" that makes "a whimsical case" ("schizotypal" n. pag.). He invents quotes for Nowlan, who speaks directly to Neilson. The concocted "poltergeist" claims to have possessed a "tinfoil hat" while living (n. pag.), a comment that depicts him as cartoonish as well as in need of professional help. Evidence comes from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* and from Nowlan's private correspondence. The author meets the manual's requirements for Schizotypal Personality Disorder, due to presenting "excessive social anxiety"; "odd beliefs or magical thinking"; "behaviour or appearance that is odd, eccentric, or peculiar"; "inappropriate or constricted affect"; and "unusual perceptual experiences" (n. pag.). These traits connect to the presentation of Nowlan across these pages, particularly in my dissertation's first chapter. His unusual metaphors, like his Flat Earth, sometimes present as perceptual distortions. I promote Nowlan as a nonconformist,

[62] Taking a thoroughly biographical approach, Neilson still makes misstatements about Nowlan's life. He claims Nowlan left Hartland for Fredericton, omitting the St. John years. His close friend Leo Ferrari is made "a former professor of English at St. Thomas University," although his discipline was Philosophy (n. pag.).

and Neilson claims that Nowlan's being "misaligned with the larger world" made him "one of Canada's best poets" (n. pag.). But Neilson treats eccentricities as diagnosable impediments to social functioning, rather than creative projections that have helped preserve him in cultural memory. Neilson mentions FES, a rarity in scholarly sources, calling it "an academic group with worldwide membership whose sole aim was to prove that the earth was flat" (n. pag.).[63] The description is erroneous. The Society involved many from outside the academy, had no sole aim, and little to prove. The Stuart Monarchy revival further shows Nowlan was "otherworldl[y]," "partial to elaborate fancy" (n. pag.). That is true. But, like FES, the Monarchy was playful, not delusional. Neilson's edited collection from 2005, *Alden Nowlan & Illness*, extended the critic's medical service by gathering poems to help patients deal with their suffering and treatment. His 2016 article seems comparatively unhelpful. It treats mental disorders in a flippant manner and all but ignores Nowlan's literary writings.

Another academic treatment of Nowlan's writing from the 2010s came with Robert McGill's *War Is Here: The Vietnam War and Canadian Literature* (2017). His study considers Canadian writers who responded to American activity in Vietnam from the 1950s to 1970s. Nowlan's "In Our Time" is included with other writings that critique media coverage of the conflict rather than military involvement in it, such as Al Purdy's "Picture Layout in Life Magazine." Nowlan's poem is a "parodic extension" of the newspaper captions it quotes; like its speaker, these employ "ironic editorialization" (McGill 144). Journalistic work is complicit in war, when coverage serves a process of

[63] Only one other source discussed in the present literature review references the Society. Cogswell's article lists FES first among Nowlan's anachronistic "enthusiasms": followed by "Dr. Johnson, the Jacobites, the Stuarts, the IRA, the Orange Lodge, the Monarchy, the Army" (224).

"normalizing brutality" (144). Nowlan's critiques are rhetorically embedded rather than direct, mirroring media manipulation he condemns. The usually positive word "generous" describes the rush of water used to torture a prisoner. That turn "indicates the insidious ease with which a single word-choice can have an editorial effect" (145). Line breaks too "create ironic contrast" (145). McGill's findings could be expanded to consider other reflections on violence in Nowlan's poetry and journalism, but the critic maintains a focus on the poet's critique of media rather than war. Nowlan felt close to the former issue. When his poem appeared in the 1960s, he still had full-time employment at New Brunswick's *Telegraph-Journal*. McGill notes that "In Our Time" ends with a voice of "reportage that is free of editorializing," which optimistically offers a model to which journalists might aspire (145). There is a lesson here for readers, too. By composing a poem in which found texts from newspaper "captions become things to be studied as rhetoric, not simply words to be passively consumed," the poem fosters active reading and "encourages critical reflection" (145). Some might take Nowlan's poems or his FES writings at face value, but his work usually rewards those prepared to uncover subtle techniques that in turn reveal deeper meanings at play.

Conclusion

After prodding from Scott in the 1990s and from Toner and Keith in the early 2000s, new approaches to Nowlan's writings emerged over the past two decades. As yet, no confluence has brought about a reflexive scholarly conversation in what we might otherwise call contemporary Nowlan Studies. The disunity of recent sources is in some ways appropriate, reflecting as it does the author's disparate, multi-generic output.

Contemporary critics have used Nowlan's texts as a means to consider wider issues, instead of treating them as a subject unto themselves. And so, twenty-first-century scholars make no reference to other contemporary studies employing Nowlan, although they sometimes refer to twentieth-century criticism. It is difficult to imagine a study that could incorporate Lahey's treatment of Text World Theory, Tongue's postmodern religiosity, Moore's concern for social media, Creelman's study of *Nine Micmac Legends*, Neilson's creative psychiatry, and McGill's look at critiques of war reporting. After a long period that saw a relatively circular academic discussions about the author, disparate treatments of Nowlan in the present century provide relief and excitement. This dissertation continues the work of expanding Nowlan's reception with the first close look at his Flat Earth Society. My review of the relevant criticism makes its own contribution by bringing together a wide selection of commentary, placing conspicuous sources alongside some that researchers might miss. The paucity of academic attention on Nowlan that Keith complained of in 2003 continues. But new editions have appeared in recent years, complemented by Gregory Cook's anthology of commentary. These releases occasioned new reflections on Nowlan within their pages. They also attracted book reviewers who have helped keep the author's once-prominent name in circulation.

Cook's *Alden Nowlan: Essays on His Works* appeared in 2006. Regrettably, it mostly reprints material published in the twentieth century: including early interviews with the author and Milton's essay discussed above. The volume's key contribution to scholarship is its substantial bibliography of primary and secondary sources. In 2011, Goose Lane Editions rereleased Nowlan's *The Wanton Troopers*, restoring previously missing text and adding an afterword by David Adams Richards. In 2013, House of

Anansi re-issued their selected poems volume with a new introduction by Susan Musgrave. Editor Brian Bartlett's 2017 *Collected Poems* volume gave rise to public readings across Canada and provoked a greater number of book reviews than any Nowlan edition published in the present century. Positive reviews include that by Nicholas Bradley, who lauded the poet's "genius" even while recognizing that the "plainness" of his language "becomes enervating over the long course" of the collection (n. pag.). Danny Jacobs inserted the *Collected Poems* volume as an object into a creative essay that fondly reflects on the poet's role in New Brunswick's literary culture. Reviewers Trevor Cook and Richard Kelly Kemick tempered praise with concern over Nowlan's potential irrelevance for today's readers. They identify a sometimes patriarchal rather than progressive treatment of gender. Nowlan "celebrate[s] the male gaze," for Cook, and will offend some of today's readers with his "occasionally vulgar content" (140). He exhibits "latent chauvinism" and immorality according to Kemick (174).[64] Their detractions sparked an extended rebuttal from Neilson, his "We Shall Know You By Your Reviews." It warns against "the danger inherent to […] conformist policing of representations," especially when the "progressively-endorsed mansplaining" by "the New White Male" (a form of "power tripping") is directed at already disenfranchised Maritime authors (Neilson, "We Shall" n. pag.). These critiques and Neilson's defense seem to reopen the cold case of negative reviews coming from outside the Maritimes at the beginning of the poet's career and the protective responses from Oliver and others. Hopefully, reactions to Bartlett's volume will grow beyond contentious reviews to new academic investigations

[64] Resistance to Nowlan's masculine tones is not new. In 2006, Carmine Starnino described the importance of Anne Szumigalski in the *Globe and Mail*, writing that "Canadian poetry's he-man tradition," which for him includes Nowlan, "has made us desperate for literary mothers" (D11).

of Nowlan's poetry. The discussion of Nowlan as a metaphorical Planoterrestrialist in this dissertation's first chapter is needed today in part because interpretations of his writing as narrowly traditional threaten the author's already tenuous legacy. The chapter sheds new light on Nowlan's non-conformist stance and alternate-world-building projects, two aspects of his career that show him working from outside established attitudes and canons. Although vigorously comic and imaginative, FES was part of a pursuit to increase respect for marginalized positions. His Society merits consideration for that reason and for the eccentric interpretive community that it united.

“when the cameras zoom in on the losers”: Nowlan and the Flat Earth Society of Fredericton

Little enough has been said regarding Alden Nowlan as an author, much less about his co-founding a Flat Earth Society in 1970. For the rare individuals familiar with his books, at first glance the poetry and prose writer may seem to stand far above his FES alter-ego: an avowed believer in Earth’s planar form. One persona composes rarified literature, the other peddles pamphlets for cheap laughs, so the easy assessment might run. Yet Nowlan’s published titles and FES writings express related outlooks. Further, each mode of writing (literary and planoterrestrial) uses plain language and earnest tones to convey surprising meaning and bizarre thought. Each is steeped in eccentric metaphors; sardonic or black humour; as well as the author’s social environment and subjective, sensory perceptions. Setting out to explore those overlaps, this chapter introduces Nowlan’s championing of “loser” figures as well, then sketches his personal experience of isolation and fellowship. Both contexts led him to establish an imaginatively sovereign Society in 1970, first among his friend-group in Fredericton. The coterie of writers orbiting his home around that time expanded to include dues-paying members in FES, a paradoxical union of dissenters. His poetry, FES, and the Atlantic-Canadian outsiders who joined his Society all operate below the level of mainstream cultural attention. Figuratively, they are “lost” documents and historical “losers.” By adopting the ultimate modern fringe position—belief in a Flat Earth—Nowlan and others dramatized, celebrated, and refused their marginality. They exercised or even exorcised disaffection through whimsy and community building. In all that, the obscure FES legacy accords with aspects of Nowlan’s poems produced before, during, and after the early 1970s.

This chapter focuses on Atlantic Canada's playfully serious Planoterrestrialists, principally Nowlan. Another essay could fit FES to the region's cultural-historical contexts. During its initial period, the Society spread eastward from Fredericton to the terminal point of Fogo Island, Newfoundland, one of the Earth's fabled corners in FES lore. Through Nowlan's planoterrestrial networking, the intervening territory came to represent a poetic and geo-planarian realm that has left scant historical trace. Even the "real world" Maritimes and Newfoundland can be seen as peripheral, being comprised of "have-not" provinces during Canada's post-confederation and decolonial periods.[65] Some will read FES's *ex-centric* mandate as a post-centennial critique of *central* Canada, others an embrace of regional difference. But here, Atlantic Canada serves as backdrop for specific characters: Nowlan, writers who became his regular visitors, and applicants who penned creative responses to his Flat Earth satire. The darkly comic Flat Earth theme soon found far-flung supporters, proving the transportability of FES. Consequently, I do not bind the Society or Nowlan's poetry tightly to the Maritimes. This outsider to the region feels unprepared for such a task. Extra-regional contexts reliably intersect with products of Maritime or Newfoundland culture, anyhow, Nowlan's poetry and his Society not first nor last among them. Future work could elaborate FES as a response to centralized institutions and historical trends in technology, globalization, and politics. For now, the fringe Society needs recording more so than issues embedded in the space race, Canada's centenary, or 1960s/70s protest culture in New Brunswick[66] and beyond.

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[65] The four eastern provinces are better off financially than Canada's northern territories, less prosperous than its central and western regions. That situation obtained in the 1970s and at this time of writing (2021).

[66]Peter Kent's *Inventing Academic Freedom* (2012) tells of the 1968 Strax Affair, which brought protest culture to UNB. Students and some faculty protested the school's new identification cards, seeing them as symbols of mechanized control. Conversely, FES membership cards symbolized humanizing liberty.

Setting the tools of history aside, my dissertation dares to cross the threshold of Nowlan's metaphorical Castle in Fredericton. We eventually head to Fogo Island to peek over the Edge itself. Paving the way for chapters concerning FES as an international and national organization, "the cameras zoom in on the losers" examines the poet who inspired the farcical Society and the Maritimers and Newfoundlanders who took up its lost cause.

Lessons in Empathy

Much of Nowlan's writing in various genres gives respectful treatment to those often cast as beyond the pale. Figures in poems include destitute alcoholics, prisoners of the state, and mentally disabled persons. The verse narrative "He Sits Down on the Floor of a School for the Retarded" exemplifies this signature mode. It closed the last poetry collection published during Nowlan's lifetime (*CP* 626-28). The poem's Nowlan-speaker communes with two adults who live with delayed intellectual capacities; the word "retarded" became primarily disparaging only after the poem appeared. "He Sits Down…" was accordingly anthologized in 2006's *Civically Engaged Reader* (Davis and Lynn 43-44).[67] To take an example from another genre, Nowlan's collaboration with Walter Learning on a stage adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* ennobled her novella's creaturely antagonist. The playwrights grant him a level of dignity that neither Shelley nor later adapters gave to Frankenstein's unnamed, so-called monster. Toward the script's close, Frankenstein's Creature reaches out and asks the title character to take his hand, wanting not to die as he had lived: bereft of companionship's comfort. The

[67] This appearance is a victory for Nowlan's dwindling legacy. The book includes major thinkers and writers, including Aristotle, Rousseau, Kafka, William Carlos Williams, Langston Hughes, and Toni Morison.

lonely scene is set, fittingly, in the extreme north. “Creature: Victor, take my hand, please […] please” (Nowlan and Learning 70). The woman in “He Sits Down…” makes a similar plea: “hold me […] hold me” (*CP* 627). Other texts extend elevating hands to laborers, rural Maritimers, artists, and children. Such writings demand respect for persons, or sometimes ideas, that many ignore or deride. Gregory Cook gives the following description: “Alden rises to the defense of those who are under attack or ostracized by community mores or state laws” (17). The same motivation led him to create a Flat Earth Society, which championed a losing position and gathered misfits in solidarity. Like Nowlan’s performance as a Jacobean revivalist, his FES persona (officially a Symposiarch) harks back to a time before the launch of a space-age society. Feeling out-of-step with a culture obsessed by progress, Learning and other associates joined Nowlan’s FES. They did so to share in his joke, take part in his antics, and declare allegiance with outsiders, outcasts, and otherworldliness. The Flat Earth symbol was a clever cover for Nowlan’s true conception of life on an unreliable, misunderstood planet with perilous edges and an uncharted underside.

A time of cultural upheaval and artistic experiment, the late 1960s and early 70s represented a high point in Nowlan’s creative career. During those years, FES emerged from the poet’s overflowing imagination and his immediate circle, but the project has gone overlooked among his activities of the period. Also resulting from creative collaboration, his co-authored *Frankenstein* adaptation debuted at the Fredericton Playhouse in 1974 and won local acclaim. The play marked a personal and professional apex for Nowlan. “It played for seventeen nights in July and August, drawing a total attendance of 7, 000 people, the largest audience in the history of the local theatre,” the

poet wrote FES member Nicholas Catanoy (1974, ANP 40.6.9.47). Praise for *Frankenstein* during his sixth year in Fredericton gratified Nowlan, who had travelled far. A half-day's drive separates the city from his home village of Stanley, but "there are truer charts" (to borrow from the poem "What Colour Is Manitoba?" [CP 525]). Biographers Toner and Cook show that poverty, ridicule, and abandonment marked Nowlan's childhood. His fictional memoirs *Wanton Troopers* and *Various Persons Named Kevin O'Brien* reflect the abuse he endured, altering names of people and places but capturing Stanley's "squalid and chaotic atmosphere."[68] Those four books relate the difficulties Nowlan faced, which do not need rehashing here. It is enough to say he identified with Shelley's abandoned character partly because his own young mother, Grace, fled Stanley without him in 1940.

Before realizing that his father, Freeman, was trapped by circumstances not of his own making and driven to frustration and drink, young Nowlan felt "terrified" by the man's "glare" and "scowl of contempt" (*Various Persons* 42-44). Terror grew to "murderous […] hatred" (qtd. in Toner 36). Even though we must be careful not to read his creative writing as straightforward biography, the tender verse portrait "My Father" seems to show that empathy overtook hurt resentment by the time it appeared in *Under the Ice* (1961):

> He lives alone now,
> when he opens the pantry
> he always acts amazed
> that there is bacon and flour. […]
>
> He is seldom happy

[68] "Not a real village but merely the houses along a particular short stretch of road," O'Brien says of Lockhartville: aptronym for Stanley in Nowlan's *fictional memoir* (*Various Persons* 5 and 6).

but I never saw a man
so content with small comforts:

wife, children gone
there is nothing left—

I know he could curl up
in his mackinaw
on his own barnfloor
and sleep thankful
at being allowed to rest there. (*CP* 67-68)

The poem portrays the poet's downtrodden father. It is also a portrait of who the poet might have become had ambition not led him away from an isolating homeplace. "My Father" displays compassionate apprehension of the damage that comes from living apart from others. Its author had been outcast and village idiot in Stanley, where his father resided until 1974.[69] One week in the July of that year saw the father die in central Nova Scotia and the unveiling of Nowlan's misshapen creation at Fredericton's Playhouse. Overcoming pain through writing, he applied lessons from his own difficulties to Freeman. Nowlan extended his charitable understanding of exclusion to people disenfranchised within society's assumed and often ruthless hierarchies. Those known as Flat Earthers figure among the "losers" Nowlan dignified, even if his Flat Earth project tilts toward symbolism and satire.

Nowlan did not finish primary school but read widely as a child. The Bible he acquired locally. Nearby Windsor library stocked British and American classics. He sent away for "mail-order literature about such things as astral projection and the Ascended Masters" (Toner 81). Exposure to texts of minor circulation inspired him to create the

[69] Nowlan spoke of his alienated childhood in Guns' documentary film titled *The Mysterious Naked Man.*

one-page *Stanley Advertiser* in 1950 (67), forerunner to items disseminated by FES. Through private reading, he studied world history. Major figures decorate his creative world, complementing concern for the forgotten.[70] Poems refer to Captain Cook, Crazy Horse, Gamal Nasser, Queen consort Catherine Howard, England's Queen Anne together with Prince George of Denmark, and Xerxes the Great (*CP* 312, 373, 386, 553, 569, 584). *Various Persons* mentions Russian Czar Alexander the First (27) as well as Irish King Brian Boru and England's King Richard the Lionhearted (12). Nowlan daydreamed about taking over a small country, such as Nicaragua.[71] The idea resulted from a sense of powerlessness on his domineering father's "postage-stamp of an untended farm" (Cook 25). Like his fictional counterpart O'Brien, young Nowlan found escape: through literature and fantasies that augmented the brutal realism of his surroundings.[72] Travel to other planes continued in adulthood. He explored poetic metaphors, formed absurd clubs, and developed alcohol dependency. A rich social life in Fredericton recuperated a formative period marred by abandonment and alienation. Literary community and play gave him a second chance at childhood, alleviated but did not resolve emotional troubles. His Flat Earth Society was childishly irreverent and recalls the imaginary clubs that children create. Its brand of creative Planoterrestrialism conveys a mystical projection; its ends-of-the-Earth geography models a precarious existence for humans, ever at risk of

[70] "Word from the Losers" is an exception to the separation of the powerful and powerless. Here, figures from the past seem not so grand as textbook versions of history would have us believe. Nowlan describes "old French aristocrats" as "farmers in patched breeches, lucky / if, besides their patents of nobility, / they owned a cow, a pig and half an acre / of cabbages." The poem's metaphor for historical narratives is "wreckage from a battle at sea […] come floating in from the lost ships / of history's losers" (*CP* 565).

[71] The fantasy is documented in, for instance, Nowlan's "Growing Up in Katpesa Creek" (15).

[72] See the formerly lost Wasilewski interview from 1983, first printed in the *Fiddlehead* in 2017 (n. pag.).

tumbling over the edges of a dangerous world. With a clowning disguise, FES addresses the underdogs and, further, the lost children within us all.

November 1970 and Before

Before depicting the founding of the satirical Society Nowlan inspired and its spread across Atlantic Canada, one must chart the long road he travelled *en route* to becoming the centre of an artistic scene in Fredericton. I bypass the difficulties of Nowlan's early life. His biographers have ably covered that ground. Cook and Toner show early lack and limitation being countered by abundance of community and spirit in later years. What has not been adequately articulated is the fact that Nowlan's life can be read through four distinct chapters, rather than as a shift from rural poverty to urban success. The four phases are marked by geographical relocations within the Maritime provinces and alternate between periods of isolation and engagement. The author's first-person testimony and his biographies are my sources for the narrative retold below.

Nowlan responded to his difficult years in Nova Scotia by moving to Hartland, New Brunswick in 1952. The poem "What Happened When He Went to the Store for Bread" recalls the serendipitous event that led him out of Stanley. Blending stoicism with affect, it considers different perspectives that he might have gained had the chance encounter that initiated a change of fortune not occurred or been other than it was. "It might even seem to me now / that there was never anything to escape from," he writes (*CP* 564). These lines typify the poet's decision not to condemn the neighbours and relatives of his past. Trading village for town led to major changes. Nowlan compared his arrival in Hartland to "a raw Highlands youth coming down to the dour but safe

Lowlands in the Scotland of, say, 1785" ("Growing Up" 24). Resettled, he set about repairing damage life as an outsider had wrought. After enduring "loneliness without privacy" (*CP* 391), he became a public citizen by joining the Fish and Game Association, the Hartland Board of Trade, the Potato Festival Committee, the Hartland Athletic Association, Knights of Pythias, and Masonic Lodge (Toner 81-83; Cook 84, 132). He chaired a committee seeking to commute an Indigenous man's death sentence (126-27). Nowlan wrote, "I belonged to a dozen or more organizations in Carleton County and, I think, that committee was about the only one that every accomplished anything" (Toner 122). These activities filled spare hours after work at the weekly newspaper, the *Hartland Observer*. There he advanced from cub reporter to news editor (99). Meanwhile, poems appeared in small magazines.[73] His verses won praise and letters from New Brunswick poet Fred Cogswell. In Hartland, Nowlan gained professional associates and community standing. He met his wife Claudine Orser at the *Observer* office and shared the rest of his life with her and her son. In terms of relating to others, the poet matured dramatically over the 1950s.

Nowlan resided in Hartland until 1963. Moving his family to the city of St. John, he took a job with the *Telegraph-Journal,* a provincial paper of wider circulation than the *Observer*. Here, he did not become immersed in community. His roles of provincial and night news editors involved working six shifts per week during the time when most were asleep and sleeping when others spent their waking lives. His alienating and isolating night-shift work appears very differently in "The Night Editor's Poem" and "How He

[73] Nowlan Studies will benefit, in future years, from the extensive bibliography currently in preparation by retired archivist Eric Swanick. Swanick's inventory includes rare and early poems published by American poetry magazines, sometimes under pseudonyms such as "Max Phillip Ireland" and "Del Acadie" (Eso).

Lost the Respect of a Friend By Pointing at the Moon." A jargon-laden litany opens the former, mimicking newspaper production's frantic pace. Its speaker fails to absorb the fact of Martin Luther King Jr.'s murder until reading by morning light the paper he produced in the small hours (*CP* 378-80). Practical work alienates the craftsman, who cannot engage the *Telegraph-Journal*'s epoch-making stories, let alone the local scene. "How He Lost …" depicts a quiet time at the office. The poet behind the editor's mask says to a co-worker, "The moon is beautiful tonight" (277). The words are not well received, reveal the speaker's ludic nature. Dreaminess is deformity in the poem. Once "a woman in a white dress," the moon becomes "a white-filmed eye, a white club foot" after the speaker exposes romantic sensibilities (276-77). He should have kept personal sentiments private. Caught between alienated labour and the social standards of urban professionalism, Nowlan's *Künstlerroman* stalled during the St. John years.

While living in that city, the author developed thyroid cancer. His health struggles inspired hospital poems that appear in collections published long after the mid-1960s, when his life-saving surgeries took place.[74] The medical procedures he saw as mechanical and undignified succeeded in their healing work. They also bequeathed conspicuous markers and fears of bodily betrayal. Removal of glands produced a swollen, scarred, and sensitive neck. Thus, henceforth, the poet's signature beard. The synthetic hormone Eltroxin exacerbated physical changes and Nowlan's mercurial temper (Toner 151). Odd appearance and sizeable stature would lead him to play the Creature in future

[74] These include: "In the Operating Room" and "Escape from Eden" in *Bread, Wine and Salt* (*CP* 189-90 and 192); "Five Days in Hospital" in *The Mysterious Naked Man* (218-19); "Semi-Private Room" in *Playing the Jesus Game* (283-84); "War Games in the Surgical Ward" and "TermCanClinc" in *Between Tears and Laughter* (363 and 364-65); "Body and Soul" in *I'm a Stranger Here Myself* (457-58); and "Hospital Parking Lot" and "Working Late" in *I Might Not Tell Everybody This* (591-92 and 613-14). *Smoked Glass* contains no hospital poems, but treats hearing loss during Nowlan's mid-forties (541-43).

years: playful promotions for his *Frankenstein* play. Toner reports Nowlan stalked his family about their home, curled fingers around a cab driver's neck and spoke lines from the script: "it will all be over quickly" (241). He used the metaphor of being "stalked" by cancer to describe lingering fears of death.[75] St. John poems depict hospitals and office environments as well as the "cheerless surroundings" (131)—squalor and claustrophobia—of tenement apartments that the family occupied. These he called "slums" and "semi-slums" for *Maclean*'s editor Peter Newman, when pitching a story on a tenants' association (4 Sept. 1971, ANP 40.17.53.19). Those dwellings gain memorable depictions in the poems "Britain Street," "Broad Street" and "That Year on Salisbury Street" (*CP* 159, 161, and 392). Nightshift work and time in hospital limited Nowlan's social life in the mid-1960s. So did discomfort with the density and poverty of his first urban setting: New Brunswick's largest city. The St. John years in some ways mirrored Nowlan's loner childhood in the "rural slum where [he] was born" (Cook 63).

Arriving in Fredericton in 1968, Nowlan felt ready to embrace community. Sprung loose from regular newspaper work, he earned the position of Writer-in-Residence for the University of New Brunswick, held by two writers previously: Norman Levine and Dorothy Livesay.[76] A friend from the Hartland years, Premier Richard Hatfield soon ensured Nowlan's appointment would outlast the usually brief tenure for writers-in-residence. The Province of New Brunswick funded the lion's share of his salary (eighty percent, according to Cook [270]) for the rest of Nowlan's life. Thus,

[75] "This disease is almost exactly like being stalked by an assassin," he wrote to publisher Clark, Irwin's Roy McSkimming (1968, ANP 40.6.38.19).

[76] Nancy Earle's 2006 dissertation, *Writers-in-residence in Canada, 1965-2000: patrons, authors, and Canadian literature,* includes sporadic reflections on Nowlan's long-term post at UNB.

Hatfield won "an unofficial poet laurate" in Nick Mount's terms (258) or "*un lutin officiel du government*," as he was addressed in a letter from Carolyn Aitken, one of Hatfield's *aides-de-camp* (1975, n. pag.). The obvious translation for *lutin officiel* is "official elf." After composing the Premier's Christmas message, Nowlan had suggested that English title for himself. Yet connotations for the French word *lutin* run, evocatively, from elf to pixie, imp, sprite, hobgoblin, puck, and gnome. His role at UNB is variously described. Cook calls him an "honorary research associate" in the Faculty of Graduate Studies (298). Toner has him "the world's oldest undergraduate" (183). It is enough to say that from 1968 on Nowlan was a respected if eccentric fixture of UNB, Fredericton, and New Brunswick. A housing provision accorded him a residence on the edge of campus: 676 Windsor Street. There, the Nowlans could receive guests in a house with a yard and room for overnight visitors, of which there were none too few. This was a major change from the tenement houses and small apartments the family had recently occupied. Arrival in Fredericton (artistic hub and "Poets' Corner of Canada"[77]) coincided with a surge in the writer's career, after writing poems on the side of journalistic work.

By the late 1960s, Nowlan could list for his Toronto publisher prominent supporters. These included Raymond Souster, Irving Layton, Milton Wilson, Louis Dudek, Hugh Garner, and Ernest Buckler (Letters to Roy MacSkimming, 1967, ANP 40.6.37.24/29). Thanks to Cogswell and others who championed the writer of rich talent but small means, Nowlan became a Guggenheim Fellow. In 1968, he used that money to become the first person in his family to return to Ireland since the Nowlans arrived in

[77] A plaque with that moniker was erected at UNB in 1947, commemorating the literary figures Bliss Carman, Charles G. D. Roberts, and Francis Sherman ("Poets' Corner").

Canada (Cook 182). That year brought a Governor General's Literary Award as well. He joked about the ceremony, where the English monarch's representative at Ottawa met "the rightful Prince of Fortara," Nowlan's mythic counterpart based on Celtic ancestry (197). The Award honoured *Bread, Wine and Salt*, a poetry collection published in Canada's centennial year. For the next two decades, no English-language New Brunswick writer would be so honoured by the Governor General.[78] In 1988, a fiction Award went to David Adams Richards, a novelist Nowlan encouraged in the early 1970s. Richards was then prominent among the young writers who sought Nowlan's counsel and friendship. Mentoring them fulfilled and transcended his official UNB duties. He developed a strong following of young Atlantic-Canadian writers: Brian Bartlett, Lindsay Buck, Eddie Clinton, Louis Cormier, Terry Crawford, Bernie MacDonald, Al Pittman, and James Stewart. Nowlan had many literary mentees, but only Richards gained comparable standing as an author. Recognizing a peer rather than student, Nowlan addressed him in one letter as "Fyodor" (Dostoevsky) and signed off "Anton" (Chekhov).[79] These grandiose codenames poke inversional fun at their own minor statures, similar to the formal titles invented through his absurdist clubs in Fredericton.

Nowlan's Russian codenames reflect the length and detail of Richards' novels of social realism (similar to those of Dostoevsky), so different from Nowlan's light touch as poet, fiction writer, and playwright (thus, a Chekhovian persona). Calling Richards "Fyodor" also references the fact that the young writer's *Blood Ties* appeared in Russian translation, a breakthrough in his career. In his biography of Richards, Tony Tremblay

[78] A French-language award went to Antonine Maillet in 1972 (Tremblay, *David Adams Richards* 321).

[79] This is the only document informing the present dissertation that is drawn from Nowlan's minor archive at UNB. The full citation is given under "Letter to David Adams Richards" in this chapter's bibliography.

sees "Fyodor" as teasing: a reference to the *Blood Ties* translation as a hack job aimed at ideological rather than literary ends. For him, Nowlan rubbed "a little salt in the wound" (241). Asserting this interpretation, Tremblay perpetuates the supposed Nowlan-Richards feud stoked by others among their circles. He ignores Nowlan's corresponding use of "Anton," which appears under the words "Fraternally and affectionately," when presenting the missive as hostile (Letter to DAR, undated, MGL33). Nowlan likely regretted that Richards, a friend and peer, had been coopted by propagandists. Tremblay leans toward feud, mistakenly but understandably. Nowlan's role as party host and poetry mentor was often complex. Alcohol fueled capricious moods and sometimes led to verbal assaults against visitors.[80] Occasional or frequent, arguments might have been inevitable for a staunchly opinionated and deeply wounded member of a small city's art scene. In Fredericton, Nowlan found friends and won a few enemies to support his growth.

The poet had led an isolated existence in Stanley and St. John, but he became socially active in Fredericton. However, his final period of residence (the late 1960s to the early 80s) differed from his years in Hartland too. This time, Nowlan did not join existing organizations but became the centre of a lively group of artists and thinkers. That role was made possible by his confidence as a celebrated poet and his willingness to welcome local writers to his home. He who had been initiated into the Masons and Knights of Pythias now instigated gatherings reflective of his personality, ludic or

[80] Spats with friends come up in Nowlan's biographies. Cook records verbal attacks against Molly Bobak and Kent Thompson (210 and 219, 230) and disputes with Walter Learning (234), Cook himself (272 and 300), and Desmond Pacey (289). Toner treats rifts with Raymond Fraser (140-41 and 269-70), Thompson (202-04), Learning (225), Jim Pride (253-54), Lorna Drew (263), and Leo Ferrari (272). The books describe Nowlan's distempers as "explosive," "cantankerous" (Cook 211); a tendency "to flip into whimsy or be maudlin" (245); "bearish mood[s]" (300); a "disputatious" disposition (Toner 225); and being "fast on the draw when […] putting someone down" (252).

brooding by turns. With the Monarchy and FES, Nowlan made others ostensible heads of those bodies: King Stewart and President Ferrari. In Fredericton, Nowlan concretized his long-standing habit of building private worlds by extending that play outward into his community. No longer a quirk to hide from a domineering father, bullying villagers, or conservative colleagues, his flamboyant imagination was suddenly celebrated by those around him. When participating in his poetic fantasies, like an imaginatively flattened planet, others confirmed his worth, validated his eccentric and self-fashioned worldview. Those who entered 676 Windsor Street were transported to another sphere of reality, as signaled by the name given to the Nowlan residence: Windsor Castle. That name affirms the place's importance as a local gathering place and mocks its invisibility in the larger world.

Parties at the humble home adopted grandiose themes that account for and follow-through on the idea of *chez* Nowlan as a whimsical court. In 1969, Nowlan wrote of a gathering at Windsor Castle to his cousin and "unofficial sister" (Toner 35) Sylvia Pride:

> We hope to have a huge party here next Saturday. I wanted to find something worthy of celebrating so this party is to commemorate the 955th anniversary of the battle of Clontarf at which the Irish defeated the Vikings. Had the invitations engraved and so on. Very impressive. The last big party was to celebrate William Blake's birthday. (ANP 40.26.4.34)

The host selects grand themes but coyly undercuts them: "and so on," "very impressive." Celebrating Blake's birthday marks him as a citizen of the poetic realm, whereas the subsequent theme party extends his fascination with world history. Selecting a millennium-old military victory, one that resulted in Celtic independence, asserts pride in cultural heritage. But his obscure choice of the ancient Battle of Clontarf is also playful. Formal invitations contrast with the tiny house that would hold the "huge" party. The

letter to Pride does not mention that Boru, leader of the Celtic army, was killed in the battle he ostensibly won. The "ruler as loser" narrative would have appealed to Nowlan, a quasi-royalist with a soft spot for history's underdogs. A 1973 gathering would celebrate the Jacobite victory in 1794's Battle of Prestonpans (Cook 242, Toner 238). The Clontarf and Prestonpans parties invoked triumphant failures. In 1794, Charles Stuart and his followers won the battle handily but lost the larger campaign. From Jacobite rebellion and Planoterrestrialism to poetry, lost causes reigned supreme at Windsor Castle.

Despite the snugness of 676 Windsor Street, it earned a place on Canada's literary map—as have Vancouver's Literary Storefront and Al Purdy's A-frame cabin in Ontario, whose stories have already been told.[81] Student writers from UNB visited Nowlan at home on a daily basis in the early 1970s, Cook reports (230). He preferred to hold court at his metaphorical Castle rather than at his office in UNB's English Department. Established local figures frequented *chez* Nowlan too. The tribe included academics and writers Elizabeth Brewster, Donald Cameron, Robert Cockburn, Robert Gibbs, John Zane, and Nancy and Bill Bauer; theatre impresario Walter Learning; philosopher Leo Ferrari; artists Tom Forestall and Bruno and Molly Bobak; Premier Richard Hatfield; medical doctor and author Nicholas Catanoy; doctor Ian Cameron; and Colonel Ian Fraser. When passing through town, John Metcalf, Patrick Lane, and Gwendolyn MacEwen dropped by. With all these comings and goings, the place took on a life of its own. Nowlan first thought to consolidate his growing coterie as The Society for St. Simeon the Mad. Plans for "pamphleteering" and "tomfoolery" under that name (Toner

[81] See Trevor Carolan's *Literary Storefront* (2015) and Paul Vermeersch's *Al Purdy A-Frame Anthology* (2009).

200) never came to fruition, but the idea anticipated FES in moniker (both being societies), by invoking altered perspectives, and in promoting non-canonical strains of Christianity. Alongside creative play, tobacco, alcohol, and spirited talk were the vital indulgences shared by the oddballs who populated Nowlan's pretend kingdom, as inhabitants, patrons, or emissaries from away. The scene, in Toner's words, mixed "the bizarre, the romantic, the intellectual and the inebriated" (192). 676 Windsor Street now honours that past as the Alden Nowlan House, home to the UNB Graduate Student Association's offices and pub. Local lore asserts that the amount of booze consumed on the premises steeply declined after it became a licensed establishment.

One Night in November 1970

Emanating from the same constellation of associates who passed through the Nowlan home, FES is said to have been created during a late-night Windsor Castle gathering on 8 November 1970.[82] In attendance were hosts Alden and Claudine, their friends Raymond and Sharon Fraser, and philosopher Leo Ferrari. No hostile tirades would come from Nowlan that night, as sometimes happened when he found himself too deep in his cups. Instead, he picked a fight with the whole round world. That battle would draw other pretend Planoterrestrialists to his side. According to Ferrari, Nowlan drunkenly interrupted a discussion between him and Sharon Fraser, regarding Ferrari's marital

[82] The date is uncertain in the historical record. On 14 June 1971, Nowlan wrote to Raymond Fraser asking, "incidentally could you possibly remember the date the society was founded? Leo says if you can't remember we'll declare it October 17, 1970 (the day he left his wife)" (ANP 40.12.24.13). The October date was a joke. Most sources use 8 November, including Ferrari's *The Earth Is Flat!* (233). Uncertain origins are compatible with FES's errant messages and ad-hoc community organizing.

woes.[83] "Leo, do you think the Earth is flat?" Nowlan interjected (Undated, ANP 30.1.31). We might imagine not only his "gentle baritone of gutturals" (Cook 152) but his very thought process obscured through the effects of Ferrari's homebrew or the house gin. Ferrari's response satisfied a rhyme. "Sure, the Earth is flat. Any fool can see that" (30.1.31). Having said this, or something like it, Ferrari attempted to reengage his curtailed conversation. But Nowlan's well-fueled enthusiasm would not stop there.

Ferrari described this spontaneous exchange for Gregory Cook during his research on Nowlan's life. A cassette tape from the audio/visual portion of Nowlan's University of Calgary archive (accession 30) records a meeting of Cook, Raymond Fraser, and Ferrari at one of Fredericton's restaurants or bars, to judge by the tape's competing background noise. Ferrari recalled the scene for Nowlan's biographer-in-the-making as follows:

> And then I went on talking to Sharon. And then he interrupted me again. And he said, "Leo, Leo, this is an important occasion." I said, "what do you mean?" He said, "we have just founded the Flat Earth Society." And we started talking about it, and we got carried away with that idea, didn't we? (Undated, ANP 30.1.31)

Carried away indeed they were—on strong spirits, the winds of inspiration, and a lofty giddiness springing from a bizarre idea that seemed so paradoxically right for the jointly technocratic and countercultural 1970s. The Flat Earth concept was likewise a good fit for Nowlan, its source: playfully oppositional, darkly melodramatic, and more attuned to ordinary human experience than the scientific achievements of his conjuncture. By 1970, communication technologies and financial institutions had produced never-before-seen

[83] Writer, editor, broadcaster Sharon Fraser, née Johnson, is a contributor to Canadian print, radio, and television journalism. She worked as editor of the *Miramichi Leader*, *Atlantic Fisherman*, *Atlantic Insight*, and *rabble.ca*; co-editor of *Canadian Housing* magazine; and as a columnist for *Spotlight, Catholic New Times*, and Halifax's *Daily News*. As commentator for CBC and CTV, she has spoken to "women's issues, fishery, culture and politics," while her university teaching has focused on Women's Studies and Journalism (see "about" Sharon Fraser, n. pag.).

levels of globalization. The North American Space Agency could congratulate itself for accomplishments in the space race, such as its 1969 photographs of our planet (taken for an astronomical sum). The comparatively earthy hippie movement had managed to loosen sexual mores and increase tolerance for unprescribed drug use, but not to disarm nuclear powers or dismantle corporate capitalism. Worldwide cultural shifts of the times may have been firmly or fuzzily in the founders' minds that November night, but Ferrari recalls they first conceived their project as "the Flat Earth Society of Fredericton" (*TEIF* 234). That moniker indicates a local club, not the transnational (though minor) resistance movement that would evolve. His quip about the Society's "auspicious" origins in the Maritimes is a grand joke: "in the large perspective of history, so many of the great beliefs have arisen in the East" (*TEIF* 233-34). A backward-or-downward-looking concept, Planoterrestrialism resists presentism and belief in historical progress. Nowlan relayed his view of the contested times for George Bowering, downplaying any personal ambition as a thought leader: "I've almost decided the best thing to do with the present is to ignore it until it goes away. It always does" (1972, ANP 40.3.15.27). In this case, however, the inebriated decision to outwit time and place by forming a local Flat Earth Society outlasted the night's revelry as well as the morning's hangover.

November 1970 and Afterward

FES's archival legacy is comprised mostly of Nowlan and Ferrari's correspondences with members. Texts for general circulation—form letters, tractates, and the Society's *Official Organ*—often go unattributed, but Nowlan and Ferrari's stylistic and intellectual signatures predominate. Claudine Nowlan's role was administrative and clerical, rather

than creative, as reflected by her title, Treasurer.[84] Sharon Fraser was named an Executive Vice-President, but archival holdings do not record any practical involvement after the Society's founding. More than for these women, FES sparked Raymond Fraser's enthusiasm, and in his lengthy correspondence with Nowlan (subject of a 1996 thesis by Winston Steeves) the project comes up repeatedly. Fraser addressed letters to potential recruits as well as one to the *Montreal Star*, in February 1971, in his guise as Chairman of the Board. The letter is held in his own UNB archives. Therein, he suggested that the "third or fourth" of the televised American moon landings represented one more in a series of mere "moon simulations":

> And to make matters worse, highly informed sources tell me that this time they switched the operation from the Nevada Desert to Newfoundland! Canadian soil. Are we to believe that Newfoundland is the moon? The specific location was inland from Port aux Basques, I've been informed. Barren territory, a treeless wasteland, the perfect location for a good moon shot. The program was monitored through a "tracking station" in Nova Scotia, and thence to the TV sets of a captive world.
>
> Why doesn't Ottawa protest? Everyone knows by now. Ottawa doesn't protest against Washington. Nor do politicians care two hoots about the people of the earth, nor the earth itself; and it's the same from the four corners across this vast and soon to be desolate surface. (Letter to the *Montreal Star*, 5 Feb. 1971)

This letter, like many FES documents, uses surface jokes about the Earth's shape and playful improvisations on conspiracy theory themes to convey serious views.

Whether or not the moon landings occurred is irrelevant to the intent of Fraser's letter; more importantly, he expresses a protectionist ethos as an Atlantic-Canadian, Canadian, and human being worried over the consequences of a rapidly evolving

[84] Ferrari and C. Nowlan signed the 1973 "Financial Statement" with their titles attached (RFF 1.2.15). The Society had raised just under one-hundred dollars in dues. Spending on postage, stationery, and printing left reserves of less than thirty dollars after sixteen months of operations. The "Statement" confirms FES's grass-roots status. It shows too that diligent records were kept—because the small amounts of money involved, like the Society's underlying messages, cloaked in humour, were important to the leadership.

Anthropocene, although the term would not be widely adopted until after the year 2000 (Zalasiewicz 178). His letter pokes fun at eastern Canada too, calling the Newfoundland location specified an isolated "wasteland." Never depicted as literally "barren" in Fraser's fictions like *The Bannonbridge Musicians* (1978), the Miramichi region he knows so well stills fails to cultivate his frustrated narrators. They turn to drink for spiritual nourishment that seems unavailable elsewhere. Living as far from economic opportunities as they do, his characters feel stationed close to the periphery or on a remote satellite in comparison to metropolitan centres like Montreal and Toronto. Canada in turn is vulnerable to American dominance in Fraser's *Montreal Star* letter. As a Canadian national, and possibly nationalist, he uses a seeming entertainment to echo the anti-Americanism of his time. Al Purdy gathered more prominent Canadian writers than Fraser, including Nowlan, into his 1968 anthology *The New Romans.* Most contributors critiqued the U.S.A.'s internal flaws and external engagements. For his part, Fraser casts NASA's lunar conquest as a hoax (which his letter is, in earnest) and proxy for U.S. imperialism. He reminds us of the limited role that country should have on a shared continent, dares us not to take that demand seriously. He calls the common world a "captive world," bringing entertainment and imprisonment together in a sordid sort of union. The note of dread closing his letter, predicting global devastation, withstands the Flat Earth humour that frames it.

Fraser's FES contributions were minimal, compared to those of Nowlan and Ferrari. This was partly because he lived in Montreal when FES was establishing itself. There, he edited "the *Mad* magazine of literary periodicals," *Intercourse*, and wrote copy for the tabloid *Midnight* (Toner 178). Before he relocated to Blacks Harbour, New

Brunswick, his Montreal P/O Box was the Society's mail drop, because the founders felt a cosmopolitan address would lend the pseudo-organization a patina of legitimacy. They were not above accommodating anti-Maritime or pro-cosmopolitan bias in service of their Society's hoped for expansion.[85] Although a co-founder, Fraser formalized his marginal role in FES by granting Nowlan and Ferrari his proxy on decisions about accepting or rejecting applicants and the broader direction of the Society (Toner 263; Letter to Nowlan, 25 Nov. 1970, ANP 40.12.6.33). Officially Chairman of the Board, Fraser seems to have received FES form letters as updates rather than solicitations of input. Despite not being an active administrator, the Chairman appears as a signatory, with Nowlan and Ferrari, on some documents sent out from Fredericton.

That inclusion does not apply to the female cofounders, Claudine and Sharon. Their names are largely absent in the Society's historical record, which affirms Toner's view of FES as a boys' club. But he exaggerates the group's maleness. Female members include Nancy Bauer, Cynthia Beaumont (Secretary to the President), Molly Bobak, Elizabeth Brewster, Lorna Drew (then Registrar and now Ferrari's widow), Heather Kirk, and Gwendolyn MacEwen. Criticizing the erasure of Sharon Fraser from FES history, Toner calls her "the only woman present at the founding" (206). Saying so, he ignores Claudine Nowlan's contributions, from her presence at the founding (*TEIF* 233) to clerical tasks she shared with her husband (Toner 264).[86] My essay privileges Ferrari and

[85] Using Fraser's P/O Box was proposed in 1971. Nowlan to Fraser: "Leo also suggests that Montreal might sound better as a site for the head office—since he feels and I'm inclined to agree with him that people tend to suspect that groups with head offices in small towns like Fredericton are crank outfits" (1 March 1971, ANP 40.12.24.6). FES mail would later arrive c/o St. Thomas University and the offices of Dr. Leo Ferrari.

[86] Toner calls it "a fraternity that kept Sharon Fraser and Gwendolyn MacEwen's involvement marginal and Nowlan, Fraser, and Ferrari at the centre" (221). He fails to show these women desired more involvement than they had and, oddly, links Fraser's lesser FES role to her absence during Nowlan's funeral (303).

Nowlan, because they completed more (playful) work than the rest of the membership combined. They represented FES in public forums more often than others. Nonetheless, the Frasers and Claudine deserve credit for helping to launch this prankster's association. Nowlan and Ferrari authored many pages of the Society's textual legacy, but those writings grew out of conversations with a larger number of people. Although Ferrari became the ostensible head of this public body, Nowlan was urged to take the "enviable title" of Symposiarch for himself, because he had "presided over" the discussions behind the inception and development of FES (Raymond Fraser to Nowlan, undated, ANP 40.12.6.14).

Whereas Fraser's minor role in literature seems permanently fixed, and possibly justified (SP 22), Nowlan and Ferrari merit more varied readings than sources about them provide. FES is one means of bringing them into the present with a range of artistic and philosophical texts in tow. One can appreciate that their entertaining Flat Earth joke had a serious side, a view which counters Toner, who finds their "academic society" had a concomitant "frivolous side" (23 and 206).[87] Nowlan's still-inflationary term "august" (Garwood 294) is a more appropriate descriptor than "academic." Toner's view of the authentic/comedic dynamic of FES discourse is inverted. He likely detected a dominant serious note for the project due to the earnest pose of Planoterrestrialism and because sincere efforts went into promoting it. Days after creating his Society, Nowlan realized the amount of work developing a *real* fake Society, a *true* hoax, would require. "My Gawd," he wrote to Fraser, "maybe we'll have to draw up bylaws!" (26 Nov. 1970, RFF

[87] Toner may be the source for Neilson's view of FES as "academic" (SP 116). Neither writer's summary accords with Garwood, who puts humour before earnestness when writing of Planoterrestrialism as "a tongue-in-cheek idea with some serious philosophical implications" (284).

1.2.15). FES popped up at two meetings of the Learned Societies in the 1970s, which might have led Toner to overemphasize its "academic" element. These took place in 1971 at Memorial University, in St. John's, and in 1977 at UNB. Ferrari promoted the group at these meetings, compromising his role as an expert on Augustine by making room for FES's President. Appearing as a Planoterrestrialist at the precursor to today's Congress of the Humanities was not only a jester invading the scholarly realm. FES shares much with the humanistic philosophy Ferrari promoted, as elaborated in this dissertation's second chapter. Among the texts produced under the Society's auspices, its aims best relay the sincere undertones offsetting the surface lampoon. The aims were foundational to the Society's philosophical brand of Planoterrestrialism and originally drafted by Nowlan. For those reasons, they are discussed at length below. Readings of the metaphors and figures that animate Nowlan's poetic world follow.

Regarding the Aims

Surprisingly, FES declared aims say nothing specific regarding the Earth's shape. In brief, they promote tactile senses over analytical reasoning, intellectual liberty over docile conformity, and metaphorical truth over material fact. The aims first appeared in a letter from Nowlan to Fraser written only ten days after FES formed. Before relaying the aims he proposed, Nowlan stated the Society should have a "tone of mock seriousness" (Letter to Raymond Fraser, 18 Nov. 1970, RFF 1.2.15). Accordingly, the aims strive for philosophical import and employ the plainspoken style found in Nowlan's other writings. Those seemingly sincere effects defy the spirit of send-up and mockery that would otherwise define the Society. Its aims reappeared in various forms over the 1970s. Their

order and themes remained unchanged, although some details and wordings were altered. The first major public airing of the aims came with Nowlan's 1972 *Atlantic Insight* article about Ferrari. "Dr. Ferrari and the Flat Earth Society" was reprinted in the first anthology of his journalistic prose, *Double Exposure* (1978); therein, the aims read as follows:

1. To restore man's confidence in the validity of his own perceptions. For more than fifteen hundred years man has been blinded by metaphysics and coerced into denying the evidence of his senses. The Flat Earth Society stands for a renewed faith in the veracity of sense experience.

2. To combat the fallacious deification of the sphere which, ever since Galileo dramatized the heresies of Copernicus, has thwarted western thought.

3. To spearhead man's escape from his metaphysical and geometrical prison by asserting unequivocally that all science, like all philosophy and all religion, is essentially sacramental and, therefore, all reality, as man verbalizes it, is ultimately metaphorical. (138-39)

Importantly, the author offers no elaborating commentary on the aims in his article, leaving readers to make their own reflections. That is in keeping with FES's participatory spirit. The 1972 rendition of the aims merely polishes the initial draft, which Fraser received in Nowlan's 1970 letter.[88] The letter shows Nowlan penned the aims himself. "Here is a rough draft of what I thought might serve as 'The Aims of the Society,'" he wrote before relating them. Afterward: "but maybe you'll think that's *too* solemn" (RFF 1.2.15). Nowlan crafted the aims independently but likely articulated concepts from inebriated talks with his friends. Before taking up the content of the aims, and before addressing their relevance to Nowlan's poetry, variants between the draft and first

[88] Nowlan's draft aims read: "1. To restore man's confidence in the validity of his own perceptions. For more than fifteen hundred years men have been coerced into denying the evidence of their natural senses. We say: Whatever common sense tells you is true. / 1. [*sic*] To combat the fallacious deification of the circle which ever since Galileo dramatized the heresies of Copernicus has crippled where it has not aborted Western thought. / 3. To spearhead man's escape from his geometric prison by acknowledging that all science, like all philosophy and all religion, is essentially sacramental and metaphorical" (Letter to Raymond Fraser, 18 Nov. 1970, RFF 1.2.15). To these, Fraser responded approvingly: "A few more like that and we all *will* believe the Earth is flat" (25 Nov. 1970, ANP 40.12.6.33).

published renderings merit consideration. Those 1970 and 1972 versions are my focus, because they appear in documents Nowlan authored himself.[89]

Changes between 1970 and 1972 made the aims palatable to wider audiences than Nowlan anticipated when writing to Fraser. Moving from draft to publication, the first aim's claim that "for more than fifteen hundred years, *men* have been coerced…" altered to read "*man* has been," meaning "all people." Both choices present male defaults for humankind, but the generic term "man" did not, at that time, exclude women as Ferrari stated in his Flat Earth manuscript (*TEIF* 220-21). From a contemporary perspective, one wonders why the Society did not use gender-neutral terms.[90] Although "men" was altered to "man" by 1972, the possessive pronoun shifted from "their" to "his." So, if feminist concern motivated certain edits it had limited application. Other text was added or deleted through revision. The first aim's "men" are "coerced into denying" their senses in draft form but not "blinded by metaphysics." That 1972 addition marks Ferrari's philosophical contributions. What others lead us to deny are "natural senses" in Nowlan's draft. Future

[89] Out of scope for this chapter, versions of the aims appearing in Ferrari's *The Earth Is Flat!* and a FES brochure from 1977 show the President's influence. His manuscript's version of the aims vilify not Copernicus and Galileo but the "sly deceptions" of the fourth century BC Greek thinker Eudoxus of Cnidus (*TEIF* 240). The book's version of the aims resembles the 1972 version more closely than that found in the brochure. "Introducing—The Flat Earth Society" pushes back the start of Globularist delusions from fifteen-hundred years in the past to "more than two thousand years" ago; replaces Copernicus and Galileo with Pythagoras (who "warped" rather than *thwarted* "western thought"); and uses the terms "mystical and poetical," displacing sacrament and metaphor (ANP 40.12.7.4). References to early Greek thinkers draw on Ferrari's professional knowledge of ancient Philosophy. They also move FES iconoclasm away from a critique of the Church to which he belonged, one led by descendants of the religious authorities who violently suppressed Galileo's views. Invoking ancient astronomers Eudoxus and Pythagoras rather than their early modern counterparts places Globularism closer to the roots of western culture than do other versions of the second aim, while making the same point about Globularism as arbitrary ideology rather than objective fact. One sees Ferrari's influence in these historical references, whereas the "mystical and poetical" spirit of FES was jointly developed by Nowlan, Ferrari, and other members.

