PLAYING WITHIN THE DISCIPLINE:
Dynamics of Authorship in Three Canadian Autobiographies

by

Adam Russell Budd
B.A., Trent University, 1992
Dip. F.A., University of Victoria, 1994

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Interdisciplinary Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

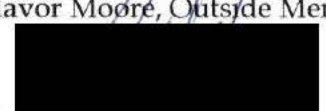
based in the Department of English

We accept that this thesis conforms
to the required standard

Dr. Stephen A. C. Scobie, Advisor (Department of English)

Dr. James Dopp, Departmental Member (Department of English)

Professor J. Mavor Moore, Outside Member (Faculty of Fine Arts)



Dr. Robert B. Walker, External Member (Department of Political Science)

Supervisor: Dr. Stephen A. C. Scobie

ABSTRACT

This thesis evaluates several approaches to three "autobiographies": Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family,* John Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse,* and Kristjana Gunnars' *The Prowler.* The thesis argues for an appreciation of the range of tropological play in a text by reading each work through a generic framework that moves beyond Philippe Lejeune's theory of the "autobiographical pact." In contrast to Lejeune, who suggests that readers merely *respond* to the text they read, this thesis proposes that critics of autobiography might derive a more interesting analysis by recognizing the *negotiation* of meaning, as it is produced *between* readers and texts.

Given the instability of literary signifiers and their problematic link to a world beyond the text, the first chapter attempts to reconcile the significance of a "monologic" narrative, Ondaatje's *Running in the Family.* As the writer names himself after Ondaatje, and suggests that his narrative represents the author, ironically, the text shows the dialogical relationship of narrative to history while it denies a dialogical play among the text's tropes. The thesis challenges most interpretations of Ondaatje's work by arguing that the text offers little direct representation of any voices other than the speaker's own, and that the speaker resists self-reflexive meditations by keeping a careful control over the anecdotes that at first seem to elicit a spontaneous response from him.

The second chapter looks at the contradictions in *Memoirs of Montparnasse.* The author opens his memoir by promising his readers that the text is a veracious representation of historical events. However, as the text develops, it becomes clear that the Glassco of 1970 is at odds with the text's characterization of him as the memoirist who claims to have written the text proper in 1932. Consistent with Lejeune's view, *Memoirs* marks itself as an autobiography through its naming of its author as the narrator/memoirist. However, when we examine the tenuous relationship between the text's author and narrator, we appreciate the range of play each persona exhibits. The text at first seems to occupy a stable generic position as "memoir," only to refute that position and question the logic of Lejeune's theory when it turns its back on verisimilitude.

What happens when a text's narrator bears only a vague connection to the author who claims to have composed the work? The third chapter addresses Kristjana Gunnars' "novel" *The Prowler,* showing how a narrative structure reproduces the implied reader's attempt to locate a stable referent embedded in the text. The narrator is passionately committed to a reclaiming of her painful childhood through writing, yet the self-consciousness the project

demands forces her, and her reader, to deconstruct the authority a present self wields over a past self when it is only the present voice that speaks (i.e., writes). This strategy, which questions relentlessly the role of the writer, encourages the reader also to question the "effect" reading has on her or his self-image. The author figure in *The Prowler*, then, is eternally elusive. No single persona can claim responsibility for the literary construction of that text.

Examiners:

[redacted]

Dr. Stephen A. C. Scobie, Advisor (Department of English)

[redacted]

Dr. James Dopp, Departmental Member (Department of English)

[redacted]

Professor J. Mavor Moore, Outside Member (Faculty of Fine Arts)

[redacted]

Dr. Robert B. Walker, External Member (Department of Political Science)

Playing Within the Discipline: Dynamics of Authorship in Three Canadian Autobiographies

CONTENTS

"Not a single instance of verbal utterance can be reckoned exclusively to its utterer's account."
"We see in the past only what is important for the present, important for the instant in which we remember our past."

V.N. Voloshinov [M. M. Bakhtin]
"Freudianism: A Critical Sketch."
The Bakhtin Reader. Ed. Pam Morris. Trans. I. R. Titunik.
London: Edward Arnold, 1994. 41-42.

