

  
(1990-10-04)

ENDINGS AND CLOSURES: Reading and Re-reading  
Frank Davey's The Abbotsford Guide to India,  
Daphne Marlatt's Ana Historic  
and Michael Ondaatje's Coming Through Slaughter

by


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B.A., University of Victoria, 1988

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of English

We accept this thesis as conforming  
to the required standard




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ABSTRACT

In Frank Davey's The Abbotsford Guide to India, Daphne Marlatt's Ana Historic, and Michael Ondaatje's Coming Through Slaughter there is a tension between the works' endings and the texts' closure. That tension leads to re-reading of the books, thus deferring closure, then leading to further re-reading. Using the distinction between work and text as a basis for the difference between ending and closure, this thesis examines the problem of closure in these three texts.

The introduction establishes working definitions for the terms "work," "text," "ending," and "closure," clarifying how they will be used in this thesis. Generic complication also requires explanation, as it is one of the major factors leading to the deferral of closure in these texts. A discussion of the notion of gratification as it relates to generic indeterminacy and as it may be affected by the tension between endings and closures concludes the introduction.

Chapter one discusses Davey's Abbotsford Guide to India. Davey's main strategies for the deferral of closure are closely related to his political agenda in this book: he decentralizes literature, refuses to privilege one narrative line over another, and constantly questions the "authority" of the author. His speaking subject shifts, leaving the

reader confused and unsure of her ground. In this way, the reader is invited to re-read, often in order to clarify her own as well as Davey's position within the text. This re-reading defers closure.


Chapter two examines Daphne Marlatt's reconstruction of history in Ana Historic. Marlatt rejects a male-centred version of history and writes her own version, one in which women are the central figures. Marlatt's characters become writers as well, so that their stories echo hers, and the readers are invited into the process of constructing stories. By erasing temporal boundaries and allowing communication to move through time, Marlatt draws readers into her text and out of it. She recreates lives that were considered closed, denying death as closure and denying the restrictive boundaries of language. Marlatt allows women to choose their own endings, thus to deny closure.

Like Marlatt, Ondaatje too uses death to deny closure rather than to impose it. Chapter three examines Buddy Bolden's multiple deaths; death as a metaphor for closure in the text is undone because Buddy Bolden is resurrected over and over. Confusion about the speaking subject, generic complication and a list of acknowledgements that appears at the end of the book all contribute to the deferral of closure in Coming Through Slaughter.

The conclusion suggests that the lack of closure in these texts is both a cause and an effect of generic


indeterminacy. Finally, it discusses gratification as a unique result of the tension between endings and closures in The Abbotsford Guide to India, Ana Historic and Coming Through Slaughter.

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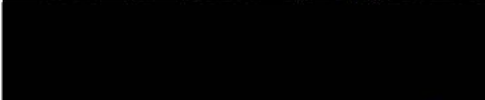
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the generous assistance and time that my thesis supervisor, Dr. Smaro Kamboureli, provided me with throughout this project.

I would also like to thank my family in Vancouver for practical assistance in the final stages of this thesis.

I wish to dedicate this thesis to one person who gave me moral support through all the time I was working towards my Master of Arts degree, and especially through the last few months of thesis preparation and writing--my husband, Andrew Liggett. Without his unending patience and encouragement this project might never have been completed.

## Introduction

### Endings and Closures

Frank Davey's Abbotsford Guide to India, Daphne Marlatt's Ana Historic and Michael Ondaatje's Coming Through Slaughter exemplify the conflict between endings and closures. Coupled with their generic complexity, this conflict raises expectations that the books' endings do not fulfil. The ending as the cessation of narrative marking the physical point where a work ends does not necessarily coincide with the structural and semantic closure or openness of the text. The conflict that is created when ending and closure do not coincide will be the focus of this thesis. Indeterminacy of meaning, common to postmodern texts, results in the lack of closure that exists in the these three texts.

In discussing the differences between literary endings and closures, it is important to draw a distinction between work and text. According to Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, the literary work is a finished product, a closed rhetorical construct, whereas text is process, a "signifying practice" (18). In this respect, while all works end in one way or another, closure may or may not occur with the ending of a work. I will be using the terms work and text to refer to two distinct concepts. Although they might refer to the same book, they cannot be used interchangeably. I take work

to refer to the combination of the narrative being told, how it is told, and the language and rhetorical devices used to construct it. The work, then, is the rhetorical structure that exists between two covers of the physical object we call the book, including all the rhetorical devices and strategies that an author may use.

A text, on the other hand, is more elusive and more difficult to define. The text encompasses the process of interaction between the reader and a work. It signifies a new set of meanings which are the result of the reading act, particularly the act of re-reading. In effect, the (re)reading act produces a text out of a work. Yet not all works become texts because readers are not always invited into interaction with a given work. It is the reader's level of involvement with a work, prompted by the work's structure and the authorial intention inscribed within it that determines whether a work is also a text or not. The Abbotsford Guide to India, Ana Historic and Coming Through Slaughter become texts through the writing process of their authors as well as my process of re-reading and continual analysis and reevaluation of them. The meaning derived from them throughout this thesis is not solely based in their rhetoric, but stems from my reading act and the way I recreate them as text through my interpretation of them.

The line between work and text is not a solid one because the two cannot be completely separated. Roland

Barthes explains:

The Text is not to be thought of as an object that can be computed. It would be futile to try to separate out materially works from texts....The difference is this: the work is a fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example), the Text is a methodological field...the work can be seen....The text is a process of demonstration (1977, 156-157).

Although I discuss work and text separately at times, it is assumed that one cannot exist in complete isolation from the other.

The distinction between work and text, then, is the basis for the distinction between ending and closure. Each work has an ending, a point beyond which there is no further narration, after which no more information is provided other than what can be gleaned from the words on the previous pages. Structurally, a work has an ending. However, as Kristeva says:

...the structural finitude...is not sufficient for the bounding of the author's discourse. Nothing in speech can put an end--except arbitrarily--to the infinite concatenation of loops (56).

Kristeva suggests that a structurally complete work, one in which the thematic loops close, need not necessarily close; its structural completeness is not the cause of closure. She continues to argue that "The real arresting act is performed by the appearance, within the novelistic utterance, of the very work that produces it, here, on the actual page" (56). The self-referentiality of the text to which Kristeva refers does not have to impose closure. That

the text recognizes the existence of the completed work within it is just a starting point, the groundwork for the interpretive dialogue between readers and texts, including that between the text and the inscribed reader that the author may become in her work.

A text may or may not offer closure; by the same token, closure may occur not simultaneously with the ending but some time after the ending. The point at which closure occurs is partly dependent on the reader, for closure may occur after the reader has resolved all the issues raised by her reading process and has disengaged herself from the text. Some readers demand satisfactory closure from a text; for those readers closure is determined also by the length of the reader's interaction with the text. By definition the text is created through the reader's active engagement with a work; therefore, it is difficult to imagine a situation where closure and ending would coincide exactly. In this, a text which a reader resolves and disengages from immediately upon reading its last word may not be a text at all, but instead may actually be treated as a work. The transition depends, in part, on whether or not the reader accepts the author's invitation to participate in the text's construction process.

We can, then, define closure as the point at which the reader's consideration of and engagement with the text's issues ceases. This is indeed the case with Davey's,

Marlatt's and Ondaatje's works: their closure as texts does not coincide with their endings as works.

Another aspect of closure becomes apparent through study of the psychology of narrators. In discussing Dostoevsky's Notes From Underground, for example, Gary Saul Morson agrees that it "ends in failure--a failure marked by his [Dostoevsky's] inability to reach either a logical or a formal conclusion" (10). Morson demonstrates that "stories that cannot be told" reflect the psychological condition of their narrators or the ideology informing their author's artistic vision. His analysis echoes that of Barbara Herrnstein Smith's discussion of the psychological element of closure which she refers to as gratification.

The presence or absence of gratification is important to the generic specificity or indeterminacy of a work. The problem of closure in Abbotsford Guide to India, Ana Historic and Coming Through Slaughter is partly due to their crossing over the borders of traditional generic forms. It is difficult to categorize them because often there is no single generic label that fits them. Alastair Fowler tells us that "the processes of generic recognition are in fact fundamental to the reading process" (Fowler 259). The reader needs parameters within which to operate. The authors I am studying have used elements of autobiography, the historical novel, diary and travelogue, each of which inherently raises certain expectations. When those

expectations are not met, our reading gratification is suspended. We are forced to search deeper for a frame of reference within which to read the text. The boundaries of the readers' expectations shift, and with each move the interpretive possibilities increase because the unexpected encourages re-evaluation. Morson talks about this ambivalence when he writes about "boundary works":

In what I shall refer to as boundary works, it is uncertain which of two mutually exclusive sets of conventions governs a work. When this kind of ambivalence obtains, it is possible to read the work according to different hermeneutic procedures and hence, all other things being equal, to derive contradictory interpretations (48).

The three works I am discussing all cross the boundaries of at least two genres, resulting in contradictory interpretations. Such contradictions within a reader's mind may lead the reader back into the text to try to clarify, to examine again, what might not have been contradictory or ambivalent if the generic classification of the work had been obvious.

Closure is deferred each time the reader analyzes the text further. When the ground upon which she builds her interpretation shifts, she tries to regain her stance by trying to assimilate the new material for reinterpretation.<sup>1</sup> As Herrnstein Smith says with regard to

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<sup>1</sup>In a section of Kinds of Literature called "Interpretation and Indeterminacy" (263-272), Fowler argues that there cannot be literary indeterminacy, by which he means "indeterminacy of overall meaning" (268). I am arguing that such indeterminacy is possible, particularly where generic

the gratification that occurs at the point of closure, "an experience is gratifying to the extent that those expectations that are aroused are also fulfilled" (3). Thus, when Marlatt's book undoes its traditional happy ending, or Ondaatje does not conclude Bolden's life but leaves him part way through his life, the reader's expectations are frustrated. The reader, then, re-reads in order to find further material that will enable her to reach some conclusions. Gratification is not provided by the author at an immediate level. When genre is indeterminate, many readings may be equally probable at the same time. The reader determines the probability of particular endings through her interpretation. The more generic complication there is, the more the text may remain open to new (contradictory) interpretations.

In many works where ending and closure do not coincide, re-reading is performed not only by readers outside the text, but also by the author. Davey, Marlatt and Ondaatje have written themselves into the texts, as both narrators and readers. Kristeva explains this paradox as the "inferential novelistic modality," in which mode "the function of the author/actor's enunciation therefore consists in binding his discourse to his readings, his

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indeterminacy persists throughout a work, and that such indeterminacy is in part what encourages the move from work to text. For Fowler's alternative opinion, see the whole chapter entitled "Genre in Interpretation" (256-276).

speech act to that of others" (45). The self-conscious author becomes both writer and reader, and as reader he interprets what he writes as do all readers. Kristeva also argues that:

Through this inferential gesture, the author refuses to be an objective "witness"--possessor of a truth he symbolizes by the word--in order to inscribe himself as reader or listener, structuring his text through and across a permutation of other utterances. He does not so much speak as decipher (46).

This is what Davey, Marlatt and Ondaatje do: they inscribe themselves as readers in order to decipher the very texts they produce.

In The Abbotsford Guide to India, Davey becomes a reader of other Canadian authors as well as of the landscape of India, a landscape created for us by the process of his writing it down. Similarly, Marlatt becomes a reader of her mother's life and her own, but she does so through the reading and writing of a diary that is not hers, but belongs to Ana, an historical figure whom she creates. Ondaatje, too, inscribes himself into his work as narrator/ writer doing research for the very book that we are reading; he also posits himself as the mirror of the protagonist with whom he identifies himself and merges by the end of Coming Through Slaughter. As readers of their own texts, and because of their own unwillingness to resolve all the issues they raise, these authors create texts that invite the readers to interpret them on more than one level. It is the

many layers of meaning and interpretation that these authors inscribe in their texts that defer closure.