[90] Ferrari writes: "As more than one ancient author has observed, man has been made the only upright animal in order that he may behold the heavens, meditate upon the Great Scheme of things and upon his place in it all. From these ponderings come man's self-image and sense of identity. In using the word 'man' in this context, it should be obvious that I have no intention of excluding the feminine part of human nature" (*TEIF* 220-21). Due to concerns over gender equality, as editor I moved the final sentence from the author's endnotes to his main text. Note that Ferrari did not qualify his use of "he" as inclusive.

renditions did not use this term. Perhaps it seemed redundant in retrospect. “What physical senses are *un*natural,” the leadership may have asked themselves. Unnatural thoughts belong to Globularists, those who lead us astray. Another change: only aim one’s draft ends, “We say: whatever common sense tells you is true.” This might have sounded too basic to convey sophisticated interrogations of our relationship to reality. But the term “common sense” returns in later versions of the aims (see footnote 28). It embeds a useful paradox. “Common sense” has multiple meanings, including technical meanings in Philosophy (*sensus communis* in Latin). It can indicate widely shared notions, basic reasoning, or sensory experience. Those applications overlap, but the aim states most neglect sensation and good sense in favour of inherited concepts. The 1972 conclusion promotes “renewed faith in the veracity of *sense experience*.” The version clarified the Society’s claims for embodiment but lost some of its punch, later revived by Ferrari stressing the “common sense” of aberrant ideas. Nowlan wrote the article with the revised aims, but Ferrari is his subject. Their voices do not divide neatly. That is not surprising or regrettable. Shared enthusiasm for intellectual play led them to so collaborate closely on FES.

Nowlan’s draft aims are numbered one, one, three. I read this oddity as a typographical error, a regular feature of first drafts and epistolary writing. The numbering error is mentioned here in place of other incidental variants, such as those related to comma use, that do not affect intended messaging. More importantly, the second aim in draft form decries western “deification of the circle” rather than “the sphere.” This shift from roundness to sphericity is crucial. Flat Earths could very well be round, as in the disc-shaped Earth featured on the logo that the United Nations adopted in 1946: “a map

of the world representing an azimuthal equidistant projection centred on the North Pole," according to the UN's website ("UN Logo and Flag"). This dissertation's next chapter discusses problems with spherical models of the planet. For now, suffice to say that after further thought FES would challenge sphericity rather than circularity. The subsequent phrase in the 1972 version of aim two was revised as follows: "the fallacious deification of the circle which […] has ~~crippled where it had not aborted~~ [insert: 'thwarted'] western thought." Replacing "crippled" and "aborted" with "thwarted" makes the aim more neutral, so that its conceptual point comes across more clearly without viscerally loaded terms. The change steers the Society towards Nowlan's style of expressing unexpected thoughts in plain language, in both prose and poetry. So, sometime between 1970 and 1972, FES leaders may have realized that employing "aborted" and "crippled" as negative metaphors would not serve their message and could create unintended associations for an increasingly diverse audience.

Another change strengthened the rhetorical power of the third aim. Its draft sought merely to "acknowledge" sacramental and metaphorical truth. The published version saw FES "asserting unequivocally" the same. The 1972 version goes on to expand the final aim, as originally composed by Nowlan. It declares not only science "sacramental" and "metaphorical," alongside "all philosophy and all religion," but includes "all reality, as man verbalizes it" as well. Some may think the third aim strives to debunk science as sacramental, to defrock religion as metaphorical. But the phrase "all reality, as man verbalizes it" invokes potent Christian ideas of word made flesh, of logos. The choice of the verb "verbalizes" (in place of alternatives like "perceives," "enumerates," or "analyzes") seems to make physical and elevate, not degrade and

deflate, expressions of human understanding. While seeing some increases in rhetorical potency and conceptual scope, the final aim, like the others, changed little over the years. Some may think a lack of growth in FES principles exposes its immature, insincere nature. Its leaders might counter by claiming divine or earthly afflatus had guided Nowlan's hand when he wrote them up.

Lingering over minor variants is justified, because the aims express the foundational philosophy of FES, just as the variants show the care that went into drafting that philosophy. Detailing such edits also indicates the fluidity of the organization, even as it was set down on paper. Member lists, roles, and policies shifted over time. Having signaled the Society's malleable super-structure, it will not be necessary, going forward, to provide equivalent information for other areas of the Society's governance. My focus is the Society's intellectual performance, not its administration. FES only truly existed on paper anyhow or, more accurately, in the hearts and minds of its adherents. Following the group's valuation of sacrament and metaphor as the organizing principle of human endeavours—namely science, philosophy, religion, and (implicitly for these creative authors) art—Nowlan and Ferrari kept the Society aloft as a transitory, conceptual experiment. A meeting of members was dreamed of but never organized. Individual members communed through mail and by keeping FES membership cards on their persons or by hanging certificates on their walls. The aims were rallying points: broad concepts, not dogmatic prescriptions. Members interpreted them differently, but the aims provided coherence for a nebulous project. They convey philosophical concepts rather than jokes; that fact outweighs particulars of the claims. In that, the Society complicates comedic intent, makes jest of sincerity and vice-versa. This point mitigates my regret that

the present chapter allows space enough only to indicate some possible interpretations of each aim. Interested readers will undoubtedly dream up alternatives to those discussed below.

Across all versions, FES's first aim promotes physical senses as our first and most trustworthy source of knowledge. It makes that point while playing with ideas of faith and fact. Once more, the 1972 published version (relied on henceforth) reads as follows:

> To restore man's confidence in the validity of his own perceptions. For more than fifteen hundred years man has been blinded by metaphysics and coerced into denying the evidence of his senses. The Flat Earth Society stands for a renewed faith in the veracity of sense experience. (Nowlan, "Dr. Ferrari" 138-39)

Although stridently backward-looking and philosophical, the aim loosely relates not only to English philosophical empiricism, but also to a literary theory disseminated by the Black Mountain School's leader Charles Olson. In the 1960s, he promoted *proprioception* (bodily awareness), a scientific term he appropriated into the poetic realm.[91] For Olson, writers and readers should produce and receive poetry with their entire physical beings; it is not strictly an oral and auditory art. Without mentioning literature, the first FES aim urges us to engage in immersive, embodied journeys through the world. Renewing sensory knowledge comes at the expense of intellectual connections between interior and external realms. In some ways related to Olson's doctrine, the aim refers to the standard five senses rather than the overall bodily knowing one could describe as a sixth sense (*proprioception*). In its humorous aspect, this FES aim assumes that because the ground often looks flat to the eye, the Earth must have planar form. From

[91] For the spiritual and literary theory underwriting Olson's poems, readers can access his lectures and essays through the volumes *Projective Verse* (Totem, 1959) and *Collected Prose* (California UP, 1997). *Proprioception* is discussed most specifically in the 1965 book of that title from the publisher Four Seasons.

the St. Thomas/UNB campus, Ferrari pointed to the level horizon encircling Fredericton for a CBC television crew, supposedly proving his Flat Earth theory. His sample size was absurdly small, of course. The gag was betrayed by goofy music playing as background to the camera's pan.[92] Still and all, the joke raises questions. For one: why take a similarly small set of photographs that show a spherical Earth (or at least curved edges) as conclusive? If "faith" in senses must be renewed, humanity's commitments must have been misdirected toward intellect and authority. The first aim uses a trinity of empirical terms: "validity," "evidence," and "veracity." The word "faith" is a tactical disruption. It relays the physical and yet spiritual vision FES used to counter scientism, secularism, as well as acceptance of second-hand knowledge and deference to experts instead of our own perceptions.

The first aim makes a serious point: it is all too tempting for us to live as if the world equated to its representational models or to interpretations found in textbooks. If "everyone knows" the Earth is spherical, we should ask how this knowledge has been acquired. If we believe in a spherical Earth because the idea reached us via credible specialists, then that "belief" equates to unscientific "faith." The first aim argues not for blind faith in Planoterrestrialism but for first-person investigatory research about the nature of our planet. Confoundingly, the anti-scientific perspective of Flat Earthism is cast here as a return to science's basic principles. These demand careful observation, critical thought, and rigorous testing of phenomena rather than adopting common beliefs, which are too often folkloric. Do-it-yourself experiments have more scientific integrity than does reliance on the priestly expertise of others. Driving that point home, the aim

[92] The segment ran on *Take 60* in 1974. CBC archives staff digitized the episode in support of my research.

ends by playfully combining secular and religious terms: “veracity” and “faith,” proof and the unprovable. It pretends to strike from the record one and a half millennia of scientific progress, presented here as bad dream rather than a period of illumination. FES iconoclasm could be read as conservative rather than progressive, insofar as the Society expresses nostalgia for lost time and the roots of human knowledge. But the aim also fosters deeply tactile and individual, and therefore unconventional, explorations of the world around us at the expense of received wisdom.

The second stated mission of the Flat Earth Society takes aim at a pair of notable astronomers in the history of science, whose teachings have become second-hand gospel. While shifting from sensory knowledge to intellectual liberty, the second aim rejects supposed progress stemming from both seventeenth-century science and the subsequent European Enlightenment with its revival of classical rationalism:

> To combat the fallacious deification of the sphere which, ever since Galileo dramatized the heresies of Copernicus, has thwarted western thought. (Nowlan, “Dr. Ferrari” 139)

Here lies an example of the Society’s seamless overlay of gravity and clowning. The weighty reference to Galileo and Copernicus takes a deliberate misstep. Those astronomers argued for heliocentrism, our planet’s shape aside. Presumably, any form of Earth can orbit or spin, whether formed like a pancake, tabernacle, or turtle. Further, cosmologists settled on the idea of a spherical planet long before the Enlightenment. Even so, condemnation of a “thwarted” civilization’s “fallacious deification” still stands. These words name a real crisis in scathing, symbolic terms. Two pioneers of modern science are presented as mythologized figures (who committed an idolatrous “deification of the sphere”) rather than objective truth-seekers. Copernicus and Galileo, here, are

ideological rather than heroic, despite their courageous challenges to proverbial wisdom and religious authority. FES usurps the noble outlier role in its secular era by countering the modern view of the Earth, which had become as indisputable in 1970 as an Earth-centred universe in sixteenth-century Europe. Between its few lines, the second aim promotes rebellion against convention. Although the Society formed a collective, it was a collective steeped in dissent. It encouraged departure from the herd and solicited individual takes on its non-ideology. The second aim does not say whether any form of deification is "fallacious" or if planetary sphericity alone is targeted for dismantling. FES leaders praised eccentric views stated by members. They did not put forward a "one true way" that would merit evangelizing. All three FES aims have more to do with countering established ideas than with building new thought systems.

The Society's third and final aim begins with a bracing return to aims one and two, before charging into new conceptual territory. It moves from opposing metaphysics (in favour of sensory perception) and slavish mass belief (in favour of bold individualism) to asserting that metaphorical truth is the only valid form of human knowledge. The third aim reads:

> To spearhead man's escape from his metaphysical and geometrical prison by asserting unequivocally that all science, like all philosophy and all religion, is essentially sacramental and, therefore, all reality, as man verbalizes it, is ultimately metaphorical. (Nowlan, "Dr. Ferrari" 139)

In layered terms, the aim denies any human endeavor can be objective, unmediated, and value-neutral. It proposes that accepting this truth frees us from imprisoning certainty, because the world is made of fluid propositions, not hard facts. Suspicion of science as it is practiced—totalizing, over-confident, falsely objective—promotes an ideal form of science, where facts and findings are symbols pointing to larger realities and, ultimately,

to the need for transformation and transcendence. At their best, scientists knowingly operate on a sacramental basis. While hostile to blind conformity, the FES founders were not nihilists or anarchists. Their idea that representations of reality are necessarily metaphorical was a positive view, rather than a detraction of science, religion, or philosophy. Recall that Fraser, Nowlan, and Ferrari all wrote poetry. Casting scientific investigation—alongside moral knowledge and religious faith—as a spiritual practice or metaphorical art in some ways returns to medieval and premodern modes of thought. The aim demands humility and flexibility from readers, regarding their ideas and worldviews. When placing science, philosophy, and religion on equal footing, the aim implicitly includes art as another sacramental pursuit, given that its authors were creative writers doing creative work. The aim does not specifically diminish or elevate its named categories of knowing, seen here as acts and rites. Instead, it dismantles hierarchies separating these forms of knowledge. Doing so, it de- and re-sacralizes religion, science, philosophy, and linguistic expression. Simultaneously, and in keeping with a paradoxical verbal act, the third aim invokes the semiotic gap that informed literary theories still emerging in the early 1970s.

As explored in journals like *Diacritics*, *Critical Inquiry*, and *boundary 2*, 1970s North American literary postmodernism built itself upon the semiotic gap. Following Saussure, European philosophers Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and others pointed to the elusive connection between word and referent (between linguistic and phenomenal realms) for evidence of the constructed nature of truth and the arbitrariness of signs, values, and power. Heidegger had more faith in language's productive power than his deconstructionist offspring did. He saw poets like Hölderlin

bridging the semiotic gap: mediating *physis* (thing) and *logos* (word) or "ground (*Grund*) and abyss (*Abgrund*)" (Albert Cook, n. pag.). The German-language metaphors of ground and abyss are coincidental to Nowlan's Flat Earth play, but they fit well with his world-tilting project. His creativity offers a plain-language and Atlantic-Canadian alternative to Heidegger's literary-theoretical, European perspective. In Nowlan's represented or, better, created realities, the world itself modulates between mundane and magical poles. The poet's speakers are modest spectators to that process, not intermediaries. The writer usually poses as a reporter or diarist, not a creator or magician. Fabulations that decorate otherwise quotidian poems do not appear as shadows from alternate realms. Seemingly hallucinated images appear every bit as substantial and even unremarkable as familiar properties of the same depicted/created worlds. Another assessment: mundane occurrences are as miraculous and worthy of reporting as high-flown visions. The point remains. Nowlan's registers do not separate oddity from familiarity. Each is expressed through metaphor, if the FES aims have it right. Nowlan's literary consciousness conveys surprising thought in flattened tones. He likewise wrote his fanciful FES aims with a straight face, covering wild ideas with unwavering frankness.

Nowlan's Verse Worlds

In a time of increased visibility for conceptual writing, language poetry, and Indigenous literature, Nowlan may have fallen behind cultural preferences and critical fashions because his disruptive imagination can appear less conspicuous than realist elements in his art. In other words, this creative thinker can be mistaken for a conservative writer—and could be ignored for that reason. I will showcase his dizzying idiosyncrasies and

offbeat humour, traits that complicate what might otherwise seem to be straightforward biographical writing. Moreover, what we might read as flamboyant confabulations are depicted within realistic settings and through plain language. That strain of Nowlan's work is studied below with reference to FES endorsements of embodied knowing, non-normative thought, and the sacramental/metaphorical nature of human knowledge and verbal expression. A FES research project and not the author's varied corpus inspires these emphases. In fact, Nowlan came to regret the attention FES attracted, when it threatened to overshadow his poetry. Not compromising his legitimacy, I raise up FES within the Alden Nowlan literary canon. Bringing the Society from a dismissed part of his work into public view mirrors his project of showing "sympathy for outcasts and underdogs" (Bartlett 24). Letting readers encounter his interior life lent an aesthetic component to that larger, moral project.

Looking for overlaps between FES and Nowlan's poetry, one can turn first to the second poem he called "Scratchings."[93] It offers six unrelated, lineated aphorisms under a title that lets these remain notes for poems, gathered into a form of anti-poem. The third proffered truth in "Scratchings" relates directly to FES. It states: "No one is more / pitifully foolish / than the person / who attempts to prove / by argument / that the world is round" (*CP* 472). The lines are tonally matter of fact, yet their claim defies standard expectations. Debasing Globularism and only implicitly dignifying Flat Earth views, the prosaic stanza reads like another FES aim. The poem appeared in 1974's *I'm A Stranger Here Myself*. By then, the playful Society had gained serious traction in terms of

[93] The first is in 1971's *Between Tears and Laughter* (*CP* 391-92). The poems share list formats and aphoristic tones but contain entirely separate content.

membership and exposure. “Scratchings” echoes one of the trolling maneuvers of FES: adopting a flagrant position to provoke misdirected ire from those who would dare oppose them. Persons who counter Flat Earth views with logic, the poem says, reveal certain weaknesses. They feel superior to others and yet remain susceptible to practical jokes and hoaxes, despite apparent investments in intellect. FES left an imprint on Nowlan’s literary output, then; more interestingly, the Society’s aims subtly resonate with patterns of meaning in his poetry. Below, instances of poetic play show his viewpoint was figuratively planoterrestrial: richly embodied, eccentric, more metaphoric than realistic. The author presents childhood memories that are emblematic of his potent, unique, and transformative visions. Recovering his child-self also elevates one of society’s so-called losers. Children generally occupy lower tiers of cultural hierarchies; that is especially so for young Nowlan, a poor, uneducated, and ostracized boy from rural Nova Scotia. As an adult, he maintained an outsider position and immunity to conformity or banality, as will be seen in the poem “Golf” and in poems that depict or address friends who helped flesh-out the imaginative kingdom he created in Fredericton and across Atlantic Canada.

Nowlan’s texts stimulate readers’ senses through convincing and surprising depictions. These testify to one person’s careful, if highly subjective, observations. The first aim of FES, then, overlaps with Nowlan’s writing. Making room for readers’ impressions, Nowlan merges clarity of expression with opaque images. FES hijinks work this way. “Flat Earth” is easier said than described. His Society offered no singular image of the planet’s physical form. References to “the Edge” or “Abysmal Chasm” are darkly evocative, not transparently descriptive. Poems about childhood memories likewise use

clear language to capture obscure perceptions. “The Mosherville Road” opens with these lines: “It is nowhere so dark / as in the country / where I was born” (*CP* 204). The first two lines sound quaint in isolation: “It is nowhere so dark / as in the country.” A startling turn follows. Moving from pastoral to gothic tones, the third line reveals a metaphoric and not only literal darkness. It descends from a deep to a deeper shade of dark, one that might persist in daylight hours. Across three lines, the phrasing is straightforward and colloquial, mellow rather than dramatic. The already spare writing becomes further pared down, even as meaning expands. The first line contains one two-syllable and four monosyllabic words; line two has one two-syllable and three monosyllabic words; next, four monosyllabic words stand alone. Maintaining a beat of two stresses per line, the passage effects a syllabic countdown as memory approaches the zero-ground of homeplace. The lines end with their most specific words. These make a statement unto themselves, in an adjective/noun/verb (or adjective/noun/adjective chiastic) construction: “dark country born.” That cobbled phrase would fit an experimental writer, whose surface language is as tricky or evasive as Nowlan’s meanings. But his plainspoken verses have ambiguities as well. The common word “country” joins Canada with the countryside outside Windsor, N.S. These dual meanings tease regional and national layers of interpretation; neither take precedence. Subtleties like this inflect Nowlan’s colloquial voice. He wrote in a relentlessly direct style, having developed his craft both as a newspaperman and creative writer. Even though the language of “Mosherville Road” is accessible, its utter darkness coaxes but does not focus a reader’s sense of sight. That tactic equates to the provocation of declaring the Earth flat and then leaving potential FES recruits to explore and announce their own latent Planoterrestrialism.

Further down "The Mosherville Road," the speaker remembers making his way along a rural route as a child at night. All but blind, he felt keenly aware of ditches falling away on either side: edges of a narrow world. The child holds up a hand and cannot see it ("saw nothing") in the staggering dark (*CP* 204). Reading, our minds' eyes search for a hand that appears disappeared. The poem's word "hand" (204) signals that extremity's invisibility, eerily suggests its absence. Nowlan's defamiliarizing non-image is captivating, because it depicts the emotions of one who feels lost and ineffectual. The absent visual image corresponds to inarticulateness about a difficult state, given that same hand will be an instrument of expression in later years, writing and typing. Sensory recollection advances the adult speaker's understanding. The poem relives the scene and lives it more deeply than was possible then. Nowlan closes: "it wasn't until tonight / almost twenty years / later I began to realize / how much I was afraid" (204). Recollection of strong emotions, and moreover of childhood, participates in the Wordsworth tradition of contemplative romanticism, where "emotion recollected in tranquillity […] by a species of reaction" comes to "actually exist in the mind" of the working poet (Wordsworth 307). The earlier English and later Canadian poet had similar methods, then, but with different results. Lingering fear lends a darker cast to Nowlan's poem than one usually finds in Wordsworth's spirited lyricism. Another poem recalls an illuminating vision: "A Night in 1938, and the Night After." Accustomed to oil lamps, Nowlan's child-self sees the introduction of electric light to his home as divine. Brightness, like darkness, is described indirectly. The "Queen of Heaven" descends, brings all the diversion required for an evening's bliss. "This was not light / to see by, this was / light to marvel at," the poem states (*CP* 577). No major advance in lighting

technology has occurred since the spread of electricity, which arrived late in Stanley. Today's readers share the boy's wonder, however. Better to see the electric age from his perspective than to follow the poem's adults into figurative darkness. They take the light for granted, play cards by it. Inwardly, the child rages. Like the man creating the poem, the boy stands apart from those who lack poetic appreciation for what we see as miraculous or mundane, depending on one's perspective. A similar gap sets Globularists at odds with Planoterrestrialists in a FES context.

"Mosherville Road" and "A Night in 1938…" subsume sharply felt impressions in vague images. Figuratively blinded by darkness or light, the poet's childhood persona was intensely engaged with the world and just as inwardly aware. "Blueberries, Strawberries, and Wintergreen" exemplifies those sensitivities. Its first two numbered sections precisely describe physical acts. The entire opening stanza runs as follows:

> When I rub a blueberry
> between my fingers
> it turns black—I discovered this
> thirty years ago
> yet never tire
> of performing
> the miracle. (*CP* 210)

Tactile and visual images lead to an invocation of divinity ("the miracle"). Toyed with rather than consumed, the berries still play a sacramental role for the poet's child and adult selves, both astonished by the physical world. ("Sacramental," recall, is a key term in Nowlan's third FES aim.) The poem's next section does not tempt readers with another curious (or miraculous) experiment. It gives clear directives from a rural connoisseur:

> The way to eat wild strawberries
> is to pick one,
> crack it between your teeth
> and let it dissolve

on your tongue before
picking another. (210)

Sound and taste commingle in this stanza. The tactile/aural image ("crack") is sharp and specific, while flavour goes undescribed. The poem savours its fruit nonetheless, giving readers conceptual time for wordless encounters with the taste of freshly picked wild strawberries. A delightfully morbid coda follows upon the described ingestion method: "These are a delicacy / that must be eaten alive" (210). Once again, Nowlan invokes communion, this time via material nutrients that metaphorically pulse with life. His version of sacrament is tactile and non-normative, in keeping with the FES aims; thus, Nowlan offers himself up as an exception to his Christian heritage and his secular era. The freshness as aliveness metaphor leads us down an imaginative path, away from physical descriptions. We enter Nowlan's childhood imaginary, a place full of stimulations that are constantly overwhelming to the not yet inured and still uncalloused senses and sensibilities of youth. The tiny wild strawberries practically palpitating at the heart of the poem exemplify Nowlan's insistence on the immediate and the singular. Importantly, he instructs us to consume but one berry at a time.

The poem's third section lends to wintergreen's "berries" (properly capsules) frightening anatomical qualities. Note the shift of verb tense at the colon below, where the break between lines four and five transports us to the scene established first as only a memory:

When I was five
I filled my hand
with wintergreen
berries:
there is a wound in each
where they joined the plant
like a tiny mouth

but with jagged edges. (*CP* 210-11)

In this final section, the poetic register does not alter despite various shifts. Tense change moves us from adult to child consciousness. The image after the colon is bizarre but reported in the same even-handed style as previous lines. Unflinching qualities of the speaker's voice enhance the spookiness of his telling. Berries with mouths are uncanny, all the more so when the mouths are wounds. In the penultimate line above, the "mouth" on each berry is compared to wounds through simile, not metaphor. The former device can create imaginative distance that might dilute Nowlan's strange vision. But this simile gives way to a grotesque and extended metaphor:

and when I felt
all the mouths
of the berries
nibbling my palm
I was afraid they
were eating me
and threw them down. (211)

The mouths' "jagged edges" (wounds compounding wound) become teeth. The transformation seems fanciful but literalizes dental metaphors already in use by botanists. Within the poem, the berry/wound/mouth description manifests in a tactile sensation that bleeds into its narrative. When the boy acts out a passing fancy, poetic flare invades reality. Simile becomes metaphor, becomes literal when he feels the fruits biting his hand and drops them. The device is sometimes called extended metaphor. The nightmarish daydream of berries biting back puts a tingle in the reader's palm, even if she does not let the book containing the poem fall. Dropping these *baccae dentatae* because of a sensory impression demonstrates the child's illimited imagination—"illimited" because interior vision has consequences beyond the mind's borders. "Blueberries, Strawberries, and

Wintergreen" records profound engagements with sensation that inspire creative response and, further, physical reaction. Although some[94] will see this as delusion and not sensory knowledge, Nowlan's writing (like FES) instructs us to see that *knowledge* and *whimsy* or *skepticism* and *faith* can be seen as interchangeable, as synonyms.

Children's imaginations are commonly vivid and convincing to themselves. Those who reach adulthood often separate inner from external realities. Nowlan presented himself as one whose youthful reveries continued to direct his worldview throughout an adulthood tempered by artistic creation. Writing poetry preserved his capacity for creativity and connection. This applies even to poems that do not address early memories. "The Great Electronic Window" depicts people cut off from their environment. They distrust the physical world; prefer spectatorship; prefer mediated representations of reality delivered via screens. "They can never touch," the poem says, and "live in fear of / the atavistic as / represented by / armpits and onions" (*CP* 467). Such un-earthy people are called "Globularists" by FES: abstracting, crassly intellectual, alienated from their own planet and bodies. Its aims declare Globularism endemic to western civilization. The poem likewise casts modern and now contemporary absorptions with electronic entertainments as a technologic plague (television in Nowlan's time, digital platforms today). "Once perhaps they were as we are, / as we become more / and more like them," the poet warns (467). He indirectly advocates for embodiment by displaying its opposite: numbed states of physical and psychic remove. Childhood poems focus in on his younger self, who moves through worlds that work in concert with his playful imagination. "Golf," conversely, balances the poet's eccentric persona with statements about those

[94] For example, Shane Neilson, one critic discussed in the preceding literature review (SP 115).

deadened by banal conformity, symbolized by their enthusiasm for a traditionally bourgeoise leisure activity. It appeared first in *Playing the Jesus Game*, a gathering of older verses and new work. Published in 1970, the poem was likely composed between preparations for *Mysterious Naked Man* (1969) and November 1970, when FES launched. Setting a poem on a golf course gave Nowlan a chance to explore his feral eccentricity (Planoterrestrialism) against the background of Fredericton's middleclass world (Globularism) to which he had ascended or, in a sense, descended.

Images and ideas in Nowlan poems are clearly expressed, although they overturn expectations. "Golf" does this with plain language punctuated by moments demanding a second look. The voice is natural, maintains plainness even in the face of deterrents such as rhyming, metrical verse, and distorted views on the field, or course, of play. The conceptually unusual sonnet runs:

> My friends believe in golf, address the ball,
> however bent, to an appointed place.
> Newtonians, convinced no orb can fall
> out of the numbered course of time and space.
>
> But I, from clumsiness or pity, drive
> balls out of bounds and into woods and traps,
> my knees and wrists vindictive in their love
> for dark and tangled places not on maps.
>
> "Golf's not your game," they say. But I persist.
> "Next one goes straight…" I promise. Oh, they're fooled
> right cunningly by my secretive wrist
> that treacherously lets the world go wild.
>
> Let them attack the green. As for myself,
> I pitch into the darkness, like a wolf. (*CP* 269)

Readers are invited to imagine the author sharing a round of golf with friends. The invitation's flipside coaxes them into an inverted world. There, experienced golfers hold

occult belief in the sport and the awkward amateur (the Nowlan-counterpart) exerts personal control over the laws of physics. Rather than athletic ineptitude (which the speaker shares with his poet), a "cunningly […] secretive" power held in the "wrist" (up his sleeve, and flexible) "lets the world," not the ball, "go wild." Straight-shooting, straight-thinking "Newtonians" who succeed at the game are interlopers from the normative world "Golf" reflects and rejects. The speaker's belief in his peculiar power should not be read as delusion. Instead, it accords with the poem's reality, where the "course of time and space" is unpredictable, uncharted. Conventional ability depends on false "belief" within the poem's bounds. Standard thought seems absurd here. Identifying the sutures between the weird and ordinary may help Nowlan's readers navigate his disorienting blend of gravity and levity. Richards writes that "literal people […] did not catch on to the seriousness of it all, or the joke. And Nowlan was a master of the understated in both" ("I Went to Meet" 127). Rather than see metaphor or dark humour as artistic layers imposed upon realism, we might think of his fabulations as commonplace elements within the independent realities his poems construct. This interpretation helps account for the seriousness with which Nowlan participated in the Flat Earth Society and Stuart Monarchy revival. These campaigns constructed alternate worlds where jests are matters of fact: serious play, in short. The literalness of his outrageous metaphors is one aspect of the author's artistic sophistication and one reason why he developed a strong following.

FES's prime mover resembles the speaker of "Golf," who poses as a feral and heroic heretic in an orthodox setting. Golfers are described as Newtonians in the poem, because they expect predictable results from their shots ("attacks" rather than plays).

Their investments in a material rather than miraculous world make them religious, insofar as "the real religion of any age / consists of what men find it impossible / to disbelieve." These lines appear in Nowlan's poem "Religion," which makes its connection to FES explicit. It concludes: "the world is round / only because we've agreed / to call it so" (*CP* 385). Nowlan chooses to disagree with the dominant view. In disagreeing, he pretends to wipe millennia of advances in human knowledge from the official record. Transport him and his confreres Fraser and Ferrari to planoterrestrial Babylonia, or to a modern-day Flat Earth conference, and in all likelihood they would gleefully declare aberrant belief in a spinning, spheroidal Earth. This tendency toward contrariness has philosophical import. Because objectivity or faith-less fact does not exist, certainty should be intellectually probed and publicly teased. "All truths are half-truths," Nowlan writes in "Golden Pyramids of the Sun" (322). The dictum does not prevent him from using the word "truth," although it lends ambiguity to the seemingly transparent term. Poetic imagination loosens our secure confidence in fixed ideas, inoculates us against absolutism. In that respect, poetry is Planoterrestrialism.

For the Flat Earth Society under investigation here, a creatively flattened Earth is an appealing metaphor. Through it, disparate ideas coalesce. The physical symbol of an uncharted Flat Earth is sacramental, at least in being a means and not an end. It is a conceptual object that invokes grounded-ness, human belonging, anti-scientism, anti-contemporaneity, and precarity (i.e., fear of edges). FES reminds us that the planet and its places are not what they might too easily seem. "This is an outlaw planet," Nowlan writes (*CP* 243). Poetic, metaphoric, or even religious/spiritual mindsets remind us that what we attempt to capture with words and ideas eludes our grasp. Hands and words are pretty

slight, after all; reality is unfathomable, only to be interpreted on individual bases. “Earth is three billion separate planets,” according Nowlan’s poem “O’Sullivan’s World” (249). If no objective, shared world exists, we ought to mine interiority and subjectivity and celebrate them. “There is the colour you see in the world and there is the colour you see in the mind,” Nowlan writes in his story “At the Edge of the Woods”; reflecting on the contrast, the narrator says “nobody can tell the truth no matter how hard he tries” (25-26). Ironically, he attempts to speak truthfully about this adage. Nowlan’s literary representations of a private world precede and post-date his solicitations of FES members, which prodded them into articulating and sharing—and thereby more fully occupying—their own imagined planets. “Not everybody’s trade is as weird as mine,” Nowlan acknowledged in a 1980 opinion column, but he believed “everybody is exceptional in some respect” (ANP 40.87.16.9). In other words, each of us has traits that demographic statistics (the column’s subject) cannot compute. The Society gave others a chance to define their positions along the ragged margin of error.

From Fredericton to Fogo

Making use of metaphorical thinking and world-building tactics, Nowlan dares us to take his play seriously in several ways. He conveys what might seem outlandish through a plainspoken and therefore credible or mock-credible style. Conversely, in poems and in the FES aims alike, he employs religious terms that suggest possibilities and dimensions beyond the material world that realistic descriptions usually present. He also employs extended metaphors, whereby apparent flourishes integrate with narrative elements in his texts. Circa 1970, his practice of metaphorical world-building leapt off the page to inform

his work as a community builder in an Atlantic-Canadian arts scene. He thrived in that role, partly because his years in Fredericton were the culmination of alternating periods of isolation, involvement, and isolation in Stanley, Hartland, and St. John, respectively. Arrival in Fredericton fulfilled lines composed shortly before leaving Hartland. "*When I am a man I will not be afraid.* / *When I am a man I will come into my kingdom*," he wrote in "Communion: 1946 and 1962" (*CP* 143). FES was a notable part of the imaginary kingdom extending from Nowlan's metaphorical Castle. He brought associates into the home and shared with them his imaginative world. They became the subjects of coterie poems, the esteemed peerage of his fanciful court, and inhabitants of his flattened planet.

While Fredericton's Stuart Monarchy waged its farcical campaign, Nowlan learned that nearby Campobello Island was, from 1770 to 1881, "the feudal fief of a dynasty of Welsh seaman" who called themselves "Principal Proprietaries of the Great Outer Island of Passamaquoddy." Thanks to a land grant from King George III, William Owen established Campobello as a renegade kingdom and titled his son, "only half-jokingly," "the Hereditary Prince of Campobello" (Nowlan, *Campobello* 2). Nowlan's Monarchy and FES gave titles to his friends commensurate in pretension to those created by Owen—which Nowlan resurfaced in his 1975 book about *Campobello*, subtitled *The Outer Island*. In a 1977 letter, he wrote to J. R. Colombo: "I fervently wish that the island had continued to be ruled by the Owen family, had escaped Confederation and was today a North American Liechtenstein, Andorra, San Marino, or Monaco. That would be such fun!" (ANP 40.8.18.14). Here, love for absurdity and obscurity intersects with political geography and world history. On balance, Nowlan favoured the rare and the renegade over the established and dependable. For him, the traditional system of monarchism was

an attractively alternative idea to western democracy. In other words, a propensity for difference and defiance pushed Nowlan toward anachronistic values. If directed by a vision such as his, North America would feature as much national diversity as the continents of Europe, Africa, and Asia. This is not to say Nowlan took from the Campobello precedent confidence in his potential for political rather than poetic power. Dreams of ruling a nation were far behind him. The Owens' dynasty of oddball mariners, like Rijeka under poet Gabriele D'Annunzio in 1919-20 (see Woodhouse), had been a rickety dictatorship, not a benevolent monarchy or free state such as Nowlan and his liegemen might have tried to create. But the Campobello history he was commissioned to write—because the island was the vacation home of Franklin Roosevelt—only came to life after its author uncovered the comings-and-goings of the Owens clan.[95]

The Monarchy and FES embed "whips in jokes" (*CP* 137), meaning their lampoons can convey profound interrogations. These satires foster critical approaches to established authorities and ideological positions. Yet the projects also formalized an intimate social group whose oppositional antics were but one aspect of their mutual accord. Early FES members appear in sincere and amusing poems that Nowlan penned in the late 1960s and early 70s, a time of social bonding for him. FES co-founders and some of Nowlan's close associates seem not to have written formal application letters as prospective Society members. The Symposiarch's intimate knowledge of them did not

[95] Nowlan wrote to Bill Clarke of the breakthrough that allowed him to complete the book, after a series of deadlines had elapsed: "Besides having been the summer home of Franklin Roosevelt, Campobello is interesting in having been ruled for more than a hundred years as a feudal fief by a dynasty of English admirals." "When I started the project," Nowlan wrote, "it was sheer drudgery undertaken for money but lately I've become very interested in it—all of the old admirals were half-mad—they built a quarterdeck on dry land and one of them fired a cannon at an imaginary Spanish invasion fleet" (1973, ANP 40.7.1.49). Wild antics such as these made the Owens more compelling to Nowlan than the austere and powerful Roosevelt family, without whom the book would not exist.

require further personal testimonies. Thus, few applicants' words are reproduced in the present chapter. Drawing from Nowlan's poetic tributes to his immediate circle should suffice to indicate their fit with his Society: kaleidoscopically kooky and resolute. Real-world associates appear in the fun-house mirrors of FES archival files and Nowlan's poems. "Dear Leo," for starters, addresses the President as "Old friend" then states:

> there are so many
> of you, so many of me,
> and more of each of us
> showing up all the time […]
>
> If I were honest
> I'd hesitate
> when asked if I know you,
> meaning do I know the one
> you usually let
> represent you in public […] (*CP* 426-27)

The theme of multiple personas accounts for Ferrari's various titles, including Archbishop, Duke, President, and Doctor of Philosophy—all outdone by "Old friend." The poem closes with these words: "it has been so long / since I last talked with / the person / of whom they speak" (427). These lines do not express nostalgia for a time of constant companionship. Rather, Nowlan came to know Ferrari in a private way that makes his memory of the public figure fade. Another poem pays tribute to his friend's daughter. "After Seeing a Watercolour by Jacintha Ferrari, Then 13" (351) shows that the Nowlan-Ferrari connection, like other bonds celebrated through FES, was not only a professional association, nor one of casual drinking companions, but one of family friends. Garwood comments on Ferrari's presence in the Nowlans' lives, writing that Windsor Castle was "effectively his second home" for a time (311).

"Sharon, Sharon" honours Sharon Fraser, who like Ferrari participated in FES's founding moment. The poem relates to the Society's anti-technologic pseudo-propaganda, in stating that her innate humanity, her "loveliness," is "one of the reasons / we needn't be / afraid of computers," because it defies quantification; "no / micrometer could ever / appraise it" (*CP* 341). The poem effects a "wholly human" and subtle "salute" that physically manifests a personal connection. The poet "touch[es] the tip / of [her] nose with / the tip of [his] finger" (341). Appearing in the same collection, *Between Tears and Laughter* (1971), "For Marilee" is dedicated to Marilee Pittman, one of three Vice-Presidents of FES.[96] She is pregnant in the poem, as seen by the "clown's bass drum / under [her] dress" (350). This dedicatee is esteemed for her secular and divine value, her humour and grace. Those traits combine in the final line: "funny Marilee, holy Marilee" (350). "Kyran's Christening" follows upon Mrs. Pittman's pregnancy. Here, the Pittmans and Nowlans are "not merely a group of persons together but a small / religious procession, in which nobody feels obliged / to put a solemn face" (335). Ceremoniousness and casualness combine among them. Regarding the same hybridity, in his "Reassessment" Keith writes of gatherings at Windsor Castle: "a casual party seems an odd place for 'rituals,' but social life is dependent on ritual" (22). Conversely, the priest performing rites in "Kyran's Christening" is casual in a negative sense. "I don't like / his taking off his vestments / before we leave, tossing them over / the baptismal font," Nowlan writes (*CP* 335-36). Memorializing the christening in poetry marks the bond that united the Pittmans and the Nowlans, who shared good times and important milestones. Ferrari writes of the Pittmans: "Right from the earliest days of the Society,

[96] Others are Nicholas Catanoy (discussed in chapter two) and Gwendolyn MacEwen (focus of chapter three).

this little family had left no doubt about their loyalty. In fact, Kyran became the first preschooler to join the ranks of dedicated Planoterrestrialists. It is hoped that the future will see more of this kind of thing" (*TEIF* 236). As well as being a widely dispersed interpretive community, FES formalized through play already strong social bonds.

Nowlan's "Gruel and Plovers' Eggs" is dedicated to Al Pittman, whose family name and geographical location made him an appropriate Overseer of the Edge for FES. Completing studies in Fredericton in 1970, Pittman returned to his home province of Newfoundland and took a teaching post on Fogo Island, on the north-east extremity of Canada's Atlantic shoreline. The Island would be enshrined in FES lore as one of the Flat Earth's corners. In fact, Nowlan's comment that "Fogo sounds a bit like the edge of the world" was made in a 20 September 1970 letter to Pittman (ANP 40.25.48.5). So, the recipient's eastward move planted planoterrestrial seeds in Nowlan's imagination. When agreeing to join the Society, Pittman stated "I don't care how strenuous the duties of such an office may be […] as long as the title sounds good" (qtd. in Fraser to Nowlan, 25 Nov. 1970, ANP 40.12.6.33). His statement reveals a pose of solemn dedication and flippant humour typical of the Society's mock-formality. Nowlan's poem for Pittman is more colourful than others in the *Between Tears and Laughter* sequence of coterie poems.[97] "Gruel and Plovers' Eggs" features fairy tale figures: an ogre, magician, and "ice princess." "When I was seven / I outgrew all that," the speaker says; continuing, "now, /

[97] None of Nowlan's poems portray the FES Chancellor and exiled King-in-waiting James Stewart. However, Nowlan described him in the "Foreward" to the poet's collection *Blood and Perception* as an "unashamed romantic to whom Don Quixote was a true Knight, who did not fail but, rather, demonstrated that his times were unworthy of him." Nowlan goes on to call Stewart "a fine poet, acutely aware of the awesome fragility of human relationships" (ANP 40.72.23.2). Such praise indicates that Nowlan's example had benefitted the developing writer, at least in the mentor's view. Adding to this already sufficient testimony of his fit with FES, Stewart defended his Planoterrestrialism with his official tract "Newton? Nonsense!" It became the opening inclusion to the "Flat Earthers' Forum" section of Ferrari's *The Earth Is Flat!* (261-63).

thirty years later / I know almost as much / as when I was six" (*CP* 353). Like FES, the poem champions a return to the fanciful world of childhood and cultural realm of legend. Nowlan expresses nostalgia for a lost time when quickly expanding fields of knowledge left ample room for mysteries beyond the limits of learning. "Here Be Dragons" is the phrase that refers to unknown territory and one that, not coincidentally, appears in Nowlan's poem "Too Much Geography?" His title invokes Canada's large size but also implies that information distributed by established science can mislead. "The atlas lies," Nowlan writes, saying that Canada is "shaped like Chile": a narrow band of population centres strung along "a tightrope between the ice cap / and the empire" (385). His poem points to the limits of standard views of Canadian geography, captures something of the social and emotional lives of its people that escape objective data. What lies directly beyond the limit of Canada's commonly explored territory is Fogo Island. What lies directly beyond the shores of Fogo few have ventured to ascertain.

In 1971, Ferrari attended the Learned Societies conference at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland. After collecting contacts for academics interested in FES, he went north to visit the Pittmans on Fogo Island and view the Edge for himself. Nowlan expounded on the import of this trip in an "Interim Report" from within the alternative FES universe. After the President "resolved to make his way to the Society's Fogo Observatory and Tracking Station, situated between Newfoundland and Greenland, and overlooking the Abysmal Chasm," he was

> beset with difficulties, many of them the inevitable consequences of the terrain and climate, and others the outcome of the terror of the Chasm that haunts the minds of those assigned by Providence the frightful privilege of living nearest it. Neither the prestige of his office nor the magnetism of his person enabled him to persuade guides and bearers to accompany him on the final lap of his pilgrimage,

> during which he was obliged to travel alone, on foot, living off dried seaweed and rainwater, over rocks and through a perpetual and impenetrable miasma. (285-86)

This inflated depiction of a summer jaunt counters the tourist-brochure image of Newfoundland as idyllic. It also mocks an anti-pastoral image of the province as a veritable outport, where pre-modern people survive rather than thrive. Newfoundland's Walter Learning played on the same theme, claiming that in Quidi Vidi where he grew up, everyone knows the Earth is flat. He joked to Nowlan of finding out some thought otherwise only after migrating to mainland Canada (undated, ANP 40.17.2). Ferrari travelled in the other direction, seeking proof and not opinion. According to Nowlan's "Report," Ferrari obtained the outer shore with Al Pittman as guide, both men fortified by "the wine of the country," a brand of rum called Screech (286). They "got miraculous / as the Scots say": a euphemism cited by Nowlan and one appropriate to such spirited occasions (*CP* 370). In Ferrari's interview with Cook, we hear that Pittman "complained that his liquor bills were so high because of the terror of living so close to the Abysmal Chasm" (ANP 30.1.31). The spatial rather than temporal end of the Earth is an appropriate symbol for the psychic cliffs that drive us back to the release provided by intoxicants or, in a healthier vein, the comfort of building imagined but sharable worlds. The idea of a planetary precipice was as compelling to FES's audience as Earth's flatness—each jumping off points for riffing wit. One Haligonian felt particularly inspired by Ferrari's adventure. She pledged to make her own pilgrimage, once the Society accepted her into the fold. S. L. Noonan would make the trip to Fogo in the "power wheelchair" with which she had already "bagged 300 miles." "Could you tell me," she asked Ferrari, "how long my Nova Scotia plates will be good in Newfoundland? My top speed is fifteen miles per hour" (1973, ANP 40.12.6.103). For her, the mythical

Edge was more accessible than Fredericton, which she facetiously reported being unable to locate in her Atlas.

The apocalyptic ring of Fogo's "Brimstone Head" made the point of land a fitting place for pilgrims to this distant corner. That placename adds a weighty scriptural note to an exceedingly minor expedition (viz.: "And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts […] from the four corners of the earth" [Isaiah 11:12]). Nowlan reported that, braced by booze and brotherhood if not divine protection,

> the President and the Overseer were successful in reaching Brimstone Head, Fogo, and in actually lowering themselves several feet down into the Chasm—the first men known to have done so and to have survived the ordeal for close to 700 years. Moreover, Dr. Ferrari, in a deed of daring comparable to Prometheus's theft from Zeus, managed to dislodge and remove a piece of the actual wall of the Chasm. This stone, about half as big as a pumpkin, is now in the Society's temporary Archives in Fredericton, under the supervision of Dr. Alden Nowlan, who has been entrusted with its keeping by the President and appointed Guardian pro tem of the Sacred Stone. The Stone may be viewed (by Members only) in the presence of the President and the Guardian. ("Interim Report" 286-87)

Nowlan's "Report" hijacks the discourse of factual reportage, a prose style richly augmented by puffery and fabulation. He invokes historical contexts ranging from European exploration abroad to Greek mythology and the Gaelic/Celtic traditions that remain one marker of Atlantic Canada's unique position within Canada. With such a wide range of cultural references embedded in it, FES merits more consideration than the dismissive contempt that "Flat Earthers" often receive.

The rock Ferrari brought to Fredericton as souvenir of his encounter with oblivion alludes to the Coronation Stone of Scotland (known too as the Stone of Scone or Stone of Destiny). The latter's mythology suggests it may have first come from Ireland or even the Christian holy lands. Ferrari's stone, then, links FES to the Gaelic-Celtic-Catholic-themed Stuart revival. These twinned projects shared participants like Pittman, who was

known at Windsor Castle as Overseer of the Edge and Duke of Fogo. In both groups, preposterously lofty titles and mockingly formal procedures—such as those governing viewings of the rock—add to the campaigns' absurdity.[98] Linking interest in a terrestrial edge with royalizing gestures, the Chasm's rock was placed under Nowlan's chair in his sitting room. The Stone of Scone can be viewed today at Edinburgh Castle, after several storied displacements. The rock Ferrari plucked from the Edge has unknown whereabouts, as Kay Burns writes in her "Introductory Preface" to Ferrari's book:

> When [Dr. Iris] Taylor first came across the coded documents authored by [Bartholomew] Seeker, she was investigating the disappearance of the rock excavated from the wall of the Abysmal Chasm by Ferrari and Pittman, reportedly kept in Fredericton at the home of Alden Nowlan. Upon reviewing references in Seeker's journals, Dr. Taylor came to believe the rock was either secretly kept on the island by Seeker or was returned to Seeker on Fogo Island from Nowlan for safekeeping.
>
> Dr. Taylor became convinced that Seeker took the rock with him when he disappeared from Fogo Island in 1978, although evidence for this was scant. Multiple references in Seeker's journals regarding the Connemara region of Ireland suggested to Taylor that the rock (and perhaps Seeker himself) may be found there. Perplexingly, she also disappeared amidst making plans for a possible research trip to Ireland [….] (17)

Taylor and Seeker are invented persons Burns adds to FES mythology. Ferrari's excavated rock, however, was an actual and not an imagined object, whatever its provenance or current location.

The stone is lost, or possibly hidden somewhere on the Earth's surface. It is not held in the *Leo C. Ferrari Fonds*, which does contain strange objects: a smashed globe, a

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[98] In his application, Nowlan's friend Dr. Ian Cameron of Fredericton teased the Society for not going far enough in this direction. He expressed dismay that FES had not been "designated a Royal Society despite the obvious Royal connection i.e. The Chancellor" James Stewart and because "the Society is not listed in the North American Directory of Acceptable Obituary Credits" (Letter to "Dr. Nowlan," 17 July 1972, ANP 40.12.6.63). Absent these markers of esteem, Cameron felt "the society should at least provide its membership with a portable reclining deductable [*sic*] group disability plan." The rest of Cameron's letter expresses his pride as a Nova Scotian native in the historical figure Joshua Slocum (1844-1909), "the first person to intranavigate the world alone" (40.12.6.63). Historical rather than fanciful narratives of Slocum's voyage use the term *circumnavigate,* of course.

bearded doll with a placard proclaiming "The Edge is Nigh," and a "cardboard bishop's mitre" fashioned for Ferrari's role as Archbishop by the Monarchy's Painter-in-Ordinary, Tom Forestall[99] (Artifacts; Toner 261). Neither is it cached at Fogo Island's Museum of the Flat Earth, if Burns is to be believed. The missing piece of the Edge can still be seen, however, via footage recorded for television's *Take 60* and now preserved by Canadian Broadcasting Corporation archivists. FES's President proudly displayed the rock for *Take 60* co-host Paul Soles. Ferrari described the "involuntary sample" he took when grabbing for safety as he dangled over the Earth's edge, as follows:

> This is a very sacred symbol of our Society, actually. A relic. […] You'll see it is covered with life, by the way. Lichens I think they are, these vegetative things here, showing that even at the edge of the Earth there is life clinging on precariously. (*Take 60*)

Hear how Ferrari dramatizes the importance of seemingly ordinary objects? Through vocabulary such as "sacred," "relic," and "precarious," he draws out the faithful and fear-based psychologies that animate FES's philosophical message and cultural satire. Just as Nowlan's metaphors thrive within a plain-spoken register, the Society's imaginative power comes across with potent clarity when attached to a rock that is a whimsically appropriate souvenir from Fogo Island.