My thesis is dedicated
to the memory of my maternal grandmother,
Sue Field (1918-1989).
She had promised me I'd be able to do this someday.

INTRODUCTION

Relating to the Tropes: Writing on Autobiography

How do I justify this stanza?
These feminine rhymes? My wrinkled muse?
This whole passé extravaganza?
How can I (careless of time) use
The dusty bread molds of Onegin
In the brave bakery of Reagan?
The loaves will surely fail to rise
Or else go stale before my eyes.
The truth is, I can't justify it.
But as no shroud of critical terms
Can save my corpse from boring worms,
I may as well have fun and try it.
If it works, good; and if not, well,
A theory won't postpone its knell. (Vikram Seth 101)

What right does my present have to speak of my past? Has my present some advantage over my past? What "grace" might have enlightened me? except that of passing time, or of a good cause, encountered on my way? . . . It always comes down to this: what is the project of writing which will present, not the best pretense, but simply an *undecidable pretence* . . .?
(Roland Barthes 121)

I

Well before I began to study the complexities of autobiographical works, I had vowed never to write one. It had seemed to me that an autobiography would merely replicate the kinds of dialectical misunderstandings I had already known, and regretted, for so long. For years, ever since I was very young, I was told that I used words too much, that I talked "too much" and "too passionately," that I listened "too intensely" or "for too long." I am still told that I need to hear things more than once before they sink in, and to this day, I am told I "hear things" that people "never even said." As a teenager, close friends said I sometimes talked too much and others said too little. A lover had once told me that I use words to cover my feelings -- I remember being commanded to "hush and just feel" -- as if by verbalizing my thoughts I was in a way betraying my spirit. Or, a shared spirit.

In his seminal essay "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis," Jacques Lacan theorizes on the emotional demands patients make on their analysts. Throughout his paper Lacan emphasizes the importance of "the apathy [the analyst] has brought about in [him or herself] to understand [the] subject" (13). Paradigmatically, the demands of the analysand on her analyst are like those of the autobiographer who tacitly addresses her reader:

> "Take upon yourself," the patient is telling us, "the evil that weighs me down; but if you remain smug, self-satisfied, unruffled as you are now, you won't be worthy of bearing it." (13)

Like the presumably suffering patient, autobiographers speak for complex and perhaps eternally elusive reasons. When a reader encounters texts that mark themselves as literary records of an author's self-disclosure, the most striking element of the reader's response to the work is contained in her willingness to empathize with the text's writer. It has seemed to me, for a long time, that by authoring texts that referred unambiguously to my "I" (i.e., me), I would be effectively inviting misunderstanding from my readers since, of course, my reader is by definition not me; this other subject must cross enormously difficult historical, ideological and linguistic barriers to access how I perceive myself and how I write about this perception. The practice of producing autobiography, then, always involves readers whose responses to the relations between textual figures of the author (who represent real people) are never predictable or settled. In his important essay "Autobiography as De-facement," Paul de Man explains that the autobiographer must "locate himself outside" or "before" the text to be able to achieve the right "timing" for constructing a metaphor that will appropriately access to the reader the author, since the text marks, primarily, the moment where idea and articulation coincide (921). As I shall explain at length later, the temporality of autobiography is crucial, because the self-referential text seeks not only to represent the author's history, but also his or her writing acts.

As a literature student educated in the wakes produced by deconstruction and academic feminism, I am attracted to two different positions: one asserts that no literary text ever contains a "unified," locatable speaker who is "responsible" for producing meaning. This deconstructive position, which emphasizes the playful dialectical relationship between textual tropes and the reader who reads them, insists consistently that literature is "a fictive institution" in which readers (as opposed to writers) "can say it all" by locating the pluralities of available readings represented in any given text (Derrida 16, 59).[1]

The responding position invests heavily in the notion that texts do contain ideological signifiers of stability, and that criticism performs, inescapably, a political and moral function:

> "Feminism" is a specific kind of political discourse: a theoretical and political practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism. In the field of literary studies, . . . "feminist criticism" is a criticism committed to this struggle, not simply a concern for gender in literature. (Moi 182)