Once a work becomes text, there is the question of whether or not it contains satisfactory closure. A structurally or thematically unresolved ending leads to re-reading, causing the work to become text. When the text does not close at the ending, then tension is created. In Davey's The Abbotsford Guide to India, Daphne Marlatt's Ana Historic and Michael Ondaatje's Coming Through Slaughter that tension is created when textual closure does not occur at the ending of the work, and re-reading is the result.

Herrnstein Smith reminds us that:

...the experience of tension is not necessarily unpleasant, but, on the contrary, may be itself a pleasure, especially if the promise of eventual resolution is secure (3).

However, she is talking about deferring closure through structural means that contain within them the promise of eventual closure. When the means used to defer closure do not contain that promise, the tension grows. A work may end before closure occurs, leaving the tension unresolved as in the case of The Abbotsford Guide to India, Ana Historic and Coming Through Slaughter. Analysis of the endings of these three texts will show how the tension is created, and how it may or may not be resolved.

Davey, Marlatt and Ondaatje all challenge traditional structures in their works. The deferral of closure is both the partial cause and partial result of generic

complication. These authors strip away many of the assumptions readers might bring to their works; they create texts that challenge ideas of superiority, that decentralize interpretive frameworks and that problematize the author's own assumptions. It is the challenge put forth by these authors that make The Abbotsford Guide to India, Ana Historic and Coming Through Slaughter so deserving of closer examination.

The Abbotsford Guide to India

Travel and Subjectivity

What the world needs is more autobiography, more  
rice & fewer lost rivers & sunburned camera crews.  
It needs more poems & crops without endings  
because we're all scared shitless of endings. &  
then what will you do? (56)

The Abbotsford Guide to India opens with a map of "Abbotsford: Hub of the Fraser Valley" with landmarks (stores, farms, etc.) indicated, and a map of India, with major cities marked on the facing page. The maps are followed by the title page, imprint page and a table of contents, after which the five sections of the book appear. Section I, "Abbotsford and India," lists "facts" about the two places, sometimes comparing them but mostly establishing a relationship between Abbotsford and India that exists only in the book. For example, "India is the centre of India & Abbotsford is the centre of the world" (3). Davey challenges the notion of centrality, leaving his readers with a totally subjective perspective. He makes it obvious that readers always approach texts subjectively. This strategy of pointing out what we as readers assume about reading and texts sets the parameters within which the rest of the text is constructed. It also lets the reader know right from the beginning that this is no ordinary travel guide, but is a guide to the reader's trip through the text.

This book does not promise to give objective information that will be of use to those planning a trip to India. Rather, it is offered to the reader as the personal perspective of a narrator who does not intend to privilege one place over another just to sound objective or proper, or simply in order to affirm larger historical and cultural assumptions about the world. Section II, "Preparing for India," includes lists of how to prepare for a trip to India, what to expect, and how to behave when one gets there. In the centre of the book is Section III, "Photographic India," a set of photographs of India. Section IV, "Off-Centre Cities: Some Views," contains beautiful descriptions of different cities in India, and, although it seems to be the thematic centre of the book, it is actually off-centre as the fourth of the book's five sections. Section V is called "Being a Tourist;" it contains a commentary on many disparate elements of India, Indian life, and deals with "Morning," "At Night," and everything in between. Throughout the book are comments that do not relate specifically to Abbotsford or India but seem to be part of different stories. The whole book brings together many disparate ideas, making it very difficult to determine what "fits" in the book and what does not.

Part of the reason for The Abbotsford Guide to India's resistance to closure is that it actually consists of various textual realities encoded within a single book. It

is a highly intertextual book, dense with stories, Davey's story and his stories of others, as well as narratives never presented in their entirety. Davey uses a mixture of material for this text, including his own previous work. He also pulls in works by other authors, but rewrites them into the context he creates through examining India and Abbotsford. He makes it apparent from the beginning--starting with the title--that the context of this work will be an unfamiliar one; indeed, throughout the book the reader feels that she is in unfamiliar territory. Davey's intertextual method allows him to provide us with some familiar material, but also encourages him to recontextualize it in order to make it unfamiliar as well. The feeling of displacement that the reader feels in this text makes interpretation difficult; agreeing upon any one interpretation, even within the mind of one reader, becomes unlikely. As a result, closure is deferred indefinitely. The reader lacks the firm base upon which to place the text--it constantly shifts ground, geographically as well as thematically. The reader must move with it, and as long as the text and reader keep moving in relation to each other, there can be no closure.

One of the frameworks within which the reader tries to base interpretation is the genre of a text. However, in this text that framework rests on shifting ground too. It contains poetry, prose, travel guide, autobiography, and a

sprinkling of other genres as well. The generic undecideability of the book contributes to the lack of closure; it encourages re-reading and re-thinking of the material.

Another factor keeping the text open is the problem of subjectivity and authority. Narrative indeterminacy and Davey's presence in the text as both a reader and a writer also make interpretation difficult and defer closure, for the parameters of the text are and remain uncertain. The fear of ending is also a prominent factor in the problem of generic undecideability. All these factors, namely generic indeterminacy, fear of endings, narrative complexity, and intertextuality, contribute to the tension that is created when the ending of the work and the closure of the text do not coincide.

It is impossible to say what the primary and secondary narrative lines are in The Abbotsford Guide to India because the narrative consists of many tangled levels. Fred Wah suggests that the book "really is a travel guide, complete with photographs (there is an outstanding photo on the cover) taken by the author on a trip to the subcontinent several years ago. But it is also an engaging and expert writing event" (34). The structure of the travel guide is certainly present throughout the book, as the narrative takes us through the preparatory stages of a trip to India, then from town to town. However, the "writing event"

quickly becomes the book's most obvious feature. Davey is self-conscious of writing throughout The Abbotsford Guide to India; in fact, his process of writing is foregrounded as the book's focus when its language becomes metafictional in places.<sup>2</sup> Stephen Scobie explains that "Davey is...explicitly aware of the dimension of writing that controls this meeting [between a poetic sensibility and a large mass of factual material], that is in fact (!) the medium in which the meeting takes place" (The Malahat Review, 105). Scobie's comment recognizes the foregrounding of the writing process that occurs in The Abbotsford Guide. The focus on the writing process puts the content under scrutiny, as the language comments on itself, and therefore on what it enunciates. As a result, our assumptions are questioned; we have to be open and receptive in order to understand what Davey is saying instead of what we expect him to say, an expectation partly derived by the generic markers in the text.

The book could still be seen as a travelogue, though a very self-consciously written one, except that other factors come into play to undermine this assumption. The question of whether the book is a long poem, for instance, is a valid

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<sup>2</sup>Self-conscious and self-reflexive are the terms that Linda Hutcheon uses in The Canadian Postmodern to explain "the postmodern." She says that the term "would seem to designate art forms that are fundamentally self-reflexive--in other words, art that is self-consciously art (or artifice)" (1). Davey's writing does contain within it the awareness of what it is saying, and of the forms in which it is presented.

one for a reader wondering how to deal with the structure of the book, which combines long and short sections, a section of photographs, "fact" lists, and lyrical descriptions of settings. The contemporary long poem in Canada, especially the documentary poem, has the ability to combine different styles and media effectively. In the Abbotsford Guide there are photographs, prose passages and lyrical passages all mixed together. The photos in the central section of the book also complicate the genre. On their own they could be a photographic essay, or, spread throughout the work in appropriate places, they would complement the travel guide the title promises. However, they appear all together in the centre of the book with captions that imitate labels in a personal photo album, such as "City Palace, Udaipur, viewed from Irving Layton's terrace in the Lake Palace Hotel (17th century)" (37). This placement leads the reader to wonder how she is supposed to integrate the photographs with the writing. If they cannot be integrated, but insist on lying outside the work, then the cohesiveness of the book is destroyed, resulting in a text that defers closure. The text, including the photographs, cannot be contained by the boundaries of the work. Instead, it spills over into that which is outside the work. When the text refers outside of itself with photographs that do not fit within, it resists closure. At this point, the travel guide structure collapses, because a travel guide contains within it the

implication of a completed trip, one that is determined by the instructions and information provided. The text of The Abbotsford Guide cannot be contained, either within the context of a trip or within its own boundaries.

Generic complication occurs also at the linguistic level of the writing. Close examination of the grammar and syntax of the book and a look at some of the earlier scenes demonstrate how generic complication further contributes to the text's deferral of closure. The first section of the book, called "Abbotsford and India," is a list of "factual" statements which are informative, authoritative, declarative, and there presumably to locate the reader/traveller on familiar territory before turning her loose in a strange land. The travelogue begins with "general information." This first section raises problems only if the reader notices the occasional lyrical passage tucked in among the instructions. The lyricism of lines such as "In winter many ice lingams hang from eavestroughs in Abbotsford " (4) disrupts the cohesiveness of the travel guide genre. Section II, "Preparing for India," lists a series of imperative sentences (with some declarative sprinkled throughout) including "What to Take," "Documents," "Baggage," "Your Flight," "Statistics" and a long list of other passages of advice for the first-time traveller to India. The structure of the language and the syntax of the statements so far indicate a travel guide. However, hidden

beneath that shell are signs of many other genres.

Intertextuality asserts itself in the occasional literary commentary. In the midst of a discussion on how to treat porters and watch one's baggage, the narrative interrupts itself with the following statement: "Everywhere in George Ryga's plays we witness the overdetermination of the specular, the patriarchal insistence on symbol & reference, that dooms women like Rita Joe to silent destruction." Then the narrative continues, instructing us to "Travel light."

(11) The reference to Rita Joe can be seen as a metaphor for The Abbotsford Guide; her cultural displacement reflects the reader's journey through the book. At the level of narrative syntax, though, Rita Joe's story has an interruptive function. Interruption is another method of deferring closure because a story that gets interrupted threatens to remain incomplete; one must return to it in order to find the end. Also under the guise of travel information hide comments denoting a feminist ideology (14), medical advice (18), and contradictory statements on various subjects throughout all sections. All these generic and narrative interferences remove the reader from the narratives presented earlier so that no one narrative can dominate. It becomes impossible to determine what constitutes the primary narrative and what are interruptions. All aspects of the narrative eventually become equally important to an understanding of the book.

The reader is distracted from the "travel guide" she is reading, and a new range of possibilities for the story's direction and conclusion is opened.

The last section of the book opens up even the geographic limits of the work. "The Himalayas remind the Canadian tourist of the Rockies....The Himalayas remind the French tourist of the Alps." (87) No longer is the book only about Abbotsford and India, but stretches to accommodate the homeland of the other tourists in India. The subjectivity of the travel experience is applied with difference to tourists of different cultural and national backgrounds.

Generic complication occurs right through to the end of the book. In "Spirituality" the text examines the issue of writing itself. We read, "Tourism can never be more than rhetoric & device." (90) Is the text taking on a sociological analysis of "tourism," or is it speaking about the inadequacy of representational language by comparing it to the inadequacy of the tourist experience in understanding a new location? Either way, it is yet another move into a new generic field. It further opens the text for re-examination and a re-reading of the language used.

The most interesting generic complication, however, particularly in relation to the lack of closure of the text, is the presence of autobiographical elements. Davey refers to himself by name in the text, mentioning his life in

Abbotsford. These references to himself both in Abbotsford and in India also contribute to the text's lack of closure. James Olney tells us that "no autobiography as conceived of in a traditional, common-sense way can possess wholeness because by definition the end of the story cannot be told, the bios must remain incomplete" ("Autobiography and the Cultural Moment" 25). The Abbotsford Guide is certainly not autobiography "conceived of in a traditional, common-sense way." A closer look at the meaning of the word "autobiography," however, will show that the necessary incompleteness is still applicable to this text because of the autobiographical elements that it does contain.