In *Under Eastern Eyes* (1987), critic of Maritime literature Janice Kulyk Keefer pointed to the persistent interest in "that which is actual, to hand" displayed by Maritime writers. This habit privileges "the accessible world of human experience common to reader and writer." She cites classic examples of physical objects that focus regional

[99] Forestall's artistic production and Nowlan's creative work intersect in a more public way in *Shaped By This Land* (1974), a book that pairs the artist's landscape paintings with the poet's verses about their region.

narratives: “Sam Slick’s clocks, Anne Shirley’s red hair, Kezia Barnes’s tinderbox, Ellen Caanan’s rug” (Keefer 6). The Society’s “Sacred Stone” is apocryphal in comparison to these items, which appear in fictions by Thomas Chandler Haliburton, Lucy Maude Montgomery, Thomas Raddall, and Ernest Buckler. But because of its combined tangible reality and metaphorical resonance, the FES rock becomes another sacramental entity that activates Nowlan’s sometimes difficult reality into an imaginary kingdom—alongside the Monarchy’s sealing wax, 676 Windsor Street, alcohol, or even a dedicated poem. If such objects fit within a larger tradition of intense physicality common to the Maritimes’ literary minds, as Keefer claims, then contemporary scholars must also be cautious of stereotyping when tying individual writers or works to regional traditions. Keefer risks romanticizing Atlantic Canadian literature when stating that a regional reliance on accessible worlds is “foreign to modernist and post-modernist alike” (6). Given their deep interest in quotidian realia, the novels of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf may be exceptions to Keefer’s idea about strictly intangible modernisms and postmodernisms, unless she finds modernist and postmodernist fictions inaccessible to rural readers due to their primarily metropolitan settings. In *Anne of Tim Horton’s* (2011), Herb Wyile persuasively argues against constraining our cultural perspectives on Newfoundland and the Maritime provinces via interpretations of eastern Canada as premodern.[100]

In his seminal work on the region in the age of globalization, Wyile writes that “where visitors so often expect a laid-back, unchanging rural existence, the Atlantic Canada of today is very much caught up in the profound economic, political, cultural, and

[100] Tony Tremblay demonstrates these risks through a reading of central Canadian receptions of David Adams Richards and Alistair MacLeod in his 2008 article “‘Lest on too close sight I miss the darling illusion’: The Politics of the Centre in ‘Reading Maritime.’”

social shifts that have come to be described by the term 'globalization'" (1). Imbalances between faulty expectations and complex realities apply equally to encounters with the writing of Atlantic Canada. *Anne of Tim Horton's* is the most important book on Maritime literature since Keefer's offering from 1987. Critics must now balance the example set by Keefer, who tries to identify what is authentically specific to Maritime literature, against Wyile's warning about reifying any aspect of Atlantic-Canadian culture in ways that keep the eastern provinces apart from urgent national or international concerns. Nowlan's writing and his FES pre-date the full effect of global incursions into Atlantic Canada, the basis of Wyile's study. One could attempt to connect FES to Maritime and Celtic aspects of Nowlan's world building that have already been identified by Keefer—such as interest in the physical as well as the "cult of community," on which topic the critic gives him the final world (38). Wyile's commentary must be born in mind as well, so as to mitigate re-inscriptions of a simplistic image of Nowlan as *merely* regional in perspective, which is to say parochial, retrograde, and unworldly. In announcing his Planoterrestrialism, Nowlan courted or, better, trolled for gullible disdain from those whose biases would lead them to expect an uneducated man from the backwoods of Nova Scotia to be a rustic simpleton instead of a sophisticated cultural commentator. Such persons were part of FES's target audience, alongside those ideal readers who cottoned on to the Flat Earth prank and spun their own creative contributions to it. Collaboration, satire, and metaphor made FES a social and literary endeavor. Any ideas invoked (primitivism, paranoia, politics) could operate as playful misdirection. Members spoofed not only Globularism in all its guises but the very occult and oppositional attitudes they seem to espouse so fervidly. No provincial or national borders

can constrain the portability of an enigmatic conceptual movement like this one. Accordingly, FES soon moved beyond its initial Atlantic Canadian setting. My dissertation, in its turn, follows this movement.

Like his Flat Earth Society, Nowlan's writing and life operate on local/regional, national, and transnational levels, any one of which offers only a narrow view of his interests, experience, and importance. His cultural Irishness sets him in trans-Atlantic or Atlantic-Canadian and not only Maritime cultural contexts. That placement helps explain his close association with Newfoundlanders who joined FES, including Learning—to whom the late poem "Home from the Wars" was dedicated (*CP* 643)—and Al Pittman. Whereas Learning left Newfoundland to found the Fredericton Playhouse, direct the Vancouver Playhouse, and work as an Officer of the Canada Council in Ottawa, Pittman made his mark as an active figure in the 1970s-era cultural revival in Newfoundland. He was a co-founder of Breakwater Books, the province's first publishing house.[101] Increased attention to Newfoundland writers in the late 1960s and early 1970s coincided with and responded to the culmination of the provincial government's efforts to close many outport communities. Local resistance to such efforts was also resistance to a modernizing world and centralized administration, early inklings of globalization. Progressive politics on "the Rock" that opposed development were conservative in maintaining traditional culture against urbanizing advancements that could be seen as

[101] Newfoundland and Labrador's Ministry of Heritage describes it this way: "During the late 1960s and 1970s, Newfoundland and Labrador experienced what has been variously called a cultural renaissance, revival, or revolution. It was a period of sustained creative activity by local artists working in a wide range of disciplines in the literary, performing, and visual arts. Often for the first time, the local population saw their stories, dialects, and customs reflected back from the page, canvas, stage, or television screen. As the movement explored the province's culture, it also helped to validate and shape it" (Higgins, n. pag.).

corrosive. Such energies helped motivate certain Newfoundlanders to enlist in the renegade Flat Earth Society headquartered in Fredericton.

Richard E. Buehler of Memorial University, specialist in literature and folklore, applied to FES. Giving his reasons for wanting to join, his application reads in part:

> I am convinced that, until the advent of Joseph R. Smallwood, the people of Newfoundland knew that the earth is flat. Mr. Smallwood, through his persuasive oratory, succeeded in convincing them that the world was round. Having accomplished this it was a simple matter for him to talk the people into Confederation. Since that time he has led the people to believe in such ridiculous concepts as John Sheheen, a massive power producing complex at Churchill Falls, Labrador, John C. Doyle, a petro-chemical complex at Come By Chance (note the symbolism of the name) and the Bank of Montreal. I am firmly convinced that, if Newfoundland is to survive as a province, a return to right thinking is essential. It is my hope that I, with the help of the Flat Earth Society of Canada, will be able to hasten this return. (1972, ANP 40.12.6.64)

The author of this FES statement of faith later became editor of the journal *Newfoundland Studies* (from 1996-2002), and although a recent arrival to the region at the time of making his application, he became active in local writing, theatre, and music scenes in St. John (Lynde, n. pag.). Note that the Newfoundland and Labrador premiership of Joey Smallwood overlaps precisely with the era of outport community closures. The premier also attracted investors to develop major resource extraction projects in the area. His leadership began with the province's entry into Canadian confederation and continued with efforts to bring Newfoundlanders and Labradorians (often kicking and screaming) into a global world with metropolitan standards that undervalue diverse local and regional traditions.[102] Buehler sounds hyperbolic in his outraged vilification of Smallwood and comedically dismissive of industrialist financier Sheheen as well as Doyle, advisor to the

[102] See Herbert Pottle's *Newfoundland, Dawn Without Light: Politics, Power & the People in the Smallwood Era* (1979). A more recent source is Richard Gwyn's *Smallwood: An Unlikely Revolutionary* (2015).

Premier, when casting them as non-entities. But as in so many FES documents unearthed in this essay, the applicant employs Flat Earth tropes to make a serious point. Sphericity here equates to the erasure of Newfoundland's independence through integration with the "Rest of Canada" and equates to degradation of the planet via megaprojects of resource extraction industries. Although creative and humorous, Buehler's application is radically conservative in maligning elites and championing the traditional and downtrodden "right thinking" populous. The terms "Globularists" and "Planoterrestrialists" readily adapted to the issue he chose to put forward.

It is tempting to interpret Buehler's application and by extension much of the FES textual corpus as Irish-derived Red Tory satire and Celtic black comedy in the vein of Swift and Beckett. Nowlan's mentee Eddie Clinton adds to such temptations. Then a FES member in good standing, he sent Nowlan a suite of poems in 1977 that included "74 and tough." The poem depicts "The Old Love of the complaint" as an Irish mentality (ANP 40.8.16.o). Love and complaint are dual sutures that transform wounds of lack and poverty into the healing that affirmation and cultural production (like Clinton's poem) require. Engineer rather than poet, Nick Teekman of the firm DynamoGenisis wrote creatively from Charlottetown to FES in 1977. He offered to "imagineer" a way "to float Nova Scotia down to warmer waters." His fantasy does not rely on Earth's geography but the desire for Maritimers to evade the "[then-]current Canadian identity/unity crisis" (LFF 2.1.17). The application from Albert Pollitt explicitly sets FES philosophy, rather than members' myriad points of grievance, within an Irish/Maritime context: "I also see this movement as a support (a rallying point) for the artistically oriented people, as they do seem to have an attitude that is based more on the emotional (the folly of the Celts, or

their virtue)" (1971, ANP 40.12.6.42). It may be true that twentieth-century Planoterrestrialism is more emotional than intellectual (a faith not a belief), but related sentiments are less easily shown to be strictly Celtic rather than broadly artistic. With creative wit, Pollitt takes the desire to join *a* Flat Earth Society for granted and justifies his decision to join Canada's FES and not England's IFERS, "whose members, though being the intellects of England," he wrote, "were also responsible for the suppression of my ancestors. There is too much Canada and Ireland in my heart," Pollitt claimed, to enlist among their numbers (40.12.6.42). Thwarting temptations to align character traits, especially folksy and rustic traits, with regional, national, or racial groups, Wyile distrusts perspectives on Atlantic Canada grounded in its roots rather than its fruits. Nowlan often complicates the clear binary Wyile presents: stereotyping or avoiding same. The poet wrote for *Weekend Magazine* that "the curious thing about racial and regional stereotypes is that they're all nonsense and all true" ("Growing Up" 22). Due to developments in mores and media over the present century, one half of that statement would provoke a much more dramatic backlash from today's readers than Nowlan's immediate audience would likely have mustered in 1975.

This dissertation's next chapter concerns transnational elements of FES and Ferrari, the humanistic philosopher and FES President. It shows him pitting his not insubstantial energies against de-humanizing trends of the 1970s and the "Gyroglobular-Industrial-Complex" (my term), a writerly strategy quite different from the metaphorical and intensely personal approaches to creative writing and Planoterrestrialism adopted by Nowlan. Ferrari wants to tear down assumed hierarchies through his political ferocity and righteousness, whereas Nowlan promoted individual subjectivity and proud loserdom.

Although such contrastable elements as bite and whimsy might be read as twinned poles of Maritime, Irish, or world-wide comedy and wit, they do fuse artfully in FES discourse, strengthened by the contributions of diverse voices. Due to their diversity, none of the applicants' statements reproduced in this dissertation should be read, when they are read, as necessarily representative of FES, let alone Maritime or Canadian writing broadly. These are individual contributions in the first instance, and their considerable variety fulfills FES's prime goal: to foster individual critical creativity. The project did not seek to attack cultural authority in a political sense, but it may have succeeded on that level. Rather, its satire, more poetically and perhaps more importantly, sought to liberate thought and feeling from proscribed fetters. Memorial University's Dr. Bruce Bennett, a marine biologist, articulated his view of the Society's value as helping "imaginations roam beyond the confinement of artificially imposed convention" (Letter to FES, 19 July 1972, ANP 40.12.6.65). Nowlan's more plainspoken and literary adage for young writers expresses a related position. "Put down what you *really* feel," he urged poets who sought his counsel, even if "to do that you have risk making a fool of yourself."[103] The advice and attendant warning holds for would-be Planoterrestrialists as well.

Inconclusion

Writings on Nowlan's life often document the impoverishment and isolation of his formative years in the 1930s and 40s. Less commonly articulated but serving as denouements to Cook and Toner's biographies, the author's final years of the late 1970s and early 80s were also a period of relative remove, as the consequences of alcoholism,

[103] The adage dates, in this instance, to 1968 and addresses Nowlan's mentee Eddie Clinton (ANP 40.8.6.3).

personal fallings out, and ill health increased. He steadily withdrew from FES, already having passed the leadership baton to President Ferrari—a transition marked by an archived bank form from March 1977 that made Ferrari the sole signatory required for financial transactions through FES's account (Ferrari to Nowlan, 1977, ANP 40.12.6.128).[104] Flat Earth jokes soured for Nowlan, when interest in the Society threatened to detract from his more explicitly literary output.[105] His imaginative kingdom had begun to dissipate. "All the old gang that used to drop in at all hours have gone on pilgrimage or are following the caravan routes," he wrote to Cook in January 1975; continuing, "I get a little lonesome sometimes. We know lots of people but they're most of them very well organized. You know, 'Why don't you come to dinner three weeks from Tuesday?' Never, 'Hey, let's have a party'" (qtd. in Cook 257). By the end of the year, he wrote to Nicholas Catanoy that "all the old crowd are gone, except Leo Ferrari" (1975, ANP 40.6.9.50). Toner reports that "The Flat Earth Society and the Stewart Monarchy were […] starting to pall" circa 1975 and 1976 (261). And as Nowlan wrote to Dave Butler, by 1977 even his close friend Ferrari was no longer a frequent guest, although living in close proximity to the formerly bustling castle: "I don't see much of Leo, mainly because his wife annoys me when I'm sober and I annoy her when I'm drunk" (1977, ANP 40.3.44.6). On 24 February 1981, Nowlan responded to an inquiry

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[104] As late as February 1977, both the President and the Treasurer (Claudine Nowlan) had to sign-off on bank withdrawals (Nowlan to Ferrari, 1977, ANP 40.12.6.126).

[105] See the undated interview of Leo Ferrari by Greg Cook. Ferrari relates that a CBC interviewer took greater interest in FES than Nowlan's poetry, to his friend's consternation (ANP 30.1.31). Nowlan wrote to Ferrari about the popularity of his FES *Weekend Magazine* article as well as a public poetry reading: "Nothing else I've ever written has inspired so many letters as that piece in *Weekend*. […] Last week I was in British Columbia, reading verses at Vancouver, Victoria and Nanaimo. There was a question period following the Nanaimo reading and one of the first questions was: 'Is it true that you're an officer of the Flat Earth Society?'" (1975, ANP 40.11.52.32).

from member Tom Dolan, writing "The Flat Earth Society is in a state of suspended animation—principally because it became *too* successful" (ANP 40.12.6.138). His italics point to an irony: that too much public attention can be poisonous for underground experiments. All these letters testify to the end of the high times at Windsor Castle, which seemed to have peaked in 1974, the same year Nowlan's *Frankenstein* adaptation made its mark on Fredericton.

In a 1983 letter to his cousin Sylvia Pride, penned shortly before Nowlan's passing, he recalled the opening night of that play as "the finest single moment of my life […] sitting in the balcony with two wonderful ladies [his wife and cousin] with an arm around each of them, and a theatre crammed with people was applauding my play" (qtd. in Toner 299). At that moment, the onetime loser had truly won his dues, realizing that he "was a member of the human race after all" (299). The comment dramatizes how difficult his life had been at times, while the date recalled, summer 1974, corresponds uncannily with Nick Mount's finding that the rise of CanLit fulfilled its ambitions that same year. Whereas the Canadian literature explosion had reached an assured plateau by 1974, according to Mount's thesis, Nowlan saw a decline in his community role throughout the second half of the 1970s and the early 1980s. That is not to say his social life degenerated to the point of complete isolation. Yvonne Trainer, a Masters' student studying creative writing in Fredericton, became a regular visitor in the 1980s, as did writer Lesly Choyce (Cook 309-10, Toner 285). Nowlan's stature in the world of letters meant he had strong, far-flung connections, even if his local entourage had dissipated. With his early death in 1983, Nowlan exited the local, regional, national, and transnational stages of history shortly after the era of poetic celebrity in Canada came to an end (in 1980, according to

Joel Deshaye's study of twentieth-century poetic celebrity). A 1982 letter from Nowlan to Learning expresses a lack of confidence about his public reception beyond poetry readers; bracing for a loss at an upcoming Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists award ceremony, Nowlan wrote of his pessimistic forecast to his long-time collaborator and FES supporter in these terms:

> Hey! Did you know that I'm one of the finalists in the ACTRA Awards (for Best Writer of a Television Variety Show)? Yes, heading for BIG TO [Toronto] Tuesday to take in the big dinner.
>
> I'm gonna wear my full Highland dress and watch Pierre Berton eat his heart out. […] The other finalists are the six guys who write SCTV and the six guys who write the Royal Canadian Air Farce. So I'm rehearsing my good sport look for when the cameras zoom in on the losers. (ANP 40.17.2.60.)

Nowlan had been nominated in a solo role for his work on television's "Christmas at King's Landing," rather than as a co-author with Learning, who had been among those late to depart from the vicinity of Windsor Castle. Learning re-located to Ottawa in 1978 for a job with the Canada Council for the Arts. The 1982 letter's description of Nowlan's competition suggests a measure of lonesomeness for their collaboration. He saw himself as a lone poet with a script about a rural Maritime location outmatched by two teams from the big city and wildly popular with national audiences. The gap between his *Frankenstein* debut and the night of the ACTRA Award dinner measures a decline in his personal outlook that easily outpaces the eight years that elapsed between them.

As opposed to his formative and final years of relative and sometimes intense isolation, this chapter has focused on the early 1970s, a time of rich creative activity for Nowlan—not only on the page but within a peer group that is unusual in Canadian literary history for its publicness and humour. At that time, Windsor Castle was visited by a wide-ranging cast of characters, from student poets to a provincial Premier. His poems,

public bodies, and celebratory parties artfully combined the satirical and the sacred, provocations and friendships. Personal pain would sometimes resurface for him in moments when drunken revelry brought out the hurt boy who lived on within the celebrated man. Writing poetry and forming alliances gave Nowlan a chance to let that same child out to rage or to play by turns. The success of his experiments in verse and community-building brought him accolades (or awards) and acolytes (or playmates). At the height of his artistic powers, Nowlan would overleap craft and play to transcendence, transporting readers from convincing description to inspired metaphor.

Others who joined FES—who ran with Nowlan's Flat Earth metaphor—fulfilled its mission of elevating the denigrated. The joke caught on. It worked. Not only Nowlan, as prime mover of the Society, but its diverse members saw the idea of a Flat Earth not as an end in itself but, rather, as a symbol that reminded adherents that the world we conceive of is never limited by our conceptions of it. That is to say, the planet contains and means more than we can understand or express. In Nowlan's words, from a prose statement issued in 1962, "everything worth knowing is unknowable" (qtd. in Cook 145). It would be saying too much, likely, to call such poetic messaging religious. FES spoofs rather than reproduces the biblical literalism that underlies the English and California-based Flat Earth Societies discussed in my introduction (SP 46). The onetime Flat Earth Society of Fredericton, however, like Nowlan's poetry, does go beyond the secular mentality dominating the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Perhaps it is fair to call Nowlan's more potent metaphors (which include his Flat Earth) artistic sacraments, so as to distinguish them from explicitly religious ones. They are rituals or portals that point beyond themselves to the nebulous complexities of a barely perceivable environment, one

that must be revered as well as studied. One path to reverence of the external realm is self-mockery, a poise which effectively counters the self-assurance of scientists, politicians, and polemicists. If Nowlan's literary legacy is to achieve its due recognition in the contemporary period, four decades after his untimely death, his position as an outsider to privilege or rebel against deadening mass culture might help advance his reputation and legitimacy. Nowlan appeals in part because he defies contemporary literary fashions and kowtows to no opinion. The theme of belief in a Flat Earth, his farcical badge of defiant honour, has regained a conspicuous place in the media landscape of the early twenty-first century. Perhaps that rising tide of anti-heroism (that sinking ship of fools) can help return Nowlan to the surface of literary culture. Appreciation of the oddity and exuberance of Nowlan's personal vision has the power to renovate readerly expectations of a figure too often thought of as a solemn chronicler of regional identity and personal trauma. His Flat Earth Society provides a convenient means to focus attention on Nowlan's unusual imagination and sly humour. His work reminds us that laughter is no joke. Hilarity, merriment, and mirth—these are equally healing and infectious.

Leo Ferrari in Cultural Memory: a Literature Review

The next chapter of my dissertation concerns the most publicly active FES member, President Leo Ferrari. It places the Society's membership and his performance of Planoterrestrialism into transnational rather than regional or national contexts. Ferrari is the most obscure author studied here, so this preliminary review can touch on the bulk of extant writing about him. His deep obscurity, compared to Nowlan and MacEwen, necessitates considering comments made outside of literary and scholarly genres. To understand Ferrari's limited role in cultural memory, one must turn to extra-literary testimonies, such as memorial statements and Internet postings. Almost no commentary on his scholarly work exists, even though he made ample contributions to the publishing world: with articles on Saint Augustine of Hippo, as a promoter of human rights, and with two minor poetry collections. His Flat Earth work has, ironically, eclipsed his more standard and professional releases in terms of reception. Ferrari's multi-generic writings have not been taken up by critics, save for rare instances of refutations from within the field of Augustine Studies. Rather, most commentaries on Ferrari deal with his dramatic character more than with specific interpretations of his wide-ranging intellectual commitments. Associates and others often describe his playful and exuberant personality. Those remembering him as a proponent of Flat Earth ideas usually ignore the variety of his career as a cultural worker, a lacuna that this dissertation seeks to repair. Ferrari's defiant charisma and eccentric charm enhanced his performance as the outspoken FES President, but the following chapter will show that he brought intellectual capacities and political concerns to bear on that role, which was teasingly comedic in the first instance.

A Philosophical Humanist

Ferrari restrained his penchant for wit in dozens of articles written over a long career as a professional philosopher.[106] In this body of work, the author interprets Saint Augustine as a thinker, theologian, literary craftsman, and biographical subject. His academic articles are thoroughly intellectual, but Ferrari found ways to push his scholarship in creative directions and test accepted limits within his specialized field. In 1971's "Symbols of Sinfulness," he attempts to explain Augustine's hyperbolic guilt over the adolescent theft of a neighbour's fruit with an allegorical reading of the incident, an interpretative style reminiscent of the early Christian and medieval thinkers Ferrari studied and taught. Ferrari maps the structure of Augustine's *Confessions* onto that of the Christian Bible, using two opposing sets of "trees" as hallmarks for the journey from sin to salvation. A pear and a fig tree in Augustine's book equate with the Tree of Knowledge and Christ's cross. Anticipating incredulity among his readers (largely other Augustine specialists), the author states that "to the modern mind, this proposed explanation may seem more farfetched than the enigma which it is supposed to explain" ("Symbols" 93). Many of his articles might have included warnings for readers expecting more solidity of argument than flourish of imagination from an academician. His decision not to augment bold findings with recognition of their limits provoked the ire of peers. There is not room here, nor in the subsequent chapter, to do justice to Ferrari's work on St. Augustine. Nor is this

[106] See *TEIF* pp. 53-56 for a complete list of Ferrari's academic articles, published from 1956 to 2003.

dissertation the place for that undertaking. But it is remarkable that sources responding to his extensive philosophical writings are mostly limited to two trenchant critiques.[107]

Felix Asiedu opposes a recurrent theme in Ferrari's essays, which often argue that Augustine's seemingly factual *Confessions* in fact combine autobiography with fictive elements influenced by the Christian Bible. Asiedu's 2001 article "Memory, Truth, and Representation at Augustine's Conversion Scene" firmly rejects Ferrari's attempts to attribute Augustine's self-representation of religious conversion to the example set by Saint Paul. Asiedu calls those interpretations "simplistic at best" (85). Conceding only Ferrari's inventiveness, the critic castigates him for an aberrant scholarly approach that seems more appropriate to Flat Earth satire than to formal philosophizing. "He uses Augustine's words in a manner that leaves so much in doubt," Asideu writes (79). He finds Ferrari's work "perplexing and uncompromising" (84), when "what should be enough to dissuade Ferrari from his elaborate conjectures emerges as yet another support for his theory" (88). The philosopher takes "an interesting tack" but one that "lacks merit" (92). "Ferrari's reasoning is brilliantly confounding" (94), "highly idiosyncratic and untenable" (99). With these words, Asiedu poses as a gatekeeper defending his field from Ferrari's renegade style of thought and argument. Asiedu's critique suggests Ferrari aligns himself with allegorical traditions of reading that were standard in Augustine's time. In "Truth and Augustine's Conversion Scene," Ferrari states that "various aspects of Augustine's notion of truth in the *Confessions* bespeak of an interiorized mystical

[107] The limitation concerns substantive treatment of Ferrari's work. Sources not discussed here provide brief citations absent elaborating considerations. Critics who cite Ferrari only briefly include Allegro, Delcorno, Eddy, Jonte-Pace, Lee, and Vaught. Andy Stark opens his 1982 philosophy paper by recalling Ferrari's humorous idea for multi-generational family stews. He moves on to discuss open-mindedness, without referring further to Ferrari, his Flat Earth Society, or to his philosophical body of writing.

mode of truth far removed from the empirically verifiable kind called for by the debate about the conversion scene" (11) that plays out in Augustinian Studies, which he attempted to disrupt. Asideu quotes these words in his critique but does not allow Ferrari room to blur the fact/fiction binary without accusing him of culpability, wrong-headedness, and lack of method. The critic attributes to the author "an exalted notion of allegorical signification" ("A Review" 103). Asideu did not intend these words as praise, but the apparent critique might have pleased the FES President, nonetheless. Within and beyond his Planoterrestrialism, Ferrari valued creativity over credibility.

Decades before Asiedu's unfavorable critique appeared, William Johnson's 1973 Ferrari interview-cum-profile appeared in the popular American magazine *Saturday Review of the Sciences*. Although interested primarily in the Flat Earth Society, as his title shows, Johnson presented Ferrari as philosopher and poet simultaneously by quoting in full a short poem from his *The Worm's Revenge*: "The philosopher / is a timid spider / Hiding from life / In piles of paper words" (Johnson 10). These lines contrast Ferrari's self-styled poetic flare with the deadening professionalism that he sought to avoid—by composing poetry and by heading a Flat Earth Society. Johnson plays the skeptical questioner to his subject's fervent Planoterrestrialist. At the article's climax, the note-taking journalist's "pencil point shattered" (10). The dramatic detail signals the ineffectual nature of his line of reasoning and submission to Ferrari's ludic charm or "sincere benevolence" (10). Johnson then ruminates on the quoted poem. Compared with Asiedu's analysis of Ferrari, Johnson's science journalism seems better aligned with Ferrari's slippery intellect. An ironic gap separates Asiedu's detraction, which comes from a remote corner in the field of humanistic study, and Johnson's charmed

appreciation, one reported in a high-profile scientific venue. That gap indicates the need for Ferrari's defiant and disruptive FES as well as his potentially troublesome confidence when claiming outlier positions regarding the canonically authoritative figure of Saint Augustine.

The second critique of Ferrari's Augustinian scholarship is C. P. E. Nothaft's "Augustine and the Shape of the Earth: A Critique of Leo Ferrari" (2011). The article was published in the year following Ferrari's death. It deals with a single text—"Augustine's Cosmography" (1996)—whereas Asiedu critiqued multiple academic articles. Before undertaking his critique of Ferrari's attempt to prove Augustine's belief in a Flat Earth, Nothaft recognizes Ferrari's overlapping role in FES. Drawing from Christine Garwood's short history of the Society headquartered in Fredericton, Nothaft writes that:

> a group of Canadian intellectuals, headed by the well-known Augustine scholar Leo C. Ferrari, breathed new life into the infamous idea by founding the Flat Earth Society of Canada (FESC) in 1970. Armed with both a serious philosophical purpose and a good dose of humor, Ferrari and his colleagues publicly championed the absurd doctrine of "planoterrestrialism" in order to subvert what they critically perceived as a popular blind faith in science that allowed scientific authority to overrule even the most basic inclinations of common sense. While the FESC itself is now long defunct, the subject of the flat earth has found a second lease of life in Ferrari's own scholarship. In 1996, he published an extensive article on Augustine's Cosmography in which he reached the following conclusion: "Surprisingly, he believed that the two greatest bodies in the universe were the sky and the earth, with the former dome-shaped and covering the latter. The earth was essentially flat and surrounded by the mighty Oceanus. The sun and moon were the two greatest bodies in the sky, but each was much smaller than the earth." Although the article has failed to generate much scholarly echo, Ferrari's views are in a good position to become received wisdom, seeing how they provide the basis for the corresponding entry in the standard encyclopedia for Augustinian studies. This situation is all the more remarkable considering that other recent writers on the subject treat Augustine's acceptance of the earth's spherical shape as a well-established fact. (35)

Starting a criticism of Ferrari as Augustinian specialist with recognition of his satirical Planoterrestrialism, Nothaft implicitly grants "Augustine's Cosmography" due credit for

raising “interesting questions” (35). In that respect, it appears modern spherical-versus-flat-Earth binaries do not translate directly to ancient thinkers. Many early cosmological texts and geographical maps remain open to interpretation. Nothaft treats Ferrari with more diplomacy than does Asiedu, then, even while expressing commensurate concern over Ferrari’s idiosyncratic contributions to an authoritative Augustinian source.

In exploring diverse historical understandings of our planet’s shape, Nothaft draws on many of the same astronomers and cosmological thinkers whom Ferrari adapts in his own Planoterrestrial history in *The Earth Is Flat!* This book uses historical figures such as Severian of Gabala and Cosmas Indicopleustes for fictitious purposes (*TEIF* 90, 170). The overlap is amusing and pertinent, given that Nothaft and Ferrari cite these thinkers of antiquity in such drastically opposing genres. Despite the wide gap separating sincere philosophical critique (on the part of Nothaft) and satirical revisionist history (for Ferrari), both writers seek to impress upon their readers that the progress of ideas from pagan philosophy through Christian dogma to modern science has been more erratic than linear. Regarding Cosmas Indicopleustes, Nothaft writes that “his resistance” to the spherical model is “best viewed as an attack from the intellectual periphery, maybe not too dissimilar to the efforts of nineteenth-century flat earthers to challenge conventional wisdom” (39). The fact that the critic does not invoke Ferrari by name at this juncture may suggest that he does not quite know where to place Ferrari in the history of philosophy or Flat Earthism. Alternatively, Nothaft may have seen Ferrari as implicitly implicated in challenging conventions, given that his name appears in the article’s title.

Writing primarily on ancient philosophers, Ferrari published on contemporary human rights as well, often under the auspices of the New Brunswick Human Rights

Commission. These educational titles highlight his progressive politics and emphasize the humanism of his work in the humanities. Regrettably, no analyses of his anti-racist and pro-equity works have emerged, which suggests they have an even smaller audience than his articles on St. Augustine. Ferrari's final non-fiction work was a memoir about his struggle with Alzheimer's Disease, *Different Minds* (2005). It was co-written with his wife and eventual caregiver Lorna Drew and received an anonymous review in Fredericton's *Daily Gleaner*. The reviewer highlights the same expansive spirit and fresh insight Ferrari related in multiple genres and through his Flat Earther guise. The *Gleaner* review quotes him saying, "in a way you're going back to when you're younger, when you're fresh in life" with the disease (Anon.). Heartening optimism and casual profundity contrast with a certain practical unflappability in the face of a devastating diagnosis:

> When they got the diagnosis, [Drew] says, "We thought, 'what next?'"
> When she asked Ferrari what he wanted to do, his response? "Let's go to lunch." (Anon.)

In keeping with the spirit of the co-written memoir *Different Minds*, the anonymous reviewer treats the couple's story in a way that might be helpful to others facing similar challenges. We hear of the coping mechanisms they developed, before the reviewer concludes with information about the disease, its pervasiveness, and available resources.

His Poetry and Persona

Like Ferrari's human rights and illness-memoir publications, his two self-published poetry collections have received little in the way of reaction. Luckily for his keen readers, Ferrari conscripted close friends Al Pittman and Alden Nowlan into composing introductions to them. Pittman wrote the Foreword to the 1968 collection, *The Worm's*

Revenge. In it, he invokes contemporary folk heroes and songwriters Bob Dylan and Johnny Cash as other exemplars of the beautiful simplicity he finds operative throughout Ferrari's versifying. Pittman quotes Dylan as saying "a poem is a naked person" and sets that definition above others (not cited) "offered by so many critics, academics, and 'professional' poets, who concern themselves so much with the exercise of defining poetry that they are seldom if ever capable of reading the stuff, simply because it's fun to read" (9). His Foreword champions poetry's emotive power as well as its "fun," in that a poet's laughter or tears are both "more important than the techniques used to produce the poem" (9). Pittman declares this point necessary to make amid a poetry industry that he finds plagued by artistic stagnation, academic workshops, and critical expertise.[108] Without drawing directly from the book itself, and not invoking Ferrari by name until the Foreword's close, Pittman casts him throughout as an honest amateur who bests the pros.

By then a noted poet, Nowlan composed the Introduction to the 1978 collection, *Over the Edge!* He begins by citing a personal relationship and embraces Ferrari as "my dear friend, my frequent companion, my secure comrade and my chosen brother" (9). Nowlan continues Pittman's writing, and aspects of Ferrari's own work, emphasizing a compelling personality over technical, poetic mastery. Indeed, neither Pittman nor Nowlan quote from the collections they introduce, even though Nowlan identifies a "new verse-form" at work: "the Ferrari-ism" (9). Elsewhere, he calls it the "*ferrarigram*" ("Dr. Ferrari" 133). No quotations from the poetry itself are used to outline formal properties of the Ferrari-ism/gram, because it is in fact a spontaneous oral and physical enactment of

[108] Pittman's complaint against the arid staleness of poetry (indeed, its flatness) was not a new one in the history of literature. It goes back at least as far as John Dryden's poem "MacFlecknoe" (1684), which satirizes the "thoughtless majesty" and "dullness" of other poets operating in his milieu (131 and 147).

inspired exuberance. Nowlan writes: “the Ferrari-ism is multidimensional and therefore resists being transferred to the page. […] The verses and epigrams printed here are to the actual Ferrari-ism what the magazine illustration is to the person” (“Introduction” 9). One requires the author’s physical presence, then, to appreciate his poetry properly, according to Nowlan. If true, this claim would account for the author’s scant reception. For Nowlan, the page robs the poems of much of their power, because “the Ferrari-ism in its pure state is improvised and enacted […] by its author and orchestrated by his laughter. He may or may not be rolling on the floor or standing on his head at the time” (10). The description implies that Ferrari anticipated the antics of performance poetry that would occupy later generations. Nowlan can recommend *Over the Edge!* even if it gives a merely credible imitation of his friend. “Even here on the printed page,” he writes, “a part of the Ferrari-ism survives and flourishes—bits and pieces of a man who has gone through hell and come out laughing, not in derision or defiance, but with a kind of worshipful joy” (10). The Introduction honours the poems that follow by lauding the man who wrote them. Nowlan’s fondness for the poet accounts for a biographical approach, but Ferrari’s epigrammatic poems also limit the scope of analytical interest. Their simplicity, however artful, has led to a small audience for Ferrari as a poet. *The New Brunswick Literary Encyclopedia* casts simplicity as a virtue, calling the poems “modernist and terse, with an abundance of humour and satire. His work explores matters such as life, death, education, and identity, but always with wit and a light touch” (Pretty and Brubacher).

Nowlan also published a 1974 *Weekend Magazine* article about Ferrari that appeared under the title “Would You Buy A Used Globe from this Man?” The text is reprinted in Nowlan’s nonfiction collection, *Double Exposure*. Therein, it receives the

alternate title “Dr. Ferrari and the Flat Earth Society.” Ferrari makes a strong physical impression in the profile. Nowlan opens the account of his friend’s Flat Earth persona with Ferrari “pounding his head against a stack of bricks. So violently that [Nowlan] winced. Not only his throat and lungs but his entire body was laughing. […] A moment later he hurled himself from his chair and, still laughing thunderously, rolled over and over on the floor” (“Dr. Ferrari” 132). This was sober rather than inebriated comportment for the professor, Nowlan points out: “he was merely amused and, as I’ve since learned, when Leo Ferrari is amused it’s as if he were possessed by the riotous Greek god Dionysus” (132). The appreciation’s length allows Nowlan space to add nuance to the potentially clownish image of Ferrari rolling about, doing a “handspring or stand[ing] on his head” (133). Ferrari is “a serious man, even a sad man, to whom laughter is both a personal and social therapy” (133). Nowlan addresses Ferrari’s involvements as a writer, not all of which leave room for laughter. Yet none of his texts are dealt with in illuminating detail, as are the physical descriptions Nowlan provides. Flat Earth themes dominate the article, but Nowlan shows that Ferrari’s Planoterrestrialism relates coherently to his more respectable endeavors. In that respect, Nowlan anticipates the dissertation’s next chapter, which articulates subtle links between Ferrari’s Planoterrestrialism and his philosophical humanism, human rights work, poetry, and memoir writing.

The New Brunswick Literary Encyclopedia’s entry on Ferrari only mentions FES while covering his other endeavors in more detail. The memorial notice published on the *McAdam’s Funeral Home* website similarly references FES only parenthetically, as one piece in the puzzle of Ferrari’s prodigious interests. “Leo Charles Joseph Ferrari”

remembers him in the first instance as a "beloved teacher" at St. Thomas University (n. pag.). Ferrari's flamboyant teaching style is depicted in a 2010 biography about one of his successful students, novelist David Adams Richards.[109] The depiction follows on the heels of a brief mention of FES. Biographer Tony Tremblay goes on to reanimate Ferrari's effective if unusual pedagogical methods as follows:

> Though an expert in Saint Augustine, his real specialty was rhetoric […] the display of which laid bare the rudiments of critical thinking. He would pick a position, argue for and against its logic and fallacies, then turn his jacket inside out and switch sides, defending expertly what he had just refuted. Students found the performances dazzling, learning about the use of evidence, the need to be familiar with both sides in debate, and the rigours of argumentation. The approach impressed on Richards the seductions of rhetoric in the construction of absolutes. He liked Ferrari instantly, getting the highest mark in his first-year courses in Philosophy 101. (107)

In this passage, physical performance meets intellectual flourish, uniting strains so often separated in writings about Ferrari. Tremblay credits him with Richards' decision to switch his undergraduate minor from history to philosophy (107). What so impressed this first-year student (Ferrari's dramatic style of argument and defiant approach to opinionizing) came to irritate the professor's peers, Asiedu and Nothaft. Note the imbalance between inspiring philosophy students and garnering the ire of professionals within the same field of study, which helps explain Ferrari's desire to make provocations out of his formal contributions to Augustinian studies. Frank Cronin, who delivered a eulogy at Ferrari's funeral, speaks positively of his "scholarly irreverence." Like other fond reports in *The Aquinian*, St. Thomas University's student paper, Cronin's remembers his colleague as having a "jovial glint in his eyes" (qtd. in Brown). This

[109] Rosemary Clews shows Ferrari's teaching continued after retirement. She writes in "Special Interest Magazines" (2006): "I invited Fredericton's 'chief granny' Lorna Drew and her husband Leo Ferrari (the first Professor Emeritus at St. Thomas University who is living with Alzheimer's disease) to speak [to my class] about their experiences and the book they were in the final stages of writing" (198).

description fits a pattern of appreciations using surface impressions to capture a glimpse of Ferrari's vivacious personality.

Nowlan biographer Gregory Cook depicts Ferrari[110] only glancingly, but he cuts a wildly compelling figure in Patrick Toner's biography, *If I Could Turn and Meet Myself* (2000). Toner grants a prominent role to Ferrari, referencing him on the opening page of the book (9). The biographer treats FES's President across seventeen pages all told, allowing space for him well beyond the FES context. As is typical in extant writing about him, Ferrari's personality and physicality come to the fore. Toner notes that the poet (Nowlan) and philosopher (Ferrari) became close friends because "Ferrari did not fit the academic stereotype" with his "wild hair" and "bacchanalian character" (186-87 and 221). Physical exploits appear frequently: "Ferrari plucked a large boulder from the Abysmal Chasm," while "secured by a rope tied to [Al] Pittman" (206); "swam regularly in the UNB pool, mak[ing] sporadic attempts to persuade his friend [Nowlan] to reform his unhealthy habits" (216); was pictured "jumping on a globe" on the cover of *Weekend Magazine* (221); and photographed in his Monarchy guise as Archbishop, complete with "religious robes and a mitre fashioned by Tom Forestall" (261). Toner reports on Ferrari's skill as a homebrewer and consumer of ale (187, 192) as well as his plans to "assume the government's monopoly on the sale of alcohol and remove all taxes on booze," once the local Stuart Monarchy campaign succeeded in attaining seats of power (222). These physical and comic appearances in the first published Nowlan biography parallel Toner's reminders that Ferrari was not just a conspicuous character in

[110] Ferrari appears only twice in Cook's *One Heart, One Way* (2003), both times in a minor role. He is recalled by Walter Learning as the person who first introduced him to Alden Nowlan and, later, is named as a FES co-founder in the only paragraph about the Society Cook saw fit to include in his book (see 234 and 240).

Fredericton but an "internationally respected" expert in "Augustinian philosophy" as well (221).

President Ferrari: On- and Out-of-Line

Garwood's *Flat Earth: History of an Infamous Idea* (2007) gives the most detailed sketch of Ferrari's conspicuous character. Her "View from the Edge" is the fullest study of FES pre-dating the present dissertation. That chapter title obviously refers to Ferrari's whimsical adventure on Fogo Island (SP 175). It indicates too FES's aberrant position in the already-unusual history of Flat Earthism. Ferrari's enigmatic character, as Garwood records it, matches the misfit outfit he served as President. "Ferrari made quite an impression on those he met," she writes: "wild-haired and wacky, he had an innate love of the extraordinary, the unconventional, and the ridiculous" (281-82). Such traits jump out against the staid background of his professional life at St. Thomas University, a Catholic post-secondary institution. The historian of ideas finds the contrast fascinating. "At first glance, establishing a flat-earth society seemed an unusual pastime for a middle-aged professor of philosophy with a BSc in science, but Ferrari was no ordinary academic," she writes. Garwood reports that a "technical career" as a chemist (following undergraduate studies) did not "fulfill his artistic and literary inclinations" that led him to pursue Philosophy (281). Despite subsequently researching and teaching ideas, Ferrari soon "viewed the dry pretensions of academia with disdain" (282). FES was a necessary "distraction," Garwood writes, "from the egotism, back-biting and stress" of campus politics. Before long, "academia was a distraction from his work as president of the Flat Earth Society" rather than the other way around (304). Garwood paints a lively portrait: a

whimsical character searching for raucous forms of escape from professional drudgery and "sedate," "serene" Fredericton, with its "elm-lined avenues and elegant government buildings" (283 and 306). Doing so, she gives equal credit to FES's humorous antics and grave messaging. Due to dementia, regrettably, Ferrari was not able to appreciate her serious look at his playful Society at the time of its release in 2007.

Since Ferrari's death in 2010, his name has appeared most often on digital Flat Earth forums, rather than in academic or literary sources. Internet users who cite Ferrari declare appreciation for his planoterrestrial satire, mistake him for a true believer in a Flat Earth, or condemn him as an agent of "controlled opposition" secretly working for the forces of Globularism. Eric Dubay leads the "controlled opposition" charge, writing that Ferrari "spent his life making a mockery of the *legitimate subject of our flat Earth*" (n. pag.).[111] Those who detect sincere Flat Earthism include Cal Piso, who in 2015 released a review of Ferrari's manuscript for *The Earth Is Flat!* on a Russian platform whose title means "Freedom of Speech and Respect." Following Piso's review, which seems to take Ferrari's Planoterrestrialism at face value, a heated debate ensues between commenters. Therein, Piso accuses another user of being naïve in viewing Ferrari as a mere satirist:

> If you have read Ferrari's unpublished manuscript, as I have, you would see that he was certainly not a globularist, and that the Flat Earth Society of Canada was not a 'parody organization' or 'satirical' but real indeed. At best your comment just shows how gullible you are by believing anything and everything that wiki writes.

[111] The accurate if defensive interpretation by Flat Earthers began when FES was at its peak in the mid-1970s. The biblical literalist Charles Johnson—President of the California-based International Flat Earth Research Society—called Ferrari a "false prophet guilty of muddying the waters of truth." These words are reproduced by Gregory Lessing Garrett (339), who similarly finds Ferrari suspect for his atheism as well as for his satirical use of Flat Earth ideas. Later in the same book, Garrett describes an accused controlled opposition Planoterrestrialist named Mark Sargent as "the Leo Ferrari to my Charles Johnson" (343).

As evidence for Ferrari's genuine beliefs, he cites the fact that FES "is mentioned on both the University of New Brunswick website and in his obituary in a serious sense" (Piso). Thus, the reviewer fails (or pretends to fail) to distinguish between an entity's mere existence and its transparent authenticity.

A blog post from outside the so-called Flat Earth community takes Ferrari's Planoterrestrialism seriously without taking his statements as sincerely meant. Space historian Roger Launius includes him in his survey of "Perceptions of Belief in a Flat Earth." Launius opens with an appreciation of imagination. He goes on to identify "a decidedly post-modern approach" at work in Flat Earth ideas Ferrari expressed. This designation recognizes the intellectual intent behind the Society's antics. Launius states Ferrari "argued for personal decisions" against inherited ideologies (n. pag.). This side of the Society's work justifies "postmodern" interpretations; the eccentric, iconoclastic movement undermined narratives guiding western civilization's development. Launius balances FES's heady mission with the entertaining "street theatre" used to amplify a "fascinating and cockeyed perspective on modern society" (n. pag.). He highlights the Society's importance by affixing it to the "middle twentieth century," the temporal "zenith" of deference to "scientific versus other types of authority" (n. pag.). Sadly, this outside look at Ferrari's Planoterrestrialism is contained in a brief passage of a short blog post.[112] Writers of longer breath who take Ferrari seriously as a Flat Earther, like Piso, fail to take him seriously as a thinker and disruptive performer. This failure often leads to sources that do not present Ferrari as a well-rounded and provocative individual, but

[112] Launius announces his work on a book-length study, not yet released, with the same title as a conference paper he delivered in 2011: "Envisioning the Earth: Conceptions of this Planet from the Flat Earth to Gaia."

instead appropriate him into ideological positions through narrow representations of his writing.

The term "Ferrari effect" has been adopted by Flat Earth discussion groups online. Having taken on a life of its own, it is usually employed without reference to its source: for example, on a forum hosted by a British "Flat Earth Society" unaffiliated with the Fredericton group. Amid a flurry of mathematical formulas, physics graphs, and hard-nosed attempts at educating or misinforming others, this Society's Secretary, John Davis, intervenes: "There is nothing wrong with the Ferrari effect except folks here misunderstanding it" (n. pag.). Regrettably, the concept does not refer to gap between stated and implied meanings. The effect refers to Ferrari's inventive justification for the rounded look of Earth's horizons, visible in the North American Space Agency's 1969 images taken from space. The force gravity exerts on light-rays accounts for the illusion; "the more space, the more curvature," Ferrari wrote (*TEIF* 114) in the same work Piso reviewed. The knowingly distortive appropriation of scientific principles is maligned by users like Xenotolerance, whose Internet handle may indicate a strident or comic personality. Others see the effect as evidence for Ferrari's status as a controlled opposition agent. For Dubay, he used a needlessly elaborate explanation related to relativity, where a simple conspiracy theory would do (Dubay).[113] Readers should not lend undue credence to any contestant in this multi-threaded tug-o-war over Ferrari. Deployment of anonymous usernames, the combative nature of digital debates, a

[113] Dubay states: "In a famous 1971 CBC interview Ferrari was asked, 'how do you explain the fact that the Earth appears round in the pictures taken from space by the astronauts?' Instead of answering and addressing the clear photo-trickery involved, Ferrari replied, 'Simple. No doubt you're familiar with Einstein's theory of the curvature of space. If space is curved—and modern physics is based on that assumption—the Earth, from space, would appear circular.' […] This convoluted, pandering answer really is no answer at all and serves only to make the listener cock their head and raise an eyebrow" (n. pag.).

tendency toward plagiarism or misattribution,[114] and the prevalence of Internet trolls or satirists should make us wary of taking anyone's chatter at face value, however tempting it may be to deplore the ignorance of impassioned, self-proclaimed Flat Earthers. Indirectly or by design, Flat Earth forums provide the same lesson Ferrari instilled: proceed through all texts with skeptical caution.

The tug-o-war over Ferrari taking place on digital Flat Earth forums recalls his border-blurring role in Augustinian Studies, a field which accepted him by publishing his findings in important venues and rejected him for his unconventional critical approach. His colourful resistance to the black-and-white nature of the fact-versus-fiction debate over Augustine's writing oddly foreshadowed his own role as a historical precedent for Flat Earth discussions now evolving online. In reviewing public responses to Ferrari's work, one notices two striking patterns. First, Ferrari often defied expectations of the genres and modes in which he wrote. In academic writing, he strove to promote his originality of insight over his rigor of argument. In *Different Minds*, he managed to articulate the effects of his normally debilitating dementia, not all of them cast in a strictly negative light. Regarding his poetry titles, Ferrari's work has been valued by Pittman and Nowlan for its simplicity and the personality it records rather than for artful constructions. As the subsequent chapter reveals with select examples, Ferrari defied the solemnity and precision usually associated with poetry through self-mockery and defiance of expectations. True to that characteristic defiance, various sources remember this intellectual author for his absurdist satire and physical antics.

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[114] See, for example, the substantial overlap between Dubay and Garrett's brief writings on Ferrari.

Further, it seems remarkable that so little appreciation of Ferrari's writings has been documented, given his varied involvements as an intellectual and his persistence on the margins of cultural memory. In the twentieth-century, Ferrari has appeared primarily in the biographies of his associates and in discussions of Flat Earth topics. Although documenting different aspects of his life and work, these literary biographies and Flat Earth sources overlap, because they recognize Ferrari as a dramatic outlier and charismatic person. Unlike Garwood, contributors to online forums may not always detect the performance behind Ferrari's Planoterrestrialism, whether they seek to elevate or debunk his position. However, he took up his most bold and absurd stance in his public guise as FES's President, and that work makes him worth considering as a precursor to the age of post-truth, fake news, and infodemics. Although some may regret the relatively small audience for his writings on philosophy, human rights, and mental illness, as well as for his poetry, Ferrari himself would likely find reason to smile over the fact that his anti-Globular satire endures today.

Leo Charles Ferrari versus the Gyroglobular-Industrial-Complex

A President in Exile

Born 8 December 1927, the unlikely founding President of Canada's Flat Earth Society grew up in New South Wales, Australia—but not upside-down as he would later insist.[115] Ferrari received general education through a Christian system before enrolling at the University of Sydney. Graduated with a BSc, he worked as an industrial chemist[116] while privately studying philosophy. Migrating to Quebec City in 1955, Ferrari continued that learning at the University of Laval. Doctorate in hand, he began to teach: briefly in Halifax; at Chatham, New Brunswick; and as of 1961 in Fredericton for the Philosophy Department of St. Thomas University. Leaving formal religion and laboratory science behind, he taught ancient and medieval ideas until 1995. After retiring, he became the Catholic, liberal arts institution's first Professor Emeritus. While working in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, Ferrari augmented academic duties with off-campus leadership positions: President of Halifax's Grosvenor Park Home and School Association and in Fredericton co-founder of the Save-A-Family Plan, which raised funds for poverty relief in India. Engaged with the Maritime communities where he spent two thirds of a long life, Ferrari was in many ways unconstrained by regional or national borders. His interests made him a man of the world as well as a conspicuous local character in Fredericton. This chapter investigates the transnational scope of the Society he served as

[115] This paragraph derives from Pretty and Brubacher's encyclopedia entry and Nowlan's "Dr. Ferrari…." Personal history is scarce in the second and third chapters of this dissertation, because Ferrari and MacEwen wrote little about their backgrounds. On-going experience makes less significant marks on their prose and verse than it does on Nowlan's creative writing, which is deeply autobiographical.

[116] Speculation: exposure to industrial chemicals increased his chance of developing dementia later in life.

President, although like Ferrari's other involvements FES has regional and national resonances as well.

How do internationalism and regionalism combine in the figure of FES's strange-but-true President? Filmed/audio interviews reveal that his Australian accent did not acculturate to Maritime speech patterns, in English or French, a second language he was sometimes called upon to speak.[117] His academic specialty too was imported to *Nouveau Brunswick*: early Christian thinkers, particularly North Africa's Augustine of Hippo. While pursuing Augustine, Ferrari enlightened domestic/international philosophy students through his popular courses at STU. As a scholar, he found a secondary interest in the emergent global (under erasure) topic of human rights. On this subject, he wrote several papers under the auspices of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission. Ferrari's poems capture snapshots of Maritime culture. They also record his brief but influential time in Germany, where he conducted research in the 1970s.[118] During another leave from STU, he toured California, where he found warm reception for geo-planarian lectures honed while speaking from pulpits in Atlantic Canada. Lastly, he met Australia's High Commissioner to Canada in Fredericton. That brief encounter overlays local, national, and transnational associations. Ferrari's letter to His Excellency John Ryan recalls the Commissioner's "spontaneous remark that [he] felt a 'strong surge of sympathy'" for FES (1978, LFF 2.1.12-3). Australia's location on the periphery of

[117] He can be heard speaking English on CBC's *Take 60* segment about FES and in the mockumentary film *In Search of the Edge*. Ferrari's *The Earth Is Flat!* discusses his modest accomplishments in French as well as French-language audiences' delight at hearing their own tongue modified by a thick foreign accent (247-48).

[118] See *Over the Edge!* pages 22-32 for "The Native," "Down Through the Ages," and "To a German Zorba"; pages 40-56 for "Overseen in Hofbräuhaus House," "The Waterfall," "The Foreigner," "Für Monika," "The Yearn to Learn," "German Catholicism," "German," "Behind the Iron Curtain," "The Supernational Language," and "The Reach of Time."

standard world maps (or worse, the underside of globes) can engender marginal sensibilities even for citizens of high standing. A diasporic Australian acquainted with ancient worldviews, Dr. Ferrari would likely have known that north-oriented maps emerged only with increasing use of magnetic compasses during the later medieval period. Flashes of professional knowledge and personal experience lent a patina of authority to his side-show persona, hop-along Ferrari the mad Flat Earther.