Progressive criticism, an aspect of the feminist movement, will "produce theor[ies of literature] that [are] directly related to the concrete lives of women and men who are most affected by sexist oppression" (hooks, 37). For example, one might approach literary texts under the impression that "[i]n patriarchal Western culture . . . the text's author is a father, a progenitor, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of power like his penis" (Gilbert and Gubar, 6). Between these critical charges, I bounce in time with the provocative moral and logical arguments produced by both extremes. I think it is important that literary critics emphasize, self-consciously, the relation between literary production and the social constructions of power. Yet, are literary texts merely *representations* of reality, or, because they are at times vested with ideological currency, do they play a part in *performing* reality?

Autobiography studies offer themselves as a particularly ripened site for theoretical critique because, perhaps more here than anywhere else in literary studies, the critical distinction between the "writer" in a text and the "author" of the text is the hottest point of debate. Throughout this thesis I use the term "author" as reference to a person whose identity may be verified or revealed through the interpretation of signifiers not included in the autobiography. When I refer to the "speaker" or "narrator" in a text, I gesture to the author's textual mouthpiece, that protagonist who purports to write the text we read. It is this protagonist who uses the figure "I" to represent him or herself.

Yet, we may ask, how can a person represent herself in a literary work with a stability that will not confuse her voice with that of an otherwise fictional persona? How can readers hold an author responsible for the textual dynamics that represent history in a form we might find libellous? This thesis sets out to ask, fundamentally, what the formal markers are that allow critics to profess the generic determinacy of certain texts. What, we might now ask, sets autobiography apart from other literary genres?

Philippe Lejeune, in his widely influential essay "The Autobiographical Pact," answers this question with bold clarity. Here is his definition of autobiography:

> DEFINITION: Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality. (4, 120)

Autobiography "brings into play elements belonging to four different categories." These categories are: the form of language in the text, the subject treated, the indivisibility of the author from the narrating "I", and "the retrospective point of view of the narrative" (4).

This definition was formulated in 1975 and, of course, an entire body of criticism has emerged since then, much of it challenging the conventionality of Lejeune's position.[2] I include many prominent critics of Lejeunian criticism in the following chapters. I explore in my first chapter, for example, Shirley Neuman's view that readers do indeed recognize the matching appellations between protagonist -- the narrator as younger character -- and live author, as signifiers of autobiography. However, "historically considered, the protagonist of an autobiography is *not* the author; he is someone who has developed *into* the author" (321). Thus, readers of autobiography must consider not only how the author represents his past, but also how the author orchestrates the relationship between his literary representatives: the narrator (his present self who is not, of course, really "present") and his past self (the protagonist who is described).

Julia Watson finds that "Lejeune's identification of autobiography with 'a passion for a proper name [(Lejeune, 20)]' which is a transformation of the person analogous to the signature in writing," is merely a "validation of the proper name as verification of the subject to exclude women and those of slave ancestry, whose names signify at best their linkage to a patriarchal chain" (60, 246). As this thesis shows, the range of responses to Lejeune continues to widen, as Robert Folkenflik's latest collection of critical essays clearly indicates.

Lejeune relies on a structuralist view of literary production, insisting throughout his work that autobiography is founded in the legality of a contract "signed" between the reader and the author, a contract that rests on a traditional concept: reliably cognitive speech acts. Ironically, such structuralism does away with the fluidity of a possibly locatable self altogether. Lejeune's theory may be summed up thus:

> [I]n printed texts, responsibility for all enunciation is assumed by a person who is in the habit of placing his *name* on the cover . . . the entire existence of the *author* is summed up by his name: the only mark in the text of an unquestionable world-beyond-the-text, referring to a real person, which requires that we thus attribute to him, in the final analysis, the responsibility of the whole written text. (11)