Olney breaks down "autobiography" into its three components, the autos, the bios and the graphe, defining autos as a self or himself, bios as life or a life, and graphe as the act of writing. He then asks:

What do we mean by the self, or himself (autos)? What do we mean by life (bios)? What significance do we impute to the act of writing (graphe)--what is the significance and the effect of transforming life, or a life, into a text? ("Autobiography and the Cultural Moment" 6)

In The Abbotsford Guide to India all three components of autobiography are present to some degree, although they are not carried throughout the whole book. The autos is only introduced near the end of the book, but the reader assumes throughout that it is the voice of the self or the autos that is speaking. Perhaps this assumption is influenced by the conversational tone of the writing, most of which is

directed at a "you," which implies the presence of an "I" and gives the reader the impression of the presence of the autos. The book contains a short excerpt from a bios-- Davey's life. Although it does not span the greater part of his life, it does encompass an important experience, namely his trip to India and how it affects him. Finally, the graphe is apparent by the very fact that we can pick up the book and read the words on its pages; they continue to communicate despite the absence of their author.

In the autobiographical mode, the "I" is not only "confirmed in the function of permanent subject by the presence of its correlative 'you,'" (Starobinski 77) but also "furnishes a subject for a narrative discourse in which 'I' is both subject and object" (Starobinski 78). The I/you split and the conjunction of subject and object in the "I" clearly indicate a story being told by a person, about that same person, to a second unnamed person--a story whose end can never be told because the telling of the story is as much a part of the story as what is being told. In other words, the subject who speaks is also the subject spoken, and as soon as the two are separated (as soon as the speaker stops speaking) the autobiography ends, although it remains unfinished and unclosed. The unspoken end in autobiography must be death, and it is because of the subject's death that the end can never be spoken.

Perhaps it is recognition of this necessary end to an

autobiographical narrative that leads Davey to say:

What the world needs is more autobiography, more  
rice & fewer lost rivers & sunburned camera crews.  
It needs more poems & crops without endings  
because we're all scared shitless of endings. &  
then what will you do? (56)

The fear of ending makes sense when it is related to  
autobiographical writing; that fear is realized in The  
Abbotsford Guide by the lack of closure of the text even as  
the work reaches its end.

Autobiography poses yet another problem in Davey's  
book, that of authority. The speaking subject, "I," is  
assumed to have some authority over his material since "the  
artist and the model coincide" (Gusdorf 31)--the subject  
matter is his own life. Starobinski lists some conditions  
for autobiography, suggesting:

the personal experience be important, that it  
offer an opportunity for a sincere relation with  
someone else. These presuppositions establish the  
legitimacy of the 'I' and authorize the subject of  
discourse to take his past existence as theme.  
Moreover, the 'I' is confirmed in the function of  
permanent subject by the presence of its  
correlative 'you,' giving clear motivation to the  
discourse (77).

In The Abbotsford Guide we are explicitly asked to question  
the authority of what we are reading when we read that "The  
relationship between texts is not to be assumed as given"  
(88). It is in the textual gaps where the "I" questions  
the legitimacy and the authority of the story that the text  
is further opened. When the motivation for the discourse is  
not clear, the end towards which the narrative is moving

loses its visibility to the readers; when the end of the book does arrive, it does not seem satisfactory or justified. In other words, there is no closure because no legitimacy or motivation has been provided from within the text.

Besides his implicit autobiographical presence, Davey also writes himself directly into his text as subject through the use of his initials. We read, "& so here's me, old F.D. of Abbotsford, British Columbia, standing right where Buddha diffidently raised his pudgy hands & preached his first sermon" (70). He writes himself also into India, into the landscape and into the events of the place. In this section F.D. does seem willing to be the subject and authority of the discourse. Davey becomes submerged in his writing, textualized to the extent that even his signature, "F.D.," disappears: he becomes part of the writing, implicated in it by it. He writes, "I am here, that is, these words are here" (72, my emphasis). The equation, counterpoised on the phrase "that is", becomes "I am...these words." Davey becomes the words he writes; his signature is totally absorbed by his text. The problem of closure here is apparent, as Scobie's explanation of signature demonstrates:

The place of the signature is that it has no place in which to take place: it plays between the inside and the outside, between the text and the intertext, between the author and the name. The signature identifies, and the signature puts identity en jeu (in play/ at risk). It is in the

signature that the name (as un nom de mort) lives on, and the name lives on the signature. The signature comes at the end, as closure, but the signature always comes back, revenant, as a performative name. The signature is a sign that never ends (Signature 113).

The signature represents, takes the place of and displaces the person whose name it is, so that even though F.D. is written into his text he is present only as text, not as Frank Davey--the living being who is again displaced by my use of his name--but only as his signature. In the end, the reader can be pulled right out of the text by the signature, in a vain attempt to get at the man behind the signature. Because the signature is a sign that never ends, the closure of the text is forever deferred. Jacques Derrida explains in Signeponge/Signsponge: "The drama that activates and constructs every signature is this insistent, unwearying, potentially infinite repetition of something that remains, every time, irreplaceable" (56). The person whom the signature replaces can never be present, yet it is the person behind the signature who communicates, and witnesses that communication. He represents that act of witnessing by his signature.<sup>3</sup>

The narrative of The Abbotsford Guide to India moves through a few other stages before it reaches the "I." It moves from "you" to "he" and back to "you," causing

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<sup>3</sup>See also Derrida's explanation of the "supplement" in of Grammatology (144-145) since he calls the signature a supplement.

difficulty in attributing the writing to an author or to a specific subject. Scobie tells us that:

To include both the third and the first person in the same text is to admit the split self, and also to invite further splitting (for the 'I' remains doubled within itself) ad infinitum, beyond any possibility of closure, beyond any supposed control of the author (Signature 149).

Davey writes in the first, second and third persons, relinquishing control and responsibility. He textualizes not only himself, but also the second person, the "you," the reader. Davey expands this technique, and adds later "revise yourself" (84). As long as each reader takes that responsibility for revision from Davey, the possibilities for the direction of the text and the final location of its closure are limitless. The text never remains the same because the readers reconstruct it every time they read it. It becomes apparent at this point why it is impossible to locate such an ever-changing phenomenon into one generic or interpretive category.

Davey's decision to write himself into The Abbotsford Guide, after attempts to write in different modes and in different speaking voices, becomes even more interesting, especially if seen in the context of some of his own criticism. In a 1979 interview by George Bowering, Davey criticized the personal distance he had kept from his earlier poetry and thought that he should allow himself to enter his poems more subjectively. In The Abbotsford Guide he manages to write himself clearly into his text; he also

gives up the control and perceived objectivity that a less obvious presence in his writing may have allowed him. The result is an actual loss of authority. He can now only attempt authority in the instructions:

While the engine cools, photograph whatever is at hand: a small tree, a nondescript building, a passing truck -- later these will be your favourite photographs (20).

However, the parameters set up at the beginning of the book should have been a warning that the work would not attempt to be factual. In case the warning was missed, the later presence of the author in his work is an obvious clue to the subjective (and non-authoritative) basis for the writing. The unwillingness of the author to even attempt or pretend to be an authority on his own material leaves the reader in a difficult position vis-a-vis interpretation. The parameters or limits that Wolfgang Iser believes exist in a work disappear when the reader cannot accept the material that is there as defining what surrounds the gaps. The text resists closure because the interpretive field is undefined--it is dependent on the reader who will have to read the text many times in her attempt to create limits that will facilitate resolution. Because of the never-ending nature of certain signs in the text (the most obvious example now being the signature, F.D.), the field can be narrowed but not closed, leaving the text perpetually open.

The interpretive problem of the book is further complicated by the narrative techniques used to tell the

story. The writing interrupts and contradicts itself. In Reading Canadian Reading Davey suggests that writing always contains at the margins "contrary or contradictory assumptions" (7). In Section II of The Abbotsford Guide Davey brings these assumptions in from their marginalized positions and foregrounds them. That the narrative is self-contradictory poses an obvious problem to those readers who might try to narrow the interpretive field to one exclusive possibility. The tendency of the narrative to interrupt itself, however, poses a more interesting problem. An example can be found in the section called "Photography":

A scooter-rickshaw must stop for ten minutes on the hill from Jaipur to Nalagarh Fort to cool its engine. Take tea at the Rambagh Palace Hotel. If an Indian appears unhappy about being photographed, offer a small tip. The best scooter-rickshaw wallah in Jaipur is Lala Das. Tourist are forbidden to sell currency or imported personal items. While the engine cools, photograph whatever is at hand...(20).

The first and last sentences fit together as part of the same story, but what comes between belongs to a different time and place, a different story. This kind of self-interruption inhibits efforts to determine which is the primary and which is the secondary narrative. It is this very difficulty which makes it impossible to summarize the story in The Abbotsford Guide. This resistance to summation and to a hierarchy of importance or significance of events is another way in which the book remains open, cannot and does not close.

Davey refuses to help the reader choose which strands of narrative to follow. He comments in an interview, "there in my writing is probably the least strain to put interpretation upon reality, to give any kind of leads to people as to where those words should point to" (Starting 123). However, in The Abbotsford Guide, Davey offers within his book some directions to the readers on how not to read the writing. As narrator, he warns us that "It's a story, as has been said elsewhere, with 'lots of possibilities'" (63). We are not meant to try to fit the story into a mold that allows only one interpretation. Later, he warns the readers again, as if speaking from a more knowledgeable point of view (in a voice of authority), "The relationship between texts is not to be assumed as given" (88). Davey offers justification for this kind of authoritative voice in some of his recent critical writing. He says in Reading Canadian Reading:

It is 'understandable', one might say, that each text should offer its constructions as forcefully as it can, since each is involved in the linguistic struggle of groups or regions for power and authority within the country. One should not, however, mistake force for truth-value, for there can be no absolute value in such matters, only ideological positions that are relative to the interests of those who hold them, positions that operate as value only within those parts of society in which they receive at least conscious assent (7, my emphasis).

Davey reminds us here that the authority of the voice is simply a construction along with the rest of the poetry; to heed Davey's warning, that force is not the same as truth-

value. The readers are utterly on their own as far as determining what is important, and what is less important, what is primary and secondary narrative, and what, if anything, is to be believed as truth. Depending on which narrative line a reader chooses as the dominant one, the story differs. To achieve closure, the endings of all the narrative lines would have to either occur simultaneously or be related thematically and structurally. In The Abbotsford Guide neither of these criteria is fulfilled: closure remains untenable.

So far we have encountered Davey as both the writer and the written in his book. We have seen how the problem of lack of closure is aggravated by Davey the writer. Yet another difficulty emerges when we encounter Davey the reader. In Reading Canadian Reading Davey re-reads what he has written in several previously published books and essays, thus reconstructing for himself a meaning that he was not necessarily aware of during the original act of writing those books and essays. In other words, as a reader of his own texts, Davey is faced with the same problems of reinterpretation that other readers of his texts encounter. He refers to the new construction and creation of meaning when he discusses his previously published book From There to Here:

From inside it could be mistaken (I myself seem frequently to have so mistaken it while writing it) as--in the word of several reviewers-- 'authoritative'. As I see the book now, it fails

(Reading 48).

The failure of the book, as Davey sees it now, calls into question the authority of the author of From There to Here, the same man who is now re-reading it. Obviously, if Davey had thought at the time of writing that the book failed, it would probably not have been published in its present form. He refers also to the failure of the text to present the authoritative and final version of literary analysis. It is likely, then, that Davey has changed his interpretation of the book now that he is a reader of it, with a unique reader's perspective. If he can reinterpret work of which he was the author when he becomes a reader, how can authority rest in an author?

Perhaps it cannot; perhaps that authority over the text lies in the reader. Once the work has left the author's hands, he relinquishes his writer's authority over it. Robert Crosman, in trying to determine the source of meaning, tells us that "it is clear who is making the meanings--the reader, whether he be the author himself or anyone else" ("Do Readers" 154). He explains later in his essay, "Do authors make meaning? Yes, of course they do, in exactly the same way that we all make meaning: as interpreters, as readers" (162). Because meaning comes from the reading act, the reader becomes the authority behind the writing. In fact this transfer of authority is crucial to the creation of the text; the transformation from work to

text depends upon it. When the readers cannot share a common interpretation or cannot even settle themselves on one interpretation, then the text remains open. Even if the author did offer a "definitive" interpretation, it could not be any more "authoritative" than another reader's interpretation. Davey is obviously aware of this; in Reading Canadian Reading he writes:

..."what a text says," as an ongoing production of language and culture, is necessarily different from "what an author says." The "author" is only one of a text's authors, and is the first of these to cease to contribute to its production of meaning (32).