As the outspoken front man or fall guy for FES, Ferrari lent the project his academic savvy, charismatic persona, and international outlook. He drew on his personal background for evidence against a spherical Earth. "I spent the first twenty-eight years of my life in Australia," he writes, asking "was I living upside down? Certainly not! Nor were any of the other 12 million Australians. We were just as much right-end-up as any inhabitants of the supposed northern hemisphere" (*TEIF* 96). He also reports observing no physical change while sailing over the supposed equator *en route* to Canada in the 1950s: excepting the mystifying excitement of other passengers. Crossing the equator "was the occasion for all kinds of parties and jolly ho-ho celebrations" onboard, he writes, claiming the equator had exclusively this "social function" (96). Ferrari exploited his national heritage in service of Flat Earth drollery in his own writing and in the press. Dick Dougherty's 1978 article for Rochester's *Times-Union* titled "Earth Is Round? That's Ridiculous" quotes Ferrari stating:

> [Modern life is] getting so damn SERIOUS! I mean everyone says there is only one way of looking at things. […] Everyone is going bonkers. […] Look, I spent the first 28 years of my life in Australia. People say: "oh, you're from Down Under!" And, naturally, I say down under what?
>
> I mean! It's bonkers. And not only that, it's unfair. Imagine if someone took YOU and kept you upside down for 28 years! I am fundamentally opposed to this sort of thing. Fundamentally. (p. A4 qtd., LFF 2.2.46-1)

FES's President bends rhetoric in the passage's closing words. His humorously sincere tone in opposing poor treatment is absurd yet provocative. There is much to oppose in the dramatic disparity across the world's nations, but few people would attribute the problem to ideas about Earth's geometric form. Further, few would imagine a tenured anglophone with a media platform felt bound to the lower reaches of access and power. Ferrari's invocations of his national background are jests, but pretending that Australians are perceived as antipodeans does dramatize and subtly resist his home-country's sometimes disadvantageous position far from the major centres of western civilization. As ever, ribbing spoofs are fortified with challenges FES poses to standard impressions of our physical planet and social world. Others found ways to echo or respond to Ferrari's Flat Earth message. Now available in public archives, their private letters are read below in an international selection.

On Applicants and Authors

William Johnson's article about FES in the *Saturday Review of the Sciences* (SP 193) attracted many American applicants. Statements of faith reaching the Society from south of the Canada-United States border offered renditions of the group's broadly anti-conformist ethos. However, Ferrari likely preferred messages from applicants who made specific, creative claims that expanded his Society's already flexible mandates. An undated letter from Baltimore, Maryland's Thomas Dolan to Ferrari ties these two strands together: the commonly anti-conformist and truly original. It outlines his motivations for wanting to join: "Sir, I consider my application to the Flat Earth Society a protest against the mechanization of society." He goes on to repeat the importance of sensory experience

and distrust of canonical science defined by the Society's aims. "Man is not losing his senses—they are becoming numb—man is losing his sensitivity!" Dolan writes. He continues: "With the blind faith of a religious fanatic, man puts his trust in a highly respected (if not worshiped), exclusive clique of people—the scientists." Compellingly, he made the unique statement that he had wanted to visit Canada in the past, "but had been discouraged by the steep uphill climb as portrayed by the globe" (undated, LFF 2.1.6-1). FES's good news about flatness gave him courage to travel. This interpretation of cowering Globularism versus emboldening Planoterrestrialism helped secure Dolan a place in the Society, because he participated in its alternate world-building project in a novel, personal, and comedic way. His deadpan quip about a perpetually uphill route leading from Baltimore to Fredericton is both a joke and potent metaphor for international division.

Dolan designed a graphic letterhead for FES, based on a map of Canada. It remained in use even after the name change from FES "of Canada" to FES. He applauded the change, recognizing that Planoterrestrialism works against political division. The applicant's allegiance with the troublemakers behind FES defied the international border that seemed to separate them. Dolan wrote to Ferrari: "Countries and people […] continue to be blinded by the nationalism and political bickering that forever serves to assassinate world unity" (3 Dec. 1974, LFF 2.1.8). He makes his ideals personal by drawing on professional experience. Dolan had worked "as a clerk in a U.S. gov. map library," where he learned that "governments, when printing world maps, usually position their own naked earthly body—their own hemisphere in the very center […which leads to] an intentional widening of the canyons of international understanding." He signed off:

"Yours for the desire of world harmony" (2.1.8). Sharing sentiments grounded in a first-hand narrative, Dolan gratified the Society's desire to foster individual exploration and transnational cooperation. For Ferrari, FES sought "national parity—in the Flat Earth philosophy all nations are indeed on the same level" (*TEIF* 102). This punning adage whimsically disguises a truly felt hope as a possible outcome of an obviously inadequate campaign.

Dolan's FES letters are diverse in themselves, and he was just one applicant responding to Ferrari's cheeky Flat Earthism. Others include Monroe Freedman, Dean of Law at Hofstra University in New York State. Freedman wrote encouragingly to Ferrari about two papers in preparation by him: "What Shall I Tell My Child About Planoterrestrialism?" and "Planoterrestrialism and Ordinary Language" (15 Nov. 1973, LFF 2.1.5-2). Ferrari included the former in the "Flat Earther's Forum" section of *The Earth Is Flat!* (293-94). The latter study, not completed or lost to history, would reportedly explore how common parlance reveals unconscious Flat Earth thinking. "Sunrise" and "sunset" were two of Freedman's examples (2.1.5-2). The application from Virginia's Rick McKee complicates FES's promotion of sensory knowledge. He records his senses perceiving not geographical flatness but, instead, an individually defined planetary experience. McKee writes:

> One cannot entirely rely on the optic nerves alone to accurately transmit reality. Indeed, since all of our sense inputs are filtered through individual subjective biases, each one of us may receive a different image of the same objects. For every man, his own alternate reality; people see what they want to see and all that. The world may actually look round to those who believe it to be so in the first place, and flat to those who worship flatness, square to those who identify with squareness…do you understand what I mean? I am trying to say, in other

> words…that the world is really an isosceles rhomboid! (Letter to Ferrari, 1973, LFF 2.1.16)[119]

This application carries out FES's endorsement of "personal decisions," an approach defined as postmodern in a blogpost already quoted (SP 204). McKee's individually determined world, his "isosceles rhomboid," is geometrically precise and oblique—as in skewed or slanting. It is not plain whether he pictures two- or three-dimensional geometry for this "rhomboid" (not "rhombus"), given that rhombic prisms are familiar structures to crystallographers. The word "isosceles" is not commonly attached to this shape but to triangles, so he may have imagined a pointedly paradoxical three-sided rhombus. McKee clearly strives for unusual conception and non-standard language. Creative ambivalence signals that he understands the playful joke and intellectual interference of the collective he wished to join.

These several examples must stand in here for the first wave of applications that reached FES from outside Canada. Although the American contingent represents the majority of interested parties abroad, FES received letters from other countries. Dr. Erik Grafarend wrote from the University of Bonn after hearing Ferrari give an address to geodesic mathematicians in Fredericton (*TEIF* 264-71). Grafarend links his reputable field of study to the willfully disreputable FES: "Assuming all gravity vectors are by definition parallel […] the curvature of the earth's surface results [in] zero, a classical result of geodesic geometry. Thus, the earth is flat" (1974, LFF 2.1.6-2). The academic contacts Ferrari obtained through Flat Earth talks at universities were one path to widening FES's international reach. Another: two men who came to know Nowlan and

[119] The reference code added to a scan of this letter in 2018 may be an error, since it is unclear why McKee's position would have landed him in Ferrari's "hope he goes away" file ("Series No. 2").

Ferrari while living in Fredericton went on to become the Society's esteemed Plenipotentiaries abroad after departing Canada. The introduction of foreign Representatives-cum-Plenipotentiaries continued the grand FES tradition of using pompous titles to defy and yet confirm (through detectable, self-abasing humour) their lowly status as a Society of unapologetic provocateurs.

During the early weeks of FES's existence, Romanian-born author and radiologist Nicholas Catanoy received Official Representative status, a title later revised to Plenipotentiary. He had by then left his medical practice in Fredericton and re-crossed the Atlantic to work in France's literary publishing industry. In Paris, Catanoy recruited to FES theatre-of-the-absurd playwright Eugène Ionesco, who was like him an exilic Romanian writer. Regarding this achievement, Nowlan wrote to another Plenipotentiary: "everybody thinks that's a joke, but it's absolutely true" (Letter to Lawrence Block, 1972, ANP 40.12.6.57). Catanoy's letters from Europe to Fredericton do not focus on FES. But one encloses a poem shared because of its Flat Earth metaphor by future Nobel Prize winner J. M. G. le Clézio. "L'infiniment moyen" from *L'extase materielle* ("The Infinitely Average," *Material Ecstasy*) includes these lines: "Ce que je sais : / la terre est plate / elle est creusée dans toute sa longueur / par une blessure seche" (Clézio 109 or ANP 40.6.9.23).[120] Catanoy found conceptual links, then, between his little-known Fredericton coterie and his high-profile work in a cosmopolitan centre. Five thousand kilometers away, Nowlan expressed the felt lack of Catanoy's presence at Windsor Castle, writing to his friend in 1972 that "Paris seems very far from here, perhaps because

[120] My translation: "This I know: / the earth is flat / it is gouged out along all its length / by a dry wound." I was tempted to replace "along" with "down" for *dans* (usually "in"), which would suggest strange psychogeographic potential prompted by sonic fidelity instead of the poet's prepositional construction.

I've never been there—whereas London which is almost as far geographically doesn't seem very far at all, because I've touched it physically" (ANP 40.6.9.42). His comment reinforces a bit of FES orthodoxy: that subjective experience of place (or distance) contains more reality for us than do seemingly objective versions of location (or dislocation) represented by scientific models. However central to FES's mission, that poetic evaluation does not qualify as dogma, because it asks members of the Society/society to define their own reality, as participants like McKee realized and celebrated by implicitly appointing himself unofficial ambassador representing the "isosceles rhomboid" planetary experience: one card in FES's shuffled deck.

Plenipotentiary Catanoy memorialized his life in creative writing that is both imaginative and documentary in nature. His *Fiddlehead Republic* (1979) recalls his time in 1960s New Brunswick, when and where he practiced medicine. The published version gives the places and dates encompassing its composition: Paris 1972 and Frankfurt 1975 (n. pag.). So, while FES was building up its membership from Fredericton headquarters, its Plenipotentiary to Continental Europe was reimagining the impressions Fredericton and his close friends had made on him. *Fiddlehead Republic* variously recognizes the city as a "Poets' Corner" (46), as the "capital" of New Brunswick's figuratively independent republic (31), and as "capital of / The Flat Earth Society of / Canada" (25). On the book's opening page, the poet writes: "In the distance the St. John River shining […] The sleepy villages regain importance / White trees move across the sky / Is this the 'Rhine of America?' / FREDERICTON / FREDERICTON" (9). Lyrically comparing the St. John River to the Rhine refuses colonialist attitudes that understand places like New Brunswick as mere outposts of European civilization. Catanoy's poem invents the word

"Fredericopolis" (46), creative renaming that aggrandizes what is effectively a *town* ("ton") as a major city ("polis"), renaming Nowlan and Ferrari likely appreciated. The poem of place recalls these spirited figures too, "*their eyes bulging with brightness*" (26). This line gives an image for the vital enthusiasm and emotive intensity the Symposiarch and President shared, qualities that led to FES's inception and success, at home or away. Bright, "bulging" eyes mark them as men set against the staid conformity of mass culture.

Another creative work by Catanoy suggests his personal fit with FES without making references to New Brunswick or Planoterrestrialism. When still a young man serving as a Romanian Cadet immediately after the Second World War, Catanoy was captured. He suffered traumatic incarceration in a Russian military prison, a year-long ordeal few of his fellow inmates survived. The long-poem *Notes on a Prison Wall* documents his encounter with "Kalashnikovs. / Genital mutilations. / Blood" (3). The description printed on the book's back page in 1994 explicates how Catanoy's confining and violent experience led to spirited epiphanies that sustained him. The promotional blurb says the author "asks us […] to find that humanity lies outside the existing structure of society and literary decorum" (n. pag.). Reviewing the same book, Virgil Nemoianu recognizes continuities between the author's desperate plight and the corresponding surge of spirit that led to his survival and, later, artistic production. He sees the poet as "one who is placed at the very limit of survival, fighting feebly yet tenaciously against totalitarian homogeneity" (152). Within the poem, Catanoy tells of his realizations regarding the dehumanizing quality of ideological thought systems. "It is foolish to trumpet ideologies in extenuated ages / when any dream of the future seems an imposture," he writes (*Notes* 14). In the years between the writer's diarized experience of

incarceration and its poetic adaptation, he fell in cahoots with FES partly because their brand of grave "foolishness" attacked through mockery ideological possession. Their imagined conflict of Planoterrestrialists versus Globularists spoofs polarizing and sometimes fatal trends in the era's cold war politics. Catanoy's pessimism also aligns him with FES's bleakly sardonic approach to countercultural messaging: flipside to all the fun.

Fiddlehead Republic and *Notes on a Prison Wall* span gentle lyricism and graphic violence, indicating Catanoy's impressive range. His varied activities as a doctor, poet, and editor have not resulted in a high profile for this Plenipotentiary, however. Little engagement with his output has appeared in published form. In a 1980 review, Peter Jay panned the anthology *Modern Romanian Poetry* that Catanoy assembled with help from Nowlan and his extended network of Canadian poets. (They made English-language versions from Catanoy's crib translations.) Questioning the editor's diligence, Jay writes that "the only principle of selection that one can discern is his own taste for the fanciful and neo-surrealist," a taste the reviewer does not share (59). Neither does the venue that published the review, generally, given *PN Review*'s tendency toward formal and thematic conservativism that, in a grand English tradition, provides odd contradictory openings to eccentricity. He finds the Canadian adaptations largely unfaithful (singling out TISH's George Bowering as "the worst offender") and writes that "Mr. Catanoy's historical essay on modern Romanian poetry is idiosyncratic in the extreme" (59). Jay considers the editor "out of touch" with his own national literature in a review that opens by citing his long-term residence in Canada (59). A recent source by Laura Pop, from 2018, reclaims Catanoy for the Romanian literary canon, despite his position between cultures and his

record of publishing in multiple languages, sometimes within a single work.[121] Pop praises what was not lost on Ferrari or Nowlan: "the personality, the richness, and value of the work of Nicholas Catanoy." She puts the obscure author forward "with a view to bridging the gap between the level of consideration given to exilic Romanian writers versus the autochthonous ones," specifically because "exilic work has been unfairly judged" by critics (87). She argues that Catanoy's experience and writing operate on local and national levels in locations abroad as well as in Romania, where he returned to live in the 1990s (92). She sums up his career in this way: "Catanoy's entire work is an interface of human dignity, an example of high moral profile also called individuation" (90). Pop cites two recent Romanian-language sources of interest: a biography by Ion Cristofor and an epistolary volume edited by Maria Pal. These works, together with Pop's article, signal the potential for a resurgence of Nicolae Cătănoiu (his Romanian name[122]) in his national literature if not in Canadian studies. A dissertation on FES may seem an odd place to elaborate Catanoy's reception, but appropriate venues for such work are rare. His humanism, creativity, and obscurity make him emblematic of FES and its international membership.

Another valued member departed for points east before FES began its campaign. Vancouver-born author Keath Fraser left his post at UNB for England in 1970. There, he studied for a doctorate and earned the title Plenipotentiary to Great Britain and the

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[121] Catanoy's multilingual *Hic and Nunc* shuffles English/Romanian/French/Spanish lexicons.

[122] Recorded by Liana Ștefan and Iulia Para (558). They capture the spirited angst that made Catanoy a symbolic Flat Earther in an age of ideological conflict and technological conquest, writing: "*L'exaspération et l'inquiétude qui caractérisent le monde actuel semblent hanter aussi l'écrivain roumain. Il ne trouve nulle part la tranquillité et le repos, toujours à la recherche d'un monde meilleur et de soi-même. Son exile volontaire lui permet de chercher et de découvrir des endroits exotiques, réels ou imaginaires, de cultiver la diversité dans la globalisation*" (559). *Traduction réductive*: his exasperation and unease apart, he is a positive model for the figure of a global citizen.

Republic of Ireland, a title that amalgamates/separates two countries. FES founders hoped he might succeed where they had failed: making contact with their predecessor based in Dover, Samuel Shenton of IFERS notoriety. Nowlan saw this as good reason to grant Fraser a high-level position, to knight him by FES's trick sword. In November 1970, he proposed to co-founder R. Fraser that K. Fraser join their tiny band of Planoterrestrialists "provided he'll dig out information in London on the British body" (ANP 40.12.6.30). His strategic position aside, K. Fraser made a good fit for FES, as Nowlan and Ferrari knew from associations with him on campus and at Windsor Castle. In a 1969 letter, Nowlan agreed to join his friend's proposed mock organization, one that never came about but was nonetheless proleptic to FES's rough textures. Fraser's plans for a "Faculty of Neglected Sense" exploited a pun on (firmly?) opposed meanings for the word "faculty": a grouping of academics by field versus sensory/logical ability. The Faculty was a precursor to FES in endorsing embodiment and making implicit jabs at the stereotypical elitism and witlessness of professional thinkers. Nowlan requested a Faculty "membership card" from Fraser and proposed for himself the title of "honorary national grand sniffer, or whatever" (ANP 40.12.22.2). This seems on odd instance of self-nomination, especially now knowing the Faculty never came about. Nowlan's dangling tag "or whatever" reverses the "honour" and federal import of his non-existent role. Fraser's interest in FES and potential symbioses between that and his literary output are not addressed here, because as a Canadian only temporarily stationed in the United Kingdom he was not international to the same extent as some other FES participants. Neither does he appear in the dissertation's subsequent "Kanadian" chapter, because his

contributions to FES are less thorough or at least less thoroughly documented than those of his CanLit peers.

With K. Fraser and Catanoy posted to the capital cities of England and France, in a 19 December 1970 letter Nowlan suggested to R. Fraser that their group might one day become "the International Flat Earth Society," a change that would effectively occur years later when "of Canada" was dropped from the moniker. He mused that it "should be fairly easy to find a Flat Earther in New York—then we'd have men in London, Paris, New York, and Montreal. Impressive as hell" (ANP 40.12.23.156). It would not take long to land a man in N.Y.C., and this happened more than a year before the first wave of American interest arrived in 1973. The first application from the United States was solicited from an author of genre fiction. Mystery writer Lawrence Block was named Plenipotentiary to the Eastern United States (Nowlan to Block, 11 March 1972, ANP 40.12.6.57) after FES Chancellor and heir to the throne in Fredericton's Monarchy Jim Stewart encountered a Flat Earth reference in Block's *Ronald Rabbit Is a Dirty Old Man* (1970). This black comedy has become a rare item, as its author accurately predicted. In a letter to Stewart that the Chancellor forwarded to the Symposiarch, who retained a copy for his archives, Block used the book's exceedingly modest success as an opportunity to insert planoterrestrial quips into the exchange:

> I would advise retaining your copy, as it gives every indication of being a potentially rare volume. My publisher, Bernard Geis, was forced into bankruptcy within a week of introducing my book to the marketplace, and hence has been quite unable to expend any significant promotional effort on its behalf. While I have always been disinclined to support conspiracy theories of history, the coincidence here seems inescapable; no sooner does a book state unequivocally that the earth is flat than its publisher is placed in dire financial straits, with the result that the book endures *de facto* repression. (undated, ANP 40.12.6.56)

Block pretends to conspiratorial paranoia while reporting actual misfortune to another writer whose career would never develop to the extent that Block's would in later decades. He shows his characterological belonging with FES by appropriating actual events into an alternative world and through a satisfying admixture of self-importance and self-debasement. The author's Plenipotentiary status adds to other prestigious titles he accepted: Grand Master of Mystery Writers of America and *Grand Maitre du Roman Noir* ("All About LB"). His nose-thumbing non-fiction titles about the writerly craft further suggest his fit with the satirical Society. They too experiment with cross-pollinating falsifying with truth-telling: *Telling Lies for Fun and Profit: a manual for fiction writers* and *Liar's Bible: a handbook for fiction writers*. Sub-canonical to these guidebooks, and even to Block's first novel *Ronald Rabbit,* is his "Personal Reasons for Seeking Membership in the Flat Earth Society of Canada."

Preserved in Ferrari's archives, Block's application statement is richly layered. It begins with childhood memories of distasteful foods foisted upon him, an allegory for ideological transmission and its rejection; then declares his preference for "the evidence of [his] several senses" over "the unsupported arguments of other others" or "the presumptuous voice of authority"; and cites Globularism's ubiquity as sufficient reason to divert from it. Regarding this third element, Block feels "inclined to invoke the Third Principle of the Law of Truisms, i.e., if a sufficient number of persons believe something to be true, it perforce is false" ("Personal Reasons," undated, LFF 2.1.2). Block qualifies his attestations by writing that he does not "*know* the earth is flat" any more than his "cat knows how an internal combustion engine works, for it is beyond her scope of absolute knowledge. Yet this does not prevent her from getting from one place to another should

she happen to take a seat in a moving car." Rather, Block "surely *believe[s]* the earth to be flat" and will continue to do so given "absence of the slightest jot of proof to the contrary" (2.1.2). The Plenipotentiary-in-the-making's spirit of wise uncertainty connects to historic and modern Flat Earth movements, in that challengers to common beliefs often question the logic behind dominant Globularism more than they purport confident alternatives.

Block's layered points of sympathy with the imaginative Society relay as well with his fictional protagonist, Evan Tanner. Block's website identifies the lead character of *The Thief Who Couldn't Sleep*, Tanner's debut appearance, as "a card-carrying member of hundreds of international organizations, from the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Order to the Flat Earth Society—not because he believes in their myriad lost causes, he's simply a joiner by nature. Besides, it gives him something to do" ("*Thief*"). The second entry in the Tanner series, *The Canceled Czech* adds to his Flat Earth Society affiliation the anti-hero's involvement in other obscure or outlandish groups: "the League for the Restoration of Cilician Armenia" and "the Society of the Left Hand" ("*Canceled*"). Flat Earth Society mentions in Block's early novels refer to the English group, because *Ronald Rabbit* and the early Tanner novels preceded FES by several years. His writing makes a better fit with FES than with its British counterpart, however, due to Block's confounding blend of seriousness of craft with darkly imaginative play. An online reviewer of *The Thief Who Couldn't Sleep* praises the author for combining modes in defiance of readerly expectations, asking: "Is this a caper comedy? A spy thriller? Revolutionary tract? Social commentary? Who the hell knows, but it doesn't matter" (Jason). Block brought his own stamp to genre writing, and his

choice of detective fiction was conspicuously FESish. Mystery writers must structure their novels around missing pieces—pieces missing from their books. An unclassifiable entity, at once poke and lark, FES likely appealed to Block for adding new edge pieces to the world's unsolvable puzzle.

An entry in Block's Matthew Scudder series, *Eight Million Ways to Die* (1982) exemplifies his defiance of generic borders. On the one hand, this work conforms to the hard-boiled detective fiction genre. Relevant conventions are fulfilled by the hero's confident yet affable machismo (he doesn't carry a gun because he does not need one); by images of overflowing ashtrays, grimy police stations, and white prostitutes commingling with Black handlers in underground jazz bars. On the other hand, standard filmic and exploitative tropes are punctuated by high-flown literary references. The novel's characters mention Diogenes and Nietzsche, John Donne and W. B. Yeats, Heinrich Heine and Edna St. Vincent Millay, Guy de Maupassant and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Cover for Block's nuanced style, the book's palpably sensational title makes a not-so subtle inference: by the time of the book's release, all of New York City's roughly eight-million citizens had become not only potential murder victims but potential killers. Whereas the Society to which Block belonged depicts the global scope of 1970s-era anxiety over technology's dehumanization effects, with *Eight Million Ways to Die* Block effects localized dread related to declining civility and the birth of modern serial killers. That dread reflects a rise in violence and a concomitant distrust in public institutions, particularly police agencies. Scudder, like other Blockian protagonists, operates on the outskirts of institutional law enforcement in his capacity as a private investigator. Tanner, that earlier Block hero and card-carrying Flat Earther, affiliates with the fringe rather than

officialdom. Their author likewise boasts an independent streak. A biographical statement on *Lawrenceblock.com* declares his college drop-out status.[123] Following a long list of accolades, it undercuts his achievements by stating that he was "presented with the key to the city of Muncie, Indiana. (But as soon as he left, they changed the locks)" ("All About LB"). Self-promotion disguised as self-abasement and casual disregard for decorum make Block something of a renegade and, therefore, at home among literary pranksters wherever they may reside.

Through various channels FES reached people far outside of Fredericton, despite its limited funds for campaigning and despite the outlandish idea it pretended to purport. Those who expressed allegiance with the group's mission recognized profound humanistic messages underwriting FES's anti-globular lampooning. In a hyper-partisan time for politics, the 1970s, their willingness to be so dramatically wrong about vital matters showed quirky courage. President Ferrari set an important precedent for the oppositional posture and transnational scope of the Society. In the next section of the present chapter, FES correspondents give way to documents authored by the Society's leaders for internal purposes or public circulation. Both strains benefit from Ferrari's contributions, although it is sometimes difficult to parse out who wrote what, exactly. The President's comment to urban geographer Barry Mayhew suggests that many unattributed statements distributed by the Society in fact came directly from its President's typewriter. He wrote to Mayhew in 1973, "the enclosed tract is anonymous because I don't like to put my name on everything" (LFF 2.2.24). I will not in these pages

[123] "LB attended Antioch College, but left before completing his studies; school authorities advised him that they felt he'd be happier elsewhere, and he thought this was remarkably perceptive of them" ("All About LB").

engage in a forensic analysis of prose style to determine what statements came from Nowlan versus Ferrari. Such an exercise would be tedious and inconclusive. In any case, FES was born of shared vision, so the idea of authorial attribution does not necessarily mix with the slippery ethos of this collective. My sampling of transnational correspondents above emphasizes the participatory nature of the Society, while the section below details ideas put forward by its leaders, with a focus on statements authored by Ferrari. However, he always went out of his way to incorporate and include contributions from others in his planoterrestrial work. In their public statements, Society members argued for a belief they did not in fact hold. In this they followed Ferrari, who refused the shelter of conformity or comforting ideals. The playfulness with which FES entered into the history of its time defied political agenda, creating a broadly defined humanism marked by laughter in lieu of studiousness, say, or idealism.

Internal Documents, External Organs

Ferrari's archive is organized into four Series: "academic writings," Flat Earth Society textual materials, FES "Artifacts," and research related to "Sabbaticals and conferences" ("Leo Charles Ferrari fonds"). The world's richest storehouse for FES info, Series two sub-divides into files capturing its "administration," "publications and presentations," and Ferrari's "Flat Earth manuscript" ("Series No. 2"). The administration component opens with the Society's "Constitution," a seemingly foundational document that had little actual influence. It is dated 8 November 1970, although I doubt any of the founders took to the typewriter to formalize plans for FES during that night's "spirited discussion" (*TEIF* 233). The Constitution was likely created later in an attempt to preserve and

solidify the tipsy decision to form a poetically inflected geo-planarian guild. The date is written in Ferrari's hand rather than typed, making it inconsistent with the rest of the document, recorded in his but not Nowlan's nor Fraser's archives. For those reasons and aspects of its appearance, one can reasonably assume the President himself prepared the Constitution.

Two elements of the nominally governing document stand out amid its absurd yet official-sounding proclamations. The first concerns voting. Only scant evidence suggests voting ever occurred, but procedures for making determinations are explicit. To wit:

> Every decision of the annual general meeting must be discussed and voted upon twice[:] once when the membership is sober, with the president presiding, and once when the membership is drunk, with the symposiarch in the [position of] chair. While drunken members will be permitted in certain instances to vote at the sober meeting, sober members will not be permitted to vote at the drunken meeting. No motion shall pass unless approved by a majority vote at both meetings. (Constitution, 8 Nov. 1970, LFF 2.1.1)

FES pledges that members would help pass motions; however, no signs indicate that widescale voting ever occurred. *Au contraire*: Ferrari wrote a form letter that states annual dues were raised from one to two dollars "by a unanimous vote of the Board of Governors," those in the Society's inner circle, like the President, Symposiarch, Chairman, and Chancellor (1 June 1973, RFF 4.5-22). If these men did meet about dues in 1973, there is a remote possibility they held a sober conversation before getting down to their proper business. The constitutional requirement of holding a dry and then a "lit" vote aligns with FES's open border between straightforward and tilted terrains. Further, privileging drunken over sober states confirms the founders' preference for subjective/altered over objective/standard perceptions of reality. FES's good-enough Governors succeeded in sharing their figuratively blurred or doubled vision with a

substantial, dues-paying membership, but ambitions far outpaced reality. Two years prior to approving an increase in FES dues, Nowlan wrote to MacEwen about his "dream" for a "national convention" of FESers, which never eventuated (June 1971, ANP 40.12.6.43). Only archival files and never an in-person gathering would bring together a wide cross-section of members.

The second noteworthy article of FES's Constitution outlines a succession plan for the Society's leadership. As with the irregular voting procedure, the plan extends the lively serious/satirical admixture that defines the group's character. Nowlan, Ferrari, and Fraser formalized an agreement that they would hold their positions for life. This proved unnecessary. All three outlived the Society's active period, Nowlan just barely. By constitutional dictate, the responsibility of appointing successors would have fallen to the Chancellor, who would have overseen the Society in the event that all three founders expired without naming heirs. The Constitution pledges that "the office of the chancellor shall be held during his lifetime by James Stewart Jr. and after his death by his eldest living son or in the event that he has no sons by his eldest living daughter, provided that such son or daughter shall subscribe to the principles of the society. The chancellorship shall descend in the same manner through James Stewart Jr.'s heirs forever" (8 Nov. 1970, LFF 2.1.1). The whiff of the royal about this article joins Chancellor Stewart with his kingly persona in Fredericton's Monarchy. The dreamed-up state of permanence for the Society via his future lineage, if any, contrasts with and sends up the ephemeral nature of its jesterly campaign.

No evidence seen by me indicates that the Constitution ever circulated. Nonetheless, membership forms required applicants to "subscribe to the Aims and

Constitution" of the conceptual Society (LFF 2.1.17). Again, several strictures were never enacted: possibly its voting procedures and certainly continuation to the next generation. Ferrari found another way to humorously make FES seem grander than it was by writing "CLASSIFIED" on missives to his fellow co-founders and the Chancellor. The President sent out one such letter in 1977. It concerns preparations for his appearances at the Learned Societies Conference at UNB that summer. He reports having succeeded in convincing "the Harriet Irving Library [to] put on a display case featuring the Flat Earth Society, thus getting back at them for that atrocious display they had on Copernicus in 1973." The same letter announces his plans to put the Society in debt by printing a total of four thousand membership certificates, cards, and "a minimum of two thousand" brochures. (Letter to Nowlan/Fraser/Stewart, 10 March 1977, ANP 40.12.6.129). Contracting out a raft of print jobs seems to have been an executive decision, not the result of collective vote. But Ferrari pledged to use his own money toward production. "Should I not recover it," he wrote, "then it will be my problem," and "having thrown my money into the Society, I will have to jump in after it." The President's unilateral decisions show that the Society's Constitution was performative, not really a guide to be followed resolutely. Sound familiar? Ferrari justified printing so much material by citing the "5,000 (approx.) academics" (40.12.6.129) who would travel to Fredericton for the Conference where he would promote FES, not Augustine. Having considered several internal documents above, let us now turn to promotional texts authored for general circulation.

In the spring of 1972, the *Official Chronicle* appeared: volume one, number one of FES's newsletter (LFF 2.2.25). The double-sided page announces recent poetry titles

by Nowlan and MacEwen. It also welcomes Lawrence Block to the fold. In a humorous vein, this first number of "Notes and News" praises Scandinavian Airlines for the motto "Navigators of the Earth since it was Flat" and states that "the Society is presently inquiring as to whether the company is prepared to offer special rates" to members (2.2.25). In the fall of 1973, volume two, number one presented even more internationally themed items than the first issue. That second installment opens with a declaration that "by Decree of the Board of Governors" the Society's name had changed from Flat Earth Society of Canada to the Flat Earth Society in response to "the vast amount of publicity and resulting inquires which the Society has been getting from the United States" (*Official Chronicle*, 1973, LFF 2.2.25). The decree duly eliminated national framing and recognized the world-wide scope of the Society's liberating mission and cultural importance, even if its perceived value relied on trenchant obscurity.

The second *Chronicle*'s second page begins with the header "Dr. CATANOY SAFE." The item below it states, in full:

> The Society was disturbed by the disappearance of its Plenipotentiary to Continental Europe, Dr. Nicholas Catanoy. It was later discovered that Dr. Catanoy was shot down while on a mission over Chad. He was taken prisoner by insurgent guerillas and later handed over to the authorities at an outpost. At last news, Dr. Catanoy was recovering from his ordeal. Dr. Catanoy is working on a book for Gallimard's on literature in the age of technology. (1973, LFF 2.2.25)

Here we have a real news item in a fake Society's newsletter. Discussion of the Plenipotentiary's disappearance spills over the bounds of FES into Nowlan's letters with Catanoy's greatly distressed spouse, Marie-Claude (ANP 40.6.9). Perhaps because his time as missing person deeply troubled Catanoy's family and friends, *Chronicle* authors did not take the opportunity to speculate on anti-planoterrestrial motivations that an armed Chadian faction (almost certainly) did not possess. Neither does the *Chronicle*

report, as does *The Earth Is Flat!*, that rebels brought down with Catanoy's plane FES applications by Ionesco and "a number of European authors" Catanoy recruited before travelling to Africa (266). Lesser points about the Society's international contingent receive mention as well. Block's writing is promoted, and new member Jeffery Wallman, "a writer in Monaco," welcomed. Raymond and Sharon Fraser had returned from Spain, and Ferrari's time in California helped "spread the Cause of Truth" abroad. The number closes with these words on "The Future of FES": "The incredible vigour with which the Society has flourished seems but a small sample of what lies ahead. PLANOTERRESTRIALISTS OF THE WORLD UNITE! MAY THE AGE OF COMMON SENSE BE NOT LONG DELAYED IN DAWNING!" (40.12.7). Bombastic language and a parallel use of majuscules matches Ferrari's fervid enthusiasm for FES's growing roster of oddballs. But the item lampoons too. It smacks of the insurgent utopianism unironic movements articulate, such as 1930s-era workers' groups or late-sixties revolutionary cliques. Given FES's part in literary culture, the newssheet's parting salvo makes sport from the popularity of twentieth-century poetic or artistic manifestos, bringing them back to life but not in a grave way.

Chronicle numbers do not name names in terms of authorship. They were presumably planned with collaborations from Fraser/Stewart (possibly), Nowlan (certainly), and Ferrari (likely the significant contributor). The Society's *Official Organ* launched in 1973 as a venue for individually authored tracts. Its first, undated issue[124] made the "Essai sur la Crédulité des Incrédules" public without attribution; *The Earth Is*

[124] Ferrari's "Classified" letter (1 June 1973) states his plan to print the first issue of the *Organ*, showing that it post-dated the *Chronicle*.

Flat! reproduces it, crediting only Nowlan (282-84). "Tractate No. 2" (undated) acknowledges Ferrari, author of "The Birth of the Globular Heresy and the Death of Theology." This tract calls Globularism a "heresy" against divine reality, and a "vengeful pestilence." Ferrari fingers the original set of pre-Christian transgressors against God: Parmenides, Aristotle, and Plato, who falsely "taught that this world is not really the world"[125] (LFF 2.2.45-3). With this short essay, Ferrari opens up work expanded in *The Earth Is Flat!*, which retells the history of western civilization from ancient philosophy to the modern education system as a conflict between fallacious Globularism and life-affirming Planoterrestrialism. References to Christian scripture in both venues send up the biblical literalism propping up other Flat Earth groups. And yet one can detect an authentic belief in the past's superiority over the present in the opening lines of "Birth of the Globular Heresy": "there was a time in the development of thought when man could actually *feel* the presence of the Almighty as the Supporter of material creation. That was an era in which the earth, as the ground of material being, was perceived as the outcropping of the Divine Immensity which stretched endlessly downwards" (2.2.45-3). The terms "outcropping" and "downwards" unite biblical Flat Earth images with those painted by the colorful FES President; both evoke inconceivable precipices, corners, and chasms in place of intervening plateaus or two-dimensional peneplains. Ferrari is similarly vague on who precisely held embodied/divine feelings/beliefs in the past or when. He is highly specific about Globularism, however, and those who sowed the abstracting "seeds of deception on the nature of the earth" that put an end to our

[125] With FES's third aim in mind, the President might have reclaimed the quote, stating "the word is not really the word" (SP 153).

collective sense of belonging. Rhetorical vagueness about what he seeks to endorse coaxes readerly interrogations of what the longed-for "Divine Immensity" might have provided or might provide (2.2.45-3). That goal may be achieved as effectively as inspiring hatred for the forces of atheistic/heretical Globularism. Both practical aims are secondary to a comic presentation of sectarian zealotry. Discourse of this kind can help readers prepare to resist similar statements made earnestly rather than in jest.

Ferrari authored the *Official Organ*'s fourth tract, "Globularism and Racism: Twin Evils." It makes an outlandish claim: that transnational economic disparity results from globular models of the planet, which place some nations above less fortunate others. Ferrari writes:

> there was no top and no bottom to the world until the globular heresiarchs succeeded in their vile attempts to persuade the mass of men that they lived on a globe hurtling at an incredible rate of speed through infinite space.
>
> This vicious lie gave the inhabitants of the countries supposed to be located at the top of the globe delusions of grandeur while causing the inhabitants of the countries supposed to be located at the bottom of the globe to suffer from a degrading and demoralizing spiritual anguish. (undated, 2.2.26)

To counteract the harmful effects of global delusion, the author recommends turning maps and globes up-side down: merely an interim measure until Planoterrestrialism can restore "national parity" by spreading the good news that all Earth's people are, properly speaking, "on the same level." This solution smacks of Swiftian satire, a biting inversion of familiarity that is equally devastating to subconscious ideas and entertaining.[126] Some may accuse Ferrari of poking fun at the serious problem of racism and inequitable distribution of resources. We know from his human rights work, however, that he felt

[126] A 2014 article in *The Guardian* by James Wan made connections between Swift's satirical critiques of cartography and the distorted representations of Africa on the Google Maps application, which show that "the continent is [still] being sold short" (n. pag.).

grievous concern for those issues, and that he dedicated much time to promoting social justice. The same criticism applies more neatly to Ferrari's attempt to link his Flat Earth cause to the feminist movement, at least because he did not write about attendant issues outside of his primarily comical work as FES's President.

FES writings usually circulated on the grass-roots level. An exception: Ferrari's 1975 essay "Feminism and Education in a Flat Earth Perspective" appeared in the *McGill Journal of Education*, which had an established scholarly audience. As with his tractate about "Globularism and Racism," this essay uses a clowning Flat Earthism to advance sincerely felt if often unsubtle points about the undervalued role of marginalized populations in modern society. The journal's editor Margaret Gillett solicited this contribution to a special issue on women in education. She wrote to Ferrari, noting that she came to Canada from Australia as he had done. "But since there can be no 'Down Under' in a Flat Earth," she joked, "does that mean we come from nowhere?" (1975, LFF 2.1.6-2). FES-wise, even this glancing exchange manages to caricature common prejudices and, at the same time, invoke enticement/fear of an unknown (here vanishing) geography: "nowhere" being one etymological connotation for the primarily idealizing Greek term "utopia." Ferrari's essay resulting from their correspondence does not focus on Feminism as a progressive movement making hard-won gains in the 1970s. Instead, it figures "the rise of Globularism on the one hand and the decline of archetypal Feminism on the other" as parallel developments in the history of western civilization ("Feminism" 78). The author follows Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* as a source for restoring the feminine divine, rather than political leaders of the feminist movement itself. His brand of "Feminism" is male, conservative, and mythological rather than strictly progressive. It

reaches backward through time to pagan spirituality, presumably a worship of feminine divinity, rather than forward to gender equity.

Some may find Ferrari's foray into the subject crass, because his Flat Earth gags only awkwardly compare disparate topics and sometimes rely on the incidental physical attributes of women, not their political struggles. Ferrari cautions that Globularism may seem "favorable to Feminism" insofar as it falsely attributes "a curvaceous conception of creation" to our planet when in fact (under erasure) Globularism's prominent proponent Isaac Newton "vainly postulates a rectilinear universe in which curves are barely tolerated as unfortunate anomalies" ("Feminism" 79). Casting the Earth as a female entity strives to affirm the importance of women from a nominally planoterrestrial perspective. But few readers would find practical applications for Ferrari's skewed Flat Earthism, either in Feminism or education. His essay does a better job of showing that Globularism enacts "a vicious and sustained belittling of the Earth" than it does of elevating women in society (79). In that regard, he transposed Planoterrestrialism into Feminism more than he successfully appropriated feminist struggles into FES messaging. An example of the essay's failure to conform to its stated principles is that it cites five authorities within its main argument, all men.[127] Ferrari does some credible though still uneven work on Feminism when casting varied "monstrous manifestations" of Globularism as resulting from the "revolt against the Great Mother," Earth (79).

Last among FES documents authored by Ferrari demanding consideration is his book-length Flat Earth manuscript, begun in 1973 and published posthumously in 2019

[127] They are St. Augustine and Graves (78), Shaw, Newton, and Pliny (79). Additional sources listed in notes are authored by Ferrari, John Wallace Spencer, Marshall Smith, Nowlan, C. S. Lewis, George Sylvester Viereck, Alexander Koyré, FES Chancellor James Stewart, Voltaire (80), and Joshua ben Sirach (81).

as part of the present research. Like other utterances by the President, *The Earth Is Flat! An Exposé of the Globularist Hoax* combines elements of farce and non-fiction, humour and philosophy, Planoterrestrialism and anti-Globularism. It advances an unorthodox version of Christian belief in humankind's proper belonging on a God-given planet, and it argues against an alienating Globularism that promotes disdain for the Earth. He writes of skyscrapers (226), space exploration (116), and hatred of dirt (227) as evidence for our sense of non-belonging or "terraphobia" (229) on what should be properly perceived as "the Ground of our Being" (89). Globularism relates to brainwashing, conformity, zealotry, bigotry, industrialization, and confusion. Proponents of Globularism are "pompously certain about that of which they have absolutely no certitude at all," the true nature of reality (79). That certainty corresponds to the one-sidedness of the shape they worship: the sphere, a configuration characterized by a uniform surface. In contrast, Ferrari puts his energies toward open-ended interrogations of the assumptions behind dominant belief rather than promoting any single Flat Earth proposition.

The long-forgotten manuscript for *The Earth Is Flat!* presents do-it-yourself experiments to prove the spherical model of the Earth erroneous. None are of the Do-Not-Try-This-At-Home variety, such as rappelling from outcrops in Newfoundland for a first-hand encounter with oblivion. Rather, Ferrari sets out to dismantle Globularism's "elementary proofs" through basic means. For example, he tries to hold clumps of soil together via "gravity": what he calls the "magical power-bringing word" of Globularist jargon, "power-bringing" being a term lifted from William James (79). Ferrari then turns to and tears up a classic 1960s science textbook by Arthur Strahler, *Physical Geography*. Working from its opening chapter, "Form of the Earth, the geographic grid" (5-15),

Ferrari continues his work of disproving earthly sphericity by disassembling Strahler's rhetoric. He observes the geographer employing vagaries and contradictions to dubious if not vile ends. Strahler repeatedly reverts to the argumentative fallacy of *petitio principii*, according to Ferrari's logic, in that the premises of his proofs take sphericity for granted. The author then turns to spectacles of the space race. He borrows for his *Exposé* a conspiracy theory already circulating and previously employed by Raymond Fraser. Ferrari too suggests the moon landings might have been faked—focusing on audience credulity more than media manipulation, however. For him, the event was strategically hyped, in actuality rather than fantasy. America's "astronauts" are inflated by that title, he observes. They ought to be called "lunanauts," because their missions did not even purport to reach the stars (116-18). Explanations for NASA's photographs of Earth's smoothly curving circumference include the distorting optical/psychic effects of cameras and "the Ferrari effect" already discussed (SP 205). By combining reasonable, questionable, and outlandish criticisms of dominant texts and views, the author challenges us to interrogate the credibility of self-assured authorities, which include Ferrari himself.

In the book's fifth and sixth chapters, Ferrari presents an alternative history of western civilization (*TEIF* 153-202). The author so longs for a time when Flat Earth belief supposedly reigned supreme that he requires scant evidence of such belief in a given text to feel empowered to appropriate various authors to his cause. Citing in a narrow and biased manner, Ferrari sees the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as a Flat Earth document (155). He accurately declares the Babylonian worldview as having taken a Flat Earth for granted, likewise that of ancient Egypt (156-58). Homer and Hesiod and Virgil as well as

the Old Testament authors and the writers of Job and Ezekiel seem to have promoted a Flat (and sometimes hollow) Earth, whereas Xenophanes embraced an infinite one (158-60). All these perspectives are swept aside by the Pythagorean sect (160-76), who popularized Globularism. The ideology matches their other abstract or absurd beliefs and practices. Ferrari connects a break with geographic reality to their religious ecstasies or, (quasi-)etymologically, "displacements" (163). Pythagorean "ravings" would have faded into historical oblivion were it not for Plato's popularization of their mathematical principles (164). From Plato's enormous influence, the "dread contagion" took hold of Greek thought and subsequently the western world (165). Globularism played out in the experiments of Ptolemy and Eratosthenes, the travels of Columbus and Magellan, and in the pronouncements of the European Enlightenment astrologers. Ferrari is capriciously accurate and fanciful in his narrative. Fancy, it may be said, inevitably plays a part in all written histories, no matter how objective in outlook their authors may strive to present themselves. His imaginative work can, paradoxically, be read as an honest account, insofar as the author makes his distortions flagrant and bombastic rather than incidental or surreptitious.

The book's sixth chapter traces ideas of sphericity forward to what Ferrari sees as the even more dramatically misguided concept of a rotating Earth. Gyroglobularism, the doctrine of a spherical Earth's rotation, is a potent symbol for the dizzying pace of life in a technological society. Gyroglobularism has its roots in the Pythagorean sect, worshipers of a spinning planet, an absurdity suggested to them by an "inordinate love of escape through whirling dances," a form of ecstatic displacement (175). The Greek Atomists inherited worship of the sphere from starry-eyed Pythagoreans, according to the author;

they simply applied the whirl to the micro- rather than macro-scale of human experience (177). Subsequent debates between Ptolemy and Aristarchus over the Earth's orbit around the sun returned in the Renaissance period, most notably with Copernicus' heliocentric position papers (178-82). We hear too from Copernican detractors Phillip Melanchthon and Martin Luther. The Roman Catholic Church declared heliocentrism heretical in 1616, too late. "They were shutting the stable-door long, long after the horse had bolted," Ferrari writes (183). Gyroglobularism logically precedes the atheism behind human confusion and hopelessness, despite the efforts of Renaissance astronomer Tycho Brahe to reconcile emergent scientific theories with "the Great Fabric of Tradition" rent by Copernicus and his intellectual progeny Johannes Kepler, a man more astrologer than astronomer (183). Newton appears on the scene as a figurative gravitational force, holding Copernican theory precariously together. Ferrari doubts the man's sanity but admires his "genius for theories and mental excogitations" whose impact required the arrival of Einstein for their equal and opposite reaction (190-91). Ferrari's citational range shows flexibility of interest as well as depth of reading. The research that went into preparing *The Earth Is Flat!* should impress upon readers that its composition sought to accomplish more than casual laughs or flippant jabs. Rather, fusing puckish humour and critical insight constitutes Ferrari's true mission.

After discussing planetary issues and drawing on world literature and philosophy in previous chapters, this high-flying book finally lands in 1970s Fredericton in chapters eight and nine, "Philosophy of the Flat Earth Society" and "Adventures with the Flat Earth Society" (*TEIF* 219-60). Harms that devolve from globularist thinking are catalogued: bifurcation of the mind's eye and the "eye of the body" (223); profanation of

"*the entire Receptacle of Reality*" in which we abide; and an anxious zealotry which induces violent reactions to dissent from "culturally sanctioned" forms of "madness" (222). Philosophically, one measure we can take to counter-act the effects of Globularism: "laugh uproariously" (244). Ferrari dares to make explicit here the unlocatable boundary-line he has been pursuing between the deadly serious issues he takes up and his confoundingly buoyant approach to them. Like that sounded out by Mikhail Bakhtin in a more strictly critical and theoretical tradition, Ferrari's laughter is an attack on relentless sincerity and a carnivalesque self-defence against deadening conformity. In chapter nine, the inception of the group during a "spirited discussion" is recounted (233). However aberrant within the literary scene of the times, the particulars of that historic evening in 1970 ought not to suggest an anomaly at work. Rather, Flat Earthism is "a spectre" which "haunts the modern psyche," according to Ferrari (237). He states that "if there were not a Flat Earth Society, one would have to invent it" (238). Fredericton could not contain the badly needed group for long, and so Ferrari charts the Society's growth from private joke to international (though occult) institution with many participating correspondents.

School children hearing President Ferrari lecture likewise found their imaginations activated by his whimsical yet relatable Planoterrestrialism. Ferrari records reactions to his work on the lecture circuit. They "rang[ed] from extreme anger to uncontrollable delight" (*TEIF* 248). His exchanges with youngsters stand out within a narrative that recounts various interactions with audiences from Newfoundland to California, made up of airline "stewardesses" and geodesic mathematicians. For example, he writes:

> One of the most skeptical audiences with which I ever have dealt was a group of grade five students. They really gave me a hard time of it. One young girl asked me if the Earth was really flat after all, how come every day in the week had a different name? In order to play for time on that one, I asked where was yesterday right now. Immediately, one bright young fellow in the front row shot up his hand and blurted out the evocative answer: "In China, sir." (*TEIF* 247)

While cross-pollinating humour and sincerity constitutes the aim of Ferrari's book, FES ultimately sought to provoke from the public creative articulations of subjective experiences. By that measure, his grade-five classroom visit succeeded. The two children quoted above seem to have bested Ferrari at his own game: a win for the President. Another child parrots the definition of the equator absorbed from others. Yet, even here, the creativity of children's minds shines through. Rather than describing the equator as "an imaginary line…," they mispronounce (improve upon?) the definition as "a menagerie lion running around the world and through Africa." The President applauds the phrase, stating "it may as well be just that, for it is just another of those Globular fictions, a mental myth which does not exist in reality" (93). The conceptual existence of the equatorial "mental myth" does not chafe in and of itself—at issue for Ferrari is its blind acceptance on the part of so many. Statements children present to him are also "mental myths," but they are individual, spontaneous verbal creations rather than rote pieces of ideological doctrine: "Ferrarisms," in short (SP 197). Globularism is harshly "adult" by comparison. Privileging creativity and angst over security and conformity, members' recreations of planetary experience look like returns to the dreamy states of childhood.

FES's brand of Flat Earthism can be seen as childlike in this positive sense, or as petulant, immature. Adults of the figuratively globularist persuasion might be forgiven

for reading the prank as a trifling distraction for would-be intellectuals. A reader of the 1974 cover story in *Weekend Magazine* wrote to its editor: “According to the article, among the members are computer scientists, university men, lawyers, physicians, geographers, astronomers and seamen who ‘don’t take themselves seriously.’ I would suggest that nobody else should.” The complainant derided “supposedly grown-up men” putting “work and energy into such a nonsensical” project and “behaving like a bunch of infants” in public (Garwood 306). I for one would counter this criticism by articulating vital messages muffled by FES gags. “What Shall I Tell My Child About Planoterrestrialism?” by member Munroe Freedman is, as noted, the final section of *The Earth Is Flat!* More wistful than comedic or comedically outraged, Freedman tries to counsel his child, who struggles to meet expectations at his school: demands that he trumpet globularist ideology. Freedman, modelling supportive fatherhood, explains to his son that he can say what his teachers want to hear without sacrificing private convictions. The arrangement thrills the boy, who learns Planoterrestrialists can employ the surreptitious tactic of “crossing their fingers in their hearts” when required to speak in Globularism’s terms (293). Ferrari repeats the child’s heartwarming phrase in his notes, relishing the story’s concomitant “warning to the Globularist teachers.” “Now, when they ask the children to parrot their nonsense,” he writes, “they will only be able to wonder, with ever deepening anxiety, how many of those dear little children are secretly ‘crossing their fingers in their hearts’” (294). The modern-day parable invokes the Roman Catholic theological doctrine of “mental reservation,” whereby believers are duty-bound to secrecy and not only to truth-telling. Alongside Freedman’s short piece, Ferrari includes

writing by seven[128] other Society members at the close of his manuscript.[129] The book's structure makes his account of Planoterrestrialism a truly polyvocal work, just as his recollections of lecturing include additions from his audiences. FES is club-like in its generous spirit of sociability, a conspicuous quality in Atlantic Canadian communities and a notable feature of childhood friendships. Collaboration and inclusion across borders are features of adult and global cultures as well, as the association between Nowlan and Ferrari as well as FES's international contingent exemplify. The subjective wisdom and playful intimacy of the Society are modelled in some ways on childhood. Busy professionals like Freedman and others used the group to conduct the serious work of recovering the sensitive feeling and playful thinking of youth.