This means that the author does not achieve self-disclosure through the manipulation of relationships between the tropes of protagonist and narrator to construct the past. Instead, she merely posits, through declarative nomenclatures, that her narrator is the author who writes, and that this gesture unambiguously discloses the author's view of herself. In speech-act theory, words are not used just to *say* things, rather they perform the function of actively *doing* something. In linguistic pragmatics, speech acts rely on a typology of conditions known as "felicity conditions" (Levinson, 227-229) and, as examples of deixis, identify the fact that words refer to objective referents existing outside the text.[3] Each of these

conditions upholds the fundamental notion that, as language use is a conventional procedure that guarantees conventional effects, the use of words actually, under certain conditions, produces a particular physical or psychological action on the part of speaker and listener (or, for Lejeune, writer and reader). Yet, although the text's physical composition might have been overseen by a real person, no single person can guarantee or be made responsible for how that text will be understood by its reader. Thus, Lejeune's notion of "the autobiographical pact" incorporates another perceived element of textual production: the reader's willingness to align the textual tropes directly with the author's view of himself. Lejeune emphasizes throughout that

> The autobiographical pact is the affirmation in the text of ["the identicalness of the *name* (author-narrator-protagonist)"], referring back to the *name* of the author on the cover. (14)

The basic assumption underlying Lejeune's theory is that the reader's association between the "real person" and the textual tropes is somehow stable, and that this stability, while it does affirm the self-referentiality of the trope, will not challenge the nature of that relationship.

Derrida's essay "Signature Event Context" offers a far-reaching examination of the ideological currency invested in the conventional notion of a signature. "By definition," according to Derrida, "a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer" (107). Yet, in typical deconstructionist fashion, Derrida proceeds to expose the problematic nature of presumably fixed signifiers that pretend to represent an "absent" subject:

> [W]riting . . . is not the means of transport of sense, the exchange of intentions and meanings, the discourse and "communication of consciousness." [In the signature w]e are not witnessing an end of writing which . . . would restore a transparency or immediacy of social relations; but indeed a more and more powerful historical unfolding of a general writing of which the system of speech, consciousness, meaning, presence, truth, etc. would only be an effect, to be analysed as such. (108)

Derrida clarifies this statment, asserting that "each concept ... belongs to a systematic chain and itself constitutes a system of predicates. There is no metaphysical concept [or utterance] in and of itself" (108).

Deconstruction seeks, primarily, not to "pass" one concept to another, but to "overturn" and "displace" conceptual orders "as well as the nonconceptual order in which the conceptual order is articulated" (108). Despite (or, perhaps, due to) the effects of deconstruction on the academy in recent years, speech-act theory continues to enjoy an enormous popularity in conservative enclaves in critical theory.[4] In "The Resistance to

Theory," de Man playfully illustrates the unfortunate confusions that occur when "literature is [seen] as a reliable source of information about anything but its own language." de Man reminds us that "no one in his right mind will try to grow grapes by the luminosity of the word 'day,'" yet it is easy to find literary critics who will confuse "the linguistic with natural reality," thus overlooking the ways in which textual signifiers play on each other to construct a perceived reality (11).

A definition of autobiography, or indeed any literary genre, then, must account for the specular complexities invited by the reading experience. de Man elsewhere argues that the autobiographer's literary referent (the "I" representing the real person) might not be organizing the text; rather, the presumably self-referential text, which is "governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture [is] thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of [the author's] medium" (1979, 920). Media resources and reception strategies complicate the text's temporal position. Autobiographies are read as metaphors of an author's experience; they are not in themselves the actual experience. de Man cites Gérard Genette: "it suffices to locate oneself (as a reader) outside the text (*before* it) to be able to say that . . . timing has been manipulated in order to produce the *metaphor*" (921). For de Man, "The specular moment that is part of all understanding reveals the tropological structure that underlies all cognition, including knowledge of self. The interest of autobiography, then, is that . . . it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of totalization (that is, the coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological systems" (922). In other words, autobiographical texts, or any other texts that pretend to represent a subject's self-reflections, are a set of fluid symbols which, ultimately, signify their own dependence on metaphor (substitution) to reveal the author to the reader.[5] The autobiography, then, shows that the author is not the text she or he writes. Moreover, the autobiographical project pretends an accessibility that serves not the author's authority, but the authority of "linguistic structures" and unstable tropes (922).