The readers "write" the text as much as the author, and they continue to "write" the text after the author has ceased to do so, until he too must become a reader if he wants to re-write his text. This interpretive activity whereby the writer becomes reader and the reader becomes writer operates against the singularity of closure.

Another problem for closure in The Abbotsford Guide to India lies in the appropriation of narrative that occurs within the text and through intertextuality. In the section called "Fatehpur Sikri (A Pilgrim for Salim Chisti)" there is a question about whose narrative it is:

Whose story? Some wife's story. Some wife who must get knocked up so her husband & in-laws do not despise & beat her. The books don't show her name. Yes they do, in a footnote. The name is Jodh Bai. The husband's name always shows. He was an emperor. The baby shows. Akbar the Emperor got an heir. Akbar thought it was his story. He built a city to tell the story. In 5 years built 3 acres of palaces in the village

where the wise man Salim Chisti fixed up Jodh Bai's story. The baby Jehangir's story. Fatehpur's story. He left the city in 14 years when the water went bad, or when he got tired of Jodh Bai, or tired of Fatehpur, or tired of pilgrim women come to ask old Salim to tell them a story (58).

The issue of whose story is being told and who appropriates that story is critical to The Abbotsford Guide and to its lack of closure. If this is Frank Davey's story, the reader is invited to question how much of it he has fictionalized. But if the reader claims it as her story, her appropriation of it is bound to affect both its interpretive possibilities and the possibility of closure. Each time the story is appropriated it is changed, and closure is again deferred. In the above passage, Akbar built a city to tell the story. What story? Whose story? We may read the story of Akbar's city. We may even try to appropriate it by taking photographs to take home and tell our "own" story about them; but the moment we begin fragmenting or reshaping Akbar's story it changes, it is stretched out. It does not end with Akbar any more. It ends instead with whoever appropriates Akbar's story; it becomes a different story. The question of "what story" it becomes remains necessarily unanswerable. As long as the story is there, it can be taken and changed and reinterpreted.

After we go to see Akbar's city in order to find out what story Davey is talking about, we are faced with the question of "whose story?" Is it now Davey's story because

he has written it into a book? The story says: some wife must get knocked up, Akbar builds a city, Fatehpur leaves the city, Davey writes an essay.... Whose story is this? Eventually it becomes F.D.'s story, when F.D. becomes a character in the book.

As another character in the book, the elephant too has a story: "Each day the elephant re-invents himself....You are so big! he, or is it you, says, as he watches himself begin variously to move" (79). The very fact that the elephant performs a habitual action "each day" problematizes not only the notion of closure but also the ending of the work. This story cannot end because the elephant re-invents himself each day. As long as this happens the story is not over. This is further complicated because the peacock also speaks in this section. And in "Cobras" the story of the dancing bear is told along with that of the cobra. Again, whose story is this? What constitutes the story?

The narrative's hesitancy, however, when it asks "or is it you" rather than "he," gives the best direction as to whose story this is. Most often it is the reader's story, the reader who appropriates the story and reconstitutes the text. As long as readers appropriate and re-write stories (as Davey did with his earlier work From There to Here), the texts constructed by that appropriation remain open.

Sprinkled throughout the section called "Gardens," we read "I loved you," & would have gone on loving you even

after the train to Chandrapur." Then, "I saw your sweet suntanned face in the faces of a hundred Indian crowds; I was both happy & unhappy" (85). The story also becomes that of the textualized "you" in these passages, F.D.'s travel companion. The introduction of another character in the writing in this last section opens up all the earlier writing in the book to re-examination. This section contains the first explicit references to a companion. This unexpected reference to yet another character in the book invites the reader to search for earlier hints or references to her in the writing, and to re-examine earlier scenes and events with the new knowledge that Davey might have been accompanied by someone on any of these explorations. He might not have been by himself or with only an Indian guide as assumed. New analyses may be undertaken, new conclusions about the authority of the speaking voice may be reached, depending on how interested the reader is in this altered premise for many of their critical assumptions. As the work is read again, new details emerge that again shift the premises of the story, and re-reading is again required. The perpetual nature of the solution only emphasizes the nature of the problem, that this is a text that will not close.

Re-reading The Abbotsford Guide to India results in re-writing the text of the book, since the text is the result of the interaction between the work and its readers. The

re-written story then requires re-reading and the cycle of the constitution of meaning continues. The reader's story is different every time the reader re-invents it by another new approach to the book. The ending of The Abbotsford Guide poses a problem because its narrative threads lack a hierarchical structure and a linear direction, and the speaking voice lacks motivation and divests itself of authority. Still, Davey attempts to give his readers an ending that is broad enough, in practical terms, to conclude all of the stories.

The final section (before the credits, which follow the ending of the story) is called "At Times." It lists a series of questions that "you" should ask "yourself." It makes suggestions and then denies them by replacing them with different ideas such as "Ask yourself how hot it is. No, ask yourself about humanity" (102). Here we read about idealism, philosophy, places in Abbotsford, the heat in India and splendour and insignificance. The last section ends with, "Tell yourself you've come to India & deserve a spiritual experience" (102). The vagueness of many of the statements and suggestions in this section could be applied to most of what we read earlier in the text. These statements propose their own ending for the book. Even though the references to places in Abbotsford indicate that the speaker's trip has ended, the repetitive mentions of heat in the phrase, "Ask yourself how hot it is...Consider

how hot it is...consider how hot it is" (102) make the reader feel that the writing is still very much located in India. The reader is left suspended between Abbotsford and India.

The final sentence of The Abbotsford Guide to India does not really clarify in which story the reader is at the physical end of the book. The tense of the verb suggests that the reader is still in India, but in the rest of this section the reader is drawn also to the Fraser valley. This displacement of the reader and of the text is partly what creates the tension between ending and closure. If stretched, the ending could account for all the narrative lines. However, the reader's displacement at the ending defers closure, and since this is the end of the work, the closure of the text is deferred right past the end, in fact does not occur within the text at all. The reader is left with a feeling that perhaps she missed an important point earlier that would have justified the given ending in a more concrete way. It is this uneasiness and dissatisfaction with the ending that leads the reader into re-reading. The process of re-reading is the result of the deferral of closure.

As we have seen, the tension that occurs between ending and closure in The Abbotsford Guide to India results from generic indeterminacy, problems with narrative authority and subjectivity, narrative complication and, finally, Davey's

presence as writer, written and reader in this book. The intertextuality of the book also contributes to the difficulty of applying one fixed interpretation. All these tensions lead to the book's further deferral of closure. The Abbotsford Guide to India is a text that invites its readers to further read, and re-read it.

Frank Davey creates a text that questions our notions of authority and centrality in order to make us aware of our reading process. The writing process as a focus of the text draws attention to both what is said and how it is said. For readers, this means that assumptions are challenged and more analysis is required to understand just what Davey is saying. He does not privilege one place over another; he refuses to make one narrative primary and others secondary. It is up to the readers to determine what exactly The Abbotsford Guide to India is a guide to, since it is not just India. The end of the book leaves us in Vancouver, not India. We have arrived, it seems, more at the beginning of a journey than the end of one. The text begins anew.

Ana Historic

## Rereading and Reconstructing History

if they could speak  
an unconditioned language  
what would they say? (75)

While Davey's book focuses on the decentring of its narrative and questioning of his authority, Marlatt's approaches the problem of historical male-centred narratives. Her feminist approach to history in Ana Historic raises different questions about closure.

Although her first novel, Ana Historic is, interestingly enough, also a deconstruction of the novel. The narrative

> interrupts itself, as Marlatt intersperses one story with another without making an attempt to create a linear structure.

Within the novel, Marlatt tells us that "a book

> of interruptions is not a novel" (37); yet the full title is

Ana Historic: A novel. Ana Historic resists closure--from

its opening question, "Who's There?" to its ending, "it isn't dark but the luxury of being has woken you, the reach of your desire, reading us into the page ahead." The book

begins with a question about identity, and ends with a

> question too, a question about what lies in the pages ahead,

the unwritten pages, the pages that history and her story do not yet inhabit. Ana Historic is a book about spaces

waiting to be filled, but trying to remain open.

open  
vs closed  
(lits, etc)

if end  
isn't  
an  
end

Two of the women that inhabit the novel are Annie, a writer living in North Vancouver in the 1980s, and Mrs. Richards, "appointed teacher for the second term of the mill school's first year. a widow, they said (a safe bet)," who arrived at Hastings Mill from Britain in 1873 (15). Annie discovers a reference to Mrs. Richards in the archives while doing research there for her husband, a history professor. The story of the two women becomes entangled as Annie tires of being her husband Richard's research assistant and decides instead to write a book about Mrs. Richards. Annie names her Ana, not a real name at all but a prefix, meaning something that comes before. As a prefix "ana" denotes "without," or "lack," thus referring to the lack of history written about Mrs. Richards. Annie writes the story of Ana Richards by imagining the "ahistoric" (30). She invents for Ana a diary and letters to Ana's father, imagining what Ana's impressions of the wild new territory around her must have been. She gets carried past the archives by her imagination. She says to herself, "now Annie, now you're indulging in outright speculation. this isn't history, it's pure invention" (55). In the absence of "real," conclusive history about Ana, Annie creates a possible history for her, explaining why she left Britain to come to the wilderness of Canada, what she left behind, and what lay ahead for her. The answers that are lacking in the brief archival reference to her are provided by Annie in the book she is writing--the

she's  
writing!

no, Ina  
says  
this

book that becomes Ana Historic. The diary and the invented story of Ana Richards fill the gap in the historical data available. All Annie knows for certain is that Mrs. Richards arrived as the second term school teacher, bought a piano, and married Mr. Ben Springer. Even within these few pieces of information available about Mrs. Richards there are contradictions suggesting alternative endings to her career. Annie concludes that "in actual fact, Ana Richards...fades into the northern shoreline of Burrard Inlet as Mrs. Springer of Moodyville, of whom we hear nothing more" (39). The paradox here is that it is the actuality of documented material about Mrs. Richards that renders her story inconclusive, and Ana Historic a novel without closure.

So little is recorded about the women that lived in Hastings Mill that Annie takes upon herself the task of further filling in the gaps in the story of Mrs. Richards. While trying to understand the experience that Ana must have had as an immigrant, Annie also remembers what happened to her own mother, Ina. Ina immigrated to Canada in the 1950s and suffered from depression and claustrophobia because she had just come from Malaysia where she had an open house, tropical climate, and servants to do everything for her. Annie discovers Ana soon after her mother's death. At the same time that Annie is reconstructing Ana's unwritten life, she is also carrying on a series of dialogues with her dead

mother, trying to understand how trapped she felt, how closed her life became when she moved to the North Shore of Vancouver. She recognizes that Ina was "walled in in the dark of the coast" (64). Annie tries to re-open the lives of both Ana and Ina. She tries to recreate their lives as they might have been, but she also attempts to offer alternatives, to remove the enclosures that trapped them. For Ina, it was the rain, the house, and the new culture that caused her entrapment. For Ana, it was the Victorian moral codes that did not allow her to live the life Annie now imagines for her. Instead, she was cast in the role of widow (although it is likely she was not really a widow, but just a single woman who wanted to escape from her father), and constricted by the role of teacher and woman in a man's world, a mill town. The conflict between these characters' historical entrapment (a kind of psychological closure) and Annie's re-visioning of their limited lives contributes to the novel's resistance to closure. In fact, Annie sees closure as a series of social, sexual and psychological strictures imposed on women by patriarchal history.