The Earth Is Flat! promotes writers of vanishingly slight repute, those known to Ferrari through his local community or through the extended FES membership. However, his book also showcases his familiarity with canonical authors. Several of these instances will be considered, before this chapter concludes with a return to Ferrari as an author of prose and poetry not immediately related to the Society. Exploiting his true literary interests, in *The Earth Is Flat!* Ferrari fraudulently appropriates early twentieth-century intellectual rivals, and personal friends, writers G. K. Chesterton and George Bernard Shaw as Flat Earthers. Chesterton has the same quote misattributed to him at several points: "A man should always question the strongest convictions of his age, for those convictions are invariably too strong" (*TEIF* 77, 282, and 290). The line is convincingly

[128] They are James Stewart, Alden Nowlan, Raymond Fraser, David Paul Gontar, Bryan H. Andrew, Freedman, and Barry Mayhew, contributors to the "Flat Earthers Forum" (*TEIF* 259-94).

[129] Editors of the 2019 edited edition felt that Ferrari had overextended his inclusive gesture and reduced the number of other contributing authors to four: Stewart, Nowlan, Andrew, Freedman. Excluded documents largely repeated points ably made by Ferrari earlier in his book.

Chestertonian in tone, yet Internet searches for it circle back to Flat Earth sources exclusively. Ferrari may have been unknowingly mistaken in quoting or may have willfully misattributed as an example of the problem with placing undo confidence in the authority of authors. Shaw's Preface to his tragic history *Saint Joan* is referenced (231) but, surprisingly, not the lines in which Shaw writes specifically of (and against) Flat Earth belief. Shaw sets the stage for Ferrari's book-length project in the following lines, the only ones directly tied to Flat Earthism in his essay:

> In the Middle Ages people believed that the earth was flat, for which they had at least the evidence of their senses: we believe it to be round, not because as many as one per cent of us could give the physical reasons for so quaint a belief, but because modern science has convinced us that nothing that is obvious is true, and that everything that is magical, improbable, extraordinary, gigantic, microscopic, heartless, or outrageous is scientific.
>
> I must not, by the way, be taken as implying that the earth is flat, or that all or any of our amazing credulities are delusions or impostures. I am only defending my own age against the charge of being less imaginative than the Middle Ages. (n. pag.)

Shaw's Preface did not promote Flat Earth belief, then, as Ferrari suggests when dedicating *The Earth Is Flat!* to "that staunch champion of Common Sense George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)[:] Playwright, polemicist, and Planoterrestrialist" (*TEIF* n. pag.). The statement quoted above does contain planoterrestrial undertones, however, in its approach to sense experience, intellectual uncertainty, and metaphorical truths. Of course, his mythical confusion takes a "Dark Age" metaphor too seriously, foolishly assumes the Middle Ages were ruled by ignorance, not yet plugged in to an earthly orb. Leave that aside. Intellectual defences of Christian and otherwise spiritual reality from Chesterton and Shaw directly precede Ferrari's attempts to bind scientific, rational thought with rebellious, imaginative Catholicism. Both religious thinkers and comic writers at the crossroads of radical and traditional thought, Chesterton and Shaw set an

important precedent for Ferrari, even if he makes distorting use of them. All three men are in different ways "poetical philosopher[s]" (159). Chesterton and Shaw share some of the unorthodox religiosity of Ferrari's thought, but comic aspects of those writers do not tip toward the absurd or outlandish. Moreover, they occupy prominent roles in the English literary canon, and iconic status places them far outside the charmingly obscure world of FES.

Ferrari reaches back farther than this pair in the annals of literary history when paying tribute to the visionary poet William Blake, whose posthumous birthday was once celebrated at Fredericton's Windsor Castle (SP 135). He quotes four lines from Blake's "The Mental Traveller," which follow: "The Guests are scatter'd thro' the land / For the Eye altering alters all / The Senses roll themselves in fear / And the flat Earth becomes a ball" (*TEIF* 170). In this stanza from a particularly bleak poem, Ferrari finds Blake describing "the roots of primal fear which Globularism tapped" in its quest for world domination (170). For a livelier depiction of the poet's metaphoric Planoterrestrialism, to complement an anti-Globularist stance, he might have further referenced Blake's *Milton*. Therein, the poet describes the valid conceptual space in which the Earth is felt to be flat. He also describes the terraphobic world of those Ferrari calls Globularists, whom Blake refers to as the inhabitants of "Ulro." Consider Plate 31/29 from "Milton: Book the First":

> And every space that a man views around his dwelling place:
> Standing on his own roof, or in his garden on a mount
> Of twenty-five cubits in height, such space is his Universe;
> And on its verge the Sun rises & sets. the Clouds bow
> To meet the flat Earth & the Sea in such an ordered Space:
> The Starry heavens reach no further but here bend and set
> On all sides & the two Poles turn on their valves of gold:
> And if he move his dwelling-place, his heavens also move.

> Wher'eer he goes & all his neighbourhood bewail his loss:
> Such are the Spaces called Earth & such its dimension:
> As to that false appearance which appears to the reasoner,
> As of a Globe rolling through Voidness, it is a delusion of Ulro
> The Microscope knows not of this nor the Telescope. They alter
> The ratio of the Spectators Organs but leave Objects untouched
> For every Space larger than a red Globule of Mans blood. Is visionary… (lines 5-20)

With similarly exuberant expressions of a self-enclosing faith, cut through with similar condemnations for self-assured minds built for external measurement, Ferrari denies the secular and scientific culture of his own time. He reveres "the Good Book" while deriding "God-fearing little Christians" who do not share in joyous worship (78 and 228). Conversely, he expresses righteous indignation against the hellfire that attends Globularism. At his most sacrilegious, Ferrari makes a joke about God sending "all the interesting people" to Hell (228). But, interesting as he may be, his "enduring optimism" (230) and "little book" (61, 153, 203, 205, 222) repeat previous efforts toward conveying paradoxical combinations of rational and mystic strains in religious belief. He reaches back through Chesterton, Shaw, James, Lewis, Blake, Donne, Descartes, and myriad others to the medieval Christian thinkers who were within his domain of professional expertise. By turns irreverent and accurate in offering up citations, Ferrari coaxes from readers of *The Earth Is Flat!* the same reaction that he attributes to Aristotle: "one could never tell when Plato was speaking literally or metaphorically" (165-66).

Philosopher, Humanist, Poet, Patient

Accompanied by non-fiction and creative writing in multiple genres, Ferrari's central body of work concerns the life and writing of Saint Augustine. The recent edition of *The Earth is Flat!* contains the most extensive bibliography available for Ferrari, and it cites

more than forty academic titles he wrote as a professional philosopher between the mid-1950s and the early 2000s (53-56). These vibrant, penetrating essays combine logical principles with ancient beliefs and biographical interpretations of Augustine, his major subject. Ferrari's philosophical topics can be linked thematically to Planoterrestrialism. Consider his critique of conservative religiosity in "Augustine and Christian Anti-Intellectualism" (1965/66) or his foray into classical astronomy in "Halley's Comet of 374 AD: New Light upon Augustine's Conversion to Manicheism" (1977). The latter was penned with the assistance of Bryan Andrew, a Royal Astronomer and proud FES member.[130] *Conversions of St. Augustine* is Ferrari's only stand-alone publication on philosophical matters. It appeared in 1984 from Villanova, a Catholic university press in Pennsylvania. The book argues that Augustine made multiple conversions, rather than the one religious conversion that dominates the standard conception of this thinker's development. *Conversions* follows the Saint from rhetoric to philosophy, through Manichaeism and astronomy, to "the uncompromising good of Catholicism."[131] Ferrari detects residues of each immersive phase in subsequent periods of Augustine's thought, making each conversion not a destination but another stage in a life-long progression. Even his final Catholic period saw developments. Augustine first reformed his life to court God's grace. Later, he believed that grace comes from God irrespective of human action or intent. The sequential conversion theme reflects Ferrari's own psycho-geographical trajectory. Education took him from Christianity to science and philosophy;

[130] When the Glasgow-born astronomer wrote "In Defence" of FES, he recalled the "self-assur[ed]" and "beardless striplings" of his cohort at Cambridge University. The surface "civility" and "mutual congratulations" on display by the commentariat of that prestigious campus are foil in Andrew's recollection for the errant charms of Ferrari and his fellows (*TEIF* 289).

[131] He arrived at this exact phrase in 2000's "Rethinking Augustine's Confessions: Thirty Years of Discoveries" (72).

he migrated "up" from Australia to live the rest of his life in Canada's Maritime provinces; and, in 1970, he made a suspiciously public conversion to Flat Earthism.

Ferrari's philosophical humanism extends to a series of educational writings on human rights. Like his academic articles, they are too wide of scope for adequate treatment here. Among them, *Human Rights and the Canadian Indian* (1973) seems especially relevant today. Authored for the Province of New Brunswick's Human Rights Commission, its historical account of First Nations' systemic disadvantage includes white establishment figures who contributed to or mitigated imbalances of justice: Samuel de Champlain, Jean Chrétien. Ferrari also credits Indigenous sources for his knowledge, including Maliseet citizen Darryl Nicholas, whom he consulted, and Cree citizen Harold Cardinal, author of *The Unjust Society*. Ferrari anticipates the era of reconciliation by acknowledging his own "inevitable white prejudices" (*Canadian Indian* n. pag.) and by highlighting linguistic diversity, cultural sophistication, and astonishing survivance among First Nations. He catalogues tools of oppression too: disease, alcohol, mining, the railway, education, commercialization, land theft, the justice system, and stereotyping. Today, we might question why resistance movements like the National Indian Brotherhood (which is mentioned) do not occupy equal space. But, when considered in relation to its date of publication, the essay sounds relatively progressive in its views.

Rather than simply overturning the image of the "Indian" as "savage," the author depicts Europeans arriving in Canada at the time of initial contact as an "untamed brood" (*Canadian Indian* 4). The point is not only historical, however. "White society of the present age," he writes, "is not the very acme of perfection that it has long been thought [by some] to be" (30). Ferrari places the onus on whites to reverse damage colonialism

has wrought, tasking them with developing a level of cross-cultural "empathy" to match their pride in "advances in education and industrialization" (5): a call to open arms. That selfsame pride is questioned. Ferrari views civilization's supposed progress as "a tragic triumph of man's conceited cleverness whereby science and technology have gained the upper hand over human wisdom" (31). Not only Indigenous peoples, then, but humanity writ large must recover "autonomy, self-sufficiency, and pride" (37) from the grip of dependency, alienation, and dread. Although this short book and FES might seem unrelated, each calls out oppressive forces hindering respect and equality. They go by different names: colonialism, Globularism.

Ferrari contributed a history of technological progress/degradation for the essay collection *Human Rights: Issues and Trends* (1993). "The Development of Human Rights in a Technological Age" charts workers' struggles against exploitative automation and the profit motives of patrician classes in industrial Europe. Whereas Copernicus and Galileo are identified as nemeses of FES in its second official aim (SP 152), and of humanity by extension, here Francis Bacon plays the lead villain. He initiated "the age of technology" through a "conquest of nature" ("Technological Age" 24). The picture of industrial life drawn is grim and one Ferrari accurately prophesied would recur once we felt "the full impact of the electronic revolution," precursor to the digital age (24). In the era of industrialization, "new technology, rather than being a blessing for the workers, was initially a widespread instrument of oppression and exploitation" (25). Ferrari carefully attributes blame to carelessness and destructive human intent, avoids describing suffering as the inevitable result of technology. That perspective would promote "Technological Animism," which could only counter symptoms of injustices dictated by

the “proprietors” of a “mechanical kingdom” (29-30). Responsive to threat and precarity, community organizers and labour unions leverage underclasses’ collective advantage. “To this end, they set up friendly societies to promote the solution, or the alleviation, of common problems,” the author writes (26). His Flat Earth Society had no platform on labour reform. But their convivial camaraderie, “homegrown empiricis[m],” and grassroots platform posed a model for society radically alternative to pluto-technocracies stratified according to financial worth and exploitability (FES Letter to Ferrari [by Trevor McKeown], 1984, LFF 2.1.6-1).

Ferrari’s labours on behalf of FES involved many typical grassroots-organizing activities: establishing and expanding a roster of members; processing cheques and money orders for amounts of two, three, and eventually five dollars (the cost for those desiring frameable certificates); claiming available platforms for edifying the public; as well as composing, printing, and distributing informational pamphlets. Much of this work would have been familiar to him from the Grosvenor Park Home and School Association and the Save-A-Family Plan (Pretty and Brubacher). These separate involvements testify to Ferrari’s sincere commitments to the health of communities he belonged to and those he did not but felt obliged to support, anyhow. His Save-A-Family Plan supported families in India, so it reflects his presidential commentary about disenfranchised populations in the southern hemisphere, absent fun-house distortions supplied by the comedic surface of those comments. Ultimately, we can see his grassroots activism, humanistic political concern, and Flat Earth performance as parallel efforts.

While Ferrari made his mark in the world of letters as a classical philosopher and contemporary humanist, he published two stapled rather than perfect-bound books of

poetry: *The Worm's Revenge or a Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Cemetery* (1968) and *Over the Edge! Poems in Grateful Celebration of Fifty Years of Life, Love and of Laughter* (1977). These ephemeral collections—whose titles signal that poetry as such is not really their first concern—broadcast the same countercultural messaging found in his Flat Earth writings. Each collection expends greater breath on expounding points of resistance to mass culture than on proposing alternative modes of being. In this way, the books conform to the FES President's antagonistic style. As a poet, Ferrari decries technological automation in "The Mechanical Beast." It depicts a scene wherein "municipal authorities" have dispatched a "roaring, clanking" machine that clears streets of snow but also interrupts human sleep and dreaming (*Over the Edge!* 18). Unlike the poet with his (psychosomatic?) allergy to anti-human trends in modern technology, neighbours tolerate this late-night interruption, "politely ignoring it— / This roaring and clanking / Mechanical beast— / Ignoring it yet!" (19). Their acceptance of this noxious presence strikes the speaker as particularly North American:

> Why if this were Italy
> Or some other civilised country
> An army of irate sleepers
> Would have arisen from their beds
> And showered the mechanical beast
> With passionate curses
> And a hail of alarm clocks
> And slippers and things (19)

The imagined resistance to mechanized forces invading the realm of sleep uses equally dream-resistant technological weapons in retaliation ("alarm clocks") as well as instruments of domestic comfort ("slippers") and elemental language ("curses"). However, by weaponizing objects on hand, these hypothetical Italian nationals—regionalists at heart, likely—also rid themselves of such devices, becoming more

elemental in the process. Thus, a victorious "army." North Americans, by contrast, are obedient victims, slavishly accepting an abrasive, technological culture. Although a long-time resident of Canada, Ferrari identifies with the poem's luddite subjects, a connection aided by his famous last name, one ironically linked prominently to one of the world's noisy machines.

"The Mechanical Beast" depicts irritation with elements of what was elsewhere called "Globularism." Other poems make a positive case for figurative Planoterrestrialism (absent FES jargon), calling for increased integration with the planet's eco/geo-logical domain, civic sphere, or spiritual plane. Through comedic aphorism or devotional contemplation, poems concentrate a worshipful celebration of life that runs more diffusely through other genres in which Ferrari wrote. "Prayer of an Agnostic" addresses, rather than petitions, an expansively ineffable deity: "I have never ceased believing in You. / It's only that Your Identity and Your Ways / Have become more and more enigmatical" (*Over the Edge!* 34). This open-ended religiosity alters its terms but not its sheer spiritism in poems told through secular vernaculars of the times: "Trembling on the brink of indecision / Shall I retreat to snug security / Or push my luck another notch / And perhaps flunk out / For keeps?" (*Worm's Revenge* 54). "Flunk out" constitutes liberation rather than quitting in this context: plunging over the edge, into the unknown. One could read courageous taste for adventure as modishly hippie. Yet determined turnings away from the (material/commercial/professional) world seem traditionally religious as well. Ferrari's "Prayer" recalls the Christian habit of seeing worldly failure as success, an inversion secularized by romantic poets that preceded him. Standing at the head of a rich lyrical tradition of letting the bottom drop out beneath one's

feet, this 1970s-era poet sides with poetic explosions over the drone of prose, inebriation over sobriety. Taking another step toward the edge, Ferrari took up planoterrestrial hijinks as a means to fight ideology. Poetry and the FES Presidency gave him means to express his vitality, although the poet and Planoterrestrialist both wring their hands over forces that block the flow of life. Unadulterated enjoyment comes through in Ferrari's French-language poem "La Vie." It states, in full: "Pour moi / la vie / c'est comme le bon vin / qui monte à la tête" (*Over the Edge!* 37). The poem's message is so plainly stated as to hardly qualify as artfully put. In English: "For me life is like a fine wine that goes straight to one's head." Much of the population, by implication, either abstains from pleasure to their detriment or experiences merely the inebriation of alcohol, not the intoxication of living.

Worm's Revenge and *Over the Edge!* vacillate between championing spirited modes of being and expressing resistance to modern technology or cultural authority. Ferrari's iconoclastic humour comes to the fore in a three-line poem, whose title repeats its opening line: "If I had the wings of a dove— / I'd fly around the world / Looking for the city / With the most monuments" (*Over the Edge!* 30). Here, monuments represent the sanctity of authoritative memorialization. The bird of peace is a winged anarchist who indiscriminately targets the vast array of official heroes upon whom it sits/shits. "The Disposable Continent" similarly depicts Ferrari's broad disregard. It states deadpan opposition rather than the scatological profanation found in his "Dove" poem. "Disposable Continent" rejects the consumer society that pervaded Ferrari's North American experience. He sees commercialism robbing contemporary life of its intimacy and meaning. "I wonder what will happen to North America / When it's through with

selling itself / To the rest of the world?" the poet asks (*Worm's Revenge* 13). The question goes (and remains?) unanswered. New Brunswick's *Literary Encyclopedia* praises Ferrari's poetic output for its "wit" (Pretty and Brubacher). That praise risks taking the comedic value of Ferrari's versifying as a limit, instead of an entry point to his radical philosophy.

"The Virtue of Sobriety" breaks with his preferred if only loosely defined genre: the epigrammatic forms of epiphanic poems that Nowlan termed "Ferrarigrams" and "Ferrarisms" (SP 197). "Virtue of Sobriety" is an intimate, humorous, narrative-realism sketch, tinged with sadness—in other words, a Nowlanism. On a drunken adventure with a local student, this counterpart Ferrari crashes his car into a snowbank. "Half purposely," he writes in retrospect (*Over the Edge!* 22). After inspecting the situation, the student, Danny, convinces his credulous professor "in the most solemn tones / That [they] had broken the telephone cable / Linking good old New Brunswick / With the Left of Canada," which houses much of the nation's critical infrastructure (22). Ferrari's drunkenness makes him susceptible to the student's trick, so he encounters paranoid visions of police and other authorities descending on the scene after a mass mobilization. The poem ends with the duped professor from away and his student disposing evidence: "And with drunken deliberateness / Hurl[ing] every remaining can of beer / Into the nearby river" (23). A conspicuous contribution to Ferrari's uneven work as a poet, "Virtue of Sobriety" reveals a sense of quasi-belonging to a national mosaic often expressed by people from the Atlantic provinces. Conversely, Danny's prank effectively mummers the outsider sitting behind the unfortunate wheel. In the poem's imagined world-within-a-world, a single minor car accident could sever New Brunswick's

apparently tenuous ties with the "Left of Canada." The poet's phrase riffs on a familiar expression regarding Quebec's *différence* from "the rest of Canada" as well as making a pun regarding north-oriented maps that place Atlantic-Canada far to the right-hand side of the country. Ferrari's joke relies on a tendency for physical models of the world to determine how we experience what they purport merely to represent. That way lies Globularism. With a loosely planoterrestrial mindset, the speaker in "Virtue of Sobriety" wanders from an accident that actually occurs (at least in the poem) to the fanciful speculation it provokes. The poem traffics across that border, a movement or swerving facilitated by the driver's drunkenness, by the poet's fancy. The local infraction is lit up like a major incident, just as FES inflated its importance with grand costuming cheaply bought. The poem and Society are akin too in being over the line: reckless, in other words, and fueled by an overconsumption of drink.

Despite their errant charms, it would be unfair to compare *Worm's Revenge* or *Over the Edge!* with the outputs of FES writers who dedicated their careers primarily to poetry: Elizabeth Brewster, Patrick Lane, David McFadden, Gwendolyn MacEwen, and John Newlove. Each of his two collections is introduced by poets of greater status than Ferrari himself: by Nowlan and Al Pittman, respectively. Rather than appropriating literary stature from others, however, Ferrari owns his marginality as a poet. This "Forewarning" proceeds Pittman's introduction to *Worm's Revenge*: "LIKE ALL FOREWORDS, THIS IS NOT MEANT TO BE READ. IT'S SIMPLY HERE SO THAT I CAN HAVE AL PITTMAN'S NAME ON THE COVER. HE'S PUBLISHED A

BOOK OF POEMS AND I HAVEN'T" (9).[132] This opening salvo participates in recurrent extraliterary messaging that typifies Ferrari's prosaic invasion of poetry, a takeover executed through cautions, qualifying notes, and other artistically anti-poetic gestures. *Over the Edge!* begins: "WARNING! This book contains little or no offensive material. Neither does it contain propaganda for THE FLAT EARTH SOCIETY" (n. pag.). The same book's first poem operates as another piece of front matter, not categorically as verse. "They think and so I am" reads:

> I think that the cover
> Of myself at the Edge
> Will help this book sell—
> Because many people
> Have heard of me
> And the Flat Earth Society
> And even if they haven't
> They still think I should exist
> Anyway. (11).

Such interrupting, meta-commenting tactics pervade Ferrari's collections. He defies the precision and solemnity usually associated with poetry, ranks it among forms of official culture he sees as suspect. As with other genres in which he wrote, his poems combine mordant humour with philosophical ebullience, irreverence with religiosity, frenetic clowning with critical intent.

The final entry in this curious author's publication list, *Different Minds* (2005) reprints a handful of pieces from his poetry collections. One entitled "Life" runs: "If you can take life / you can take anything" (47). The poem transforms a common term for murder into one about invulnerability, displaying Ferrari's talent for epigram: verbal

[132] Self-abnegating once more, Ferrari mailed MacEwen copies of his verses, prefacing: "here I trepidate, since I am no poet, but a mere philosophe" (13 Apr. 1972, GMP 24.41).

compression, semantic expansion. By the time his final publication appeared, new meanings had evolved for these lines from *The Worm's Revenge or A Funny Thing Happened to Me on the Way to the Cemetery*. In *Different Minds*, he describes his ongoing experience of Alzheimer's disease from the inside. His wife and co-author Lorna Drew gives a diarist's account of caring for her ailing husband. Both promote the dignity of his unfortunate condition and those similarly afflicted. Each gains new appreciation for the alternative insights altered mindsets offer. Ferrari and Drew state the book's purpose upfront: "By sharing experiences of our uninvited encounter with Dr. Alzheimer, we can break through the barriers of silence and loneliness.… [L]et us speak out proudly and loudly about it—even laugh—and realize that while we last, we too have our contributions to make to the rich tapestry of human life" (n. pag.). Writing about Alzheimer's disease carried forward Ferrari's human rights work, then, by further promoting his vision for "the human family in which diversity is not merely sufferable, but rather a welcome stimulation"; these words helped him outline the historical *Rise of Human Rights* in 1970 (34), a banner year for Planoterrestrialism. Yes, Ferrari's dreams for the "human family" played out in the co-creation of FES and in one couple's isolated experience of debilitating health challenges. Drew describes coping strategies she developed, necessary curatives for the burden of caregiving she prematurely inherited from her husband. These include tears, journaling, the support of friends, and meditating on the surprising "poignan[cy]" of her husband's condition (*Different* 65). Her portions of the book convey the endurance of lovingness in their relating throughout a "long goodbye" (77) and the shared sense of humour that saw them through it. "If you're going to be on this ride," she writes, "your routine might as well include laughter. Listening to

other people, and hearing their stories, I feel like I'm a member of a club I hadn't even known was out there" (38). The couple movingly charts their emergence from isolated struggle, following the diagnosis, to their work as spokespersons for the Alzheimer's Society of New Brunswick. Proceeds from *Different Minds* support that Society, and Ferrari donated his body to Alzheimer's research. The notice of his passing in 2010 on *InMemorium.ca* mentions the memorial honouring his donation in the "'Garden of Memory' at Dalhousie University in Halifax" and requests mourners contribute to Alzheimer's societies in lieu of flowers ("Leo Ferrari"). Those commenting on the website remember his teaching, his friendship, his laughter, his fondness for ale, and, less commonly, his Flat Earth lectures.

Which Way to the Precipice, Please?

By tracing the author's engagements across temporal, geographical, and conceptual borders, I have shown that Ferrari embedded sincere social critique into his capering Society's gags. Authentic sentiments show through his comedic mask and range from pro-feminist and anti-racist standpoints to traditional spiritual messages and anti-industrial or anti-technological sentiments. Salvific in intent, his Society broadly promoted metaphorical truth as an alternative to supposedly universal truths by using an anti-ideology to combat "the bovine uniformity of modern thought" that Ferrari saw as pervasive in western society (211). The sincerity of the President's intent often contrasts with the funny side of his FES work, although he blurred that border too. "Leo Charles Ferrari versus the Gyroglobular-Industrial-Complex" has read Society texts to understand creative and political uses for Flat Earth ideas. These sources preserve the confounding

blend of gravity and levity that sets FES apart from other forms of Flat Earth revival. Underwriting myriad jabs at mainstream cultural ideology, an attack on the supposed divide between sincerity and humour grounded the Society's campaign, much more so than its official aims. Ferrari dispels the harmful binary, which he finds peculiar to the same "Anglo-Saxon tradition" he could disclaim as an unconventional Catholic and New Brunswick convert (*TEIF* 219). Official enemies were dubbed Globularists. In reality, FES was against anyone who would take them too seriously or not seriously enough, those who "have no sense of metaphor because they lack a sense of humour," to quote his condemnation (215). There is a whiff of sixties kitsch about Ferrari's anti-heroic Flat Earthism, yet he persistently cites canonical figures of western philosophy. Ferrari's was a tricky, exilic Planoterrestrialism bound for antiquity and tangled up with his work as scholar, poet, and humanist.

Like him, Gwendolyn MacEwen announced her unstable relationship with time and place through Canada's premier support group for those afflicted with living upon an effectively flattened planet. Literary enchantments and FES letters created by her and other Canadian members are the subjects of this dissertation's final chapter, which follows upon a review of how others have recently read MacEwen. Regrettably, no critical source has yet considered how FES hijinks tickle at the edges of her notable work as a poet and prose artist.

Gwendolyn MacEwen in the Twenty-first Century: A Literature Review

During the present century, a substantial amount of critical and creative writing has preserved Gwendolyn MacEwen's literary legacy, at least in comparison to those of her one-time fellows Nowlan and Ferrari. In the context of this dissertation, then, she seems a relatively major figure. Yet she remains understudied relative to many of her peers. To date, only one book-length study of her writing has appeared, and it exists only in German: Linda Weiland's *Unravelling: C. G. Jungs Individuations- und Archetypenlehre im Werk Gwendolyn MacEwens* (2013).[133] In English, a cluster of contemporary articles and tributes testify to her enduring relevance. Reissues of her poetry and prose have also appeared in recent decades. Taken together, these sources encourage a resurgence in readership and work towards securing MacEwen a prominent place in Canadian literary studies, as in world literature. Alongside Weiland's monograph *Unravelling*, publications by Sahar Al-Husseini and María González-Rodríguez revive the author beyond Canada's borders. MacEwen criticism is widespread but diffuse. Interpreters identify various qualities of her writing, usually without referencing other twenty-first-century readings of her work. This strain of scholarship does not cohere into an active subfield: what might

[133] Rosemary Sullivan wrote on MacEwen's life in *Shadow Maker* (1995). In the 1980s, Jan Bartley released two short books on her writing. Bartley depicts MacEwen as an explorer of the psyche, as does Weiland's recent study. From the publisher's summary of *Unravelling*: "heute ist Gwendolyn MacEwens Werk größtenteils in Vergessenheit geraten: Als zu eigenwillig, um im kanadischen Kanon zu bestehen und im 21. Jahrhundert Relevanz zu haben, wird es bewertet" (beucher.de). My translation: "Today, Gwendolyn MacEwen's work has been mostly forgotten: judged as too idiosyncratic to exist in the Canadian canon or to have relevance for the twenty-first century." Weiland resists the decline in MacEwen's currency and sparks interest by promoting the idiosyncratic nature of her publications. *Unravelling* overlaps with my efforts to revive MacEwen via Planoterrestrialism and to take eccentricity as a marker of, not detriment to, her value.

be called MacEwen Studies. Below, I address prominent examples of commentary about the author, while spotting resurfacings along literature's outer shorelines, appearances that also uphold her faded visibility. This literature review documents academic investigations of MacEwen's books, responses in more explicitly creative genres, and re-issues of her work. The scope is limited to sources published after 2000, with the goal of fostering ongoing interest in her authorship. The review asks, "why does MacEwen matter today?" and "how do recent sources add or fail to add to extant interpretations?" The dissertation's final chapter contributes to MacEwen scholarship and her revival by examining concurrences across her creative writing and FES membership, while reproducing segments of unpublished correspondence with Nowlan and Ferrari. Those letters highlight her penchant for wit and whimsy, a feature of her output overlooked in criticism. MacEwen's playful humour has not marked her reception to the same extent as have mythic and tragic facets of her experience, persona, and craft. Conversely, her personal character and otherworldly geographies are two matters important to the subsequent chapter that have been widely recognized in the available literature.

Academic Analyses

Since 2000, more than a dozen articles or book chapters have taken MacEwen as their topic. Others make passing references. Sources often depict her viscerally dramatic style and inventive use of mythology. Such findings repeat commentary produced during the previous century. One contemporary source grounded in twentieth-century discussions is Leonor Martínez-Serrano's 2018 study "Following the Old Stones Skywards" in *Women Poets and Myth in the 20th and 21st Centuries*. The Spanish critic shows MacEwen

straddling the mythic and mundane, citing related assessments by Canada's Margaret Atwood (1974), Frank Davey (1974), Tom Marshall (1979), Jan Bartley (1983), George Woodcock (1993), and Rosemary Sullivan (1995). The backward-looking list of sources suggests the twenty-first century has heard little new said about the author in this regard. The essay overlaps with MacEwen's FES membership (not mentioned), because Martínez-Serrano recognizes that she "explores the no-man's land between reality and illusion and seeks correspondences […] that may demonstrate that the ordinary is imbued with a mythical burden if seen properly, through the inner eye of the imagination" (73). For this critic, she wrote against a situation in which "human beings had been severed from all that was magical, fantastic, mythical, and divine in the universe. Stuck onto the actual objective world, modern men and women seemed incapable of penetrating the surface of things to grasp the invisible underlying layers of meaning hidden beneath reality" (74). The description equates MacEwen's value to poetry's revelatory and inspirational power. Martínez-Serrano describes the poet's career as a maturation, whereby imaginative elements became increasingly accessible through attachment to familiar objects. The next chapter of this dissertation will demonstrate that her reality-defying Flat Earth fantasies regularly incorporated recognizable objects, places, and people.

Belonging to world literature and a national context, MacEwen employed historical incidents and distant places as well as her immediate environment when joining mythic impressions to tangible realities. Accordingly, scholars study her writings set in foreign locales[134] and those that employ Canadian settings, such as the fiction titles

[134] See Al-Husseini, Principe, Deshaye, and Wood on *The T. E. Lawrence Poems*.

Noman and *Noman's Land*. The Noman books concentrate her perplexing habit of sometimes spelling Canada with a capital K. Heidi von Born references this strange orthography in her essay "No Name—No Man's Land or Finding the Way to Kanada/Canada." She does not explore implications of "*K*anadian" spelling, however. Marc Colavincenzo treats the subject directly in his 2003 book *Myth and Mythologizing in Postmodern Canadian Historical Fiction*. He discusses the Noman character under a heading that echoes MacEwen's alternative orthography and revives an archaic spelling: "Magic*k*ing the Real." The critic aligns the Noman books with fiction by Michael Ondaatje and Robert Kroetsch, two of Canada's better-known magical realists. For Colavincenzo, *Noman's Land* is an "inexplicably under-rated novel" that develops "the history of Canada" into "the 'non-history' of 'Kanada'" (160). That difference mirrors "the distinction between personal and public history/time" (161). As an amnesiac character going by an anonymizing name, Noman's identity is as obscure as MacEwen's K, necessitating a personal quest for him and critical investigation by Colavincenzo.

Noman's amnesia makes him an immigrant to the present and a stranger to himself. Colavincenzo writes that "foreignness, connected often to rootlessness and loneliness, comes up repeatedly as an essential part of Kanada and Kanadians" (161). Noman is allegorically both C/Kanadian and C/Kanada, so his rootlessness could attract readers interested in migration and displacement. But for Colavincenzo, likely for MacEwen too, "this is a character who might be regarded as a *tabula rasa*" (161). That romantic notion has tended to facilitate Indigenous erasure by establishing the myth of "a country without a national past" (161). Writing (like MacEwen) before decolonization became a widespread cultural imperative, the critic finds validity in the fact that "native

history appears only as a trace" in *Noman's Land*; its absence invokes "the brutal colonial past which reduced this same history to scattered remains" (178). Colavincenzo sees MacEwen using techniques of "collage" to gather up fragments of her own culture—Atwood, MacLennan, Group of Seven, Mackenzie King—because no "attempt to create a paradigm of Canadian identity" can succeed in monolithic form (165). A secondary spelling of Canada concentrates a push toward multiplicity, mosaic. Colavincenzo understands her K to indicate an endlessly subjective country: "there are some thirty million Kanadas; each is private, and each of them has only one inhabitant" (174).[135] Struggling to uncover his, Noman is a "Kanadian Everyman, undergoing in an extreme form the process of 'kanadianization'" (174). But the critic ultimately arrives at a new kind of totality, or togetherness: "if the novel does hint at a larger concept of Kanada, then it can be nothing other than the simultaneous presence of all these private Kanadas which come together to form a collage which can then also be called Kanada" (174). This dissertation's next chapter continues this interpretation, exploring further implications of MacEwen's K (SP 320). The need to expand this discussion results only partly from the limited scholarship available. Another cause: MacEwen left behind a richly varied output that express her stridently nonconformist but otherwise unstable attitude to nation and Earth, individual and society. Her status as a *Kanadian* writer informs my take on her *Planoterrestrialism*, improving a situation where neither subject has received sufficient attention. MacEwen's Kanada and her FES involvement exemplify her disorienting geographies (political, physical), which have already attracted commentary.

[135] Nowlan's "O'Sullivan's World," already mentioned in the dissertation's first chapter, conveys a similar message (SP 167).

Some of MacEwen's writings recognize Indigenous knowledges that belong to the land she occupies, an awareness sometimes lacking in her work. Other writings portray heavily mythologized colonial figures with a critical eye. Her 1965 radio-play *Terror and Erebus* provoked critical responses, partly because it sets European explorers and Inuit people side-by-side. Issues of (de)colonization were not key elements of MacEwen scholarship in the previous century. Renée Hulan has since brought these issues to bear on MacEwen's script about John Franklin's final expedition. Franklin fits with MacEwen's Icarus figures (a trope continued in FES letters), insofar as the British naval officer perished from sailing too far out of his element. MacEwen's landscapes are often more defamiliarizing than recognizable, but within her itinerant oeuvre the arctic represents a limit case of land that resists any newcomer refusing to learn its ways.

Before the 2000s, *Terror and Erebus* received unfavorable mention in Sherill Grace's "Gendering Northern Narrative" (1997). For her, it fails as cross-cultural representation, because a "southern masculinist ideology is imposed on the Inuit […] unironically" (167). The only disruption of conventional explorer narratives for which Grace credits the play is that its author occupied a "southern, Euro-Canadian" female rather than male position (175). Hulan departs from Grace's view in her 2002 study of *Northern Experience and the Myths of Canadian Culture*. She sees MacEwen's white characters carrying imperialist attitudes with them to the far north but does not ascribe those attitudes to MacEwen (159). Instead, she sees the author challenging "myths surrounding the north's history of great men" by "represent[ing] certain myths, including the north as an imaginary space," revising "the standard explorer narrative" of heroism into "the sin of hubris that brought Franklin to tragedy" (146-47). Hulan uses interactions

between white characters to show that the play's "clash of knowledges is explicit" (147). *Terror and Erebus* represents starkly different perspectives, if not separate worlds. In 2015, Hulan advanced further arguments for MacEwen's progressive treatment of Franklin. "White Technologies and the End of Science" asserts that she made the Inuk guide Qaqortingneq the play's "most authoritative voice" (124). In 2018, Hulan briefly returned to the script in a book-length study of *Climate Change and Writing the Canadian Arctic*. The critic repeats her previous findings, adding that *Terror and Erebus* heralded non-fiction sources and government policies that would place "Indigenous knowledge at the center" of understandings about the northern territories (*Climate* 19). A 2001 source by Pedro Rodríguez had noted that male writers attempting to deconstruct Franklin's legend followed MacEwen's unattributed tracks (25). Evolving criticism about *Terror and Erebus* constitutes a rare instance of reflexive continuity across MacEwen sources. However, the lack of references to other twenty-first-century criticism in these analyses epitomizes the diffuse nature of this would-be literary subfield.

MacEwen's representation of the land she occupies as mysterious and endowed with unheeded knowledge led Stephanie McKenzie to include her in *Before the Country: Native Renaissance, Canadian Mythology* (2007). McKenzie addresses a single poem, "Dark Pines Under Water." It belongs to a strain of Anglo-Canadian writing that is not "dependent on recognizable mythology but [constitutes] a search for mythology, a desire to understand the land as holding clues to some kind of national awareness or narrative" (28). McKenzie offers no explication of the poem but situates it on a continuum of tradition and influence. Its landscape is odd, alienating; even so, "Dark Pines" fits within a lineage of "Canada's foundational poets," its "discoverers and explorers," and its "early

critics," due to a physiography that offers fresh depictions while knowing "much ha[s] yet to be 'told'" (28). A half-paragraph early in the study is devoted to MacEwen's poem. Later, a passage from Kroetsch's *Badlands* is seen to reflect "Dark Pines" (43). His novel pictures otherworldly landscapes and the failure of whites to make themselves at home in environments shaped by First Nations cultures. McKenzie holds MacEwen's vision apart from Indigenous worldviews that counter colonialism, but the author's poetry (like her FES affiliation) shows that she resisted dominant, utilitarian perspectives.

MacEwen's ex-centric position within Canadian literature has propelled interest in her work. Conversely, Joel Deshaye makes her central by placing her alongside poets Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, and Michael Ondaatje in his 2013 study of *The Metaphor of Celebrity*. He states that MacEwen wrote about widely known male figures with dual purpose: to subversively critique masculinity and to make her own precarious position feel more secure. Deshaye claims she wrote about T. E. Lawrence "to take from Lawrence some of the power that men, rather than women, often have" (189). This view should be complicated by catastrophes that undermine her male characters, Lawrence being no exception. The men who populate her writing are Icarus figures—compelling, aspiring, doomed. For that reason, Deshaye must describe them as "potential" rather than shining "stars" (173). In this, they are like their creator. Deshaye acknowledges "the context of her limited celebrity," compared to the better-known poets he studies (173). Including her helps him correct the predominantly male canon of Canada's twentieth-century poets as well as her neglected importance. MacEwen's career began shortly after an upsurge in Canadian poetry, which Deshaye measures as running from 1955 to 1980. Her final years, then, were a period of decline for the poet and her art form. When

discussing MacEwen's early death, Deshaye draws connections between personal and historic chronologies, embedding her as an unfortunate artist emblematic of rapidly changing times.[136] The critic attends her writing with greater care than one finds guiding most sources that report on her difficult life.[137] Critical engagement with texts overtakes interest in her biography: an appropriate balance, since Deshaye's study recognizes the damaging effects of celebrity on artists and audiences alike.

Deshaye finds *The T. E. Lawrence Poems* illustrative of MacEwen's talent. That late collection "complicates her voice" (186) by artfully pairing her subject's "stylistically restrained and precise" tone with the "'inflated poetic language' of her earlier books" (187)—a comment that borrows from Davey. Deshaye admires MacEwen for creating a convincing impersonation of her subversive hero "while remaining critical about Lawrence's flaws and the limits of what she could know about him" (192). He speculates on her personal reasons for adopting Lawrence: his unorthodox masculinity and "a time of crisis in her life" that parallels difficulties experienced by him (192). Such speculations are never entirely confident, nor do they dominate his assessment of her explorations of celebrity. His restraint more likely results from reading MacEwen's book than from biographical commentaries about her. Besides discussing MacEwen's private life, Deshaye analyzes her rhythms (176), enjambments (179), imagery (181), themes (188), intertextuality (190), and development across a foreshortened career (179 and

[136] von Born strikes a similar note, calling MacEwen "a symbol of many writers in her country": "a famous writer who was not able to survive on her writing" (193).

[137] Richard Almonte critiqued a tendency toward biographical interest with his 2003 dissertation *Biographical Influence in Canadian Literature*. For him, MacEwen's early demise and female gender explain why personal background frequently overshadows analysis of craft. Regrettably, he does not provide the careful readings he calls for with his sustained critique of biographical interest that forestalls criticism.

184). Critical elements make his book a useful source for MacEwen Studies, one that will likely endure.

Martínez-Serrano, Hulan, and Deshaye all dedicate articles or chapters to MacEwen. Critics who place her in larger contexts (like McKenzie) differently add to her legacy. They often import her onto unexpected ground, exposing the author to audiences with seemingly unrelated interests. Introducing a 2011 issue of *Canadian Literature* on avant-garde poetics, Alessandra Capperdoni invokes MacEwen and Pat Lowther as forerunners to more recent and overtly experimental poets. Given their directness of expression, these women might seem irrelevant to the radical grammars generated by Lisa Robertson or Rachel Zolf. Capperdoni's recuperation of Lowther and MacEwen as experimentalists defies their usual categorization "within aesthetic categories of, respectively, the mimetic and the mystic, or a broadly defined modernism. But their poetry is replete with gestures and postures enacting ruptures of language and representational writing" (104). Following a proliferation of experimental poetry, MacEwen's techniques can come to look, at least on the surface, stylistically conservative. That perception likely contributes to the current lack of a comprehensive account of her contributions. A major reclamation would require insights from readers like Capperdoni, who promotes her radical (not canonical) importance. MacEwen has only a cameo in Capperdoni's introduction, but it exposes her to contemporary readers with extreme tastes. The critic values MacEwen for the unusualness of her output, an assessment that accords with the approach taken in this essay, where her alliance with a fringe Society provides an entryway to her literary thought.

In his interdisciplinary study *Interpreting Cultures* (2006), Johnathan Hart champions MacEwen's border blurring artistic ethos. He describes her intellectual task as blending seeming polarities: "subject and object, home and exile" (Hart 104). Her poems "reflect or refract the world" with geographical depictions just as elusive as the escape artists she represents elsewhere (104-05). Hart does not explicate how MacEwen achieves these effects. He calls her "a favorite poet of [his] at school" (104) and "one of Canada's most powerful poets" (284) without unpacking his fascination. *Interpreting Cultures* nonetheless makes a significant contribution to MacEwen scholarship with its lengthy list of secondary sources (284-86; 291), one expanded and updated at the end of this dissertation's bibliography.

For their part, Alexia Moyer and Nathalie Cooke cite MacEwen when exporting poetic interests into a Food Studies context. Their "Canadian Literary Breakfasts" (2017) appears in the journal *Cuizine.* Although MacEwen figures in one paragraph only, the critics position her as a major contributor to breakfast writing. And they find her "sacramental" approach to food continuous with other, metaphor-laden writings, since her immediate subject points readers to larger ideas (Moyer and Cooke n. pag.). The poet's plate, like her Earth of similar shape, must not be taken at face value. The day's first meal is "a device through which author and reader alike consider big questions through smallish spoons and fried eggs" (n. pag.). The critics include a visual image titled "MacEwen's Kanadian Egg" (fried) without discussing her disruptive spellings or alternative approaches to national discourse (n. pag.). Along with the source of their image, they let this mystery dangle. In a more specific vein, Moyer and Cooke note her influence on George Elliott Clarke. He acknowledged his debt to her example when

tackling the topic of breakfast. Tracing poetic heirs is one means of recording the writer's importance, and I have undertaken a related effort by documenting MacEwen's Flat Earth Society network. Barbara Godard too testifies to MacEwen's impact on poets. Her "Refiguring Alterity in the Poetry of Mary di Michele" returns to di Michele's comments from the 1980s, reminding readers of MacEwen's influential "negative capability" (94). For di Michele—who spoke at MacEwen's funeral (Findley, *Inside Memory* 296)—she displayed that facility most vividly in her *T. E. Lawrence Poems,* a poetic suite that disguised one voice inside another. "Di Michele emulated this 'poetic tour de force' in her Frida Kahlo poems," Godard writes (94). As with other brief mentions in literary scholarship, Godard's treatment of MacEwen is minimal but useful, especially for those searching out her place in a long line of authors.

As noted, some cameo appearances by MacEwen transcend her literary context. Abella *et al*. argue for the usefulness of her poetry in classrooms—and not for her poetic techniques. Rather, their 2016 article in *Canadian School Counselling Review* states the potential for her poem "1958" to foster independent thinking and resistance to peer-pressure in young learners. Educators included it in a pedagogical unit meant to develop "self-awareness, perseverance and ambition" for Grade 11 students in Calgary (31). My dissertation echoes this endorsement of MacEwen's assertive nonconformity and determined self-examination. Punning on notions of "Discovery," Louis De Vorsey elsewhere imports MacEwen into a legal/historical context by reproducing her poem "The Discovery" in an article for *Terrae Incognitae* (75-76). He writes that it would make a strong candidate "should the Society [for the History of Discoveries] ever wish to choose an official poem" (75). Recounting his expert-witnessing in a court case regarding

jurisdictional disputes between America's federal government and the State of Alaska, De Vorsey raises Franklin's explorations but not MacEwen's treatment of him. Instead, he places her highly personal contemplation ("The Discovery") near the article's outset and a poem by Charles Baudelaire at its conclusion. Those bookends elevate MacEwen's status in world literature.[138] Dispersed mentions of her by Moyer and Cooke, Abella *et al*., and De Vorsey extend the author's traces well beyond the literary frontier.

Some academic sources split the difference between MacEwen's life and writing by recording her cultural involvements besides authorship. Mark Cohen touched on alternate aspects of her career in a 1999 article on Timothy Findley's *Headhunter,* which refigures MacEwen as the character Amy Wylie. Prompted by the novel, Cohen recalls MacEwen "waged a campaign to save Toronto's stray cats" (n. pag.), an activity reimagined in Findley's dystopian fiction. That example of her work as public intellectual and concerned citizen typifies the "lost cause" nature of her pursuits, as does FES membership. Saving a metropolis' semi-wild creatures or converting its population to Planoterrestrialism were impossible tasks and likely enticing for that reason. Alternatively, a successful campaign MacEwen participated in managed to overturn a Toronto by-law in 1962. Michael Vance records Interpoet's victory in his study of Robert Burns statues in Canada, "Burns in the Park." At Allen Gardens, site of Toronto's monument, the municipal government had allowed "the preaching of sermons […] but required all other speakers to obtain a permit. The group, led by [Milton] Acorn, challenged the regulation by reading their poetry in front of the Burns statue" (Vance

[138] Lauren Davis counts her among important authors when asking "what would have happened if [Dylan Thomas, Gwendolyn MacEwen, Hart Crane, and Jack London] had lived […] How much extraordinary literature has been lost along with the battle against booze?" (720).

228). Interpoet's civil disobedience succeeded, despite police action against them and a *Toronto Star* letter warning against "a left-wing Communist conspiracy" (228). City administrators designated "the area adjacent to the Burns statue […] 'poets' corner' as a result of the dispute, as a free speech area where no permits were required" (229). Later, MacEwen would defiantly express Flat Earth views. Stated in jest and through private correspondence, these nonetheless dovetail with her protesting suppression of free speech in the 1960s.

Ruth Panofsky documents another involvement MacEwen pursued in a history of the Macmillan company subtitled *Making Books and Mapping Culture* (2012). From 1965 to 1969, MacEwen worked as a freelance reader of hundreds of manuscripts. Panofsky speculates that MacEwen abandoned this post when Macmillan's already minimal investments in poetry began to falter (179-81; 255-56). Even so, her status as a Macmillan author predated and outlasted her tenure as reader. The company published five MacEwen titles between 1963 and 1974.[139] Panofsky finds value in her "contribution to Macmillan, as an astute and instructive reader of poetry in particular," because it "sheds substantial light on her writerly vision" and "illuminates the literary aesthetic that drove Macmillan's trade publishing program of the 1960s" (176). She finds links between MacEwen the professional reader and creative writer, extracting from more than thirty reports. Canadian literary specialists may wish to consult that responding to an edition of D. C. Scott's poems (179-80), whereas readers pursuing FES's literary network should consult her report on a collection by David McFadden (177). Drawing from MacEwen's reader reports instead of her poems is a highly unusual tack. The reports are

[139] By 1979, "Don Coles remained the sole poet on Macmillan's list" (Panofsky 256).

rarely seen archival documents now held in the Macmillan Company fonds at McMaster University, and they fuel a singular investigation of MacEwen as a literary worker.

My dissertation's next chapter seeks to continue that innovative tradition. It develops a new way to discuss MacEwen and, further, uses scholarship as an opportunity to reproduce unpublished writings. In her project, Panofsky finds the poet and Macmillan "compatible" entities with shared literary standards (182). She states that MacEwen appreciated "solemn, high-minded," "serious and enduring" writing and that, as her publisher, "the Macmillan imprint conferred high literary status, respectability, and cultural significance on MacEwen's work" (182). The vivid picture is incomplete. The present essay seeks to overturn common depictions of her as a "solemn" writer without compromising her "cultural significance."[140] MacEwen's time as manuscript reader may seem more professionally relevant and intellectually "serious" than her campaign to save stray cats or her Planoterrestrialism. But the decline of Macmillan's poetry program, prior to the company's demise, shows that she allied herself with cultural forces that lacked certain outcomes and secure futures. Part of MacEwen's value to the present project matches one announced by Panofsky. Studying MacEwen-at-Macmillan helps the critic "widen the historical canvas, which has tended to obscure the importance of women in Canadian publishing" (10). MacEwen diversifies a Macmillan history that features, "by necessity, male presidents and editors at the helm" (10). Similarly, MacEwen interrupts my inevitable focus on male FES authors. She provided little in the way of leadership,

[140] Nowlan used the word "solemn" to capture his first impression of MacEwen, one he soon disavowed as "foolish" (SP 295).

but her otherwise minor contributions to the Society were just as compelling and imaginative as those of Nowlan and Ferrari.

Exporting MacEwen across literary boundaries, importing activities beyond authorship into literary criticism—both approaches can expand her audience and help enshrine her legacy. My own work continues the approaches undertaken by De Vorsey and Moyer/Cooke, Vance and Panofsky by introducing MacEwen to those interested in Flat Earth ideas and by attracting poetry readers to her geo-planarian experiments. Her "extra-curricular" activities often promoted lost causes, and FES is just one pursuit adding to her performance as one of Canada's "powerful losers" (von Born 193). Cultural engagements outside authorship produced more ephemeral documentation than have her poetry and prose. Researchers like Panofsky employ archives to generate evidence for the way such engagements extend personal views and relate to her publishing career. As will be shown, FES was an eminently appropriate venue for MacEwen to divert some of her excess energy.

Writerly Testimonies and Creative Tributes

Writers have remembered MacEwen and revived her body of work in non-academic genres as well. Personal essays and creative tributes testify to her value for a wider audience than criticism usually addresses. As with a subset of scholarly sources, some non-fiction works record cultural contributions the author made outside of creative writing. Joe Rosenblatt's assemblage of short prose pieces on diverse topics, *Lunatic Muse* (2007), mentions her work as proprietor of Toronto's Trojan Horse Café. Rosenblatt speaks to its eventual failure rather than its culinary or musical offerings

(100). He also lauds MacEwen as his "poetic mentor" (92), a role shared with Milton Acorn, her first husband and co-editor on their "mimeographed literary magazine called *Moments*" (93). Rosenblatt does not elaborate on these activities, instead details the power of MacEwen's persona and poetry. He esteems her ability to translate for the page an intense vitality, a "charisma so potent that at times it seemed almost an entity to itself" (96). Rosenblatt makes space for comedic sensibilities as well. Regarding "Breakfast for Barbarians," in "A Feeding Glory" he writes that her "humour is used to soften a hunger that comes across as eerily real" (115).[141] Artistic rather than scholarly in tone, Rosenblatt offers insights in a casual manner that makes his interpretations largely untraceable in his source material. His insights are nonetheless valuable for documenting MacEwen's career, her mentorship, and for rare articulations of her comedic sensibility, an appreciation lacking in most secondary sources.