Walls  
create  
openness

Another major character in the novel is Zoe, "a visual artist of some kind" (59). Annie meets Zoe at the archives, and the two become friends and often get together in a cappuccino bar. Zoe listens to Annie read from the novel she is writing (a novel about Ana), and gives her advice about how to let it progress. Usually, Zoe's advice is to let the

characters live and choose their own paths. She tells Annie not to restrict them, and eventually convinces Annie that she cannot own the characters, that she does not have to control them. She teaches Annie to let go of the control, to stop cutting off possibilities and to let the characters open up their lives in a way that they were not able to do in nineteenth-century Vancouver. In effect, Zoe tells Annie to be wary of closures. Together, Ana, Annie and Zoe live a story that begins over and over again. Ana Historic opens with Annie's story presented to us in the first person, but it grows also to become a novel about Ana's story, with Zoe always living at the periphery. Annie's life follows the stories she creates. Her fictions allow her the same choices they offer to her characters; she creates new possibilities and new life for herself by inventing, strangely enough, a new life for Ana. Throughout the novel Annie moves closer and closer to being able to fully live her stories. Her fiction permeates her reality. \* \*

Fictionalizing reality is only one way that Ana Historic resists closure; there are many. One method is its use of historical and archival material. Laurie Ricou says:

She [Marlatt] is a profoundly historically-minded writer. But she is quite uninterested in traditional history, that is in a written history of political decisions, economic movements, dates, technological discoveries and pivotal battles--all mostly male. She is interested in word of mouth and in what has been and is heard. And she is especially interested in the history of the language (208). \* \*

Marlatt rejects traditional history as a closed form, a form that presents "fact" as something that can be defined and remain unchanged. She asks, "what is fact? (f)act. the f stop act. a still photo in the ongoing cinerama" (31). Fact cannot fully explain a world that is in flux, a world whose events can only be interpreted, as Davey has shown us, subjectively. History that tries to identify exactly how events occurred does not account for the variety of interpretations or experiences of all the different people, particularly the women, of that time. For instance, the stories that Annie tells about Ana's female friends are not written in the history books she studies--they are excluded, showing why Marlatt is not satisfied with traditional history, but substitutes fictions instead. Marlatt's resistance to closure is ideologically necessitated by her desire to let women tell their own stories, choose their own directions.

Suppose  
factual  
history  
is actual  
story  
multiautho  
ship

Marlatt, in an interview with Janice Williamson, explains:

If history is a construction and language is also a construction, as we know--in fact, it actually constructs the reality we live and act in--then we can change it. We're not stuck in some authoritative version of the real, and for women that's extremely important, because we always were--the patriarchal version was always the version, and now we know that's not true. We can throw out that powerful little article. When we change language we change the building blocks by which we construct our reality and even our past 'reality,' 'history' (52).

In this way, Marlatt can reject traditional history and

still use archival material in her writing. In Ana Historic archival material is used not only to explain what happened to the various women in the stories, but also to demonstrate the gaps in the record of a past that has been recorded by men. The opening up of history creates space for the female writer to reconstruct stories, narrating a life that has not been represented by traditional history, extending the lives that history renders invisible. Such a process allows the writer to keep the text open.

*✓ create  
irony  
+ history*

The links between Ana, Annie and Zoe and their experiences in living and in not fully living also contribute to the text's lack of closure. Annie writes possibility and opportunity into their lives, and keeps their stories going, so that they do not close even upon death. She refuses to let Ina's life close. She will not accept the ultimate closure that death imposes on a life; instead, she prolongs the life of Ina through her own life and through her written dialogues with her dead mother. Similarly, Annie also creates several possible choices for Ana, giving her the chance to teach piano if she wants, to marry Ben Springer, or to move in with Birdie Stewart, the "madam," in Gastown. By the end of the novel Ana has several opportunities, and Annie no longer feels the need to make the choice for her. By finally allowing her character Ana to have a life of her own, Annie relinquishes control and again defers the closure of Ana's story. In the process,

she learns about her own choices, and begins at the end of the novel to open up her own life by starting a new relationship with Zoe. She realizes that she does not have to be Richard's Annie. From being enclosed in marriage, she enters a new life. The relationship she develops with language while reconstructing the life stories of Ana and Ina does not impose the same kind of closure that marriage does. Language allows her to explore its boundaries, to extend the relationship beyond traditional limits. \*

The desire to extend life, as well as the wish to extend narrative and sexual desire, are all explored in the novel and help to defer closure beyond the ending of Ana Historic. Marlatt links sexual and narrative desire, and since both of these desires are continuous as long as a woman is writing/living/loving they will not end on the last page of the book. The stories continue beyond the last page, encouraging the continuation of narrative desire, keeping the text open far beyond the ending.<sup>4</sup> Narrative desire is created by the temptation of the reader to find a conclusion that gives sufficient motive to the events that occur in the story. Annie herself struggles with narrative

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<sup>4</sup>Di Brand compares Ana Historic to George Bowering's Burning Water, saying that "both play with the discrepancies between memory and imagination, recorded history and lived experience, lamenting even as they celebrate it, the arbitrariness of the writing process, its intimate connection with loneliness, with absence and longing." Here she hints at what I am saying about the connection between narrative and sexual desire. Brand then places these ideas in a feminist context (38).

desire when she tries to control Ana, and to account for all of the choices that Ana might make. Even the urge to tell Ana's story is a result of narrative desire on Annie's part. This narrative desire is derived from Annie's lack of gratification with the psychological closure she perceives in women's lives.

Sexual desire comes into play between Annie and Zoe as Zoe keeps urging Annie to let Ana give in to her desires. Annie is shocked to realize that it is she who wants Zoe. She becomes aware that her suggestion that Ana might move in with Birdie was just the result of deflecting her own sexual desire for Zoe into narration. The scene at the end of the novel, when Annie and Zoe go into the bedroom and close the door, offers us both a conventional "happy ending" and the undoing of that traditional ending, since the happy lovers are both women and their affair is just the beginning for Annie rather than the final result of her self-exploration. The happy ending is also undone by Marlatt's comment earlier in the novel that "this is not a roman/ ce" (67). It is not a traditional novel; the happy ending therefore is not purely traditional, nor is it only the beginning of a romance. It is a beginning for more than just the two lovers, as the second ending indicates when we are invited into the pages ahead, pages yet to be written. The desire for conclusion is not fulfilled in Ana Historic; both narrative and sexual desire continue beyond the ending,

keeping the text open.

Another starting point in Marlatt's book is her use of archival material to identify the gaps, the stories missing from the written history of Vancouver. She does not let that written history limit her imagination or her story. Documentation could lead to the closing of an argument by providing the necessary proof to support a conclusion. Instead, Marlatt's text remains open as she allows the documentation and archival material to spark her imagination and suggest direction for the story she is writing. She works not with the facts recorded in the archives, but with the "omissions" and "concealments" of the written records (Brand 38). Ron Hatch, in his review of the book, calls these gaps and omissions the "ahistoric which lies hidden in all history" (11). He refers to that which history may not address, and which is often timeless (such as human nature) or that which is personal, not considered relevant or important enough for a history book. There are also all the stories that remain untold, such as those in which women were central figures, which do not become historic. In order to find the hidden ahistoric, one must excavate, dig deeper than the archives, and search in the imagination to discover the unwritten stories.

Linda Hutcheon talks about the issue of closure in relation to archives and written historical "fact," suggesting that history includes absences, leaving room for

"her story, anahistory" ("telling" 19). This suggests again that the use of historical material can lead to openness and imaginative fiction rather than a closed system of beliefs, of indisputable "facts." Hutcheon also addresses this issue elsewhere, relating it to the postmodern, saying that postmodern writing "reinstalls historical contexts...[but also] problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge" (Poetics 89).<sup>5</sup> In Ana Historic the notion of history is problematized not only by Marlatt's filling in the gaps with imagined stories, but also by her positing of alternative histories, or as she calls it, a "choice of fictions" ("On Ana Historic" 97). She points out that there are different versions of history--as many different versions as there are people to witness and write about it. A reader reading the novel is given the choice as well. Marlatt does not choose the definitive version of history, nor does Annie choose one version of history for Ana, the protagonist of her novel. At the end of the book, the text offers the readers a choice of how to read the dual endings. The two endings are contradictory. One is traditional, with the two lovers going into the bedroom and closing the door. The other ending is postmodern. It reflects on the methods the novel has employed, and invites the readers further into

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<sup>5</sup>See also Hutcheon in "telling accounts" (17) where she discusses generic complication as an issue in Ana Historic. Hutcheon relates genre to grammar--an interesting connection, especially in a text which foregrounds language through syntax and through etymological analysis.

*history  
is  
just  
another  
fiction*


the text to see what might be on the pages ahead. It is through this ending that the text remains open, undoing the neat closure of the previous ending.

The choices that Annie gives to Ana are also important to the text's lack of closure. Ana's story begins with what the archives reveal about Mrs. Richards. Annie finds the historical Mrs. Richards both lacking in detail and apparently trapped in her time. Ana cannot escape her time because she has been left there by history, not written into the present like the most important men of that time. The new story Annie creates allows Ana Richards to live, to have options and to choose her own way of life in a way that history would not let her choose. The text is opened up, then, by the use of the historical material as material for the revisioning of history.

Ana's story becomes a catalyst for Annie's choices, and  
y their stories become linked as Annie begins to act on her new awareness of her own life. Marlatt uses links between these women of different generations to keep her text open. She traces the relationships and similarities and differences between the women both forwards and backwards through time. Annie's experience in the present time of writing her novel is imaginatively transformed into writing, and becomes the story and life of Ana Historic. She allows Ana to have choices and to view her situation in relation to the male-dominated society around her, and to create a

female cocoon. The cocoon, although sometimes an image of enclosure, also refers to the process of metamorphosis. Annie helps Mrs. Richards to develop a degree of self-awareness and gender-awareness that she would be unlikely to have experienced in the late nineteenth century. Zoe becomes another link, joining Annie with Ana by convincing her to relinquish control over Ana's destiny. Annie is then able to let go of the directive force she exerts on her own life. As her new choices and possibilities increase, textual closure is deferred even while making a predictable ending more and more likely. The differences between the women serve as a starting point for the exploration of the different lives, and the imaginative re-living and re-writing of them. As long as a completed life is not allowed to remain a closed system, but is opened up through the life and questions of another generation, the lives remain open, not over.

Within Annie's life the possibility for new life exists. Annie does not at first realize that she is not fully alive, but is living in the shadows of her husband, and of her mother. In order to reach a state of being in charge of her own life, Annie must come out of the shadows of those people. In her search for more satisfaction, she reaches out to Zoe. Zoe, whose name etymologically means life, helps eventually to draw Annie past her lack of distinct female identity, and into life as a woman, separate



> from her identities as "daughter" and "wife." Zoe opens  
 > Annie's life to the future, so she can live her own story  
 > rather than reliving history.

> The story that Annie writes about Ana runs parallel to  
 > the story that Marlatt writes about Annie. Marlatt calls  
 > them a type of "rhymes," where the stories echo each other,  
 > like generations ("On Ana Historic" 101). Both women are  
 > writing, but their writing is at first only for themselves,  
 > hidden from the public eye. Annie is eventually able to  
 > stop hiding her writing under Richard's research notes, to  
 > move out from under that shadow. Ana stops keeping her  
 > writing secret as she sends letters to her father, and also  
 > lets her feelings out when she visits Birdie in Gastown.  
 > She has Birdie to encourage her to admit her feelings. The  
 > links between Zoe, ~~Annie~~ and Ana are reinforced through the  
 > imagined encounters between Ana and Birdie.

The women in the novel are linked not only with each other, but with their physical selves and with language. This link exists as a manifestation of the link between narrative and sexual desire in the novel. Marlatt uses the relationships of the women to themselves and each other to explore the relationships between the bodies of women and the body of language. She told Janice Williamson that "the 'feel' of words has something to do with the feel of the body, of the contours of early memory" ("Sounding" 49). In Ana Historic she examines more closely what that "something"

women  
as  
writers

is. Part of it grows out of the etymological analysis that Marlatt applies to words, enabling her to re-appropriate words whose meanings has become foreign to female experience. By tracing the origins of the words, Marlatt often reveals that they started with much different meaning, often more closely tied to the earth and natural world. In this way she translates women's experience into familiar language, but now a language that can be theirs. This process of translation removes many of the boundaries imposed on interpretation of words by a more closed system of language and meaning that relies heavily on a limited number of "common" uses for words. Marlatt opens up the meaning and the boundaries of her text by allowing it to transcend the present, but at the same time tying language back to the body. Sometimes the exploration is not purely etymological, but relies on pieces of words and what they might mean in a different context.<sup>6</sup> For example, at one point Annie is considering the problem of Mrs. Richards' name, the name of a presumably dead man. Nothing in the name tells us who Mrs. Richards might be. At the same time,

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<sup>6</sup>For an alternative interpretation of the results of Marlatt's use of etymological roots, see Tostevin (35) where she suggests that "the etymological breakdown of words...has allowed many women to establish a newly found intimacy with language. Granting a word an ultimate definition, a final authority in its most ancient meaning, posits an origin, a truth, with which some women have felt comfortable." I argue that it is precisely the lack of "final authority" and the unearthing of multiple truths rather than "a truth" which allows women to feel comfortable. However, Tostevin's analysis is an interesting one to pursue.

Mrs. Richards is considering the other women around her and what little she knows about them. Mrs. Richards' thoughts on the matter are given first; as she writes in her diary, "I cannot keep only to drawing rooms and the School! I am not a Proper Lady perhaps" (32). Annie comments on Ana's diary entry, saying, "Proper, she says, Lady capitalized, and it is barely sounded, the relationship between proper and property" (32). The analysis continues, moving away from "proper," and into the origins and meanings of the word "lady":

lady, hlaefdige, kneader of bread, mistress of a household, lady of the manor, woman of good family, woman of refinement and gentle manners, a woman whose conduct conforms to a certain standard of propriety (32).

Lady

The language moves away from Ana, but then returns to her problem of being "Proper." This deconstruction of words reveals the extent to which closure (whether textual or psychological) is determined by ideology and culture.

The history of words, where they come from and how they change through time, can enhance their meanings in the present. Searching out their roots allows Marlatt to refer outside of the time and language of her text in order to invite in other ideas, associated words, roots, meanings. Thus she keeps language always present for her readers and allows them the opportunity for conversation and connection with the language. These linguistic and textual devices enable the text to remain perpetually open for the reader.

A woman must lock up her own conflicting desires if she does not have the language she needs to express them.

Marlatt says, "You can't really separate sexuality from language, even though we try to talk about them, separate them out. You can't separate audience from writing"

("Speaking" 27). She speaks of "the unspoken urge of a body insisting itself in the words" (Hutcheon, "telling" 18).

Elsewhere she suggests that the imagination rests in the physical, that we can write with the body ("Speaking" 28).

She refers not only to female sexuality, but to the various cycles and processes of the female body. Menstrual cycles, giving birth, the body speaking and verbal communication are all linked in the cyclical nature of female physicality.

This cyclicity defers closure.

At the centre of Ana Richards' experience is a scene where one of the other women of Hastings Mill, Jeannie Alexander, is giving birth to the first white child to be born at the settlement. Ana sees the birth in terms of the body speaking:

How dark it looked, an angry powerful o,  
stretched, stretched, hair springing black above.  
This was Jeannie, this was something else not  
Jeannie, not anyone, this was a mouth working its  
own inarticulate urge, opening deep--

...

And Ana was saying Push, even as she caught a  
glimpse of what she almost failed to recognize: a  
massive syllable of slippery flesh slide out the  
open mouth (Marlatt 125, 126).

The body gives birth to life, to language, to continuity, cyclical life. It is here that Ana begins to understand the

language of the women; it is during this scene that Annie, too, the writer of Ana's story, begins to understand her own language, and allows herself to see the difference between what her language is trying to say, and what she has been forcing it to say in Richard's research. Her language allows her to open up her experience instead of forcing it to conform to a traditional mold, one which imposes closure on female experience.

Annie's writing can now be based on her own emotions, her own, unique experience as a person and her experience as part of the collective group called women. Marlatt's own writing is based on a response to her own consciousness of the body, not on the use of language as reference (Wah 15). Marlatt clearly states the relationship when she says, "Any word is a physical body. Its body is sound" (Wah 16). Julia Kristeva sees the link, too, both between physical and narrative process, and physical and narrative desire. She suggests that language is sensual and musical, and is as close as we can get to the earlier fusion with the mother's body. This desire for connection with the body, both connection with the sexual body and the body of language, is a moving toward, a movement that is never concluded (Marlatt, "Sounding" 51). In language, the "moving toward" is characterized in the turning of the page, in order to read the writing lying ahead. In Ana Historic we are invited to continue to turn the page, to try to reach the

full connection with language, even after the writing has ended. The last page invites us to write into the pages ahead. It is this connection with language, with the body of language in this novel, that characterizes the text and the reader's relationship to the text. It is this non-concluding nature of the desire that delays the closure of the text beyond the ending of the book.

The language of Ana Historic invites its readers to interpret it, and to think about how it enacts experience rather than just representing it. As mentioned above, Marlatt asserts that "You can't separate audience from writing" ("Speaking" 27). She explains that she is trying to show how everything is connected--"the web, the network, the continual flux, the flowing" ("Speaking" 27). This interaction and connection between audience and writing draws readers into the story. Annie's fiction-making process and its effect on her life reflect Marlatt's writing act and its influence on her readers. Annie constructs Ana's diary, then reads it. We as readers read the diary and Annie's reading of it, as we read the story of Ana Historic and Marlatt's process of creating it. Marlatt tells us that she is trying to create a space for conversation with her readers. She says "I want to open similar spaces for this kind of conversation with readers of my own writing" ("Sounding" 53). By giving Zoe a name that means "life" and by naming the two women Annie and Zoe, she

creates space for all her readers. She incorporates the alphabet, from A to Z, which is both a frame (a closed structure) and a starting point for the creation of language. In the "happy" ending of the book there is no space between Annie and Zoe; their desire has brought them together and diminished the gaps. The door is closed to the outside. However, the second postmodern ending invites the readers in; everyone's name is generated by the language, constructed from the letters A through Z, so all the characters and readers are included in the invitation to re-enter the text. The speaking "I" shifts; it is both Annie and Marlatt. Like Davey's "you," Marlatt's "we" closes the gap between readers and characters, thus blurring the distinction between fiction and reality. Marlatt talks about "the whole notion of audience: who do you write for, and how does that actually shape the writing" ("Sounding" 53). In this novel the "writing beyond the ending" (Rachel Blau DuPlessis) must come from the readers. It is shaped and carried into the unwritten pages by them.

Sexuality as a "generative source" ("Speaking" 27) acts in the language of this novel to keep generating possibilities and spaces for new imaginative pursuits. Yet it is up to the readers whether or not they will pursue those options. The language of "the erotic is a moving outward, and simply shows itself. It lies outside the bounds of domination and use" ("Speaking" 29). The language

is presented, allowed to be, not used for a specific purpose, particularly not to dominate meaning or interpretation. As Marlatt links language to the erotic and to female sexuality, she brings in the notion of birth. We give birth to language as we give birth to one another. Di Brand explains:

A word about audience: Marlatt longs for, imagines a world in which women are real, are present to themselves and each other, not as psychotics or misfits but as lovers and mothers, readers and writers of a common language, "giving words, giving birth, to each other--she and me, you" (Brand 40).

In Ana Historic Annie moves from being a misfit to being a lover and a mother, and a woman who becomes fully present in her own language by the end of the book. This newly attained level of existence, within her own writing, allows her to begin again, this time as woman, not as someone else's daughter or wife. She is the woman that her body tells her she is, the woman her tongue attests to through her telling of Ana Richard's story, through the telling of her loving of Zoe.

The readers are invited into the unwritten future pages by the concluding lines of the novel. "There is always a next page, the next page, even if it's not yet written, it's imminent there....But language itself, especially writing, is another kind of deferral," Marlatt tells us ("Sounding" 52). She defers the closure of her text by reminding us on the last page that the unwritten is for us to create. She

addresses her readers and speaks of "the reach of your desire, reading us into the page ahead" (my emphasis). The last page of the novel, from which the above quotation was taken, does not have a page number. The paragraph lies both inside and outside the work. The written word stops in the middle of the page; it does not use the boundaries of the novel. It exceeds the limits of the page, and the boundaries of time. Fred Wah tells us he "doesn't know where the journey will end" (14). I think that it is that uncertainty that invites the reader to continue the construction of language past the end of the novel, to continue to defer closure as long as language remains alive and generative. Daphne Marlatt's resistance to closure, then, leads her readers to reconstruct history and language along with her, and to continue the process beyond the ending of Ana Historic.

story  
+  
history

## Coming Through Slaughter

### Death and Non-closure

Up there on the stage he was showing all the possibilities in the middle of the story (43).

While Davey focuses on the decentring of literature and the questioning of the assumptions we make as readers, and Marlatt emphasizes feminist perspectives and the rewriting of history, Michael Ondaatje approaches the issue of closure in his own ambiguous way in Coming Through Slaughter. He uses narrative and generic complication to reconstruct the partly closed story of Buddy Bolden. Ondaatje undoes textual closure by having Bolden die multiple deaths. In this text, it is the process of dying, as opposed to the event of Bolden's death, that becomes the focus. As with Davey and Marlatt, Ondaatje also foregrounds the process of artistic creation rather than the final product of that creation.

To construct the fictional biography of Bolden, Ondaatje blends fact and fiction. Through interviews, recordings of Bolden's music being whistled, state hospital documents, books about the history of the area he lived in, and a lot of artistry and imagination, Ondaatje re-opens, and adds to, Bolden's story. Although the story appears seemingly closed because of the time that has lapsed since Bolden's death, Ondaatje works against that closure through

the "facts" and fiction that he brings into it, thus generating new story.

What little is known of Bolden's life also provides Ondaatje with the imaginative fuel for an open-ended story. In both life and fiction, Bolden does not die a musician. He stops playing his cornet and falls into silence for two years, then returns to his family and to his music, plays in a parade where he goes mad, and falls into complete silence. Taken through *Sunshine and Slaughter* to the asylum, Bolden leaves behind his music and his voice. He stops talking and playing and retreats completely into the concrete world of touching--he cuts hair and touches objects in his room. Bolden has throughout his life an obsession with touching which is partly balanced by his public appearances and his music. In the asylum, however, that balance is disturbed. A "dead" musician, he no longer holds his instrument, but touches only the inanimate objects in his room for the remaining twenty-four years of his life. This marks one of Bolden's multiple deaths in Coming Through Slaughter: death as closure is undone by Bolden's many deaths. By analogy, the closure of the text is undone too, for Ondaatje employs death as a metaphor for textual closure.

Undoing the closure of the text creates tension throughout the book. That tension is partly attributable to the plot complications that arise early in the text and are developed later. Both its generic undecideability and the

paradoxical and contradictory nature of Ondaatje's writing complicate the reading process. Also contributing to textual complication are the multiple narrators, including Ondaatje himself who tells stories about Bolden and other characters. I will briefly clarify, to the extent that the text allows, some of this complication, so that my references to narrators or to the book itself will be clearer.

Generic complication in Coming Through Slaughter raises problems mainly because of its tendency to affect interpretation. The elements of the historical novel are obvious in the text, especially because dates and place names are provided, as well as fairly accurate maps of New Orleans at that time. The elements of the Bildungsroman are also present; the book examines the life, growth and development of an artist. Ondaatje combines genres, but does not choose one above the other, thus preventing readers from becoming too comfortable with clear distinctions. In the same way that he blends truth and fiction until they become inseparable, he mixes genres, disturbing the underlying assumptions readers bring to his texts. This is in keeping with Bolden being "almost completely governed by fears of certainty" (15); through his blurring of boundaries Ondaatje succeeds in transferring Bolden's sense of distrust of certainties to his reader. She must remain alert because the assumptions on which she bases her interpretation are

questioned by the very narrative she tries to disentangle.