Phillipa Dowding also testifies to MacEwen's generosity as a guide to new authors. She met MacEwen through a professional rather than personal literary connection, as was the case with Rosenblatt. Her tenure in the 1980s as a student at the Universities of Western Ontario and Toronto fortuitously overlapped with MacEwen's positions as a writer-in-residence at those institutions. Dowding went on to open her 2014 young-adult novel *The Strange Gift of Gwendolyn Golden* with an epigram from MacEwen and discuss her influence in a blogpost. She describes the use of the name

[141] Other entries on MacEwen: "Romance as a Guilty Meal" (116-19) on the *T.E. Lawrence Poems*; "Bedding Down for Eternity" on "Dark Pines Under Water" (120-22); "A Love Affair" on "The Last Day" and "Marino Marini's Horses" (123-26); and "Arriving at the Perfect Paradox" on "The Yellow House" and "In the Garden of the Chelsea Arts Club" (127-30). The longest entry is an unfavourable review of Sullivan's *Shadow Maker* biography (95-113). Present space does not allow for individual treatments, but citations are given here because these titles do not use MacEwen's name, nor does the book supply an index. Rosenblatt conveys his enthusiasm for MacEwen in unapologetically freeform manner.

"Gwendolyn" in her fiction as incidental, chosen for sonic effect: "I was going for alliteration of the hard 'G,' Strange/Gift/Gwendolyn/Golden" (phdowding). Another parallel: her story employs the Icarus myth, a common motif for MacEwen. Dowding recalls her as "charming, warm, down-to-earth, a wonderful storyteller, and very smart" (phdowding). Through residencies, MacEwen encouraged student writers, but such connections were glancing compared to those shared with actively publishing poets like Rosenblatt. Compensation earned from this work did not alleviate the destructive poverty of MacEwen's final years, however. Paid or volunteer, professional activities and public campaigns she pursued deserve greater consideration than they have to date received. Rosenblatt and Dowding's comments on MacEwen's mentorship, like my account of her FES involvement, span the professional and personal. They mark a middle ground between published works and private life.

"Three Sisters" is a personal essay published in 2005[142] by Daniel David Moses. It places MacEwen alongside two others who inspired developments in his writing career: Pauline Johnson and Lenore Keeshig-Tobias. Many sources deal with MacEwen's untimely death, but for Moses she provided the rare example "that a writer might be a living creature" ("Three Sisters" 21). In the late 1960s, MacEwen toppled the canon previously presented to Moses, then a high-school student who thought "part of the necessary definition of a writer [was] that one be dead" (21). Although she still lived, MacEwen's books appeared in his school's library due to the growing Canadian nationalism and CanLit boom contemporaneous with his coming of age. He found MacEwen impressive for her "use of what seemed ordinary language," "the way it could

[142] The talk was delivered in Spain in 1992 but first printed in *Pursued by a Bear*.

suddenly be musical," and "its playfulness, its imagination" (22). That initial encounter led to a life-changing decision for him: "I, too, would at last become a writer" (22).

After charting personal developments toward Indigenous belonging and First Nations activism inspired by Johnson and Keeshig-Tobias, Moses recalls a shift in his perception of MacEwen. He recounts the author's death, which occurred two decades after his first exposure to her writing. "Friends who had been friends of hers […] had been out of town. And she had been so alone and poor" and "probably wounded," he writes ("Three Sisters" 26). These lines express sympathy for her plight, but in passing over MacEwen joined the ranks "of those writers who had always been [his] oppressors": dead authors (26). The change was literal and figurative. Moses' Indigenous perspective shed unflattering light on her treatment of land, nation, and spirit. "'Oh give me a break, Gwendolyn'" he thought, reading "The Names" in her final collection. One could interpret the poem as acknowledging First Nations title or, with Moses, as obscuring Indigenous contributions (27). Another poem in *Afterworlds*, "The Question" wryly addresses artistry, a subject wherein MacEwen has clear authority. Balancing his detraction of "The Names," Moses describes it as "beautiful" (29). By the late 1980s, however, the poet was no longer a guiding influence, only an early inspiration. Because MacEwen was "seductive but seduced by the popular image of the writer as a sort of solitary, spiritual explorer" (27), she had limited relevance for a storyteller grounded in Indigenous community and tradition.

Ten years after publishing "Three Sisters," Moses returned to MacEwen's influence in a 2015 post for the Brick Books website. Here, he expands on her example. She helped him discover himself as an "'exigrant,'" a citizen between worlds. Recalling

her sense of complicated belonging, he writes that "she became one of [his] first guides to this territory" ("Guide to Canada?"). Her "Dark Pines Underwater" made him reconsider the borders that seemingly set his life on the Reserve apart, made him ask whether they actually separated him from the rest of the country to which he felt himself an "exigrant." Considering her "willingness to look at [the land I recognized, and grew up knowing] and articulate its reality," Moses reflected, "maybe we really were in the same place after all" (n. pag.). The post repeats offence taken at colonial presumptions in "The Names," sometimes reproducing "Three Sisters" verbatim. As with "Three Sisters," Moses uses another poem to redeem MacEwen as a settler-Canadian but not imperially minded artist—at least not consistently so. This time, he draws on "Black Ice" to suggest that "maybe she had begun, too late, despite what she wrote, to understand what this land had to say" (n. pag.). To borrow from MacEwen's language, Moses grapples with the extent to which the author belongs to Canada (official, colonially governed, foreclosing) or "Kanada" (a quasi-nation of "exigrants"). His post expands on the earlier essay, being equally critical of colonial sentiment but going farther in reclaiming "her voice"; "I can't not recall it," Moses writes, "its lyric power, its wisdom, its desire to know" (n. pag.). He ends his testimony with links to resources that provide further information on MacEwen, an act of promotion not detraction.

Rosemary Sullivan has likely done more to secure MacEwen's literary legacy than anyone. Sullivan's 1995, Governor General's Award-winning biography *Shadow Maker* has become a key source for researchers, although scholars like Almonte (SP 269, note) and writers like Rosenblatt (SP 276, note) have resisted the limiting biographical framework it employs and inspires. Sullivan addresses MacEwen in the opening essay of

her 2001 prose collection *Memory Making*. “Memory-Making and the Stamina of the Poet” is a personal essay that recalls the biographer’s final meeting with that “lonely figure” who “had been so dignified, even decorous,” whose decline into alcoholism, incapacity, and death had once “seemed inconceivable” (7). Isolation and torpor seemed incongruous with the intense vitality and self-determination MacEwen had once exuded. “No one was gutsier than Gwen,” Sullivan writes: “few were as funny” (9). Her appreciation for the author’s humour is relayed via their personal connection, rather than through an appreciation of her creative work, where comedic tones are wry and subtle, may even evade detection.

Sullivan aligns MacEwen’s decline with a downturn in poetry’s prominence. She explains her motivations for composing a biography in these terms:

> And I say to myself—I need to tell this life because no one, beyond that eccentric circle who still read poetry in this non-poetic age, knows Gwendolyn’s work. And even among them, there were only a very few friends who knew the real cost of what it meant to be Gwendolyn, knew what lay beneath the gutsiness and bravura. (9)

Behind MacEwen’s charisma lie “missing pieces” (10) subtracted from her personality by a challenging childhood, marred by mental illness and alcohol addiction suffered by her mother and father. Discussion of the poet’s death is overshadowed by respect for her endurance, for “the stamina it took to be Gwen” (15). The personal admiration, intimate friendship, and biographer’s motivation that Sullivan documents make her essay a strong backgrounder for the more widely read text, *Shadow Maker*. Highly active in the literary scene of her times, MacEwen appears in memoirs by other authors she knew: David Helwig, Harold Horwood, and Judith Merril. Journal entries of peers also record thoughts

about her. Such collections include a 2013 volume of journals by George Fetherling, which followed upon Timothy Findley's from 1990.

Presumably, Nick Mount did not know MacEwen personally. Even so, he resurrects her in a lively way in his popular history about the rise of CanLit, *Arrival* (2017). He draws a brief but dynamic sketch, contrasting difficult aspects of her childhood with a remarkable self-determination and intellectual facility. After dropping out of high-school, she taught herself Hebrew, Arabic, and ancient Egyptian "all in the service of poetry" (Mount 77). *Arrival* records contributions beyond authorship, such as her self-propelled micro-press Aleph, "which was Gwen MacEwen, a library copying machine, and a stapler" (149). Mount's book has been criticized for its particular cast of contributors to post-war Canadian literature: received by some as unjustly white, heterosexual, and middleclass.[143] MacEwen receives less attention from Mount than do some of her peers, yet she (like Nowlan) stands out as someone who overcame impoverished beginnings to make her voice heard, even if some markers of privilege may have contributed to her (limited) success. Mount's treatment of MacEwen employs the creative license that fuels his mythic presentation of CanLit authors. He calls her an "Isis reborn" *vis-à-vis* Acorn's "cigar-smoking caveman" (78). Mount finds her books less compelling than her persona, however. *Julian the Magician*, *The Rising Fire*, and *The Shadow-Maker* receive one, two, and three stars (79-82) respectively in Mount's five-star rating system. Micro-reviews accompanying these scores fail to do the books or his low rankings justice. Rosenblatt, Dowding, Moses, and Sullivan remember MacEwen's influence on them in non-fiction prose, while Mount's history records her contributions

[143] For more on the controversy, see my review in the *Dalhousie Review* (vol. 98, no.3).

to the CanLit boom of the 1960s and early 70s. Other writers revive MacEwen in their work as poets and playwrights, continuing a twentieth-century tradition established by Atwood, who reimagines MacEwen in "Isis in Darkness" and *The Robber Bride*; Findley, via Amy Wylie, a minor character in *Headhunter*—rather, a major character in a minor role; and Doug Fetherling, Kenneth Sherman, Raymond Souster, and Phyllis Webb, who each pay tribute to MacEwen in poems.

Primarily remembered as a poet, MacEwen helped shape the versifying of a subsequent generation, as the writing of Elizabeth Philips, Di Brandt, and Mark McCutcheon show. Philips invokes MacEwen with "In This Country" from *A Blue with Blood in It* (2000). She contrasts MacEwen's interest in colorful mythology with a quietude stereotypical to Canadian culture, the latter seen as incompatible with literary appreciation. The "quiet cesura" of MacEwen's death opens "In This Country"; its "loneliness" equates to "poems / remaindered in bins at Coles and WH Smith" (Philips 58). These stores were staples of consumer culture in Canada's late-twentieth century but were decidedly non-literary in their curation. Whereas "serious" authors attract little serious attention in Canada, Nigerian writers have hope or dread for greater awareness from "followers" or the "prison guard turned hangman" (58). Philips sees MacEwen as a generous importer of elsewhere, gifting oranges to "the beggar standing in the wind / at Sherbourne and Bloor"; "afterwards his hands / smelled of another country" (51). She haunts her city as an enigmatic "poet on a / bicycle," "a phantom / rider, hieroglyphic" (51). These moments combine local realism and exotic fabulation, divergent aspects of MacEwen's work. At its close, the poem returns to the poet's death: she "had to consume a whole / case of vodka to dream herself home again" after her Lawrence encounter (51).

That line break announces a contrast common to much commentary on MacEwen, between abundance and lack, desire and pain. Prior to the enjambment, the word "whole" suggests ambitious appetite, perhaps satiation. Vodka becomes the feast's sole ingredient after the turn. This implies incompletion, great needs that spirits cannot slake. The poem's refrain "in this country" seems to hold Canada to blame for MacEwen's death, due to systemic neglect of the nation's cultural workers, especially those without comforting messages to share. Philip's free-verse elegy resists that neglect, transforms a sense of loss into a source for fresh inspiration.

Shortly after Philip published "In This Country," Di Brandt released *Now You Care* (2003). Its "Afterworlds" makes the act of poetic séance explicit, opening with the elemental lines: "Gwendolyn, I call you back / from your bed of roots." The invocation produces an "unexpected resurrection, as from drowned Atlantis out of the carnelian sea" (Brandt 19). Rather than combining otherworldliness with a recognizable Toronto, like Philips, Brandt emphasizes MacEwen's exotic flare while importing her to the poet's own region. We see her "brutal jewels flashing ornate in the naked / prairie sun" (19). Brandt echoes MacEwen's intense, decorous registers, here, and when addressing her as "prophetess of blood and fire […/] drunk on the jeweled wine of death," as "princess of Babylon" (19). Mark McCutcheon encounters MacEwen's bust rather than her ghost in his 2019 poem "In Gwen MacEwen Park." Memorial of an earlier time, the parkette is "an oasis" in Toronto, "a city forever on fastforward" (McCutcheon 70). Her statue's plinth inscribes a MacEwen quotation reproduced in the poem. The statue had been joined by a second monument that memorializes Constance Rooke with "a slim magnolia planted last year" (70). Rooke's commemorative plaque is also quoted. The poem revives

these writers through their own words rather than fabulations, as in poem's by Philips and Brandt. McCutcheon's speaker feels ceremonious in the final stanza, however: "I splash a dram from my cup onto the sunwarm soil" (70). The libation is poured for Rooke rather than MacEwen, but this physical rite reflects an artistic tribute offered to both women.

MacEwen expanded her output as a poet and prose writer with scripts for radio and stage. Fittingly, playwrights have revived her for contemporary productions. Claudia Dey's *The Gwendolyn Poems* (2002) includes MacEwen's parents, her husbands, a close friend, and a psychiatrist. We hear the poet argue and fantasize, see her drink and dance. Often, an expansive inner world comes in conflict with a stifling environment. That imbalance fits with national stereotypes when the character says: "My curse, my stupid Canadian curse, when faced with the devil make weird small talk" (Dey 46). Dreaming her way "out" of the conflict, the poet sees herself as "Atlantis […] a drowned city" but "want[s] to be an astronaut" (46-47). Dey draws on MacEwen's publications to uncover imagery that reflects her flamboyant personality. She also draws MacEwen freehand when imagining private conversations. Some will find less interest in the author's tumultuous relationships than in a conversation with a character who probes her view of the poet's public role:

> Interviewer: Is there a place for the poet in the consumer age; in the age of information?
> Gwendolyn: Yes. Though I don't think I'm alone in saying it's difficult to find. 1980 could easily be seen as an unimaginable nightmare. (62)

This ambivalence develops into a negative attitude. She tells her doctor, "I'm a poet and it's the end of poetry" (69). Dey sees MacEwen as unduly neglected and dramatizes her isolated final moments. The Epilogue constitutes the most speculative part of the script, where MacEwen encounters Lawrence in the afterlife (79-82). Those unfamiliar with

MacEwen's writing would struggle to determine whether some other exchanges are historic or speculative, because even the published version does not specify what parts of the play borrow or invent.

Linda Griffiths reanimated MacEwen for the stage with her Chalmers Award-winning play *Alien Creature: A Visitation from Gwendolyn MacEwen*. The script appeared in 2000, two years before Dey's and from the same publisher: Playwright's Canada. Unlike Dey's populated production, Griffiths offers an extended monologue by the reimagined poet, whom she played in the original production. Griffiths is more precise than Dey about the extent of her borrowing, citing thirteen quotations from MacEwen's poetry in her play's printed version (55-57). Of course, theatre audiences might not detect shifts between Griffiths' riffing and vintage MacEwen, nor would they note the K in "Kanada" (37). Mysteriously, a repeated quotation from MacEwen's prose is not cited; the line "poets are magicians without quick wrists" (30, 45) comes from *Julian the Magician*. In league with the present treatment of her and other commentary, the script reflects MacEwen's overwhelming fears and compensatory powers. The character describes herself as "a small Canadian wren shaking with fear" (14), while stage directions have her "*called up from some other dimension*" (13). Griffiths appreciates MacEwen's humour, has her use sing-song tones to invoke critics who miss that element: "They think I just write sad stuff. I do not write dark fluff" (42). The character speaks of her poetry as becoming "deeper and darker and lighter and funnier" all at once (25). She declares, wryly, "I have a sense of humour. The dark doesn't" (33). These lines pair recognition of her comedic sensibility with the difficult experience that nurtured it.

In *Alien Creature*, the title character's plight seems caught up in cultural shifts of the twentieth century, with literature and myth giving way to globalized finance. Its agents "came with their calculators and merging endless mergers they got so powerful" they could undermine creative industries (Griffiths 14). Toronto is an important site of such changes. "I watched this city get sold," the MacEwen character says (17). The "fourth dimension" her generation of mystic artists sought in the 1960s and 70s "turned out to be stocks and bonds" of the 80s (19): dehumanizing rather than spiritual abstractions. Griffiths reinserts MacEwen into Toronto's history as one who resisted de-poeticization. The character invokes the audience's help in that work: "Make me an ancestor of this city," she says (19). The script pays tribute to MacEwen's poems, plight, and "alien dignity" (45). It belongs to the growing body of creative works that employ her as an example of artistic endurance and spirited defiance. *Alien Creature* also inspired critical studies. In *Theatre and Autobiography*, Katherine McLeod's essay probes the improvisatorial techniques that Griffiths employed in composition. The critic uncovers "points of rupture" in the layering of the playwright and poet's voices (93). She writes that the play "is as much about MacEwen's words as it is about the interplay between Griffiths' words and MacEwen's" (93), developing the playwright's statement that "only both of us can speak" (Griffiths 10). McLeod finds Griffith's work formally complex, because in self-reflexively combining two voices it "perform[s] a destabilizing of the MacEwen known to the general public, at the same time performing a MacEwen that cannot be codified and cast aside as a self that is 'known'" (96).

Alongside inspiring criticism, Griffiths and Dey's plays opened the door for others to return MacEwen's scripts to the stage. Productions of MacEwen's *Trojan*

Women at West Virginia University and the University of Calgary in the 2010s inspired MA theses by those working behind-the-scenes, Cody K. Lorich (costume designer) and Melissa Thomas (director). *Terror and Erebus* and *Tesla* were performed in 2019 with the accompaniment of the Toronto Improvisors Orchestra, an event billed as a "Celebration" (poets.ca). Artists in the realm of literature, theatre, and music, then, have variously contributed to securing a lasting place for MacEwen in contemporary cultural memory, as have those working as editors and publishers.

Contemporary Reissues

MacEwen titles are now largely out-of-print, although new editions and anthologies have maintained her visibility. Editor Meaghan Strimas combines various genres in the only selected edition to appear in the twenty-first century. Her *Selected Gwendolyn MacEwen* (2007) from Toronto's Exile Editions continues and complicates the tradition of Exile publishing MacEwen poetry volumes in the 1990s. Those *Early Years* and *Later Years* volumes were edited by Atwood and Barry Callaghan (the press' founder), with Atwood's introduction (volume one) giving way to one by Sullivan (volume two). Strimas relied on Sullivan as the still-reigning MacEwen expert for a 2007 introduction. Her selection foregrounds poetry, ranging from *The Drunken Clock* (self-published, 1961) to *Afterworlds* (1987), while also representing fiction, non-fiction, and scriptwriting. Following published works, a "Scrapbook" section reproduces archival materials such as newspaper clippings, family photographs, personal correspondence, and early writing that appeared in MacEwen's high-school yearbook, for which she served as "Literary Editor" (Strimas 318). Like this essay, with its extracts from correspondence,

the edition expands the range of readily available materials. Further, it added to MacEwen's public reception by provoking a lengthy review by poet-scholar Anita Lahey, "Hide and Seek." Lahey deals directly with the edition and considers MacEwen's value more broadly. So, the edition has revived, altered, and expanded the author's afterimage. Today, Exile continues to honour MacEwen and encourage new talent by distributing annual funds via the Gwendolyn MacEwen Poetry Competition, which reserves its largest award for the "Best Suite by an Emerging Writer" ("Fiction and Poetry Competitions").

Toronto's Insomniac Press has also extended MacEwen's bibliography. It rereleased her two novels in 2004, including unsigned sections on "Suggested Reading." Because "literary critics have been less interested in MacEwen's fiction than in her poetry," the publisher compiles rare sources committed to fiction (*Julian* 174; *King of Egypt* 333). These include an article by E. B. Gose (1964), a thesis by Jane Kilpatrick (1972), and two Spanish-language articles by González-Rodríguez from 1999 (*Julian* 174). The novels receive Afterwords penned by the author's sister Carol Wilson. Comments on *Julian the Magician* open by stressing the incredible "achievement" of the book, considering that MacEwen was twenty-one years old at its release (172). Wilson discusses the painful time of the novel's creation. Their father died three years prior to its publication. He had been MacEwen's "mentor, her sounding board and the strongest supporter of her determination to become a recognized author" as well as the person who "provided the beginning of Gwen's lifelong interest in magic" (172). In her Afterword to *King of Egypt, King of Dreams*, Wilson recalls MacEwen's "absorption with Egyptian history and culture" during repeat visits to the Royal Ontario Museum during their childhoods and during her solo trip to Egypt in 1962 (330). These editions combine the

three types of sources in the present literature review. They reproduce overlooked writings, point to scholarly resources, and occasion new commentary about the author. Another reissue came from yet a third Toronto publisher. In 2017, House of Anansi rereleased her travel memoir *Mermaids and Ikons* with a new Introduction by Rosemary Sullivan.

Exile, Insomniac, and Anansi have resurfaced MacEwen in the twenty-first century, and their editions are complemented by anthology appearances. Predictably, anthologists concentrate on her poetry. "The Discovery" was included in Zachariah Wells' 2008 collection *Jailbreaks: 99 Canadian Sonnets*, with editorial notes on the poem. She appears in an anthology dedicated to Canadian form poetry, *In Fine Form* (2016). Editors Kate Braid and Sandy Shreve selected "The Children are Laughing" (a madrigal) and "Barker Fairley and the Blizzard" (a prose-poem) for their second edition. Thematic rather than formal concerns led to her inclusion in Shanty Bay Press' 2002 release *Circus: Five Poems on the Circus*. The rare item includes poems illustrated (and presumably gathered) by Walter Bachinski. "The Circus" appears there alongside similarly themed poems by D. H. Lawrence, P. K. Page, Kenneth Koch, Crispin Elsted, and Rilke. Neil Astley's *Staying Alive* anthology of five-hundred poems includes MacEwen's "The Death of the Loch Ness Monster" and selections from the *T. E. Lawrence* suite alongside poems by those she knew (like Nowlan) and those she admired (like Lawrence). She keeps respectable company, then, and appears at home under the title *Staying Alive: Real Poems for Unreal Times*. The 2003 book maintains the legacy of many deceased authors and expressly reaches back in time to revive poetic values for the technological twenty-first century.

Poems show up in prose contexts as well. Her connection to Toronto led to appearances in Jane Fairburn's *Along the Shore: Rediscovering Toronto's Waterfront Heritage*. This prose history of MacEwen's city includes "Dark Pines Under Water," "Animal Syllables," and several photographs of the author. Extracts from three poetry collections as well as the Noman books help illustrate Canada's largest city in Amy Harris' 2010 study *Imagining Toronto*. A 1969 public performance of more than a dozen poems and passages from *Julian the Magician* is transcribed in Anne Urbancic's collection *Literary Titans Revisited: The Earle Toppings Interviews with CanLit Poets and Writers of the Sixties* (2017). It includes reminisces about MacEwen by Toppings. He praises her elocution, calling her "a kind of Billie Holiday among poetry readers" (Urbancic 321). The "interview" is actually a reading with brief comments about the poems supplied by their author. The selection of verse was presumably her own, making MacEwen a co-editor of sorts for her contribution to the book.

A separate collection of interviews edited by Beverley Daurio, *Dream Elevators* (2000), reproduces an exchange MacEwen had with Robert Sward in 1986. Her entry maintains the expected prose (speech) format in its discussion of spirituality, live performance, influences (Hart Crane, W. B. Yeats), and advice for new writers ("to be bold always, to dare, to take risks" [Daurio 89]). Besides interviews, hard-to-find documents appear in the anthology *Where the Nights are Twice as Long* (2015), which includes seldom-seen letters between MacEwen and Acorn. Prose selections from her Noman books appear in Mary Morris' *Maiden Voyages: Writings of Women Travelers* (2012) and Barry Callaghan's *The Stories That Are Great Within Us: Toronto Stories* (2013). Between them, these collections reflect MacEwen's prose output, which featured

writing about her home city and the distant locales she explored as an independent traveller. Interviews and correspondence, then, are exceptions to the rule that anthologists rely on MacEwen's widely available poetry. This situation leaves ample room for literary editors to promote the author through unpublished or uncompleted writings housed in archives, and my dissertation provides an example of the fruitfulness of such work. Expanding the range of MacEwen's available writings beyond the known corpus parallels efforts to expose her poetry to new audiences through translations, such as the Spanish versions presented by Aimée G. Bolaños and Hugh Hazelton in 2017.[144] They participate uniquely in a diverse range of academic scholars, creative writers, and literary editors—within and outside Canada—who seek to secure a place for MacEwen in a worldwide literary canon that, at present, she merely haunts rather than properly occupies.

Transience as opposed to fixity, holding an unruly rather than a proper place—these traits will make MacEwen appealing to readers with a taste for literary obscurity and creative defiance. A similar paradox marks her contemporary legacy. Her enduring importance to literary history is maintained by scholars, creative writers, and editors. Popular audiences have not embraced MacEwen's books, however, possibly dissuaded by the intensity of her oddness and grace. Tragic qualities of her life and work prevent some from detecting her offbeat humour, which merits wider appreciation. The fact that she had her career cut short can too-easily overshadow her substantial achievements. Hopefully, the future will see a resurgence of MacEwen through new editions of her

[144] Poems were previously translated into Greek by George Thaniel for *The Amaranth* and into Italian by Branko Gorjup for *Il Geroglifico Finale: The Last Hieroglyph*, during the 1980s and 90s, respectively.

texts, digital access to forgotten works housed in archives, and an expanding discussion about her artistry and value.

"I'll write you from Atlantis": MacEwen and pan-Kanadian Flat Earthism

Part One

It was 1987 outside and cloudy on the late-November night when Gwendolyn MacEwen tipped over the Edge she had long suspected on the periphery of her earthly existence. Light easterlies blew through the city as she joined the ultimate abyss. The cause? Acutely withdrawing from alcohol alone inside her basement apartment. Age: forty-six years. Temperature? That November twenty-ninth, it dropped sharply just a few hours after Astronomical Twilight, plunging to nearly twenty-below then scrambling back up over the lip of zero, all within the hour. Lay the blame on frontal occlusion, some cyclogenesis or Psychopomp stirring above Lake Ontario. Whatever the immediate cause, dying before her time has become a recurrent trope in writing about MacEwen—unavoidable mythology surrounding a seductively mythic writer. Knowledge of her difficult life and early demise have made it challenging to read MacEwen as a comedic poet or enduring figure. But her imagination was not strictly dark, nor her trajectory a straightforward downfall. She found and wrote about mechanisms that sustained her through ongoing personal troubles and fearless public explorations. MacEwen's involvement with Canada's Flat Earth Society combines two supports she relied on: literary solidarity and expressing outlandish sensibilities. To date, her time with FES has provoked surprisingly little comment. It receives a partial, partially inaccurate[145]

[145] Sullivan wrongly states that Nowlan first met MacEwen Summer 1970 and implies her recruitment took place then, months before the Society's formation. Sullivan writes that "her job was to find new members since, at the moment, there were only three." MacEwen is identified as the fourth member, but Nicholas Catanoy, Keath Fraser, and a few others preceded her (*Shadow Maker* 259).

paragraph in Sullivan's biography *Shadow Maker* (259) and a single sentence in Garwood's *History of an Infamous Idea* (284).[146] Flat Earthism aside, MacEwen still has undeservedly minor currency in Canadian literary studies as it plays out in academe. This despite her hypnotic presentation of Canada's social and physical environments. Her books sometimes give an alternative spelling for the nation-state's official name. MacEwen's "Kanada" is a swerve or distortion, spectre of the intellectual vandalism carved out by Planoterrestrialism. Here, in Part One of this chapter, it will be proven too tricky to say whether this avowed Flat Earther should be read as MacEwen herself or a comic persona created in the secret vaults of her rich but unprofitable literary career. Whoever she was, or pretended to be, this First Vice-President of a 1970s underground society still holds an appropriately ex-centric place in literary history.

MacEwen's affiliation with the Maritime agitators behind FES demands consideration for several reasons. First, she added to its makeup as a Toronto resident and female author. Second, her creative contributions rival any others from outside the Society's initiating circle. Third, her imaginativeness made MacEwen an ideal recruit, more so than her literary prestige. Looking at her output through the tinted lens of Planoterrestrialism expands her reception by highlighting humour and strange representations of place. These qualities are inseparable from the dark side of her troubled life and writerly style, but they complicate MacEwen's inadequate reputation as a solemn figure. FES activities exemplify her defiant strength and oddball imagination. Below, I report on her fitness for a Vice-Presidency, then document her letters with

[146] Compared to her publishing career, the FES Vice-Presidency remains an odd-looking baby duck on the outskirts of *Lac Dom.*

Nowlan and Ferrari. Next, “I’ll Write You from Atlantis” finds commonalities across her obscure/obscurant Flat Earthism and familiar writings. Part Two introduces Canadian members in and beyond the literary world. With underlying intents and obvious play, they populated, animated, and fleshed-out the peculiar Society MacEwen represented.

Paving the Way

The project was still known as the Flat Earth Society of Canada when this important author in a national arts scene joined up. She knew Nowlan already. They met in 1968, when MacEwen gave recitations across the Maritime provinces. After their visit, Nowlan wrote to her as follows:

> Frankly, the moment I started talking with you here I liked you. For some reason I hadn’t expected to. I guess I had heard somewhere that you were writing a novel about ancient Egypt and, irrationally, I decided that anyone who wrote a novel about ancient Egypt must be a painfully academic and hopelessly solemn young woman.
>
> I apologize for having thought such stupid thoughts about you.
>
> As I told you here I think your new poems are beautiful and you read better than anyone else I’ve heard. (7 Jan. 1969, ANP 40.17.49.3)

He based his indirect impression of MacEwen on the assumption she had strictly historical rather than mythic interests in Egyptology. His idea of her as “hopelessly solemn” was soon overturned, and he would become well attuned to her offbeat sense of humour through an exchange of Flat Earth letters in the 1970s. First, Nowlan’s admiring affection resulted in an unrelated request. In 1969, she agreed to participate in the anthology *Modern Romanian Poetry* (Letter to Nowlan, 14 Oct. 1969, ANP 40.17.49.4). Nowlan asked Canadian poets to adapt literal translations made by its editor and future Plenipotentiary Nicholas Catanoy (SP 218). MacEwen contributed versions of Ion Barbu

poems, but they did not see daylight until 1977. In contrast, the invitation to join FES was answered in short order and required no specific action.

Nowlan must have felt that recruiting a notable, big-city representative would help distinguish his fledgling project. In Toronto, MacEwen had contact with a thriving arts scene, with established and emerging publishers. Her stature and level of access might have seemed to someone originally from rural Nova Scotia to match her towering environment. Living in Toronto made her symbolically a national writer, while Atlantic-Canadian authors of the time were often discounted from afar or treasured at home as regional figures. This point of difference made MacEwen's enlistment an appealing prospect for a Society looking to expand. She could help "nationalize" FES, although her imagination was not bound to Canada. She wrote on far-out places, turned to myths of the eastern Mediterranean for material. Travel to Egypt, Israel, and Greece influenced her writing, including FES letters. That exposure and influence earned her the epithet "The Sphinx of Toronto."[147] A renegade bard, MacEwen also called up Gaelic/Celtic heritage in poems that may have caught Nowlan's eye. Even when writing on immediate places in central Canada, she evoked international resonances and the multicultural mixing transforming her city. Occupying a national centre did not translate into depictions of an anglophone or abstemious "Toronto the Good." Rather, her writing exposes open borders or internal contradictions that complicate Canada and its most populous urban area.

For his part, Nowlan felt himself an outsider when visiting Toronto on literary business. In 1969, he responded to a fan letter from Lynne Clare, a resident looking to

[147] Ludwig Zeller's image by that name covers Barry Callaghan's collection *The Stories That Are Great within Us,* which has extracts from her *Noman's Land*.

flee the city. He told her the place had "all the arrogance of a metropolis with few of the civilities." Its citizens presumed to "save [him] from the wild Maritimes the way missionaries used to save Polynesians from their nakedness" (ANP 40.6.29.6.). Writing to the Maritime lawyer and conservative politico Libby Burnham in 1980, Nowlan spoofed cosmopolitan perceptions of provincial primitivism and asserted an outdoorsman's identity, claiming: "I go to Toronto to hunt for bears." The same letter spoofs the historic name for Ontario, calling it "Uppity Canada" (ANP 40.3.41.2). Those statements pre- and post-date FES. In 1970, he wrote McClelland and Stewart's Anna Szigethy (later Porter) that for "a Maritimer going to Toronto is somewhat like a visit to London by an Orkney Islander. We tend to think of the world as being flat with Boston at one end and Montreal at the other. That makes Toronto an island beyond the Poison Sea superinscribed with the words: 'Here Be Dragons'" (ANP 40.18.28.18). He calls up his region's heritage but exaggerates its remoteness when invoking Scotland's mostly uninhabited Orkney Islands. The comparison, although comic, accurately describes the metropolis as wealthy, Anglophilic, and Protestant, an unwelcoming or overwhelming environment for him. He uses his geoplanarian imagination to characterize the city as mythic (unknowable) rather than familiar (iconic). Ferrari too deployed alternative geography to exaggerate his distance from anglophone Canada's cultural capital. He fantasized about conducting an "Overseas Expedition [to] Toronto" from Fredericton to "hunt" for potential initiates (List of members, undated, LFF 2.1.6-2). Neither man went so far, however, as to suggest MacEwen should be named Plenipotentiary to Ontario rather than serve as their First Vice-President and countrywoman.

MacEwen too resisted her city's dominant culture. She associated with new immigrants, artists, stray cats, bicycles, Toronto Island. These are the allegiances of a proud "exigrant," to call up Moses' term (SP 278). Her sentiments come clear in a black-and-white interview with Toronto author Morley Callaghan (1903-90). One line of his questioning concerns cultural upheaval and increasing diversity in the city they shared:

> Callaghan: I'm Morley Callaghan. And on this particular program, my distinction is that I live in Toronto. And I have with me here Gwendolyn MacEwen. You like what they call "the new Toronto." Do you have no affection at all for the solid citizens of Toronto? I mean the people who were here, say, fifty years ago? The people who, let us face it, made Toronto?
>
> MacEwen: This country, this city, is so innocent still. That is, it can still be shaped. People come inside, and it's pliable. It can be shaped according their desires, their needs.
>
> Callaghan: You sound like a politician now.
>
> MacEwen: This is how I feel [both talking at once]. I feel myself like a foreigner who has come from outside. (Longfellow)

MacEwen felt at home in select corners of her city, less comfortable with the imagined stabilities of the "old" Toronto Callaghan upheld. Desire to reshape the world around her found creative outlet first through poetry, later FES. There are, we know, many Torontos within many Canadas. Expressing her sense of alienation from a supposedly closed urban society, MacEwen heralded a vital, diverse, and globalizing (whoops) city. Representations of Toronto's transition extend to depictions of "Kanada," a made-up country free from unifying mythology. The revisionist or exploratory sense of place she applied to her city and nation fulfill geography's inherent elusiveness. "There are so many places for places to hide," she wrote in "I Have Mislaid Something" (*Armies* 7). In succinct, plainspoken terms that line reveals her world to be labyrinthine, mystical. The poet's planoterrestrial perspective comes out not from reporting the fake news of Earth's flatness but in viewing reality as irreducible to the standard ways we think about it.

Alongside brandishing a nonconformist social/geographical imagination, her Gaelic/Celtic pride made MacEwen a good fit for a Society based in New Brunswick. The organization's closest analogue was Nowlan's Monarchy, another pseudo-movement (SP 41). Like FES, this royal goof sought to ennoble and spoof a lost cause: restoring a Scottish family to the British throne. Sullivan records MacEwen's affinity for Scotland, a poetic rather than historical interest incorporated early into her public persona. Young "Wendy McEwen" changed her surname after reading "that the Macs were the Scottish bards" (*Shadow Maker* 56). Switching Mc to Mac is emblematic of Celtic/Gaelic fluidity, personal will, and sensitivity to subtleties of language. A subset of MacEwen poems assert Irish/Scottish inheritance, a division blurred over centuries of settlement in Canada and through close ties in the "old" countries. Her tartan motifs combine cultural revival with elegiac dislocation.[148] The closing stanzas of "I Have Mislaid Something" make its disappearance theme visible with their diminishing lengths:

> I have mislaid something very important
> and possibly very large
> like a castle in the Highlands
> where the ghosts of my ancestors
> wait with bagpipes and with horns
>
> I have mislaid many places
> in this house without history
>
> there are so many places for places to hide[.] (*Armies* 7)

This castle symbolizes loss of heritage. Yet faint connections persist. The speaker's "ancestors / wait" upon ground "mislaid" or "hid[den]" rather than lost. Their "bagpipes"

[148] For Gaelic/Celtic remnants see her "Death of the Loch Ness Monster" (*Afterworlds* 17-18) and "Reviresco: In Memory of Padraig O'Broin" (*Shadow-Maker* 26). Each combines cultural embrace with longing inspired by spatial/temporal dislocation from European roots. Another poem, "Celtic Cross" speaks to the need to "keep and hold / The forms of loss," an impossible task, evidently. It closes with an image of the title symbol being "erased" by "flowing water," in Ireland no less (25).

and "horns" remain, though they do not sound. The castle provides a conceptual structure for the poet to cling to, distant and ephemeral though it may be. Embracing inheritances from world myth and composing poetry from them gave MacEwen a way to enrich what she perceived (like many white authors of her time) as the shallow soil of Canada's cultural landscape. A sense of myth-lessness in this "house without history" was foundational for her generation. Its writers often felt free to invent, borrow, and sometimes appropriate from more richly defined traditions than theirs.[149] Seeking "a way of being in the impossible world," ever at odds with Toronto's sober Protestantism and crass consumerism, the poet sought out "fellow travelers, adepts in the labyrinths of myth" (Sullivan, *Shadow Maker* 56, 85). They in turn found her. Poetic use of Gaelic/Celtic heritage might have given MacEwen and Nowlan shared points of reference, but representations of Greek myth feature more prominently in her FES letters than any signs pointing the way back to the British Isles.

Without referencing shared heritage, MacEwen described Nowlan's region as enticing and evocative for her. Following their first meeting, she wrote to him about having felt "envy" for the "relaxing" pace of life there. She had been "impressed" by "weird landscapes in Nova Scotia with sunken forests and haunted misty pools." Toronto seemed disappointingly mundane upon return, its "usual cold slushy self" (undated, ANP 40.17.49.2). However, the trip from Fredericton to Halifax through a storm revealed that ground travel could be as frightening as flight. Her unease is preserved in Brenda Longfellow's film *Shadow Maker*, winner of the 1998 Genie Award for Best Short

[149] Writers have since turned against this perspective. The notion there was no *real* Canadian history erased true harms bequeathed by settlement and colonization.

Documentary. It includes this extract from a letter to Margaret Atwood: “Discovered to my horror that I now have to add trains to my list of frightening things. Before, it was only cars, planes, and subways. The train I was on was particularly fast. I spent five hours in paroxysms of terror” (Longfellow). In transit, the shaky poet met an old seafarer. She gave him a copy of her latest book before learning of his inability to read. In ritual exchange, he gave her an antique compass. For someone who cannot read, a book may seem “a pointless gift,” as her poem about the encounter states (*Shadow Maker* 20). Although, it may help the recipient acquire that skill. In this instance, her poems make an appropriate token: exchanged for a compass with a woman who struggled to navigate indecipherable worlds. Just leave it to MacEwen to locomote by rail with an antique sailor. She wrote up the anecdote in epistolary prose for Nowlan (ANP 40.17.49.3), then as “The Compass” in her 1969 *Shadow-Maker* collection. That book received a Governor General’s Literary Award the year after Nowlan had won the same honour. Her writing attracted acclaim and supporters, Nowlan among them, because she transformed experiences of disorientation and fear through connectedness with others and courageous, often curious explorations of exterior landscapes, inner depths.

Enduring her portion of psychic distress helped prepare MacEwen to adopt and adapt Planoterrestrialism. That pseudo-ideology recognizes the precarious nature of earthly existence and offers a bolstering community response. Sullivan’s biography relates MacEwen’s turbulent formative period and the steadying influence of her intellectual acuity and spirited self-determination. Her parents provided two viable models for disorder. “If they had gone over a dark edge,” Sullivan writes, “she too would know that edge and that darkness. It was extraordinarily brave, but it was not a survivor’s

strategy" (44). When employing Edge metaphors, Sullivan does not make reference to FES. Going over a "dark edge" of consciousness maps the same ends-of-the-Earth geography typical to Flat Earthism. According to Sullivan, the poet's parents were beset by poverty, addiction, and psychological strain. The same difficulties made stifling normalcy difficult, impossible, or at least undesirable for MacEwen. This background explains her quick affinity with FES's prime mover. Commonalities between them are striking, when we compare Sullivan's biography to those on Nowlan by Toner and Cook.

Both Nowlan and MacEwen suffered childhood traumas and went on to pursue compensatory artistic play. Their creative careers are a general example of this approach to recovery, FES being a case in point. They shared fatal reliance on alcohol. Nowlan survived dependency until age fifty, MacEwen till forty-six. Autodidacts of hardscrabble beginnings, they had scholarly intellects but felt suspicious of academia. Neither completed public school. Even so, Nowlan developed encyclopedic knowledge of royal lineages and MacEwen's literary pursuits transformed her into a polyglot and amateur Egyptologist. Writer-in-residence positions situated them on the fringes of universities, providing Nowlan/MacEwen regular/intermittent paycheques without unduly restricting time dedicated to their craft. Remembered nowadays as poets, they wrote fiction, plays, journalism, history, translations, children's literature, and travel accounts. Despite establishing themselves in fixed locales—Toronto, Fredericton—they refused stable identity. Nowlan invented alternative personae that flesh out his mercurial character. MacEwen used the relieving tactics of role-playing to blur a constrictive gender binary. A conspicuous example of her shape-shifting and gender-bending name play is the *T. E.*

Lawrence suite[150] studied by Deshaye and others. No available sources document her invention of FES applicant Icarus Platis, a non-existent figure discussed further on in "I'll Write You from Atlantis." Familiar or obscure, these instances of building male alter-egos creatively defied inherited expectations.

According to Sullivan, deploying male postures through a "tomboy" persona helped MacEwen achieve a sense of security that she lacked in childhood (*Shadow Maker* 37). That lack can be traced to an impoverished home life and the limited roles prescribed to girls and women at the time. Recollecting the schoolyard, MacEwen "remembered being the only girl in a boy's gang, imagining herself as Joan of Arc leading them in their ritualized war games" (37-38). FES's conflict between Planoterrestrialists and Globularists recalls those playground imaginaries, where MacEwen combatted assumed barriers. Despite her participation/leadership in shared world-building projects, isolation marked her relationships to peers in childhood and adulthood alike. Sullivan writes that "Gwendolyn decided […] she would turn her loneliness into a gift; she would be the unapproachable initiate into mysteries others barely understood" (39). Long before joining FES, MacEwen inhabited the fringe. A non-conformist and even oppositional mentality nurtured her dark but darkly comic visions. These traits primed her for FES membership, more than her metropolitan or female status, two characteristics that helped expand the Society's makeup but did not determine the nature of her participation.

[150] MacEwen's impersonation of Lawrence was not constrained to the page. During a sojourn in Greece, she "invented herself as Lawrence of Antiparos" by affecting Arabian headdress (Sullivan, *Shadow Maker* 317). Consider the complexities of the scene: in the cradle of western civilization, a female Canadian artist mimics a male British military leader, one most famous for posing as an Arab insurrectionist. As usual, MacEwen creates a multiplex reality that transcends the limits of her place, time, and subject position.

Flat Earth Mail

At the end of 1970 or beginning of 1971, Nowlan invited MacEwen to join his satirical Society "over a few drinks in a bar in Toronto" (Letter to Raymond Fraser, 11 Jan. 1971, ANP 40.12.24.1). Even that private discussion had public impact. He wrote that "the people at the next table, eavesdropping, went almost nuts" overhearing his unusual talk with the prospective Vice-President (40.12.24.1). MacEwen agreed to join after giving his invitation "a full twenty-five minutes" of "serious thought," as she later wrote him (undated, ANP 40.12.6.18). Colourful exchanges with FES's Symposiarch and President followed. These relate her "deeply committed" enthusiasm, revel in the project's disruptive philosophy and absurdist play (40.12.6.18.). The letters are held in archives at Fredericton, Toronto, and Calgary. The collections span eastern/central/western Canada, a distribution reflective of FES's national scope. Members lived throughout the country, from Newfoundland outports to Pacific shores. Between those extremes, MacEwen's Toronto stands out as a conspicuous site of cultural production. The depositing of FES letters in the prestigious Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, as part of MacEwen's archive, brought the playful Society into a highly reputable context. It fulfills the national ambitions of the Flat Earth Society of Canada, even though Ontario lacks the proverbial flatness of the prairie provinces or convenient "edge" metaphors natural to coastal regions—although a Great Lake shoreline may suffice, in a pinch.

MacEwen soon levelled her characteristic non-conformity against some of the Society's established principles. In other words, she entered through the window rather than the opened door and transformed a party already in progress. Stuart Hall gives a similar description of feminist critics productively (that is, disruptively) entering Cultural

Studies, an intellectual movement previously dominated by men (268). Predictably, the V.P. defied FES "orthodoxy," answering absurd proposals with equally imaginative counterpropositions expressed with inventive wit and deadpan earnestness. MacEwen protested plans for a protective fence around the planet's perimeter. This structure was intended to keep people out of the "Abysmal Chasm." In MacEwen's view, an impediment of this kind would threaten the survival of "creatures which crawl out of the Chasm from time to time to deposit their Abysmal Eggs on the edge of the earth" (Letter to Nowlan, ANP 40.12.6.18). She hoped the celebrated oceanographer Jacques Cousteau might lend the group his bathysphere, so they could lower it over the Edge to investigate the Chasm's unexplored ecosystem. Meanwhile, she proposed "to allow numerous holes in the Fence on the Brink which will permit passage for these little-understood creatures" of the deep (40.12.6.18). Her wildlife corridor proposal expresses concern for mythical egg-laying creatures eerily reminiscent of sea turtles, who emerge from the water at night to lay eggs in sand. It also makes rebuttal to arguments for protective barriers. Cast in a trans-species context, her counterproposal carries coded reference to her female difference from Nowlan and Ferrari.

President Ferrari wrote to MacEwen, expressing appreciation for her "unremitting devotion to the cause," her "apostolic ardour" (13 Apr. 1972, GMP 24.41). Despite her grand title and playful contributions, however, MacEwen's involvement was peripheral compared to the administrative and promotional work undertaken in Fredericton. Nonetheless, she took exception to receiving one of Ferrari's Xeroxed form letters without having had the opportunity to collaborate on its contents. She made her sentiment this clear: "Yuk!" (Letter to Ferrari, 11 July 1973, LFF 2.1.6-1). With a level of

diplomacy commensurate to her high position, she tempered this visceral reaction. "Think of my dilemma when I as more or less Absent Vice President—(because I don't live in N.B.)—am sent a *form* letter! […] But I realize that I have not done anything really constructive in the last year, and I have deserved my fate." She closed on a beseeching note: "P.S. Tell me the truth about my status in the F.E. Society" (2.1.6-1). Ferrari responded to the situation with contrition and cheek: "*Dear* Gwendolyn, Please excuse any affront in the way we may have seemed to have treated you. Any form letter sent was simply to keep you abreast (so to speak) of what was going on" (Letter to MacEwen, 11 Nov. 1973, LFF 2.1.6-1). Labouring references to embodied femininity, he sounds determined to relate to his V.P. in a gendered way. Or did he only follow her lead? A letter from MacEwen to Nowlan reports that she had been charged with flatness by an enemy of the Society while defending its views. She writes, "I do hope that you and the other members of our group will appreciate the fact [that] since I am not a very buxom young lady, I cannot take such a comment lightly. I left, feeling edgier than ever" (ANP 40.12.6.18). Conflating geographical and anatomical flatness in this joke bests the dubious wit of Ferrari's references to the sexism of "Globularists," already seen (SP 235). Biological sex and gendered archetypes pop up in MacEwen's planoterrestrial correspondences. She exploits opportunities for ribald humour, if to a lesser extent than Ferrari.[151] Nowlan seems not to have played on gender tropes in letters to her, but some

[151] Heralding her entrance to the Society in his January 1971 letter to Raymond Fraser, Nowlan emphasized her being a woman in a diminishing manner. He does use terms of respect, such as "no less a person than Gwendolyn MacEwen" and "Leading Novelist, Poet." Conversely, he sounds distracted from MacEwen's accomplishments by writing that Fraser's wife "Sharon (bless her little feminist heart) will be delighted to know that the FES has a female executive officer" and when claiming (tongue-half-in-cheek) that naming MacEwen V.P. meant they could list her near the top of their rankings, merely "to please Sharon" (ANP 40.12.24.1).

might ask whether he would have dismissed a male colleague for writing on Egypt so quickly as he did, initially, MacEwen.

As part of her FES performance, she invented an applicant named Icarus Platis. This, or he, was partly a dodge or tease regarding the gender divide separating MacEwen from Nowlan and Ferrari. She named her male creation after the mythic Greek figure who symbolizes hubris. Platis' family name derives from a bilingual riff on FES's motto "Flat Is Beautiful,"[152] which was in turn a comedic appropriation of the 1960s Black Is Beautiful movement. With the invention of Platis, MacEwen's creative work and planoterrestrial play duplicate one another. Interest in Icarus figures stretches across her literary output.[153] She wrote that she translated Platis' application letter from its original Greek. Like ruins, remnants of that alphabet remain. According to Platis' testimony, he "came to Canada some years ago to escape the overwhelming pressure of [his] country's history—the folly of the Pythagoreans, the shame of Plato and Aristotle, the inexcusable blindness of the like of Aristarchus [an astronomer of the heliocentric persuasion] and Ptolemy," who was a highly influential cosmographer (Letter to Nowlan, 9 Aug. 1972, ANP 40.12.6.69). Alienation from the standard cultural inheritance of his homeland (regime of rationalism/science/technology) pushes him toward the Society, a refuge for renegades. In that respect, the letter could be signed by him or MacEwen. He resembles her too in countering orthodoxies. "The Edge is not to be found on Fogo Island," he corrects, "but on the island of Hydra in my native land." For him, proximity to the Edge

[152] Appears in Ferrari's letter to Mark Paul-Elias (Dec. 1973, LFF 2.1.6-2). MacEwen used the slogan in an undated letter to Nowlan (ANP 40.12.6.20).

[153] Examples are professional and personal: interest in T. E. Lawrence, her fictional protagonists (doomed but inventive men), or her tumultuous marriage to Milton Acorn. More on Icarus ahead (SP 325).

explains “why the island is so full of artists, writers and the like” (40.12.6.69). The signatory resembles MacEwen’s émigré husband Nikos Tsingos too, a musician who fled Greece due to “the overwhelming pressure” of the Regime of the Colonels (1967-74). Platis writes, “Friend, I have flown across continents, braved the ridicule of my associates, disowned the unfortunate heritage of my ancestors, and have not faltered in the Cause” (40.12.6.69). Disaffected or devoted, the attitudes of Platis and MacEwen overlap even if he—orderly, formal—dated his letter, something MacEwen seldom did in missives signed by her. A general lack of dates on her letters prevents a chronological narrative of her FES involvement. Still and all, such linearity might be inappropriate for an account of her otherworldly Planoterrestrialism. Her FES engagement is marked by erratic transformations. She signed letters as Gwendolyn MacEwen, Icarus Platis, and once as “Gwendolyn Platis” (Letter to Ferrari, 11 July 1973, LFF 2.1.6-1).

Practical financial considerations moved her to make Platis’ non-existence plain in her July 1973 letter to Ferrari, sent along with two-dollar annual membership dues. Those funds would cover her and Platis both, she stated: “me and Icarus Platis are one and the same—(ha, ha!)” (LFF 2.1.6-1). Her letter goes on to update Ferrari on a planned research project. “In a more serious vein,” she wrote, “Nikos and I are planning the next year in the Cyclades, doing a serious survey of the Atlantis theory of Dr. [Spyridon] Marinatos of Athens. *No kidding*. I’ll write you from Atlantis, i.e. Crete, and possibly send a postcard from Santorini, which is of course the famous volcanic island of the Aegean” (2.1.6-1). References to Atlantean research could be interpreted as another Greek joke, a goofing gesture to conspiracy-theory traditions that normally perpetuate Flat Earthism. However, repeating the word “serious” does not necessarily mask the

fantastical nature of her imagined project, one that did not result in a publication but was apparently thought through with some care. The farcical and authentic work together in MacEwen's FES letters as in her literary corpus. Exposure to Greek culture fired her imagination, but it also sparked desires for occult knowledge of submerged kingdoms. Making Crete Atlantis in this letter typifies MacEwen's skill in agitating accessible layers of reality with mythological vibrations. For her, Platis' application was "of some significance insofar as this may be [the Society's] first Greek member, and the historical implications of that cannot be too highly stressed" (Letter to Nowlan, ANP 40.12.6.69). What an invaluable paper treasure, then, would have been a letter to Fredericton post-marked Atlantis!

Similarly combining known and unmapped places, Raymond Fraser pronounced that the televised moon landing had been staged in Newfoundland, as deduced from the scenery (SP 140). Cheekily interjecting, MacEwen recognized instead "a vacant parking lot in the outer suburbs of Toronto" as the true set for staging NASA's black-and-white footage (Letter to Nowlan, undated, ANP 40.12.6.41). Moonlighting poets on a lark, Fraser and MacEwen represent their Atlantic Canadian and metropolitan environments via desolate fringes, not as fertile ground or cultural centre. Neither writer had to travel far to encounter figurative moonscapes. MacEwen alerted Nowlan to an insurgent threat she had uncovered right there in Toronto: "THE ROSICRUCIANS AROUND THE CORNER" (ANP 40.12.6.18). Like FES pretended to do, adherents of Rosicrucianism pursued revolutionary potential through esoteric knowledge. Contemporary Toronto was

an unlikely place for the European cult to surface.[154] Skewing history, MacEwen suggested that Pharaoh Akhenaton—anti-hero of her *King of Egypt, King of Dreams*—spawned Rosicrucianism. His cult "goes underground every five hundred years and then re-emerges like the phoenix," she wrote, speculating that the underground to which it retreats "might in fact be the Abysmal Chasm" (40.12.6.18). This warning against competitors effects a jibe, alluding to uncertainty about whether the Order of the Rosy Cross was a secret society or mere hoax. We might ask the same about FES.

These humorous challenges and witty interjections repeat the mordantly comic and playfully bold voice familiar to MacEwen's readers. They also parallel original suggestions. She wrote to Nowlan, proposing the Society establish "a series of sunken cables linking N and S America to [/] with Europe and Asia" (ANP 40.12.6.41). This would halt continental drift, a process putting all land masses at risk of sliding over the Edge. She proposes a bridging, not barricading solution and thought her idea could "help to improve Continental relations" as well (40.12.6.41). Her most detailed proposal operates on the local rather than transnational level, but it too concerns bringing people together. She wrote to Nowlan:

> An official plaque must certainly be erected in the Fredericton headquarters on Windsor Street. I have ransacked my kitchen in search of some metal thing which is of sufficient flatness and roundness to serve as a symbol, but to no avail. Therefore I suggest that without delay, you as Corresponding Secretary should encourage your local pizza parlor to donate one of their pizza trays to be used for this purpose. In future, when our society is larger, we may be able to persuade some of these Italian gentlemen to make special Anniversary Pizzas for us, with the peppers and anchovies arranged in such a way as to skillfully depict the map of the world. You can imagine how subtly this effect could be produced; for example, the large cheesy patches would represent the Sahara and other deserts,

[154] "One might expect a blindness to the fantastic dimension of reality in Toronto, that prosaic city where Gwendolyn MacEwen (1941-87) was born and died," writes David Ketterer in his study of fantastical Canadian authors (57-58).

> whilst chopped peppers would depict the large foresty regions of the earth, and so on. Also, it goes without saying, these Commemoration Pizzas would be consumed by members of the society as a sacramental meal, with the President and Vice President blessing the various continents and islands before they are consumed. (undated, ANP 40.12.6.18)

This delightful suggestion foregrounds satirical performance and metaphorical sacrament, centre and circumference of FES. The impulse to attach ceremony to physical objects, and moreover to nourishment, indicates a sacramental act that must have won Nowlan's sympathy. But the celebratory pizza dinner never came about. It exists only on paper and in MacEwen's mind, making it a strictly metaphoric or mystical event.

In contrast to her lively thought experiments about people and creatures, ideas and inventions, MacEwen's pizza party relies on Flat Earth clichés of a tabletop, disc-shaped planet. The shape corresponds to the standard Flat Earth image, but it also pays (ironic?) homage to the host in Roman Catholic mass. In that (stained?) light, her unusually basic image for Earth may have been defined here only to add a note of gravitas to her proposal. Some explanation seems wanted, because her Flat Earth image pales next to environmental scenes in her poetry. Those are detailed in the following section of "I'll Write You from Atlantis." Suffice it to say for the moment that her visions stretch from "the vast necropolis of space" (*Armies* 47) down to "the clumsy luggage / of the desert" (*T.E. Lawrence Poems* 55), from spiritual cosmology to psycho-geography. Comic but tense, the poet wears "the whole cosmos like a conical hat / with the raw brain set under it" (*Rising Fire* 55). Those lines distill her darkly humorous pose. She wears an inescapable dunce cap and/or witch's hat that only partially conceals the vulnerability of her "raw brain." Expressive of an inner sense of frenetic disorientation, the trippy verse worlds she invents contain "trees that grow sideways" (*Shadow-Maker* 48) under "the

secret houses of the sky" (*Magic Animals* 125). Given her unaccountable takes on personality and place, FES made a suitable channel for redirecting some creative overflow. MacEwen's letters to Fredericton are compelling ephemera, showcasing outlandish humour and occult enthusiasms. Exchanges with Ferrari are of secondary value, because they are mostly limited to FES topics and lack the peer-to-peer intimacy of her exchanges with Nowlan. Ferrari excelled as an academic philosopher but produced only two slim poetry collections that added little to his reputation. Contrastively, MacEwen and Nowlan garnered acclaim as poets. Despite her friendliness with Ferrari and esteem for Nowlan, FES's First Vice-President seems not to have returned to Windsor Castle after her visit there in 1968.

MacEwen enthusiastically accepted a role in FES and then boarded a plane to Athens. In a postcard to Nowlan, she reported having viewed a concave horizon when flying over the Atlantic Ocean: "the horizon curved upwards which gave me the impression we are dealing with a flat earth with upturning edges" (undated, ANP 40.12.6.19). This meditational projection may have helped to calm excited nerves, given her fear of flying. It also makes a dead-pan quip about optical effects produced by airplane windows. Landed in Greece and acclimatizing to the heat, she sent another postcard to Nowlan. Its image shows statues of humans serving as columns, wide flat platforms above and below them. "They're on the level. Love to all" was all she wrote (13 Nov. 1971, ANP 40.12.6.52). Despite the distance from her home-country, she kept FES in her thoughts. While travelling through Greece, MacEwen would learn the zeibekiko, a dance she loved as "both a fight against gravity and a kind of flirtation with the earth" (*Mermaids and Icons* 89). "It is normally performed by a male dancer who is

either at the end or the beginning of his wits," she writes (89). This typically enigmatic phrase interweaves destructive complexity with beautiful innocence. That the zeibekiko was officially the purview of males likely increased her enjoyment in performing the ritual. FES too could be viewed as a boys' club. MacEwen's involvement was in some ways fleeting, but she made her mark on the group's history with her stimulating letters. In this chapter, she stands at the head of a pack of Kanadian Planoterrestrialists, persons surveyed in Part Two of "I'll Write You from Atlantis." First, links between MacEwen's FES letters and broader authorship demand an examination.

Some Literary Connections

MacEwen's FES letters and published output each feature idiosyncratic representations of landscape, imaginative imports from elsewhere into ostensibly Canadian writing, and a Janus-faced tension between light and dark elements. She sets mirthful yet sardonic instances of humour against background sentiments of pain, fear, or defiance. Broadly considered, her literary titles accord with FES's aims. Her style of thought is sensual, eccentric, and heavily invested in metaphor, as my gathering of examples will demonstrate. MacEwen is undoubtedly a "serious" writer, no less so when we consider her courageous playfulness. This section proves her Planoterrestrialism was no trifling distraction from the acclaimed cultural work she pursued but, instead, an example of it. Besides a general parallelism between her squarely literary and Flat Earth utterances, her sharp exchanges with Nowlan and Ferrari pierced the pages of one of her books.

Before "A Lecture to the Flat Earth Society" appeared in MacEwen's 1972 *Armies of the Moon* poetry collection, she sent a draft to Nowlan with the title "An

Undelivered Lecture to the Flat Earth Society" (undated, ANP 40.12.6.18). A change accompanied by other slight adjustments[155], removing *Undelivered* constitutes a loss, since that word stressed the conceptual rather than practical nature of FES's campaign. Appended to the draft, a handwritten apology: she felt "rather guilty" for having "stolen [Nowlan's] concept" and asked him to consent to its publication. If he objected, she would let it remain a "sort of private token of madness" (40.12.6.18). Nowlan approved her request, was "*flat*tered" in fact, especially because so many felt "dubious about being publicly identified with such an organization" (my emphasis; 29 Mar. 1971, ANP 40.12.6.40). In its archived and published forms, the poem is dedicated "For Alden Nowlan" and "with apologies to A.N.," respectively (40.12.6.18; *Armies* 20). Credit to her: it captures the Society's combinations of dread and mirth, isolation and collectivity. "The Abysmal Eggs of those creatures of the chasm" and want of a "bathysphere / to explore the depths" come directly from correspondence (*Armies* 20). Conversely, her poem makes its theme of belonging with outsiders explicit. That intimacy is enacted rather than stated in her FES letters. In *Armies of the Moon*, she intones a direct address: "you, who inhabit with me / The Very Edge of the Abyss," "the Rim, the Brink, the Final Boundary of fear" (20). Oddly, she recognizes this plural "you" as kin (them? us?) for being outliers. One's remoteness is figuratively geographical, more acutely social or emotional. According to Sullivan, MacEwen "was best when writing portraits of the broken, the misfits, those whom society had rejected as peripheral" (*Shadow Maker* 162).

[155] In the published version, the phrase "Canadian branch" no longer attaches to the "worthy organization," nor are its members described as "beautiful fools" (ANP 40.12.6.18). The poem was de-nationalized to some degree, then, in going public. The term "beautiful fools" echoes *Beautiful Losers* by Leonard Cohen, a writer to whom MacEwen has been compared (Lahey 44-47). Her poem expounds "that the impossible is also real" only in draft (40.12.6.18). The phrase locates the border between reality and dream but does so too prosaically, perhaps, to have survived revisions.

Despite her assessment, only one anthology editor (and not one critic) who draws from MacEwen has gravitated to her Flat Earth poem: Jeni Couzyn.[156] FES initiates celebrated the periphery (code for underground, counterculture) while pretending to shudder over its menace (madness, death). The Edge distresses and unites them, sure as globularist imperialism. Raising her trick glass to misfit camaraderie, MacEwen toasts their lot: "And those of us who always lived too near / The Edge to begin with // Have the consolation of each other's company," even if "we are doomed on this Disc which spins its insane dreams / Through space" (20). Descriptions of fear are attenuated by true solidarity and absurd humour. Indeed, she wrote to Nowlan that the rogue "Lecture" came into being because she "couldn't get all the Flat Earth hilarities out of [her] head" (ANP 40.12.6.18). Some may see the piece as aberrant within MacEwen's output, a workbook jotting about an extra-curricular activity. But Mary Reid surmised from other evidences that the poet's couplings of "apocalypse and affirmation, despair and hope" were the hallmark achievement of her mature production (n. pag.).

MacEwen's "Lecture" presents frightening scenery viewed from some far-gone corner on "the long flat continents of dream" with "nothing ahead but the sweet and terrible night" (*Armies* 20). The hallucinatory setting matches far-out geographical images presented in other poems. She gives a meta-image for her uncanny natural

[156] Couzyn included this "Lecture" and "The Mirage" in her 1989 anthology of poems by women, *Singing Down the Bones* (64-65, 13 [1991]). Other Canadian poets are included (Margaret Atwood, Pat Lowther, P. K. Page) in this international selection of twentieth-century poets (Anna Akhmatova, Louise Glück, Denise Levertov, Sylvia Path, Anne Sexton, Stevie Smith, Alice Walker) as well as more historical ones (Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti). Honouring the power of MacEwen's poem with which it begins, the book's fourth section is called "The Flat Earth." Foregrounding the poem in this way, Couzyn elevates MacEwen's prestige within a largely canonical selection.

settings when writing elusively of "backwards landscapes" (*Earth Light* 37).[157] An overarching sense of confounding disorientation scatters into myriad instances, where "weird apocalyptic sceneries, whimsies" meet our "filigreed senses" (*Early Years* 40). An enigmatic cartographer, MacEwen leaves ample room for readers to interpret oblique phrases such as "numb sky" (*Shadow Maker* 31) or "blind skyline" (*Earth Light* 34). Who ever saw "boulders bumping into foolish clouds," one might ask (*Magic Animals* 17)—or what objective qualities make an entire "city" feel "brittle" (*Afterworlds* 118)? Where does grass grow "overgreen"? In what world do "flowers release[e] their thunder" (*Afterworlds* 16 and 77)? Fleeting visions hold steady on the open page, like "nests of lightning" seen for four whole beats "in the trees" (*Armies* 34). Strange-making articulations "fight against familiarity" (*Magic Animals* 31) and help MacEwen "plot / the birth of a more accurate world" (*Shadow Maker* 53), presumably one that validates the kind of unexpected impressions she announces. Leading by example, she wants readers to probe their own relating to environment. Her late prose-poem "Sunday Morning Sermon" urges us away from standard perceptions and toward more active envisioning. "Now you can see as much as you choose," she writes: "you can watch that tree as it sits there doing nothing, or watch that tree as it zooms through space. […] But if you think you are starting to know anything at all—beware" (*Afterworlds* 90). This poem echoes alarms FES rang over the danger of certainty. Like "Sunday Morning Sermon," the Society invited people to discover or dream-up expressions of planetary belonging and alienation.

[157] Library closures in 2020 made returning to some stand-alone collections a challenge and so, with regrets, certain selected volumes are cited here (see SP 9 on disruptions to informational access).

At once immediate and unfamiliar, MacEwen's weird geographies are a perfect mismatch for the open-ended Planoterrestrialism that emanated from Fredericton.

Many poems play with general elements found in landscapes the world over—sky or skyline, earth, water, flora. Yet, granted an inescapable Canadian poetry context, MacEwen often creates scenes that would seem customary to a national readership, if not for her defamiliarizing style. "Dark Pines Underwater" inverts an otherwise recognizable setting. Its surface describes reflections of trees on lake water, a traditional lyric subject subjected to unsettling treatment. The pines are literally and figuratively "dark." They live uneasily beside a "furtive," not placid, lake. The scene defies expectations of stasis, photographability. Pines presumably on shore seem to "sink" entire into the lake's mirror (*Shadow-Maker* 50). No mere romantic contemplation of waterscape, MacEwen presents a setting that "turns you inward," making "Dark Pines" a psychological poem that "reach[es] downward" to some submerged object or destination. The poet merges person and place in curious reciprocity. "There is something down there and you want it told," she concludes, nimbly skipping from third to second person (50). As with "Sunday Morning Sermon," this poem transfers to the reader the speaker's desire to bring subconscious thought into public view. MacEwen's poetry is rife with lively dynamics like this, where familiar images overlay enigmatic depths.

Recesses of a temporal nature are advanced in "The Park, Twenty Years Later." The poem is set at Toronto's Christie Pits, where present-day leisure activities recall "another arena, / another Colosseum, / different athletes" (*Afterworlds* 77). A scene not far from the poet's home evokes competitors from ancient Athens, in defiance of linearity and credulity. They haunt a municipal park during "the colossal sadness at the end of

summer" (77). Her architectural adjective "colossal," attached to an emotion, characteristically fuses physical and psychological modes. The poem's Toronto seems peaceful, aside from such ruptures in time and space anyhow. But the specified time of year (end of the so-called high season) may prophesy a fall for our civilization, just as Athens once fell to pieces. MacEwen's title is exact and evasive. The poet names the park she depicts but leaves the title's interval of time open to interpretation. It might mean that two decades elapsed between her conception and composition. The relatively brief span seems to bring ancient Greece and contemporary Canada closer together too, closer than two millennia. From ancient Athens and pharaonic Egypt to Atlantean revival and occult Rosicrucianism, the author's expansive embrace of remote histories and myths implies a romantic or post-romantic rejection of her techno-scientific present. That embrace and that rejection are literary gestures enacted in her poetry and FES letters alike.

This poet often obscures commonplaces of her experience with visionary elements, a writerly habit in line with planoterrestrial thought. In MacEwen's universe, Christie Pits is a Greek Colosseum. "The Holy Burlesque" danced by a Greek performer occurs simultaneously in "Sodom and Athens and East Toronto" (*Armies* 17). Nowhere does she explicate her personal poetic, but combinatory gestures like these recall the kinds of modernist "situational analogies and/or historical rhymes"[158] that made Ezra Pound's *Cantos* so fascinating, at least for his devoted reader and sometimes correspondent in Toronto Marshal McLuhan (Barton). Like these men, MacEwen unleashed poetic potential through unexpected fusion. And that not only in poems. Under

[158] Synonymous phrases in this instance, whereas "historical rhymes" can also refer to sound pairings complicated by different pronunciations of the same words over time. Basically, the three-dimensional chess of singsong.

FES's fraying banner, she disguised herself as Platis, used "Atlantis" as code for Crete (SP 308). She creates a physical reality that is porous enough to fit lock-and-key with her leaky contemporaneity and divisible identity. Decorating the quotidian with transcendental splashes and linking her Canadian experience to foreign cultures were talents she practiced rather than took to naturally, it would seem. Recall her description of Toronto as banal after touring the Maritimes (SP 300). She wrote to Atwood after a return from Egypt: "Back in Toronto. Looks as good as it ever will, which is not saying much. Canada is so quaint, so naïve, so hopeless" (Longfellow). Seeing dullness bog down familiar places may result merely from comedowns following periods of travel and excitement—or from something more insidious. MacEwen enlivened her depictions of Canadian locales through mythic resonances, mysterious embellishments. FES too participated in the "Kanadianization" of national culture. It gave her an excuse to exercise her talent for fabulation and humour, to test ways in which Flat Earth jokes could be taken seriously, and, crucially, to express a creative worldview with personal flare.

Although her title character's name alludes to Greek and French classics[159], Canada receives more focused treatment in MacEwen's prose-fiction Noman books than in her poems. The first, *Noman* (1972), contains the story "Kingsmere," which she sent to Nowlan in draft form (undated, ANP 40.17.49.1).[160] The story concerns Prime Minister William Lyon McKenzie King (1874-1950) and gives a second-person tour of his country

[159] Obvious antecedents are explorer-Captain *Nemo* (Latin "no one") in Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas* and Homer's Odysseus, who falsely identifies himself as Outis (Greek "no one") to the Cyclops. These figures might well have been in MacEwen's mind when she authored her anonymous hero.

[160] Variants relate mostly to commas, hyphens, and ellipses (six dots in draft, three in the book). A drafted phrase not printed: King's mother's "long white hair stream[s] out behind her in the wind" (ANP 40.17.49). Perhaps this seemed to MacEwen or editors a jejune way of reanimating Mrs. King into a fairy-tale figure. She is punning-ly described in both versions as "Queen of the Fairies" (40.17.49; *Noman* 52).

retreat in western Quebec. The title specifies an exact location but also foregrounds "mere," this being the Old English word for "water" or "lake," making the retreat's grounds implicitly, appropriately fluid. "Kingsmere" opens by marking the place so plainly as to give no indication of the otherworldly scene that unfolds. She begins: "To the north are the Laurentians; to the west, the valley of the Ottawa river; to the south, the capital" (*Noman* 52). The river flows east of Kingsmere as well. But MacEwen leaves that direction undisclosed, unimpeded. From points east, King imported relics ("synthetic ruins" [52]) to decorate his estate. These include "an ancient bell from a wrecked Nova-Scotian ship"; stones "from the Houses of Parliament at Westminster" in England (52); and "a row of unreal Grecian columns" arranged ritualistically as "naked windows and doors for the forest and the hills. […] You look out through a classic arch and see, not Athens, nor Rome nor even Palmyra, but the green Gatineau hills of Kanada" (53). Perhaps King's transformative framing of a central-Canadian landscape occasions this "K" spelling. By analogy, King's unusual habits and occult beliefs that the story details make him a former "Prime Minister of Kanada,"[161] a country that does not quite exist.

This possibly over-generous interpretation of MacEwen's K would accord nonetheless with David Ketterer's mention of her alternative orthography. In *Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy* (1992), he sees the "magical Otherworld she calls 'Kanada'" as one "diametrically opposed to the mundane world" (58). By analogy, Kanada represents an imaginative or planoterrestrial world that stands apart from an inherited or globularist reality. To ground this understanding in literary terms, replace the

[161] The Prime Minister's habits became widely known through Charles Stacey's biography *A Very Double Life* (1985). The title is ratified by King's diaries, now digitally available through Library and Archives Canada ("Diaries").

classifications "magical" or "planoterrestrial" with "metaphorical" or "poetic." In my view, MacEwen's Kanada runs counter to the "k" in "Amerika," a parody of German spelling deployed in the United States by post-war protesters on the order of Youth International Party leader Jerry Rubin. He used a "k" to call out and combat totalitarian strains infecting his governments and police agencies.[162] MacEwen seems to use her K to describe a loose-fitting national culture that anyone might tailor to suit their liking.

In *Noman*, the story "Snow" features an unnamed *arrivant* "fresh from the Mediterranean." To him, snow fell as "heavenly confetti, ambrosia or manna" during "that first winter he was in Kanada" (76-77). His *C*anadian companion has no such poetic view of snow; "she, of course, was used to it" (76). The book's closing section finally introduces the title character, already an amalgam of other unnameable or unknowable men and moving through a multicultural, magical world with no memory. Like King or the unnamed man in "Snow," Noman the conspicuous amnesiac wields unruly sensibilities. "He was so interested in everything that was going on around him," the narrator Jubelas (a jubilarian? a Jew?)[163] reports; "his eyes were full of surprise, as if he never expected to see the things he saw" (86, 88). Thus, the country to which this "stranger" (85, 86) belongs is Kanada rather than the expected, predictable Canada that surrounds it. "There is another country, you know, and it's inside this one," Noman tells a television reporter after taking a long swim in *Noman's Land* (138).

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[162] Rubin identifies as a "child of Amerika" and its "orphan" in his *Scenarios of the Revolution* (12-13).

[163] The name seems to signal jubilation sardonically, since the narrator's restrained style of thought makes him resist Noman's spirited example. MacEwen might have drawn the name from Freemason mythology. Therein, "Jubela" identifies one of "three ruffians" who assassinated the architect of King Solomon's temple ("Hiram Abiff").

In that follow-up volume from 1985, Noman repeats Ferrari's proposal that we turn maps upside-down to free us from a hierarchy that places northern nations above others (SP 233). "Turn a map of the world upside down," Noman says, "and you realize that too is the world. Kanada is down there" (65). Like a good Planoterrestrialist, or poet, Noman looks for alternative perspectives. His preference for the nocturnal/underground/international over workaday/staple/well-worn elements of K/Canadian life comes clear through culinary habits. "Italian pizzas in the midnights of Kanada," he observes. "Chow Mein and Sweet and Sours in the small hours," foods which "we never eat by day. […] By day it's mashed potatoes, white bread, cornflakes" (*Noman* 87). Like MacEwen, her charismatic amnesiac probes below surfaces to uncover what is overlooked, submerged, exceptional. Forgotten. Noman alters, renames, makes new. Other characters are re-christened by him with foreign, mythological names. He calls them Jubelas, Kali (a Tantric Goddess), and Omphale (after the French form of the Greek word "omphalos," meaning naval/centre of the world) (84). So named, these Canadians become Kanadian citizens. Noman's re-birth occurs when he passes through an archway at Kingsmere, linking the two books in which he exists. His passing through at King's "mere" homophonic-ly suggests "mirror" (passing through to/from the other side) and, more precisely, the French word "mere" ("mother," sonically "sea"). These reciprocal implications lend literal-linguistic resonances to Noman's metaphorical birth, where remnants of an architectural archway call up a forgotten mother's pelvic bones.

Spelling Canada with a K vandalizes common property, but the act makes subtle reference to standard spellings in German and Greek (*Kanada, Καναδάς*). Invoking a more immediate context than European languages, MacEwen gestures toward the

Haudenosaunee word for "village." Edyta Krajewska and Allan Rayburn validate the familiar narrative that, in 1535, Indigenous guides used their word for "village" or "town" (frequently transliterated as "Kanada") when sailing up the St. Lawrence River with Jacques Cartier, who subsequently used it to refer to territory north of the river (Krajewska 97, Rayburn 14). This origin story seems especially pertinent to "Kingsmere," because the traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy lie just southwest of the retreat's grounds. Further, *Noman* opens with "House of the Whale," a story narrated by Lucas George, an Indigenous man raised on the "Skittegan tongue" of Canada's west coast (6). Daniel David Moses has spoken well to MacEwen's handling of First Nations topics (SP 277). Joanne DiNova commits a single sentence to the matter, including MacEwen in a short list of white writers who contribute to decolonization but are not analyzed in her *Spiraling Webs of Relation: Movements Toward an Indigenist Criticism* (2005). She regrets that MacEwen "was only beginning to grapple with the troubling issues of 'Kanadian' presence in Aboriginal territory when she died in her mid-forties" (DiNova 50). Bearing out the slipperiness of MacEwen's K, DiNova's statement does not pin down whether Kanada-with-a-K aligns with colonial or ethically progressive strains of culture. Beyond hinting at First Nations heritage, "Kanada" may relate to India's Kannada region, along with its language group and associated spiritual philosophies.[164] A tight puzzle of possible implications makes the term Kanada[165] a cipher that imbricates the local or indigenous with the mythic or extrinsic.

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[164] Shastri *et al*. studied the region's ecology in "Tree species diversity in a village ecosystem in Uttara Kannada district…" The Dravidian language Kannada/Kanarese and its literature have been studied in Lidz's "Causation and reflexivity in Kannada" and Narasimhachar's *History of Kannada Literature*. The ancient sage Kanada outlined his hybrid Hindu philosophy and natural science (a pre-Planoterrestrialism or pre-Newtonianism?) in the Sanskrit-text *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra*. An English translation by Kak, *Matter and Mind*,

MacEwen's attraction to King stemmed partly from the fact that he preceded her as one who viewed Canada through an exploratory/poetic perspective. In different ways, they imported foreign objects/ideas because these do and do not belong *here*. King as collector, MacEwen as writer espied equivalences where others saw distance and difference.[166] Kanada can be read as the (im)proper name for the time and place MacEwen makes strange. Her literary tactic runs sharply against the grain of a strong social-realism tradition in the anglophone national literature. Did Québécois writing of the period feature more playfulness? Ask Hubert Aquin, Jacques Ferron, or Anne Hébert. MacEwen inscribed *Noman* and *Noman's Land* "to all the strangers in Kanada" (both books n. pag.). Vagaries of these dedications make it unclear whether she addresses a sub-set of the population, such as people unknown to her or those who *find* or *found* their own countries as true Kanadians—i.e., *estimate* or *establish*. Another possibility: the liberating and/or burdensome factor of a low-definition national character make *all* the country's inhabitants figuratively estranged. And living as ever in "THE LONELIEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD" (*Noman's Land* 9), they feel isolated by more elusive traits than distance and winter. Acceptance of one's singular solitude precedes appreciation for uniqueness *en masse*. Welcoming transformation is a good idea, even at the expense of national coherence. And transformation goes on, with or without our

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appeared in 2016. The same year, Bharati wrote on the sage in "Acharaya Kanada: Father of Physics and True Inventor of Law of Motions."

[165] In 1999, the instrumental post-rock band Godspeed You! Black Emperor released an extended play titled *Slow Riot for New Zero Kanada*. Like MacEwen's, the Montreal band's shoegazing use of K seems to suggest a country still in-the-making, one that will develop from creative agitations.

[166] MacEwen writes as a seasoned traveller in "This Northern Mouth": "in the east / they ask me of the dark, mysterious / west" (*Shadow-Maker* 21).

blessings. A society built on a truly democratic ethos might resemble FES, at least insofar as it encouraged dissenting opinion from a broad spectrum of people.

MacEwen made her additions to Canadian literature by drawing on world mythology to expand depictions of domestic lives and lands. Icarus Platis was an import to her FES letters, and many Icarus figures populate her books. This feature traces back to the "Icarus" poem in her chapbook *Selah* (1961). Her male characters are often men of failure rather than triumph, even if like King they occupy powerful positions. In her impersonation of Lawrence, militaristic aspects of his personality are undercut by contemplative peaceability and a rape that leaves him "reduced to shreds" (*Lawrence Poems* 46). Julian of *Julian the Magician* doubts his own miracles, self-immolates by the flint of his self-propelled fame. *King of Egypt, King of Dreams* devolves into a chorus of testimonies, interrupting narrative focus on the novel's main character. Such polyphony parallels Akhenaton's failure to impose monotheism by fiat, which ends his reign. The Royal Navy's Sir John Franklin is the fallen, snow-bound star of MacEwen's verse play *Terror and Erebus*, *exposé* of his fatal hubris. Latitudinal Icarus: he sailed too close to the north pole. Sub-zero Icarus: he sailed too far from the sun's warmth. A mass of ice refuses to excuse or salute him. Over in the next century, hunting for mythic names in a Toronto phone directory, Noman spots Spiro Ikari. He humorously speculates the man "lives alone, writing outstanding aeronautic papers" that prove "the instability of the jumbo jet" (*Noman* 89). These men MacEwen depicts or invents are as dissatisfied and disobedient as their author. At the centre of her narratives, she perpetually inserts men from the margins of society, men with pieces missing, or men who hold shadowy positions in history. Female authors of her ilk—most prominently her associate

Atwood—tend to depict men who represent dominant culture, but they often remain underdeveloped on the sidelines of female-focused narratives. *Surfacing*'s Joe and David are typical examples from Atwood. Or, take the agents of Gilead in *Handmaid's Tale*. Atwood writes that "no-one has invoked the male Muse with such frequency and devotion as has Gwendolyn MacEwen" ("Muse" 25). The comment is apt, although we must bear in mind that MacEwen's masculine-identified afflatus breaks with literary tradition. That not only because her muses are male but, further, because they tend toward crash landings rather than feathery descent into some poet's garret or basement.

A dramatic example of reckless descent befalls the "motor cycle Icarus" who rides through MacEwen's "Poem Improvised Around a First Line" (*Magic Animals* 40). He is contemporary, eternal, and ancient at once. "It's all one thing for you— / cigarette, phallus, sacrificial fire," the speaker says, showing the motorcyclist's erotic nonchalance and at-homeness in quotidian and timeless realms. His overland trip "from Toronto to Buffalo" is described hyperbolically as a "grimy flight / on wings" not waxed but "axelgreased" (40). The goal of this ride is not ambitious, as one would expect from an Icarus adaptation. He seeks merely "a secret beer over the border," stateside: a legal and common rather than hubristic quest. The speaker envisions a disastrous fall, nonetheless. We see the "bike burning and in full flame / and twisting and pivoting over Niagara / and falling finally into Niagara" (40). These borderland waterfalls are the precipice he goes over. "Motorcycle Icarus" sets out with an unambitious goal, then comes his downfall from ground-level. In MacEwen's view, one does not have to reach great heights to meet fatal declines, Abysmal Chasms. One can simply *whoops* over ever-present ledges rather than tumble from a hard-won apex. Her poem "When I Think About" is a list-poem that

catalogues mortal fears: from "drunken drivers, slippery / streets, [and] lightning bolts" to "manholes, fences that can elec- / trocute you in a minute, falling / wires, high winds, floods, fires" (*Armies* 22). Given "the million possibilities" that threaten calamity, the speaker feels to have survived "thirty years […] by some sheer *fluke*" (22): "Sheer fluke" meaning luck with steep sides. The poem repeats this world "sheer," suggesting lack of stable ground from which to operate in a turbulent, threatening world. That sense of desperation and drama no doubt fuels much of the excitement in MacEwen's poetry. Lack of faith in secure footing makes her humour both trenchant and uplifting. Appropriately, the list-poem follows directly after "Lecture to the Flat Earth Society" in *Armies of the Moon*. Its images of a Flat Earth surrounded by void fit with MacEwen's heightened, precarious existence. Metaphorically, her life should be lined with protective—though never sealed and probably not electrified—barriers. Padded walls might be an even safer option, metaphorically. "When I Think About" presents a void, absent object of its title pointing the way. Under this fragment, the poet enumerates an inescapable vortex surrounded by Earth and all its trappings. The situation is contiguous with Flat Earth symbology, even in reversal.

Ever at risk of taking a fall of her own, the female creator behind a leaky raft of Icarus figures carried an "Abysmal Chasm" within. Her poem "Fragments from a Childhood" seems to record an early encounter the author had with the ground-level Icarus predicament I have described. Seduced by comic-book narratives into belief in self-propelled flight and costumed in a homemade cape, the child in the poem "stand[s] poised over the steep ravine that leads down to the river." From there, "it's a long way down to the bottom" (*Fire Eaters* 19). The poet invokes Icarus by name, but no flight

attempt is made. In the end, the child "walk[s] away"; "it starts to rain and [her] miraculous cape drips" rather than melts "all down [her] back" (21). Desire to fly and belief in that possibility replace flight in this imitation of Icarus. Abandoning fantasy tumbles into a kind of fall. It is well represented by the child's cape, soaked rather than smoldering. This girl, if she does represent MacEwen, carried forward her sense of standing at a precipice, her vital respect for grave danger. An inner abyss looks out unblinkingly through a self-description from *The Rising Fire*, MacEwen's first commercially available collection: "and behind my eyes there is / a great ensuing blackness" (20). Ledges appear everywhere in her verse worlds, sometimes directly underfoot. *Rising Fire*'s opening poem, "the Breakfast" states that "the end takes place / in each step of your function" (3). That end is circumscribed by the limits of one's sociability or psychology in the high view, while also referring to line breaks that break up the poem's words themselves. "The Breakfast" turns the tables, establishing an opposingly infinite and harmonious cosmology, "which fits your measures; has no ending" (3). Here, the finitude of human existence confronts an endlessly interpretable environment (again, in the high view) in a poetic line about harmony, pre-set rhythms, and infinity. Like her FES poem, "the Breakfast" bridges integrated and isolated mindsets. Bridging like this protects against fatal descent. Icarus figures are typically male, but MacEwen adopts that persona as poet and Planoterrestrialist alike. More genderbending play appears in the poem "January." Writing comically, she states "I have a gentlemen's agreement with my pain" (*Fire-Eaters* 6 and 7). This line is a refrain: a coy joke made from stereotypes about vulnerability and stoicism. Over time, the refrain cements the idea that undeniable suffering can strengthen our loyalty to self-definition.

Among the author's books, an adaptation of a script by Euripides gives the longest look at expressly female suffering. MacEwen's version of his *Trojan Women* is a classical Greek tragedy that amalgamates conflicting female perspectives, all refigured through a contemporary voice. From Cassandra to Hecuba, various archetypes come to life. MacEwen's dramatis personae adds stereotypical descriptors to contrast these roles. Euripides introduces characters according to familial connections—wives, mothers, daughters. MacEwen sketches personalities. Hecuba is "aging, but ageless"; Cassandra is "a holy virgin. She is a nubile fifteen-year-old"; Andromache is "about thirty, self-righteous and shrill"; and Helen is "in her mid-twenties, beautiful, a pathological liar" (*Trojan Women* 32). These descriptors emphasize categories in the absence of Pallas Athena, the transcendent Goddess whom MacEwen strikes from her adaptation. This leaves the male god Poseidon to set the stage for its limited range of action. However different in character, none of the play's women escape suffering the Trojan War's ruinous aftermath. Articulate through pain, Andromache states:

> I'm a *woman*.
> I know all about the depths of suffering,
> Great yawning chasms of pain
> like black cavities in the earth
> or the guts of volcanoes
> That open up to reveal
> The fathomless mouths of the fathomless "gods"
> Which are nothing but our fears and desires
> made huge and horrible,
> spewing forth blood, and lava.
> There is no bottom to those craters…
> There is no end to pain… (56)

This speech uses geographical metaphors invented by MacEwen, who habitually adapts rather than translates her transnational source materials. She wants to "re-create their atmosphere and charm in English in as relaxed a manner as possible" (*Honey Drum* 8).

Andromache uses startling and viscerally corporeal environmental images to describe social and emotional burdens. That pattern recurs across the author's writing, including FES letters. The speech's sexually suggestive references to geographical "depths," "chasms," "cavities," and "fathomless mouths" draw out our hair-raising position on an unknowable planet circling headlong through an infinite universe. Bodies and geographies merge in a way that suggests blood, ingestion, digestion, vomiting, and parturition. Conforming to the genre of tragedy, nowhere does *Trojan Women* provide the reassurance of solid ground or bodily safety. We are left with no good reason to think some new peace could emerge from the war-torn history it charts.

Janus-faced, MacEwen committed herself to comedy as well as tragedy. Her adaptation of Aristophanes' *The Birds* became her first posthumous release (1993). This ancient play follows a doomed attempt directed by two self-exiled Athenians to construct a metropolis in the sky with help from some feathered friends, shortly foes. MacEwen adds Canadian elements, referencing the Plains of Abraham (52), Air Canada (79), and Superman (17). She also adds a stage direction requiring a sign at the edge of the stage indicating "Sheer Drop." FES might have called for similar measures while awaiting more permanent solutions. MacEwen's adjustments to canonical sources exhibit the same bold engagement she brought to her Vice-Presidency. Her Greek adaptations balance tragedy and humour, just as her planoterrestrial letters and poetic play mask and reveal an anxious, edgy interior life acknowledged with a knowing smile. As noted in the preceding literature review, few have singled out her comedic flare. Yet her oeuvre offers possibilities for such consideration, from wry quips in freaky poems to her children's stories of the 1980s *Chocolate Moose* and *Dragon Sandwiches*. Few exceptions prove the

rule that critics focus on her emotional or mythological weightiness. A long-time supporter and friend, Atwood articulated MacEwen's comic power in a way that seems relevant to Planoterrestrialism. Without drawing that connection, she states that what MacEwen "offered was an entrée to amazement, to a shared and tingling secret, to splendors. But there was an undercurrent of amusement too, as if you were a fool for being taken in by its voluptuousness; as if there were a cosmic joke in the offing, a simple, mysterious joke, like the jokes of children" ("Isis in Darkness" 65). She gives this reading in fiction that refigures MacEwen as Selena, Toronto poet and covert Isis. Atwood's impression of her friend's humour could refer to only a few Canadian writers. FES authors who balance bemusement and severity in darkly comic or typically long-nineteen-sixties ways (e.g., Nowlan, McFadden, Mowat) are reasonable contenders. But one thinks of MacEwen first. Moving, frightening, funny—her authorship is well worth celebrating, whatever shape our celebrations might take.

Part Two: A Flat-out Census

Writerly Types

Joining FES, MacEwen took a risk many Canadian authors did not. Locating prospective members among her peers was a duty she undertook, apparently with little success. A 1971 letter from Nowlan to Al Pittman records an exception. It reproduces part of the application sent by Max Reynolds of Toronto. He had received FES literature hand-to-hand from MacEwen and, according to the Symposiarch, Reynolds put forward his "profoundest respect for Alphonsus J. Pittman" as his reason for wanting to enlist. Nowlan assumed this applicant in Ontario thought Pittman was "fictious," like Platis

(Letter to Pittman, 29 June 1971, ANP 40.12.6.44). The east coast's Overseer of the Edge was still a relatively unknown poet at the time. Reynolds was a sculptor and long-standing friend of MacEwen. He soon became, in her words, a "member in good standing" and drew up sketches for a Society "Emblem" or "medallion" at her prompting (Letter to Nowlan, undated, ANP 40.12.6.58). Nowlan wrote MacEwen on 12 March 1972: "I think the idea of having a Flat Earth medallion is great. […] But the president, Ferrari, thinks the Reynolds design is too boisterous." He supplied an alternative design "suggested by Ferrari and Fraser" (ANP 40.12.6.59). No artist's object materialized. Even so, these letters are valuable for showing that MacEwen recruited active, creative participation from Torontonians. My research uncovered only scant evidence showing this part of her work for a made-in-urban-Kanada Planoterrestrialism, whereas letters from others frequently nominate associates for membership.

Limited interest in FES from CanLit practitioners is understandable. Writers who joined risked reputation and opportunities, risked being perceived as cranks or crackpots by those who would take FES at face value. Sullivan's biography shows MacEwen unsuccessfully solicited participation from Atwood in a letter of 13 January 1971, held at the time of Sullivan's research in Atwood's private collection. MacEwen wrote: "One of our immediate aims is to approach the United Nations with the request that a large fence be built around the Edge of the earth to save people from falling off into the Abysmal Chasm, and also to discourage possible suicides" (*Shadow Maker* 259). The passage begins with a standard FES gag, then embeds grave meaning into the "joke." In turn, "discouraging suicides" invokes the bolstering sense of support she found in a unique interpretive community: "if you feel," she wrote, "more or less On the Brink, you must

join the club" (259). Enlisting could be seen as healthful by insiders but disastrous by outsiders. None of the more prominent Canadian writers of the 1970s joined the Society—even if they felt culturally alienated and wrote with defiant whimsy about social and natural environments. Atwood and Cohen are conspicuous absentees who exhibit alternately or jointly playful/serious approaches to literature. So are poets MacEwen paid tribute to in her verses: Marian Engel ("Fireworks," *Afterworlds* 79); Susan Musgrave ("Magic Cats," *Magic Animals* 138); and Al Purdy ("Wine Maker," *Earthlight* 36). Poets still and all, notable Canadians might have worried that forging a reckless affiliation with Fredericton would jeopardize career building they had accomplished before the Society's time. Some would have simply never noticed it.

Allow for just two instances where non-participating authors show natural affinity with Planoterrestrialism's agitations. Take first Kroetsch's "Lonesome Writer Diptych" from his unconventional memoir *A Likely Story* (1995). Regarding Kroetsch's rural world of the Canadian west, the poem sees place as capricious, threatening not grounding: "To our surprise, in the / parklands, we discover / that even geography is not / a certainty on this fickle / planet. / Riding the buck- / ing bull of plate tectonics, / we hang on for dear life to / a floating world" (116). This reads like a FES application. Kroetsch's lines mirror the Society's displacements, desperations, and drollery, all while attesting to sub-canonical knowledge of his most immediate world's geologic/climatic/economic boom-and-bust cycles. Given his reputation for magical realism, place-based poetics, and flamboyant deconstruction, this Alberta writer may seem an all-too convenient example for demonstrating planoterrestrial strains in Canadian literature beyond FES. A less predictable example, Mavis Gallant is more narratively realistic and less stylistically

innovative than Kroetsch. Nonetheless, her writing of the 1970s sometimes deals in figuratively planoterrestrial thought. In her story "Speck's Idea," the principal character's frail rationalism is described as "a mistrust of the bogs and quicksands that lie beyond reality perceived" (Gallant 474). Her metaphors for unknown realms are not overtly comic, but they do represent a creative use of place. They transform a cool, urban story by alluding to natural/supernatural settings lurking in damp spots behind curtains. Not coincidently, the same grey-toned story mentions a Paris "lecture on lost Atlantis" (499).

Besides MacEwen, nationally recognized writers affiliated with Canada's Flat Earth Society include John Newlove, Patrick Lane, David McFadden, and Farley Mowat. Younger than them, Heather Kirk has not garnered much public recognition. A short survey of letters exchanged among these five and Fredericton headquarters follows. I will not in these pages elaborate on how published works and Society involvements of authors discussed intersect, even though case studies with Nowlan, Ferrari, and MacEwen bore fruit. "I'll Write You from Atlantis" moves in another direction, recording applicants from outside the literary realm. Their reasons for wanting to join are comedic, confessional, philosophic, and political. Application processes asked Canadians—accomplished writers or not—to set down personal thoughts, make creative attestations. These are made public today thanks to the archival preservation work of many hands. Readers may find more immediate interest in the words of known poets, but the inclusive spirit of FES demands representation from the broad range of characters adding to the participatory experiment.

Born in Saskatchewan and having lived in British Columbia and Ontario, Newlove wrote about a wide swath of his country. By the 1970s, he was an established

poet working as an editor for McClelland and Stewart in Toronto. His poetry collection *Lies* (1971) received a Governor General's Literary Award shortly after Nowlan and MacEwen accepted theirs. He developed an acquaintance with Nowlan before submitting a 1971 application letter to Windsor Castle. The document is spare, in keeping with his unadorned style as a poet. In its first of three single-sentence paragraphs, Newlove objects "to the interference of fashionable scientific hypotheses with the rational observation of man's senses" ("REASON FOR APPLICATION," 27 Sept. 1971, ANP 40.12.6.53). This statement combines ideas from FES's aims, which promote sensory experience and disclaim scientific orthodoxy. Newlove goes on to express doubt over the credibility of "evidence" presented for "the presumed globularity of the earth" and reproduces a popular myth about the purpose of Christopher Columbus' voyages, which he then debunks with an equivalent but intentional error. He writes that the explorer proved "it is possible to travel in circular directions upon a flat surface" and not, as some believe, Earth's sphericity (40.12.6.53). Lastly, he sets down but does not unpack his "personal objection to the theory of gravitation, so intimately tied to the notion of the round world" (40.12.6.53). This brief, three-part "REASON FOR APPLICATION" is derivative of FES promotional materials and erroneous ideas about Columbus. It lacks the specificity that could give shape to his physiographic mindset.[167] Newlove's application gives no sign of the potent perspective he relates in his just three words from his prairie poem "The Pride." Therein, he refers to his home region as "a half-understood massiveness" (*Black Night Window* 107). This is some anti-slogan for Saskatchewan.

[167] Among poets who applied, only Elizabeth Brewster sounds as tight-lipped as Newlove. Her application states primly, "I find myself in accordance with the aims of the Society, especially with the Third Aim, which is a necessary aim well expressed" (Letter to Nowlan, undated, ANP 40.12.6.5).

Saskflatchewan, sorry. Ambivalence toward unknowing marks Newlove as a writer fit for FES. Perhaps he thought his literary reputation and friendship with Nowlan would secure him a spot in the Society, whatever reasons he might give for desiring one. His muted tone might suggest he felt no urgent desire to participate, especially since this letter seems to be the only relevant bit of their long correspondence. Nonetheless, a copy of Newlove's FES certificate remains in Ferrari's archive, alongside that of MacEwen, in recognition of his literary prominence not his devotion to the cause (LFF 2.1.6-2).

Nowlan and Newlove's correspondence spanned 1968 to 1981. Nowlan dedicated his unpublished poem "Two Tasmanians" to Newlove, provided letters of recommendation, and invited him to participate in *Modern Romanian Poetry* (ANP Inventory 114). In turn, Newlove included Nowlan in his 1977 anthology *Canadian Poetry: The Modern Era* (114) and made the following tribute for a memorial article written by Fraser Sutherland: "I was impressed with his sense of locality and both it and he encouraged me in forming my own style" (Sutherland). Nowlan appreciated Newlove's writing, with qualifications. "His poems are beautiful," Nowlan wrote professor-poet Robert Cockburn, "but, reading them or hearing them read, you'd think that everyone else in the world but John Newlove was dead. All his work sounds that way to me—as if he were the last man alive in the world, writing poems and reading them aloud to himself" (1968, ANP 40.8.8.13). This time to Anne Greer: "Sometimes [Newlove's] poems read as if they were written by the last survivor, the only man left alive in the world. Not that it isn't good stuff, but it is such *lonely* poetry" (1968, ANP 40.13.52.25). For Nowlan, Newlove writes with an anti-social aesthetic that excludes others. Self-presenting as an irredeemable outlier, the Newlove persona resembles

MacEwen's Flat Earth lecturer. But MacEwen took care to reflect those who populate the Edge with her, turned to them in her poem and through letters. Newlove engaged the Society minimally and maintained a more reclusive posture[168] than many of his peers.

More stylistically effusive than Newlove, British Columbia poet Patrick Lane relayed his enthusiasm for FES with gusto. Elsewhere, Lane gave detailed testimony relevant to Newlove's characteristic anti-Globularism. "Inner Landscape as Despair," his review of *Lies*, is extraneous to FES but not to its oppositions. Lane reviews Newlove in darkly glowing terms, takes Nowlan's impression of detachment a step further. If the poet places himself at the centre of a deserted world, Lane thinks he does so to use "himself on the page as metaphor for the fall of man in a mechanized anti-human" society (59). Newlove feels himself not to belong to his conjuncture, "but it isn't the poet who has gone wrong," Lane writes, "it is society that has, the society that no longer has room for the poet." Consequently, "the poet has become the fool or is classed as insane" (61). Hence, Flat Earthish. Newlove's despair is "the despair of man trying to live with the reality of himself severed from godhead" in a technological age (61). These statements describe a certain breed of Northern-half-North American post-Christian and post-national poets. These creatures are often defiant, eccentric, metaphorically minded, and on any given day quite visibly inebriated, tending as they do to take their sacraments perhaps a little too seriously. These types belong among the anachronistic misfits of Canada's Flat Earth Society. As he recorded it, however, Lane's admiration for Newlove

[168] Chris Hutchison's memorial poem "John Newlove Was Here" appeared in 2004. It describes him as a lone figure, using Christian references to an unpopulated world: "John Newlove wakes at the other end / of a long desire, rolls out of bed, rolls / a cigarette from Bible paper. Lighting the last page / of Genesis or maybe the first / of Revelations." The world and CanLit scene that survives the poet are seen as desolate in the final line: "Now everyone is gone" (108).

misses out on his humour. Newlove spoke to his comic poems with reference to "Elephants." The poem fills three two-line stanzas: "[Elephants] aren't any more important / than insects, // but I'm on the side / of elephants, // unless one of them tries / to crawl up my leg" (Colombo, *Rhymes and Reasons* 96).[169] In a statement less taciturn than this poem, Newlove calls "Elephants" "a joke" about his "paranoia, one of those exaggerations that seem to indicate the truth better than a precise telling of it could; a denigrating badge worn for the sake of identification" (96). "Elephants" combines the structure of jokes with otherworldly possibility and fear of death by trampling. Giving a flat smile, the poet sides with the kingdom's lower orders. The poem flashes a "denigrating badge" to readers, no show of meritorious virtue.

Lane's correspondence with Nowlan spanned the late 1960s to the early 1980s, like that of Newlove but with fewer items (ANP Inventory 86, 114). Nonetheless, Nowlan ranked Lane alongside Newlove as "among the very few poets whose opinion [he] value[d]" (letter to Lane, 1982, ANP 40.16.16.14). He wrote this to Lane in 1978: "you are one of the few poets in the country who doesn't bore the arse off me" (ANP 40.16.16.12). Lane found stronger terms to praise his friend.[170] From Vernon, British Columbia, he wrote the following to Nowlan one month before the founding of FES: "my feeling about your work already known—don't even like reading your poems—they're

[169] Was this a mere happenstance of literary history? Colombo grouped together four FES writers in his 1971 collection of interviews *Rhymes and Reasons: Nine Canadian Poets Discuss Their Work*: MacEwen, Newlove, Nowlan, and Tom Marshall. Colombo makes no reference to their Society in the book although he was in the know. His 1984 reference work *Canadian Literary Landmarks* mentions Ferrari's expedition to the Edge ("FOGO" 19).

[170] Paying tribute to Nowlan after his death, Lane co-edited with his wife Lorna Crozier a selected poems volume and dedicated one *Last Water Song* poem "For Alden Nowlan." This would make a good starting point for a case study of Lane as poet-Planoterrestrialist. He announces kinship with his dedicatee in these terms: "Those born in forests know what shadows are" (18).

too good—put me in a bad place" (10 Oct. 1970, ANP 40.16.16.4). Another paradoxical compliment he paid Nowlan is preserved in a letter from Nowlan to Fraser, in which he writes: "In the same mail as your letter there was a nice post card from Pat Lane in Peru. He says he still likes me even though I'm 'an obstreperous bastard' when I'm drunk. 'All poets are paranoid, anyway,' he says" (1972, ANP 40.12.24.46). To consolidate the separate poetry of these three—Nowlan, Fraser, and himself—Lane proposed a book of poems representing the trio. He thought a fourth writer might contribute, "perhaps someone else say Ken Belford or whoever" (Letter to Nowlan, undated, ANP 40.16.16.7). In his letter, sent from Montreal after having drinks with Fraser, Lane suggested he might add "a few drawings" to the collection that never eventuated. However, Lane would illustrate Nowlan's long-poem *Gardens of the Wind* for its release in 1982. Visibly of its era, Lane's stream-of-consciousness letter eschews capitals, punctuation, and paragraph breaks. Despite the lack of customary markers to guide his reader, it discusses literary matters in a much more comprehensible way than does another missive addressed "TO THE FLAT EARTH SOCIETY," which effuses. It seems to have caught the author in a mood of rambunctious spontaneity—possibly inebriation, suggested by chaotic orthography and repeat mentions of beer. Testing the boundaries of coherence, his application is a literary experiment as well as an attestation for admissibility. It diverges from his intelligible style in poems, even overruns some of the more idiosyncratic expressions in FES files at Calgary or Fredericton. Marked by sudden leaps in theme, register, and layout, the one-page letter alternates paragraphs and columns of text, each riddled with creative eccentricities and typographical errors.[171]

[171] The letter has "shud" for "should"; "ti" for "to"; "penthoyse" for *Penthouse*; "what'er" for "what're"; and

Lane makes two Flat Earth representations near the beginning and end of his letter, finding more interest in seemingly unrelated tangents. His first line gives Brecht as an alternate addressee for his letter "TO THE FLAT EARTH SOCIETY": "(or shud I say to Brecht for Galileo who misrepresented the whole business—not even an Eureka but a flat denial when presented with whatever profundity said 'Fuck it—it's flat' and went and had a beer)" (undated, ANP 40.12.6.16). Here, Lane smuggles the astronomer Galileo (an enemy named in the Society's aims [SP 152]) from his scientific context into literature via Bertolt Brecht's 1943 play *Life of Galileo* (*Leben des Galilei*). Pairing libation with fare, the letter's final column of text reports "the world spin[ning] / flat as a plate / what you eat off" (40.12.6.16). Loosely phrased though they may be, these opening and closing statements have obvious relevance. An erratic train of thought rushes forth through the middle passage, threatening derailment. The applicant's far-flung ideas range across mentions of alcohol; Darién Province in Panama, a reference to Lane's travels and to John Keats' Petrarchan sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," which aligns exposure to poetry with the age of exploration: each thrilling, each a gateway to "wild surmise" (Keats 100); George Chapman, the Elizabethan translator, poet, and playwright of comedies and tragedies who Keats cites; the nudie magazine *Penthouse*; feminist Germain Greer; and Brooklyn's Maimonidies Medical Centre. The fact that Lane spent time in New York State[172] and South America during the late 1960s and early 1970s stands behind his place-based allusions. For him, the concept of a planetary Edge

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"froom" for "from." This last may strive to mimic Danish pronunciation, given that Lane's line includes an opaque reference to "something from Denmark / with soul" (ANP 40.12.6.16). These features seem to represent eccentricities and/or errors, bill-bissett-ish disruptions of standard language and/or accidents of improvisatorial typewriting.