Although the historical novel and the traditional Bildungsroman are inscribed in Coming Through Slaughter, they are distorted by Ondaatje's narrative style. More specifically, the structure of the historical novel is undermined in the "Acknowledgements," where Ondaatje admits that he has used, along with the real names and characters, "more personal pieces of friends and fathers" (158). His use of personal material indicates that he has imposed elements of a more modern time on a novel that is supposed to take place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Furthermore, Ondaatje's historical sources are not entirely accurate. He treats them as truth, but some are later proved inaccurate by Donald Marquis who wrote In Search of Buddy Bolden: First Man of Jazz in 1978. Marquis will become more central to this argument later, but for now it suffices to say that Ondaatje's book is not fact-based, but is based rather on rumours, stories, records, interviews, observations, and photographs. The presumed objectivity of history, together with the closure it promises, is questioned.

Looking at Coming Through Slaughter as a Bildungsroman is far more problematical, particularly as it can lead to the kind of interpretation put forth by Constance Rooke in her essay on the book. Rooke argues that the story's traditional structure "has a happy ending" (268). To

support her argument, she quotes Bolden, saying, "'The right ending is an open door you can't see too far out of. It can mean exactly the opposite of what you are thinking'" (94). The open door itself suggests possibility rather than closure. The tendency of the text to render meaning inconsistent with the expectations Ondaatje raises in the reader's mind is consistent with the contradictory nature of his writing. The ambiguity inherent in the above quotation is exactly the ambiguity that leads to re-reading, and to the perpetual openness of the text. Coming Through Slaughter provides the reader with no "ending," never mind a happy one. Bolden's multiple deaths lead the text to a point where even death is not closure, causing Coming Through Slaughter to undo its own textual closure. Without a clear conclusion, it becomes more difficult to argue for a happy ending, or any ending at all.

One way of dealing with the book's generic problem is to call it a fictional biography. This characterization, as discussed by Naomi Jacobs (2), accounts for the fictional and factual elements of the book, and the blurred line between them; it does not threaten to impose formal limits or restrict its thematic possibilities as the historical novel or Bildungsroman threatens to do. The foregrounding of fictionality keeps interpretive possibilities open. As Linda Hutcheon argues:

Ondaatje's tale of New Orleans jazz musician Buddy Bolden, Coming Through Slaughter, sits not only on

the border between poetry and prose, but also on the boundary between biography and fiction (Canadian Postmodern 21).

Fictional biography as posited by Coming Through Slaughter is also a form that lends itself to manipulation and distortion through the interplay of biographical and fictional facts. The reader can no longer distinguish between fact and fiction because together they become what Ondaatje calls the "truth of fiction" ("Acknowledgements"). The blurred line between facts and fiction further contributes to the deferral of closure, for it denies the reader the fixed, firm groundwork on which to build a closed interpretation. The generic complication cannot be ignored, but calling the work a fictional biography allows discussion of the content of Coming Through Slaughter without limiting its interpretive possibilities too much. The fictional biography embodies elements of the historiographic novel and the Bildungsroman, so that they can exist simultaneously without cancelling each other out.

Also deferring closure and complicating the reading process of this text is the complex narrative structure Ondaatje uses. Different voices narrate the stories of Buddy Bolden. Some passages switch, quite rapidly, back and forth between narrators with no warning so that it becomes difficult to keep up with the changing perspective. For example, the scene describing Bolden attacking Pickett in the barbershop is introduced by Webb talking to Pickett,

some time after Bolden has disappeared. Suddenly the perspective of the narrative changes back to the morning of the fight. This time it is Bolden narrating the scene. He is alone in the barbershop before opening, when in walks Pickett, whom he suspects of having an affair with Nora, his wife. Buddy narrates, "I lay the towel over his shirt and knot it at the back of his neck. He passes the bottle to me and I put it away" (72). Then with no warning the narrative switches to Pickett:

'I started talking about his mood which was so quiet you know so fuckin strange for him and he still wouldn't say much' (72).

This first sentence does not contain anything that could not be attributed to Buddy as easily as to Pickett. It is only later in the passage that it becomes obvious that the narrative switches from Bolden's voice to Pickett's. By leaving the identity of the speaking subject ambiguous, Ondaatje distances Bolden from himself, while at the same time he gives the story more impact. The narrative becomes immediate to the readers as the characters involved relate their experiences with Bolden. It is almost as if they are all in the same room as the reader, contradicting or supplementing each others' stories.

It is useful here to look at Jacques Derrida's notion of the supplement: its contradictory function corresponds to Ondaatje's writing and helps to account for what happens when the characters complete each others' stories by adding

to them in the process. According to Derrida, the supplement is an addition to that which is complete, but it also completes something which is lacking:

The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence.

...  
But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself in-the place-of; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void (144, 145).

The supplement both completes the incomplete and simultaneously adds to that which is already complete. Ondaatje's characters supplement each others' stories, indicating that the narrative is at once complete (closed) and incomplete. This accounts for the lack of cohesiveness in Bolden's story; the narrators keep adding to it to fill its void. His story cannot close because there is still that which will be, and is, added to it.

Hutcheon comments on the supplementary effects of multiple narrators. She says that multiple narratives leave the "readers...to pull together the various and fragmentary points of view we have been offered and...make an evaluation and interpretation of all we have been told" (Canadian 65). The burden of interpretation is put on the readers whose task is made very difficult precisely because of the fragmentary nature of the narrative. Jacobs also talks about the use of multi-voiced narrative in fictional biographies, suggesting that it "simultaneously reduces literal belief and increases psychological intensity" (5).

The psychological intensity is what makes the narrative so present to the reader in Coming Through Slaughter. However, it is the reduction of literal belief that is important to this text's lack of closure. There are so many possibilities and contradictions in the story that the readers have to sort through them and try to decide what to use as a basis for their interpretation of the text. In a fictional biography based on documented information which is already fictional to a large degree, there can be no truth except the "truth of fiction" (158), truth that can only be deciphered through numerous readings. This kind of truth, far from being clearly stated, can be inferred from Ondaatje's own narrative and generic devices.

In contrast to the multiple narratives that emerge from the various speaking subjects, one important event is not narrated by anyone. Bolden's death, the physical death of his body, is reported second hand, but nobody narrates or explains it. The event remains incomplete precisely because nobody takes on the task of narrating it. Instead, we read a small entry from A Brief History of East Louisiana State Hospital by Lienal<sup>o</sup> Gremillion: "1931. Buddy Bolden dies" (Slaughter 144). Then the narrative continues, talking about Bolden's time in the asylum. It is as if the death simply did not occur, or has been deferred indefinitely by the narrative's return to his life.

It is apparent by now that it is very difficult to

discuss Coming Through Slaughter in a cohesive or linear way, since the generic and narrative structure of the book contains within it contradictions and complications. However, I think that by discussing the tension between ending and closure, the contradictions in the text can be accounted for without proposing a resolution. This can be done on two levels. First, Ondaatje's own merging with the various artist characters (especially Bolden), and, thus, his recontextualization of the characters and relocation in the text defer closure beyond the ending of the book. Secondly, Bolden's multiple deaths, the use of death as a metaphor for closure and Bolden's relationships as explored through the parade scene where he goes mad all keep the text open as well.

Ondaatje merges with artist characters in the book because he too is an artist, both as writer of the book and as narrator within it. It is interesting that Ondaatje, an artist whose medium is language, chooses as the central figure in his book another artist, but one who left behind no evidence of his art. Bolden never recorded music, and lived his life in a constant conflict between his public and private selves; there exists of him only one photograph in which he has half faded out. However, in pursuing the elusive musician, Ondaatje discovers a source of artistic and imaginative inspiration in Bolden's life and art. He uses his own understanding of artistic creation along with

the few documents that are available, and adds that "some facts have been expanded or polished to suit the truth of fiction" ("Acknowledgements" 158).

The acknowledgements at the end of the book pose another problem regarding the closure of the text. They are again a supplement to the text, pointing to its incompleteness of the text. Their other function, though, is to lead the readers back to a time before the text's existence, to the research and information-gathering activities that preceded the text. In other words, we are led to the non-existence of the text. Closure cannot occur in a text that, paradoxically, refers to a point preceding its own making. By now death as a metaphor for closure has been undone, so that once again even the possibility of death does not impose closure on the text.

Ondaatje's use of both fictional and historical information, his treatment of it, and his obvious interpretation and manipulation of facts and events to "suit the truth of fiction" result in a story in which Bolden never comes completely into focus, just as the photograph of him is half faded. Ondaatje turns the historical Bolden into an artist torn between privacy and public life, torn between the demands of his art and his relationships and unable to keep up with both. Bolden and Ondaatje move closer and closer as the story progresses. Ondaatje as narrator (and as researcher) visits Joseph's

shaving parlour, where Buddy worked as a barber, and takes a picture of it:

The photograph moves and becomes a mirror. When I read he stood in front of the mirrors and attacked himself, there was a shock of memory. For I had done that. Stood, and with a razor-blade cut into my cheeks and forehead, shaved hair. Defiling people we did not wish to be (133).

The moment of recognition that connects the two artists pulls the story beyond Bolden's life and into the present, where it becomes a new story. Ondaatje identifies himself with the difficulties of being an artist, and with the violence that Bolden inflicts on himself and sometimes on others. The reference to "people we did not wish to be" indicates that Ondaatje is aware of the merging of characters that is occurring as well as of the public role that the artist is forced to play. As the work nears its physical end, the text grows larger rather than drawing to a close. The characters are being drawn together, and a new level of interpretation, one in which Bolden represents the artist in Ondaatje, becomes possible. The text that grows out of their connection transcends the boundaries of the book and moves right into the present and the concerns that Ondaatje the writer/artist is addressing here.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>It would also be interesting to consider Bellocq the photographer and Webb the detective as points of reference for Ondaatje in the text. Ondaatje draws a self-portrait of the artist through these figures, and interesting connections can be found in the web spun among them. For discussions of Ondaatje's use of photography, see Dennis Cooley and Lorraine Mary York.

Although Ondaatje also fills in many of the gaps left in the story of Buddy Bolden, he still leaves the actual character of Bolden unresolved, unclear. He summarizes what is known about Bolden from documents he has looked at:

'Buddy Bolden who became a legend when he went berserk in a parade...'

...  
 ...you like a weatherbird arcing round in the middle of your life to exact opposites and burning your brains out so that from June 5, 1907 till 1931 you were dropped into amber in the East Louisiana State Hospital. Some saying you went mad trying to play the devil's music and hymns at the same time, and Armstrong telling historians that you went mad by playing too hard and too often drunk too wild too crazy. The excesses cloud up the page. There was the climax of the parade and then you removed yourself from the 20th century game of fame, the rest of your life a desert of facts. Cut them open and spread them out like garbage (134).

This passage shows evidence of the methods Ondaatje uses to open up Bolden's life, making it relevant for himself. He begins with a fragment of a sentence that he came across, which intrigued him. From that one factual statement grow speculations about why Bolden went mad. Then Ondaatje looks at what some other people said about the parade, about what drove Bolden to madness. Finally the fictions he creates become part of the incomplete history he composes in his attempt to explain Buddy Bolden. Because of the inevitability of the fictionalization of history, including that which occurs in Coming Through Slaughter, Marquis' attempt to strip away the fictions from Bolden to reveal the "truth" is doomed to fail. Ondaatje is not attempting to

get at the truth. The sources he uses to learn what little was known about Buddy Bolden in 1976 were already fictionalized. They contained rumours and suspicions that were later disproved by Donald Marquis in In Search of Buddy Bolden: First Man of Jazz. Interestingly enough, even though Marquis manages to disprove some of the persistent rumours, he is still unable to find the truth behind the rumours. Much of his book also relies on speculation, which Marquis is unwilling to trust, so Bolden becomes even more elusive. Marquis is unable to escape the process of fictionalization that has taken over Bolden's life.

Hutcheon, in discussing historiography, reminds us that:

...we can no longer accept that the 'givens' or the 'facts' of history are eternally fixed and 'natural' .... Historical 'fact' is the systematized, constructed version of brute 'event'; it is the past given meaning by its writers and readers. The meaning of the past is not coherent, continuous, or unified--until we make it so (Canadian 16).