[172] While there, he helped with the physical production of the 1970 stateside Nowlan new and selected poems volume *Playing the Jesus Game* (Lane, *Last Water Songs,* 18).

calls up mountain peaks that run along the Darién Gap, a borderland joining/separating present-day Columbia and Panama, the northern edge of South America with/from the isthmus of Central America. We see a human silhouette perched atop these high-altitude fault lines. This is Balboa, certainly; by hasty misattribution in the previous century, Cortez; possibly the applicant too, on a poetic pilgrimage; in abstention Keats and Chapman and any reader; maybe no one at all. The poor person stands there, anyhow, feeling triumphant and ready to "drop" with "wild" Keatsian "surmise" (40.12.6.16). For Lane, the seductive vertigo of abyss must code some inner feeling too, besides an explorer's glory or a lyricist's flight—perhaps even the personal "guilt, fear, self-pity, self-loathing, self-destruction" he charted in his memoir *There Is a Season* (51). The Darién passage from his letter intensifies a foreign landscape and alters a lyrical poem that has earned a solid spot in the English canon. He pursued relatable experiments in *Unborn Things: South American Poems* (1975).

Familiarity with subjective geographies aside, this aspiring Planoterrestrialist includes among his credentials his personal character. The letter does not present a conspicuously comic voice, but Lane shows himself to be appropriately flippant and playful with his pastiche of topics. He calls himself "the only poet who types this way," presumably referring to his disjunctive mood and his "one finger," "without punctuation" typing method (ANP 40.12.6.16). Connections between recorded thoughts fall away, "as if the concept[s]" he skims over were "too much" for him (40.12.6.16). Depicting himself as one subject to the sway of ideas, not their master, Lane indicates a loosely poetic and acutely planoterrestrial personality. The letter follows its final reference to planetary flatness with three closing lines: "as I set out to learn / amazes me / what the hell"

(40.12.6.16). This sign-off is vague. But it makes clear Lane's qualified position as a seeker, his stupefaction, and his resignation. His quasi-coherent letter attests to a brazen, reverential, and yet ironic spirit of engagement with FES; "so who else could belong," he asks (40.12.6.16).

An author of narrative prose, Farley Mowat developed a broader audience than those drawn to Canada's poets. He published scores of books between the 1950s and 2000s, appealing to popular and literary audiences. Because of his stature, Mowat was invited to join the Society, like MacEwen. He wrote as an insider in letters dating from 1973, 1974, 1979, as well as the April and July of two unspecified years. In 1973, he reported on his recruitment efforts to FES's "Dear Chancellor," Stewart:

> The other evening I had occasion to wine and dine Mr. Kildare Dobbs and to discover that he is a man of the True Faith, indeed. He is a Flat Earth man. After submitting him to a detailed and penetrating examination I conclude that he should be invited to become one of us, and I heartily recommend that he be invited to become a member. I believe he will respond warmly to such an invitation. (10 Dec. 1973, ANP 40.12.6.114)

The nominee has letters in the *Alden Nowlan Papers*, but these relate to Nowlan's submissions for *Saturday Night* magazine, where Dobbs worked as managing editor (ANP Inventory 141). The following year, Mowat wrote once more, this time recommending Professor John Livingstone. Livingstone was an Environmental Studies Professor at York University who, in 1994, won a Governor General's Literary Award for his polemical non-fiction book *Rogue Primate: An Exploration of Human Domestication*. Decades earlier, Mowat described him as one "worthy to take part in our great crusade," as determined through another "thorough personal investigation" (Letter to Stewart, 1974, ANP 40.12.6.117). Neither of Mowat's letters specify traits—such as a seriously playful attitude or resistance to self-domestication—that make Dobbs a "Flat

Earth man" or Livingstone a "worthy" candidate. Nor do they reveal much about Mowat, outside his willingness to play along with the Society's sham formality ("detailed and penetrating examination[s]") and actual sincerity ("warmly," "heartily"). Another member, Donald Cameron gave a rich picture of Mowat in an article for *Atlantic Insight*. Cameron has him "the kilted Roaring Boy" of Canadian literature, a "quarrelsome eccentric" who is "astute, irreverent and generous." For him, Mowat "travels beyond the reach of regulation and bureaucracy, always seeking people who sustain [his] lusty natural anarchy" ("Farley Mowat, prophet," Oct. 1979, LFF 2.2.46-1). Without mentioning FES or Mowat's penchant for literary comedy,[173] Cameron profiles the type of dressed-down writer well-suited for membership.

Relatively late in the Society's history, in 1979 Mowat wrote once more, asking the Society's President to enlist a family member. Mowat's "errant" and "wooly-heade[d]" son had relocated to New Brunswick for a job with the CBC. Mowat thought induction into the Society's ranks would help "ease the pangs of his novitiate in Fredericton" (25 Oct. 1979, LFF 2.1.8). Here, Mowat shows appreciation for the outsider fraternity FES could offer, like MacEwen had done. The letter then responds to an inquiry as to whether Mowat would accept an honorary doctorate from UNB. His mixed response declares his disregard for official accolades and love for out-of-the-way places: "I already have four of the lousy things and don't know what to do with them. However, it might be fun to get one from U.N.B., certainly a lot more fun than from one of the bigger Metropolitan universities," he wrote (2.1.8). Mowat's relative interest in UNB

[173] The semi-autobiographical novels *The Boat Who Wouldn't Float* and *Never Cry Wolf* are two examples of Mowat's adulterated humor.

likely extends beyond the small-city charm of Fredericton, given his long-standing commitment to Atlantic Canada, a region he lived in, wrote about, and protected as a conservationist.[174] Mowat acquired nine honorary doctorates all told, mostly from small institutions from Cape Breton to Vancouver Island—with a stopover at Toronto, by the bye. UNB granted him no such honour, perhaps because Mowat expressed to Ferrari more enthusiasm for FES. "I probably wouldn't turn it down" was all the excitement he could muster when contemplating an association with Canada's oldest university (2.1.8).

Outside recommending associates, Mowat further engaged by reading *The Earth Is Flat!* An undated letter conveys his punning response: "plane astonishment" (Letter to Ferrari, "April Tooth" [2 April?], no year, LFF 2.3.57-3). Mowat committed to passing Ferrari's manuscript to editors at McClelland and Stewart, along with a promise to write a forward upon its acceptance. That commitment failed to hasten the ill-fated manuscript's eventual release, delayed until after the author had died in 2011. Mowat passed away in 2014, too soon to compose a forward for ISER's 2019 edition. The book briefly quotes Mowat's most creative FES utterance (*TEIF* 78). It was lifted from a letter dated 11 July (no year specified), wherein Mowat answers the Society's call for subjective testimony about our planet. He writes:

> I have been working on what well may be a breakthrough for Our Cause. The earth is not *actually* flat in detail, only in overall dimension. It is actually *corrugated*. Rather like a flat piece of corrugated cardboard. The ups and the downs are what account for the general illusion so abhorrently prominent in our mechanistic society, that the earth is round, or curved. As an example: when a ship appears to disappear below the horizon as it sails away from the shore, it is actually only descending into one of the corrugations. At a distance beyond sight

[174] Primarily focused on Newfoundland where he lived in the years leading up to the founding of FES, Mowat's books about Atlantic Canada include *The Grey Seas Under*, *The Black Joke*, *The Boat Who Wouldn't Float,* and *A Whale for the Killing*. For his role as a conservationist, see *Rescue the Earth: Conversations with the Green Crusaders* and Andy Thomson's film *Ten Million Books*.

> range of the observer, it climbs up out of the hollow, goes over the ridge, and descends again. […]
>
> In due course I shall be able to submit my paper on the Corrugated Flat Earth […].
>
> In order to achieve absolute verisimilitude my paper is naturally being written on corrugated cardboard. It isn't easy, I can assure you. (LFF 2.1.5-1)

His view fits within a strain of planoterrestrial theories that defy a sphericity/flatness binary. Mowat puts his idea forward as a joke, especially in the final lines about the difficulty of composing on cardboard. But in challenging FES "orthodoxy," the planetary form he imagines exhibits the rebelliousness that marks him as a "Flat Earth man."

FES hosted famous writers as well as less visible figures like Heather Kirk, whom the Canadian literary canon has largely overlooked. She wrote to FES in 1971, long before she began publishing book-length titles. Born and raised in Ontario, Kirk pursued undergraduate studies in the early 1970s at Dalhousie University in Halifax. According to "Heather's Biography and Resumé," from the author's website, an interest in Lucy Maude Montgomery led her to the east coast. She met Nowlan there and subsequently enlisted in FES. Her application reads in part:

> The winters in this country are long and there aren't very many people around whom I like, fewer who do me any good.
>
> Dr. Nowlan handed me the *Flat Earth Society* pamphlet last night towards the end of a party at my place which had developed in a spontaneous way after a poetry reading (which consisted of Nowlan, whom I knew, and a number of young Maritime poets, whom I had never met—I had just been a member of the audience). Now at this party, for the first time ever at such a gathering, I had felt warm, felt that I belonged, felt a sense of community. So it was with the pamphlet. For the first time ever, when reading a pamphlet, I felt warm, felt that I belonged, felt a sense of community. Even today, after a second sober reading, that feeling is still there.
>
> So I guess that means I subscribe to the aims of the *Flat Earth Society*.
>
> (Letter to FES, 1 August 1971, ANP 40.12.6.49)

Kirk announces outsider belonging, but as a novice writer she stands a bit apart. She emphasizes that exposure to FES and a poetry scene inspired feelings of "warm[th]" and

"community" "for the first time." She describes an integration that counters lonely isolation.[175] The applicant closes with these words: "Me not enrolling as a member in the Flat Earth Society would be like walking naked (without even my glasses) outside in a blizzard when I could have stayed overnight. Oh please, can't I join" (40.12.6.49). Acceptance into FES and Nowlan's personal coterie may have helped Kirk persist in growing her nascent publishing career. Her first books were young adult novels (2000 and 2004), followed by a biography of Mazo de la Roche (2006) and a study of that author's sources (2007). Next came a re-write of John Richardson's *Wacousta* (2005), then two studies of pacifist resistance movements. *Be Not Afraid* (2011) charts Poland's anti-Soviet Solidarity movement of the 1980s. *Seeking Peace* (2017) concerns the much longer history of the non-violent Christians known as Quakers. An irony: despite her youthful application's devotion to a Maritime poetry scene, Kirk's recent non-fiction books on a revolutionary resistance movement and a dissenting religious sect might pair better with FES than would her earlier literary scholarship and creative fiction.

The literary stature of Ontario's David McFadden falls somewhere between the obscurity of Kirk and the heights of fame Mowat achieved. McFadden published some three dozen titles between the late 1960s and 2010s, mainly poetry. His work attracted a small literary audience; received three Governor General's Literary Award nominations; and won the 2013 Griffin Poetry Prize. According to poet-critic Frank Davey, McFadden's writing lent "mythic proportions" to places in his immediate environment, such as "the great Niagara Escarpment" (*Canadian Encyclopedia*). That comment

[175] Nowlan had a similar breakthrough after meeting Fred Cogswell, who made poetry seem "concrete and real" through a personal connection no longer mediated by the page (Davies 33).

combines the writer's commitment to locality and imagination, qualities that made him a strong candidate for FES membership. Like Newlove and Lane, McFadden corresponded with Nowlan. Like Lane, he found much to praise in Newlove's *Lies*. After joining in 1972, McFadden wrote to Nowlan that *Lies* was "worthy of a Flat Earth Society of Canada Poetry Award if ever a book of poetry was" (16 Feb. 1973, ANP 40.18.32.9). No such prize existed. Regrettably, he did not specify his points of admiration. Preserved McFadden-Nowlan exchanges span 1972 and 1977. They record a literary connection that includes but is not limited to FES (ANP Inventory 99).

Through the post, Nowlan and McFadden developed mutual esteem. Early in their correspondence, from his home in Hamilton, McFadden related his sense of union with this "stranger" in Fredericton:

> Yes I know John Jones.[176] He works on the rim, about 20 ft. away from the police desk where I spend a lot of time [working…]. When he heard that I wrote poems he asked me if I knew you. Strangely enough, I said Yes. Then I thought about it for a moment & had to add: "No, I don't really know him, but when I read his poems and stories I feel as if I do since his literary aims seem similar to mine." I hope you don't think this is presumptuous of me to say this, but it is the way I feel. Stan Dragland of UWO in London also ask[ed] me if I knew you & I had to think for a moment. With a little shock I realized I had never met you nor even corresponded with you.
>
> (Letter to Nowlan, 2 April 1972, ANP 40.18.32.5)

McFadden signs "your friend" (40.18.32.5), solidifying a connection he gained initially as reader and fan. Nowlan reciprocated from a distance, writing: "I have the feeling that you and I would like one another. Hell, I do like you—even though we've never met in the flesh, we've met hundreds of times in the mystical kingdom of the word" (1973, ANP

[176] Jones likely knew Nowlan from his time in New Brunswick, before working as a sports editor for the *Hamilton Spectator*, the newspaper that employed McFadden ("John Jones").

40.18.32.10). McFadden's friendship with MacEwen came about in the 1980s, after the Society had dissipated. The emotional and practical support he gave her is recorded in Sullivan's *Shadow Maker* (374-75). She mentions their alliance through Coach House Press but not their FES connection. Presumably, McFadden and MacEwen became friends for the same reasons they separately fell in with the Society: irreverent humour, personal eccentricity, and anti-careerist approaches to the literary world. McFadden and Ferrari seem not to have met, but they share a remarkable parallel. Near the end of their lives, each wrote movingly about mental debilitations. McFadden passed away in 2018 after salvaging memories for his *Abnormal Brain Sonnets* (2015). His title points toward a disease of aging, like Ferrari's *Different Minds*. Funny, I had thought *Minds* headed poems, and *Brains* were built for non-fiction prose. Generic borders become chimera in their boundless imaginations, just as these writers' approaches to authorship challenged expectations for big-L Literature. Ferrari's poetic irreverence has been studied in the previous chapter. McFadden's is signalled by the barely existent network he co-founded, "GOSH: Gentleman of Sensible Height" ("David W."). Was this just a joke? Or, golly, does the fake association's name accurately plot McFadden's literary voice partway between the quiet little stanzas of an Eli Mandel and the grand lyricism of oversized poets like Purdy or Nowlan?

After establishing a long-distance rapport, McFadden felt eager to join FES. In an autumn 1972 letter to Nowlan, he wrote: "Please enroll me immediately in the Flat Earth Society of Canada," continuing, "I know you as a fine poet & first-rate journalist but am still astounded & delighted that you were perceptive enough to have me pegged for a flat

earth man" (9 Sept. 1972, ANP 40.12.6.13). McFadden's compliments give way to personal testimony:

> The Earth is flat—flat as a chessboard. I've always felt that, except for a period of about one year when I was abt. 12 & under the spell of a particularly somnambulistic teacher. […] Despite my beliefs, however, I've never had the courage to admit to being a flat-earther—until now. I feel much better for it already. Confession is good for the soul—a blessed release. Perhaps in my next letter I'll admit some of my even more hidden beliefs. (40.12.6.13)

Against Mowat's symbolic corrugation and MacEwen's formal concavity, McFadden plays a "chessboard." His Flat Earth game suggests maneuverings, puzzles, problems, clashes. An opponent of some kind, he wants to agitate "somnambulistic" conformity. Rookie on the losing team, his mere disclosure won him "blessed relief" if only for that season. Lastly, he suggests drafting Glenn Gould onto the squad (40.12.6.13). This recommendation provides insight on McFadden's personal Kanadian canon. It includes arts beyond literature and blends experimentalism with tradition. Gould was a classical composer who brought disruptions to that genre. Known too as a broadcaster and writer, he is thought of foremostly a pianist and interpreter of Bach. In another FES letter, from the end of 1972, McFadden challenged a prominent member of the Canadian media establishment, cc'ing an eclectic cross-section of cultural workers.

Nowlan and Ferrari appeared as proud Planoterrestrialists on the Canadian Broadcast Corporation's nationally televised news program *Take 30*. The episode aired in December 1972, featuring interviews with Paul Soles and comments from future Governor General Adrienne Clarkson, the show's co-hosts. Clarkson's apparent disdain for FES provoked McFadden's ire. He wrote in protest to the television host, condemning her "mindless […] open sneering," her "superior attitudes toward the society and the field

of thinking it represents," and her "unwillingness to think and to sympathize or empathize" (27 Dec. 1972, ANP 40.12.6.86). In short, he accused her of disseminating Globularism. McFadden sent the letter to individuals and entities he assumed would agree with his take on the matter: Nowlan, Ferrari, and Mowat; singer Stompin' Tom Connors; broadcaster Peter Gzowski; writers Melinda McCracken and George Bowering; *B.C. Monthly Magazine*; and, from the field of visual art, The Nihilist Spasm Band's John Boyle and Greg Curnoe. Curnoe illustrated McFadden's *Great Canadian Sonnet* (1970) and *Animal Spirits* (1983). The artist stands behind the cc'd organization McFadden calls "The Committee for the Preservation of Neglected Aspects of Canadian Culture"[177] (40.12.6.86). Over his career, Curnoe's concern for "Neglected Aspects" focused on the value of folk art over fine art. FES likewise occupies a "neglected" position in relation to mass media outlets like the CBC. National airtime was granted to the group on *Take 30* and later *Take 60*, but that does not guarantee producers saw it as a subject for thoughtful interest rather than a curio and light entertainment.

Among those slated to receive carbon copies of the Clarkson letter, FES's Symposiarch responded. He agreed that "Clarkson's languid superciliousness was insulting" (24 Jan. 1973, ANP 40.18.32.8). Others disagreed, as Nowlan reported: "Raymond Fraser, for instance, and Sharon Johnston" (later Fraser) "felt that she had gone along with the spirit of the thing in her normal manner which, according to them, is often mistaken for pseudo-aristocratic disdain" (40.18.32.8). McFadden expressed regret that he had not hit on the phrase "languid superciliousness" himself (16 Feb. 1973, ANP

[177] Curnoe and Pierre Théberge published *Review of the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada* in 1974. According to Lerner and Williamson, the journal was in fact a London (Ontario) Public Library and Art Museum exhibit's "catalogue [appearing] in the guise of a single issue (and apparently the only issue) of the *Review*" (119).

40.18.32.9). Regrettably, I cannot confidently assess the host's tone or demeanor. No recording of the 1972 broadcast survives in CBC archives. Those corporate holdings do contain an apparent re-broadcast of the segment on CBC's *Take 60* for 7 March 1974.[178] On that program, Soles announces his "card-carrying" membership status in FES. Clarkson, for her part, sounds a little more than doubtful. She shakes her head while making her only comment regarding the segment. Summation: "By your beliefs you shall know them, Paul, mmm mmm" (*Take 60*). Clarkson's comment post-dates McFadden's letter, but her tone may signal the same haughty attitude described with varying levels of charitability by McFadden, Nowlan, and the Frasers. To what extent did Clarkson intend to alter a familiar biblical quotation with her 1974 statement? The Gospel of Matthew contains the phrase "by their fruits ye shall know them" (KJV, Matt. 7.20). So, she might have meant to say "by their" not your "beliefs," given that her knowing "superciliousness" indicates that the Society itself, and not her or her audience, will determine its (low) value. Whether or not the host misspoke in applying a plural possessive pronoun, a citational irony undergirds her comment. Matthew 7 opens with the phrase "judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7.1). That gospel truth might have served as another FES slogan, if the Society's provocations had been direct rather than coded, imperative and not ironic.

Government Speaks Up, Professor Squint Opens His Eyes, and the People Demand More

[178] CBC archives made a digital copy of *Take 60*'s episode upon request. Other identified radio/television appearances by FES could not be located within the phsycial collection.

CBC broadcasts constitute a particularly conspicuous union of the fringe organization with institutional culture, although others abound. Some applicants' statements bear official letterheads that contrast with the playfulness they express. A letter from Sydney McBryde was sent from the offices of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly during his second term as an NDP MLA for The Pas. He served too as provincial Minister of Northern Affairs. "Obviously, I had not believed that you really existed," he wrote. He continued, writing that "the trauma of having this belief shattered was so great that I thought I might have to start believing in Santa Claus, or even Farley Mowat. The effect of this traumatic experience was a conversion (at least partially) to your beliefs" (14 June 1974, LFF 2.1.6-2). McBryde mimics being taken aback, target reaction of Flat Earthism near and far. But he ties a stupefied response to the existence of FES rather than its claims. McBryde goes on to propose a planoterrestrial theory. He sees Earth as "waffle-like" in shape, following from observations of flow-patterns in his local watersheds (2.1.6-2). Mowat too posed as a naturalist when describing a similar form. Rather than simply seeking membership, the MLA plans to establish a "Half-Flat, Half-Round, Waffle-Like Earth Society" and solicits ten-dollar fees from his addressees (2.1.6-2). Reversing the application process, asserting competing absurdities, McBryde won approbation from the founders, who encouraged independent thought more than they sought out followers or funds. McBryde does not stand out as especially peculiar among the Society's supplicants or honorees, but his must rank among the more unusual messages ever composed on Legislative stationery.

Another application came from John Phillip Maclean. He identifies as a "first novelist" but uses stationery attached to Canada's Senate: "the Office of Senator Muriel

McQueen Fergusson" (Nov. 1973, LFF 2.1.6-2). A native of New Brunswick who became the first woman appointed speaker of Canada's Senate (1972), the Liberal Senator may have been unaware of her staffer's unusual use of office supplies and (speculation:) work time. Without specifying his role on Ferguson's team, Maclean requests a prominent position in the Society beyond the general membership he had been granted:

> Dear Dr. Ferrari: I do some work for Senator Fergusson and steal her stationery for VIP correspondence like this.
> Thank you for the membership.
> Let me say first how grateful I am.
> Let me say second, "Where's my title?" I see you have an opening for a fourth vice-president, never mind ex officio member of THIS Senate. I guess it wouldn't hurt me to start somewhere back in the pack. (2.1.6-2)

Seeking to advance his planoterrestrial career, Maclean does not articulate his subjective geophysical perspective, nor does he do much to promote himself as author of *Backroom Boys and Girls*, a novel[179] published around the time of his Flat Earth letters. Apparently the only book he published, *Backroom* concerns sexual dynamics *vis-à-vis* Canada's electoral system. Maclean brought his work-life experience to creative writing, just as he blurred lines between his government role and recreational interests.

Canada's military makes a cameo in FES history, courtesy of the decorated Colonel Ian Fraser. Col. Fraser became a regular visitor to Windsor Castle and an enlisted Planoterrestrialist, first Division, while stationed at Gagetown. After transferring to the base at Lancaster Park, Alberta in 1975, he requested that he be "permit[ed] to establish a chapter of the Society" at that outpost, among the Airborne Regiment. "A number of the

[179] The book gained a mention in the *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English* (Klinck *et al*. 237). It is grouped therein with other titles related to governance.

officers are very interested," he wrote before stating: "they are that kind of people, which further justifies my praise of them!" (Letter to Nowlan, 15 Dec. 1975, ANP 40.12.21.11). Many of us would not first think of soldiers as the "kind of people" who would participate in a freaky, Flat Earthy insurgency. The friendship of Nowlan and Fraser contradicts that prejudice. Consider his description of those working at Lancaster Park in a 1975 letter to Nowlan:

> The Airborne Regiment is splendid! Lots of great soldiering, all the parachuting one could want and just about any type of physical activity soldiers could get themselves involved in. They are hard workers, great drinkers, and everyone is a poet under the skin. You would love them, and I can assure you, in the entire Regiment I have yet to run into an insincere person. There are no cellophane-wrapped young technocrats here, so in that respect it really has the edge on the rest of the military world. (40.12.21.11)

These "poet[s] under the skin" (and uniforms) not being "cellophane-wrapped young technocrats" constitutes a reference to Nowlan's "In the Officer's Mess," a poem set at a party on the Gagetown base and dedicated to Fraser and his wife Gladys (*CP* 460). Stereotyping military professionals as "cellophane-wrapped" personalities (conformist, obeisant) circulated among Nowlan's coterie. Listen to his letter to Fraser from 30 March 1974:

> I still regret missing your New Year's Day Visit. Two of the people here that day were a young writer and his wife who tend to accept all the current cliches about the military. They were utterly bewildered to discover that I had friends who visited me in uniforms and that, instead of being neo-Fascist brutes, soldiers could be quite amicable creatures. (ANP 40.12.21.5)

A uniform may seem no less out of place at an eccentric poet's home than a FES pamphlet would be in an army barracks. Nowlan's social world was expansive, and one strength of the Society he co-founded is its eclectic representation of the wider society that surrounded and suffered its provocations.

Fraser spread the good news of Planoterrestrialism among servicemen in Alberta. Several applied and, prematurely, posted dues to Fredericton. They awaited reply. Patience grew dangerously thin. Writing to Ferrari on Regimental stationery, Fraser claimed to have "intercepted" plans for an attack on Fredericton drawn up by Major Bob Elliott and Captain Grant McLean (21 Feb. 1977, LFF 2.1.5-2). They had "yet to receive membership cards, certificates, etc. for membership in the Flat Earth Society," even though "they subscribed totally to the philosophy and doctrine put forward by the society" (2.1.5-2). Cheekily, he relayed suspicions the men had that "the organization ha[d] fallen into inefficient hands and that some rogue somewhere [wa]s posing as Dr Ferrari and [wa]s absconding with the funds!" (2.1.5-2). The Colonel instructed Ferrari to "send membership data, etc as soon as possible and eat this letter for fear it [would]n't fall into the wrong hands!" Consequences could be dire if "these guys decide to want to recover their $5.00 each using the resources of the Canadian Airborne Regiment" (2.1.5-2). Enclosed documents outline a plan for attacking Windsor Castle, St. Thomas University's Philosophy Department, and Ferrari's private residence. That these personnel deploy humour should come as no surprise. But it is odd to see a Flat Earth hoax being taken up in official stationery and tactical language at a Canadian military base, far cry from a poet's sitting room.

Academics from across Canada sought membership in FES. Nowlan and Ferrari must have felt particularly gratified by interest expressed by professional geographers, such as Dr. Henry Castner. Castner wrote on the stationery of the Department of Geography at Queen's University in 1973. The President's views regarding "observations on the form of the earth and on some cartographic conventions which bias our view of it

[…] intrigued" him (Letter to Ferrari, 30 Jan. 1973, ANP 40.12.6.98). He asked for "any 'position paper' which sets out the Society's views" (40.12.6.98). Demonstrating a renegade tendency within his discipline of cartography, Castner was at pains to set himself apart from "global heresiarchs (such as some friends in UNB's own excellent photogrammertry and geodesy departments) who are committed to the spheroid" (40.12.6.98). The geographer sought to correct one general FES principle, however. He did not see anti-Globularists as a hopeless minority. He writes that Ferrari "overestimates the influence that these people [Globularists] and the astronauts have upon the general public," citing Mercator's cylindrical projection as a viable, even canonical alternative to the orb (40.12.6.98). Castner dedicated himself to challenging commonplaces of geographical thinking. His 1990 textbook *Seeking New Horizons: A Perceptual Approach to Geographic Education* sought to expand standard methods for teaching people how to work with maps and to relate to the world these depict, with a focus on engaging young people's physical senses.

Ethnographer and anthropologist, Memorial University's Professor Emeritus Elliott Leyton may be the most frequently cited academic who sought out FES. He wrote to the Society in 1974, offering a joke in place of oppositional philosophy. His application letter states:

> I sense, rather than perceive, that there is in fact a connection between the myth of air travel and the fact of flat worldliness. […] Heavy objects drop when you let go. Therefore, air travel was a concoction of the railroad companies to permit the prohibitive fares they charge. It would seem that in fact what has occurred is that the steamship/railroad cartels have paintings of a globular earth far below; paintings which they place on rollers and roll past your 'airplane' window, blurring your vision, and convincing you that your 'plane' (which is in fact a disused tramcar) is in flight. (LFF 2.1.6-2)

Leyton uses his letter as an opportunity to riff on conspiracy theory tropes. But the process whereby human-made aircrafts achieve liftoff is, in fact, a mystery. In 2020, *Scientific American* published an article exploring the conundrum that we put trust in airlines, even though experts cannot explain the physical principles of aerodynamic lift (Regius; cf. Spiro Ikari [SP 325]). Leyton addresses that problem with farcical speculation. His letter pokes fun at expert knowledge, performs knee-jerk paranoia about corporate trickery. Regrettably, this seems to be his only piece of FES correspondence. His scholarly writings from the time relate to two sides of the Society's work: bringing creative people together and resisting societal trends that move people away from humane interaction. Leyton's edited collection *The Compact: Selected Dimensions of Friendship* (1974) might have been submitted as testament to his commitment to camaraderie. ISER Books, its publisher—who put out Ferrari's *The Earth Is Flat!* in 2019—billed the collection as "the first major attempt in modern anthropology at studying friendship on a cross-cultural basis" ("Compact"). The following year, Leyton published on practices at large-scale industrial projects, illustrated through intimate narratives rather than standard methods, i.e., statistical or policy analysis. *Dying Hard: The Ravages of Industrial Carnage* relates to FES's more casual discourse, given the concern expressed over dehumanizing trends in a technological era. Only later in his career did Leyton develop international prestige. His work on the psychology of serial murderers made him a frequent source for media outlets and police agencies as well as the subject of a National Film Board documentary, *The Man Who Studies Murder* (2003).

Most FES applicants lacked prestige or prominence, predictably. Ted Palys was still a graduate student of Social Psychology at the University of Manitoba in 1973 when

he followed-up on his unanswered application. After receiving a belated response from Fredericton, he wrote the following rejoinder: “I was beginning to fear that my original letter had been lost in the mails. I had visions of the Post Office (words referring to the deity should always be capitalized) attempting to send it via some needlessly complex circumglobular route which, of course, would have resulted in my letter being lost forever” (Nov. 1973, LFF 2.1.6-2). Here, the applicant playfully invokes a planoterrestrial reality that makes standard methods of navigation invalid. He also pokes fun at the authority of federal institutions, referring to Canada Post as a god. This pointed joke relies on common suspicions over the level of control governments and corporations have over information and, in some cases, the destinies of citizens attempting to participate in specific societies or society itself. Palys went on to publish many scholarly works, from the 1980s to 2010s, and to teach Criminology, Research Ethics, and Indigenous Studies at Simon Fraser University. Another applicant from the Prairie provinces, Deborah Turnbull wrote to the Society in September 1973. As a staff rather than faculty member at the University of Saskatchewan’s Regina campus, she suggested that “a live presentation of [the Society’s] views, evidence and convictions” would be a good fit for programming at the University’s Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, which she served as its Business Assistant and on whose stationery she composed her letter (Sept. 1973, LFF 2.1.6-1). Like many writing from her region, Turnbull cited the “very large and undeniably flat portion of this earth” where she lived as a point of connection with the east coast’s Planoterrestrialists (LFF 2.1.6-1).

Another para-academic correspondent in 1973, Jane Lemke applied to the Society using stationery of the University of British Columbia’s Department of Anthropology and

Sociology. She served as a departmental secretary. Lemke wrote to express her view that "traditional science has been allowed to run amuck" (1973, ANP 40.12.6.96). Opposing the field's practice broadly, she wrote in favour of "balance groups, like the F.E.S., Hollow Earth Society, U.F.O. societies, etc.," who "poke at [science's] ego." Without such groups, she felt, "things will only get worse, and soon any deviant from the current theory of a thing will be beheaded" (40.12.6.96). Lemke correctly describes FES's purpose as poking (fun at) the ego of science, and resisting conformity, while her statement about beheadings of heretics is gruesome. It fits with the dystopian predictions of fiction rather than alarm bells usually sounded within academic institutions or countercultural activism. Lemke exaggerates to register truly held beliefs, presumably. She expounds that science's "assertions are based on fear and insecurity, born out of sealed, atrophying minds." She aligns with resistance to certainty, writing: "I am coming to doubt that anything can be proved immutably […] good old society uses poor science's assertions, usually to the detriment of the entire universe (if there is one)" (40.12.6.96). This final point explodes the myriad ideas about Earth's shape in archival files dedicated to documenting FES. Lemke invokes the ultimate uncertainty that existence itself, and not merely science, could be a fatal delusion.

Lemke contributed to sociological knowledge when leveraging her experience as a worker to critique university hierarchies. Her article in the *Insurgent Sociologist* journal, "Letter to My Working Sisters" (1975), could have provided additional attestation for her anti-globularist worldview. In it, Lemke decries female academics who hypocritically claim feminist and Marxist positions yet treat their own in-group as superior to others. "Socializing between faculty and staff is non-existent," she writes; "in

normal academic society, general human consideration is dropped—we secretaries become untouchables" (Lemke 75). This condemnation of inequity aligns her with FES letters. Lemke resists the automatic "respect and authority and importance and credibility" that "society bestows upon […] mere mortals" simply because they have received "a greater amount of intravenous education" than most (76). Further undermining traditional education systems, she wittily appropriates academic jargon when describing immersion in her workplace as "field work amongst" professors (76). Repeating methods from her FES missive, Lemke's broad critique is decorated with violent metaphors and revolutionary messages. For her, university hierarchies constitute a "system which is choking us all" (77). Regarding the plight of working-class women on campuses, Lemke writes: "we do their most menial work for [female faculty] so that they have more time to write their ideas, develop their chosen careers and creativities, and forage around for their inner realities. We, however, are not given that time by society, or by these women" (77).[180] In the following decade, academics would begin using personal computers as word processers and so rely less on (usually female) spouses or office staff to type their articles and books for them. Meanwhile, a pre-digital Flat Earth Society could not help Lemke ameliorate material struggles. However, the fact that she used departmental stationery to write to FES suggests it inspired her to reclaim space and time at her "extremely boring, meaningless, irrelevant" job, which left "brains too numb to revolt" (78). The Society's invitation to explore "creativities," to "forage around" in

[180] Bearing out this critique of inequitable opportunities between professors and staff in institutions of higher learning, one of the few marks Lemke left on recorded intellectual history is a minor credit given by Dorothy Smith. Smith's contribution to *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader* (2003)—"Women's Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology" (1974)—ends with a note about women who assisted as typists, Lemke and Mildred Brown. The author expresses "indebted[ness]" to them but, today, that would seem to demand further reflection on power dynamics, especially given the title of Smith's article (33).

"inner reality," undoubtedly held importance for many. As Lemke writes, "we all make better people when we are functioning as bright stars on our own, instead of computerized robots" (78). To that end, her article ends with a call to establish "women's groups, staff unions, collectives—whatever" on campuses, ones that could attend to the needs of all women, not only those with professional designations (78).

Academics and para-academics from across Canada engaged FES by declaring nonconformist views on their disciplines and on academic systems writ large. Not all professors reacted favourably. According to Ferrari, Dr. W. Reavley Gair[181] proudly admitted to "tearing down the notices" advertising FES presentations at the Learned Society's conference held at UNB in 1977. Ferrari lodged a complaint about the incident with the event's director, David Galloway;[182] the President's statement reads, in part:

> Sir, I am sure that you will agree that the academic profession would have come to a sorry state if our very own colleagues went about the University tearing down any notices which did not suit their tastes. […] I am therefore taking this opportunity to complain formally and forcefully about an example of what I consider to be most reprehensible behaviour. (29 May 1977, LFF 2.2.34)

The straight-faced sincerity of this letter demands respect for minority positions in no uncertain terms. An earlier complaint Ferrari submitted to Galloway exhibits the lampooning humour that he more commonly deployed. A few months prior, Ferrari had raised a point of contention regarding promotional materials for the conference in these terms: "There seems to have been some mix-up. I have just seen a brochure which lists

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[181] Author of *The Children of Paul's: The Story of a Theatre Company, 1553-1608* (1982) and editor of *A Literary and Linguistic History of New Brunswick* (1985).

[182] After emigrating from Scotland to Canada, Galloway taught for UNB's English Department from the 1940s to 1980s. While there, according to Tony Tremblay, Galloway was influential on his student-cum-colleague Fred Cogswell. Galloway "guided his study of the early French Romantic Alfred de Vigny as well as what he termed 'the visual grammars of William Blake'" (Tremblay, *Fiddlehead Moment* 166). Galloway's 1985 interview with Cogswell in *Studies in Canadian Literature* became an important source for Tremblay's *The Fiddlehead Moment* as well as his *Fred Cogswell: The Many-Dimensioned Self*.

the Flat Earth Society's talks under 'Entertainments'! Have those evil Globularists been at work again?" (Letter to Galloway, 20 March 1977, LFF 2.2.34). Galloway went along with the spirit of this playful complaint, responding to Ferrari, serendipitously, on April Fool's Day: "I wanted to give the Flat Earth Society top billing with the Royal Society, but the wicked Globularists threatened me with assassination. I am sorry that I succumbed because I should rather fall off the earth once and for all, than face an after-life of spinning round it in perpetual torment" (1 April 1977, LFF 2.2.34). Galloway likely had real stakeholders in mind when inventing murderous agents of Globularism in his letter. Regrettably, his responses to these complaints seem to be his only documented FES engagements. In an unexpectedly related matter, as a literary critic he contributed the opening essay to the *Literary History of Canada* (1965). His essay, titled "The Voyagers," interprets the Enlightenment-era concept of "the New World" as an extension of myths that date back to "Plato's *Lost Atlantis* in the western ocean beyond the Pillars of Hercules," myths which record "man's longing to find a Never-Never Land in the reality of dreams" (Galloway, "Voyagers" 3). In his letters to Ferrari and in "Voyagers," Galloway demonstrates a sympathy with the Society's promotion of mythos and place.

Many applicants had only remote connections to the literary industry or the scholarly realm. The Society's diverse membership, Garwood writes, included "marine biologists, teachers, doctors and a folksinger," "land surveyors, attorneys, air-force pilots, geodesists, geologists and astronomers, alongside an undertaker, a judge, a few farmers and some real-estate agents" (Garwood 296, 310). Among the notable applicants not discussed by Garwood figures the Finnish-born resident of Burnaby, British Columbia Vaino Ronka. He put his communications-engineering education to work in private

industry rather than as a university researcher.[183] Ronka wrote to the Society a few years after relocating to the west coast, following a distinguished career with Geonics Limited in Toronto, where he worked as a designer of instruments used for geological exploration. When Ronka sat down to write a letter in 1974, he was in a mood to explore imagination and humour rather than reflect on his rich experience at the technological frontiers of the geological industry. His anti-sectarian statement of faith attempted to appeal to the FES founders as follows:

> I consider the society a step in the right direction. But maybe you do not go far enough. I have actual evidence that the earth may be round, but in the reverse sense. I have seen (and I am a keen observer) that my shoes wear out mostly at the ends. Both shoes wear out in the same manner, so it cannot be due to my peculiar walking habit. Even elementary calculus will tell you that it is impossible to have the same abnormalcy in both feet.
>
> On the other hand I understand that the Society cannot go all the way in one step. I hope, however, that my observation is seriously considered. Otherwise a development of a Western dissident group cannot be avoided. (1974, LFF 2.1.6-2)

Ronka humorously imagines a planetary structure that is out-of-step with scientific consensus and FES orthodoxy alike. He also asserts first-hand observation as his evidentiary source for knowledge. This message to New Brunswick ends with a hint of feigned menace, adding the threat of a competitor group arising on Canada's opposite coast. Another applicant from the Vancouver area, who worked as a journalist for the *Vancouver Province* newspaper in the early 1970s, John Braddock[184] formally requested

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[183] Holder of many design patents, Ronka co-authored only one scholarly paper: "Five Years of Surveying with the Very Low Frequency-Electro Magnetics Method" (1971).

[184] Braddock had worked as managing editor of the *Atlantic Advocate* at least until 1968 (Kent 48). For it, he wrote on the 1968 Strax Affair at UNB in "Strife on Campus" (reproduced in *Student Power and the Canadian Campus*; see Kent on the Strax Affair [SP 122, note]). Braddock's sympathies with student and faculty protestors, rather than authorities like Alfred Baily or the institution's benefactors like K. C. Irving demonstrate the oppositional temperament that would draw him to FES. Present research has not determined the extent to which Nowlan or Ferrari became acquainted with Braddock prior to his westward relocation.

the right to launch a chapter of Canada's Flat Earth Society that would be headquartered in British Columbia. Despite this applicant's enthusiasms and the fact that Ferrari addressed him as FES "Commissioner General of the West Coast of Canada" in one letter, no western splinter group seems to have eventuated, neither as a force of expansion nor opposition (Letter to Braddock, Feb. 1972, LFF 2.1.6-1).

Saskatchewan's L. Main did not make reference to his vocation when he reached out in December 1974 and again in June of 1975, having grown impatient with the Society's silence. Like others before him, he complained about the leadership's slowness of response and asserted a regional claim in attesting to his qualifications.[185] "I'm beginning to think there is no Flat Earth Society," Main wrote in his second missive, continuing: "In a Round Earth Society, the president would have got round to answering a letter written to him on December 19th last. Sniff" (Letter to Ferrari, June 1975, LFF 2.1.12-1). His earlier letter opened with these words: "As you know, it isn't necessary to have been born in Saskatchewan to believe that the Earth is flat. But it sure helps" (19 Dec. 1974, LFF 2.1.12-1). So saying, Main repeats the theme found in humorous comments made by many inhabitants of Saskatchewan and Manitoba who applied to the Society. But Main goes further than most prairie residents by balancing an affirmation of regional qualities with a negative comment regarding central Canada as a place of undue economic dominance. Aside from his view of the flat lands that surrounded him, a secondary perspective that Main records runs as follows:

> In the West, rivers flow North. That is, they flow down to the sea but up the map. One can get a boggled mind trying to fathom that. If you're traveling West on the

[185] Another prairie resident, L. J. Conner encouraged FES heads to move to Russel, Manitoba, because "in [his] heart of hearts" he knew "that Russel Manitoba is very near the center of the earth's flatness and is […] quite safe" from dangers posed by the planetary edge (Letter to Ferrari, 26 Dec. 1972, ANP 40.12.6.81).

> Trans-Canada, there's a road sign West of Lake Superior that reads: "The Artic Watershed—from here, all rivers flow north."
>
> That natural barrier between Ontario and the West stops the rivers from flowing East, but it doesn't stop our money from draining into Toronto and Ottawa. (Letter to Ferrari, 19 Dec. 1974, LFF 2.1.12-1)

Given an expressed opposition to Toronto and Ottawa's economic influence over his region, being headquartered in New Brunswick might have advanced the Society's appeal for Main. "I'd sure be proud to be a member," he wrote, going on to say: "in return, I'd be happy to propose you as a charter member of the Society of Correction Liners, Gopher Holers and Downhill Skiers of Prairie Canada. There ought to be at least one East Coast believer, sight unseen" (LFF 2.1.12-1). The Society to which Main refers likely did not exist outside this letter. However, its title captures the whimsical spirit with which he engaged FES and codes a truly felt sentiment of confraternity.

Between them, Nowlan and Ferrari's archives contain several hundred application and follow-up letters from the 1970s and (though fewer) 1980s. The file of FES correspondence in Nowlan's archive is arranged chronologically and, for undated letters, alphabetically by correspondent. Ferrari's archive commits much more space to documenting the Society, than that of the Symposiarch, and has a more complicated arrangement. The *Leo C. Ferrari fonds* assigns queries and applications to files ranging from "Hope He Goes Away" (LFF 2.1.16) to "Publishables" (2.2.38). Thus, Ferrari's repository gives some insight into how the Society's leadership received them. "I'll Write You from Atlantis" concludes with discussion of three applicants whose missives are privileged as "Publishable" in Ferrari's archives, those sent by Howie and Joan Puckett of Lethbridge and one John C. Dawson of Vancouver.

A retired Staff Sargent of the US Marine Corps, Howie Puckett wrote to the Society from his residence in southern Alberta in 1977. His letter was sent ten years after his relocation to Lethbridge, where he gained a Bachelor of Arts degree and his educator's certification from the local university. That training allowed him to work providing "counselling service in the city" and as "a special Education teacher for several years" according to his obituary, one that pays tribute to his "special skills with children" ("Harold Cecil 'Howie' Puckett"). Only three years prior to his death from illness at age fifty-two, with playful humour and imagination, qualities that must have aided his work with young people, Puckett provided "Five Proofs of Flatulence" (scatological hot air). These rely on physiography deeply rooted to his regional setting. For him, flat landscapes around Lethbridge, "The Steppes of Alberta," provided "visible and concrete proof that the Earth is flat." Puckett also found a creative explanation for the appearance of "the alleged mountains to the West," which, according to this applicant, "are a mass hallucination advanced by the Lotus-Land peoples [British Columbians] who wish desperately to stop the migration of its Unemployables to Alberta" (4 Oct. 1977, LFF 2.2.38-2). Puckett invented planoterrestrial explanations for other alpine phenomena too. "In the North of Alberta," he wrote, "one can clearly see the desperate finger-gripping marks in the pre-Silurian rock formations." In these fossils, he sees "the futile graspings of an ancient race which tried—unsuccessfully—not to slide off the Edge as seen near Peace River" (LFF 2.2.38-2). Puckett makes explicit the benefits of exercising creativity. "Better a man stagger from a set of self-reasonable bundles of information to another," he writes, "than to become glued to the Stake of Universal Truths which will in time under a new Administration catch afire" (LFF 2.2.38-2). In other words, conforming to standard

viewpoints offers no security, because religious, scientific, and political attitudes inevitably evolve over time. Therefore, one could find themself suddenly on the wrong side of history, simply for having chosen a side.

Unlike that composed by her husband, Joan Puckett's application does not engage geography or humour. She focuses instead on her personal philosophy. She expands on the Society's first aim: renewing valuation of sensory experience. For her, "rejection of the senses" is "an embrace with nihilism, and a denial of life." She writes that the abstracting ideology Globularism produces "alienation," "anomie," "disassociation," and "irrationality," because no proponent of this belief system can "affirm any association with his life, his experiences, nor his fellows" (undated, LFF 2.2.38-2). This philosophy pervades FES discourse, but her letter shows a knack for expression that might have merited its canonization as a "Publishable" document as much as her underlying message. Puckett writes: "The belief that we live on an insignificant glob of astral rubbish, hurtling at breakneck speed through an expanding spatial keyhole on eternity, subjects our thought to the deadening conclusion that our lives and experiences aren't worth the two coppers we owe Charon, the boatkeeper" (LFF 2.2.38-2). She knew the Society sought to promote the planet's significance, expand the "spatial keyhole" of perception, and enhance the liveliness of existence. Mythological imagination is fundamental to that pursuit, hence Puckett's reference to Charon.

Implicit to J. Puckett's application is the idea that FES offered meaningful leadership and healing work. Elsewhere, she co-authored with her husband a letter-to-the-editor that sees historic/mystic versions of that societal role being relevant to modern-day therapists. She and her husband both held that position, so in other places and times they

would have been called “Hetman, Hauptmann, Witch doctor, Herbalist, Crone, Dreamer, or the like” (583). Their jointly signed letter to the editor of the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* from 1972 repeats sentiments J. Puckett wrote up for the Society. The former sees hysteria over “moral deviance” and an “embrace [of] Continental Existentialism” returning humankind to “antihistory,” “cut[ting] man away from his experiences” (583). The Pucketts defend the intervention of psychologists when problems arise, rather than Witch Doctors or Kanadian Flat Earthers. FES is a kind of affordable therapy, though: helping others record views of forces that harm or heal people who too often suffer “the lack of being touched, an inability to love or be loved […] and the loss of personal identity within present society” (583). J. Puckett’s writing to FES and her co-signed letter to the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* tend to focus on negative (“deadening”) rather than connecting forces. Even so, she calls for us to integrate our inner and public lives, to speak our problems aloud with others. Importantly, acceptance into a Flat Earth Society was one means of feeling accepted into society as a whole and not exclusively a way to stand out. Enlistment in this charming, goofy organization required individualistic expressions as a prerequisite. Therefore, FES belonging is tantamount to the worldview co-sponsored by Alberta’s Pucketts. They saw civilization as “a differentiated mosaic of individuals trying to maintain cohesion without absorption” (584).

A final application comes from John C. Dawson of Vancouver. He clears his throat “(Ahem)” before launching a disputation (undated, LFF 2.2.23-2). In some respects, he affirms principles others ably express. He writes that “in the complex technical world we have created it is a distressing fact that we have become excessively dependent upon specialist/expert/intellectuals to tell us what to believe and how to

conduct our lives" and, further, that "we are now specialized to such an extent that scientific 'logic' is frequently contradictory to what we can actually perceive." As evidence of the latter, Dawson provides the example that bumble bees cannot fly according to Physics (2.2.23-2; cf. Regius and Ikari [SP 325]). Dawson then gives a refreshingly unusual example of Globularism. A Kafkaesque situation symbolizes dehumanizing trends in his technological age. "A utility company computer" had sent him a print-out warning "that a zero bill must be paid by the overdue date or service [would] be discontinued" (2.2.23-2). Enclosed, no instructions whatever on how to pay a bill for zero dollars and zero cents. This instance of machine illogic threatens basic means of survival (heat, water, light). Seldom do expressions of technological dread find such specificity as this or hit so close to home. Dawson may have had already launched his career with BC Hydro when sending this letter, but he might not have risen to his eventual position as "Community Relations Manager" for that utility company, an achievement recorded in his 2014 obituary ("John C. Dawson"). Empathetic concern for humane treatment expressed in his letter would have aided Dawson in that work. His obituary also records his undergraduate education in Commerce at the University of British Columbia, completed in 1957 ("John C. Dawson"). Dawson leverages that knowledge to critique the proverbial expert's tendency to treat people as data points. He writes that "a statistical economist will solemnly inform us that it is quite possible that a man with his feet in a hot oven and his head in a freezer would, on the average, be quite comfortable" (2.2.23-2). Given these instances of "patently contradictory 'logic' of the specialist/expert/intellectuals" and machines, Dawson felt "that the Flat Earth Society of Canada has a vital role to play […by] in a dignified and civilized way help[ing] to restore

some of life's unity" and "putting personal perceptions and common sense back in their rightful place" (2.2.23-2). Letters sent to FES by the Pucketts of Lethbridge and Vancouver's Dawson are housed among the "Publishable" statements in Ferrari's papers, although none appear to have been used in official publications.

I hope that my sampling of uncommonly potent FES correspondence will inspire future pilgrimages to the archival sites that made the present study possible. Here, we learned that Nowlan wisely invited MacEwen's participation in the Society he based on a willfully wrong-headed belief. MacEwen then imported his ironic Maritime Flat Earthish-ism onto the shaky ground of her imaginative world and literary career. "I'll Write You from Atlantis" further showed that the creativity and eloquence exhibited by relatively anonymous people sometimes measures up to the words of celebrated poets, say a MacEwen or McFadden. Uncovering insightful and laughter-inducing expressions by members previously unknown to me proved a bitter-sweet pursuit. Because the Society's active period occurred in the newly historical 1970s, Internet searches for names of correspondents frequently turned up recent obituaries that give rare testimony to lives lived mostly out of public view. Some may glance at their FES scribblings and foolishly dismiss the authors as a deplorable lot of Flat Earthers. Now that all is said and done, one may not wish to identify as such but might think twice, at least, before using the term. That is my practical lesson from exposure to the material, the thinking, the poems. Unsorting Society records in my own way proved the only possible course for this scavenger to scramble across such steep terrain and into the half-light of understanding. Research in archival reading rooms felt strangely confusing and exciting, more so than in books or online. Some days it was a bit like being at a busy party on a

November night in a little place. No one's talking right to you for the moment. Then, you think you pick out some outrageous statement coming from the corner by the stereo system, where a man in square glasses flips through crates of records and laughs so loud at the ceiling that everyone can hear him. You squint at mostly illegible handwriting from across the smoky room. A woman blows in from the kitchen wearing a silly hat and holding three drinks. You strain to overhear amid the hubbub and merrymaking of people starting to feel quite rosy and quite doomed and so if not letting loose altogether, then just a touch.

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