No matter what Ondaatje knew about Bolden and what he did not know, he manages to make Bolden a character we can attempt to understand, albeit only tentatively. Jacobs tells us that "certain details very important to Ondaatje's interpretation of Bolden are either mistaken or simply and admittedly invented" (Jacobs 7). In terms of historiography, though, it is less important that the facts are not necessarily historically accurate than that they have been interpreted by Ondaatje, "polished" by him to suit his artistic needs. Therefore, despite Ondaatje's use of

imaginative fiction in the biographical areas that are explored in his text, Bolden is presented as a presumably historical figure until Ondaatje starts pulling him from his temporal context and merging him with his own artistic aspirations and frustrations.

When the author and character begin to merge, the temporal sequence of events becomes less important to the story, deferring closure once more beyond the temporal end of Bolden's story. Roy MacSkimming refers obliquely to this process when he writes about "a transcending of cultural and racial and historical barriers" in works (93). In other words, the text has been removed from its context, the context being that which encloses the text and imposes boundaries on it. That enclosure is removed, leaving the text in an unclear context. By the end of Coming Through Slaughter it is not apparent who is making the last statement of the book--it could be either Ondaatje or Bolden. This occurs only because the temporal, cultural, racial and historical limits of the text have been altered. The contextual boundaries are constantly being redefined and the text lies open, like a desert of facts to be "spread...out like garbage" (134).

Because Coming Through Slaughter is partly presented as a fictional biography, the death of the protagonist could impose closure to the text. However, not only is the ultimate closure of death undone throughout the book, but

the last page of the story leaves us with Bolden in the hospital, with twenty-four years left in his life:

I sit with this room. With the grey walls that darken into corner. And one window with teeth in it. Sit so still you can hear your hair rustle in your shirt. Look away from the window when clouds and other things go by. Thirty-one years old. There are no prizes (Slaughter 156).

This section could just as easily be Ondaatje speaking as Bolden. The two figures have merged completely; the reader can no longer tell them apart. If it is Bolden speaking, we are left without the completion of his life. His story ends twenty-four years before his death comes. He is left with only the rising and setting of the sun and the changing seasons, of which Bolden becomes a part as he follows the sun all day, every day. If it is Ondaatje speaking, then the text has exceeded its temporal boundaries and moved into the present. Ondaatje is left sitting in the grey room, fulfilling his artistic destiny but giving up private life in the process.

The space too is undefinable. The corners are not clear--they look grey. Boundaries have been removed, although the presence of a window still leaves the room partly enclosed. However, the narrator directs us to look away from the window whenever it becomes obvious that it separates an enclosed space from an open one. We are left with an indefinite grey space whose corners fade away, leaving openness. The description of the room also keeps the text open, though, because Ondaatje too becomes a part

of the natural cycle of light and darkness brought by the sun, and exists in the perpetual grey of twilight. There is no closure as long as he is in there writing. Death is supposed to be the ultimate closure to a life, but Ondaatje does not let that happen in the case of Buddy Bolden. Death as the ultimate closure to a life is denied, as that life is recreated.

As I have already mentioned, Bolden's own life within the novel contains several symbolic deaths, which by their plurality undo the closure usually imposed by death. The very fact that death strikes the same man several times in different forms is itself defiant of closure. Bolden is described in terms of his geography at the beginning of the book, and a few pages later he commits "landscape suicide" (22). This reference prepares us for Bolden's trip to Shell Beach, where he goes to play with his band, and eventually disappears. He does not get back on the train to return to his family and his music, but falls instead into a musical silence that lasts for two years while he lives with Jaelin and Robin Brewitt. He cannot return with his band because the public pressure is too much for him--he needs some time to be silent, to free himself from his art for a break. The image of this silence as death is reinforced when Bolden watches the train with his band on it leave without him. "He woke to see the train disappearing away from his body like a vein" (39). He feels his blood and life draining as

he loses his music. The silence, however, is an ambivalent metaphor because it is also an image of renewal, as it offers Bolden a chance to recover his strength. Bolden is resurrected by Ondaatje and returns to his family, where Willy Cornish has moved in with his wife, and spends a few days with them. Everyone notices that Bolden has changed. This is the new Bolden, baptised by the river and the Brewitts' water, drawn through his landscape suicide to life again, and returned a new man. He is less extreme, does not exaggerate people's stories any more, and does not have to be moving and talking all the time. He can sit quietly and listen. He has survived the first death.

After five days at home, Bolden joins a street parade, cutting in at the middle just as he did the first time he appeared in the jazz scene in New Orleans. It would appear that his career has come full circle; that suspicion is confirmed when Bolden damages a blood vessel from the effort of playing his music, causing him to stop playing the cornet. Before he is injured, however, he finds the ultimate artistic purity he has been seeking. A female dancer from the crowd starts dancing in response to his music, and he reaches what he has always wanted, the perfect blend of public and private self. Paradoxically, it is not sustainable:

...this is what I wanted, always, loss of privacy in the playing, leaving the stage, the rectangle of band on the street, this hearer who can throw me in the direction and the speed she wishes like

an angry shadow (130).

The blend of his art with another's, the loss of control and the music being changed with every note, is what Bolden has been striving for. The loss of privacy and the physical relationship that the two artists develop in public finally frees Bolden from his conflict between public and private lives. He finally reaches a balance with this dancer.

The strain of trying to keep up, to make every note new and strong and louder, proves too much for Bolden. He is led to artistic suicide by the dancer who draws his music right out of him by force: "she hitting every note with her body before it is even out so I know what I do through her" (130). He tries to keep up with her dance, but the effort is too much and the blood vessel in his neck pops, silencing his cornet. Again, as at the Brewitts', fluid silences him. The scene that describes Bolden going mad at the parade is long and its lack of punctuation leads it to the climax. Ondaatje describes explicitly what happens to Bolden when he reaches the peak of his music and is forced beyond it:

...feel the blood that is real move up bringing fresh energy in its suitcase, it comes up flooding past my heart in a mad parade, it is coming through my teeth, it is into the cornet, god can't stop god can't stop it can't stop the air the red force coming up can't remove it from my mouth, no intake gasp, so deep blooming it up god I can't choke it the music still pouring in a roughness I've never hit, watch it listen it listen it, can't see I CAN'T SEE. Air floating through the blood to the girl red hitting the blind spot I can feel others turning, the silence of the crowd,

can't see

...

What I wanted (131).

Life becomes secondary to the purity of art. This scene contains imagery that becomes more and more sexual, until Bolden reaches the climax of his artistic and physical experience simultaneously. Putting art before life he pushes himself to the limit, and collapses.

An earlier scene in the novel is echoed in the words "what I wanted." This scene recalls Bolden on the bus from the Brewitts' to Webb's cottage on Lake Pontchartrain. He sits next to a woman he does not know, and imagines a whole relationship with her, starting in a motel room at the next bus stop, moving through the first fights, intimacy, and exchange of personalities. Without the complication of actual physical and emotional contact, which is what eventually exhausted his relationships with Nora and Robin, he is able to experience relationship without losing his personality to anyone. We are told that "What he wanted was cruel, pure relationship" (88). The suicide that Bolden contemplates earlier in the book is here accomplished in a way. He has reached silence, which seems to be the only way he knows to balance his life. He has found a legitimate way to escape his audience and the pressure that the public exerts on him. He no longer has to live up to his own efforts to make his music always fresh, always new, never heard before. The second death occurs, erasing the closure

implied by the first, but imposing a stronger closure. This time, the structure of the novel so far contributes to the sense of closure we have after Bolden enters the parade and goes mad. His musical career now has a paradoxically circular structure, as he lapses into silence.

Bolden maintains his silence in the asylum. He does not participate in conversations with the other patients, nor does he talk to anyone who comes to see him. Most of the patients pretend that they know who their visitors are so that they will come again, but Bolden wants no part of their games or their company. He does not even participate in their protest, when each of them is given a piece of glass with which to cut the tendon in their ankle. Bolden looks at the glass and gives it back without cutting himself. He is living a kind of death, by refusing to participate in life. Even the horrific aspects of institutional life such as being raped regularly are unreal to him, and by detaching mind from body and living a private and misunderstood silent life he manages to remain alive without really living at all. Bolden remains in the asylum with fewer and fewer visits from his friends. When Willy Cornish goes to visit, he reports that:

...Buddy touches things, there are about twenty things he will touch and he goes from one to the next, that's all. Won't talk, so you know they even have a band but he has nothing to do with it, was cutting hair but that stopped a while back. Now this touching thing (150).

Part of the reason for his lack of visitors is his strange

behaviour, but part is also that Nora told one of his friends, Webb, not to visit any more because Bolden was dead. Webb only discovers the lie in 1924 when he meets Bella Cornish at a party: "But he's not dead, whispered. He's still at the hospital, the state hospital, he's still there, heaven" (149). Because of Nora's lie, for Webb, the story had ended. However, it is re-opened; Bolden comes back to life for Webb, and continues to live. Again, death is denied and the text re-opens.

On November 4, 1931, Buddy Bolden dies. As the only major event in the book that is not narrated by anyone, it lacks finality and authority. There is no one to witness the event and to tell it. The result in this story is an emptiness, a lack of text, surrounding the biological death of Bolden. Typical of Ondaatje's ambivalent style, then, we have both an emptiness and an excess regarding Bolden's death; a lack of presence and an excess of information. That the report of Bolden's death is presented twice in Coming Through Slaughter indicates that hearing it once did not have the finality, the closure needed to give it real impact. Because of the multiple deaths that Bolden experiences, death as closure is undone. The repetition of the experience denies it the closure that is usually imposed by death. After Bolden's many deaths, he is left in a room at the asylum, in perpetual twilight.

The sense of closure that could exist in this text is

undone both through Ondaatje's manipulation of Bolden's story and his self-positioning within it, the recontextualization of the story and the many deaths that Buddy Bolden dies. Narrative and generic complication also contribute to the structural ambiguity of this book, contributing to the difficulty of resolving the issues Ondaatje raises. Together with interpretive difficulties and an ambiguous and contradictory writing style, this causes the ending of the story to remain open.

The emptiness that first exists in the gaps in Bolden's story is turned into plenitude. The lack of certainty leads to multiple stories, although, paradoxically, there are still gaps and stories that are left untold. There is too much information and not enough story; "the excesses cloud up the page" (138). The plenitude of facts, stories, and information undo closure, overflow the boundaries of the work, and deny the emptiness and finality of death.

### Conclusion

Frank Davey's The Abbotsford Guide to India, Daphne Marlatt's Ana Historic and Michael Ondaatje's Coming Through Slaughter, all demonstrate a tension between ending and closure. By combining elements of different genres and challenging conventional notions of literary forms (most notably Marlatt's rewriting of history), these authors invite their readers to participate actively in the reading process, to make sense of the disparate elements present in the texts.

The lack of closure can be seen as both a cause and an effect of generic indeterminacy. Specific generic forms become difficult to decipher when a text remains open. The reader is left with a puzzle with some key pieces missing; genre remains an elusive notion when closure does not accompany the physical ending of the book.

At the same time, the difficulty the reader faces in trying to determine or define the genre contributes to the texts' lack of closure. Since one aspect of closure is psychological gratification, a lack of gratification defers closure. When a reader is unable to determine genre, or is unwilling to categorize a text, the gratification arising from satisfied generic expectations does not occur. The text remains open as the reader continues to analyze text and its genre.

The effect of deferred closure is a challenge to the

reader. Davey, Marlatt and Ondaatje prompt their readers to question what is presented as 'given' in a text, and to interact with what they read. The foregrounding of language and literary methods in these texts, combined with the lack of closure, invite the readers to be aware of the text as process rather than as finished product.

These authors' refusal to privilege certain aspects of text, history or geography over others grants their readers greater interpretive range. Therefore the readers become more involved in the creation of meaning. The result of inviting the readers into the writing process is the deferral of closure that occurs in Davey's The Abbotsford Guide to India, Marlatt's Ana Historic and Ondaatje's Coming Through Slaughter. Rather than frustrating the reader, though, the invitation to re-read offers a unique form of gratification.

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Sept. 28, 1990