As the sharp theoretical differences between de Man and Lejeune illustrate, throughout autobiography studies critics dispute the means by which "the author" of a text merges with her textual representation, "the writer" who narrates. Aside from their means or possibility of mergence, the association between speaker and author in the field is generally analogous to the nature of metonymic discourse as it was defined by the formalist critic Roman Jakobson in 1956. In "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," Jakobson theorized that speakers use language in two ways, each of which corresponds either to "metaphoric" or "metonymic" poles in language:

> The development of a discourse may take place along two different semantic lines: one topic may lead to another either through their similarity or through their

> contiguity. The metaphoric way would be the most appropriate term for the first case and the metonymic way for the second, since they find their most condensed expression in metaphor and metonymy respectively. (110)

As a rhetorical term, metonymy refers to the designation of a trope to represent an exemplary aspect of its larger object. Metaphor is used to paradigmatically represent a separate object. The distinction is made, primarily, by the means in which speakers employ them. For Jakobson, Tolstoy's synechdoches "hair on the upper lip" and "bare shoulders" are metonymies because they stand in for the character who bears these features (111). However, the use of "cats and dogs" in the sentence "it's raining cats and dogs" is a metaphor because cats and dogs are not, semantically or semiotically, an attribute of rain. Not even their attributes are meant to be referred to.

When Philippe Lejeune insists that readers comply with the narrative's "rules" by investing in the notion that an author's name in her text will be understood by the reader as a representation of the actual person who writes, he conceives of the literary trope as a metonymy. However, what if the reader does not comply with this semiotic structure and hence won't conceive of this contiguity between the two figures? Does the text, then, lose its autobiographical qualities? Lejeune's theory explains that readers enter into a tacit contractual agreement with autobiographical texts, consenting that the protagonist, narrator, and author represent the same subject and that the narrator's stories represent the historical development of that subject. In my thesis I explore the ways in which nomenclatures are manipulated to stand in for the dominant narrative figure. I shall argue that, because the trope's links to peripheral referents are so complicated, the autobiographical dimensions of a literary text emerge through the reader's speculation on the nature of the text's narrative structures and textual thematic concerns.

Contemporary critics such as Leon Surette take issue with Jakobson's definitions in ways analogous to the critique de Man offers of Lejeune: both critics assert that semiotic systems such as "autobiographical pact" and "discursive poles" rely on the assumed understanding or compliance of the subject with the implied semantic associations of the formal theory. "In truth," Surette claims, "metaphor is a trope of 'resemblance' -- a relationship that exists *outside* [the articuations of] semantics and outside semiology . . . to which we have cognitive access even though the relation of resemblance is itself ill defined" (570). For example, for Jakobson, the use of the term "head of state" for the Governor General is an example of metaphor, because the state has no corporeal form and the trope employs paradigmatic substitution to achieve its effect; "head" is substituted for "leader." Yet, perhaps the speaker does not use the term metaphorically but is actually referring to the highest level of the state's government. In that case, "highest" is contiguous with "head" and "government" is contiguous with "state," hence the perceived semantic and semiotic uses

are made redundant by the speaker's cognitive associations. Likewise, the epistemological authority in autobiography is by no means defined by an abstract contract between a reader and author: it is vested in the dialectical relationships between literary tropes and the reader's conception of them.

Reading "autobiography" through deconstructionist and formalist theory allows me to focus on several key issues, each of which originates with the question: What are the textual signifiers that allow critics to assume the generic specificity of "autobiographical" texts? Do critics tend to employ the Jakobsonian means of registering the perceived semiotic referents of textual signifiers and, through this, determine the author's intentions? While I sympathize strongly with the directions such a critical position might take (as the following chapters will show), I also attend to the possibilities offered by a de Manian interrogation of the textual subject: I proceed to examine how the narrative structure of a text reproduces the reader's attempt to locate a stable referent perceived to be imbedded in the text. In short, I deploy formalist and deconstructionist theory to emphasize the disciplinary nature of literary self-representation, while I explore the range of play the speakers and protagonists exhibit. In many cases, the speaker's representation seems to push the perceived limits of the text, as it proceeds to develop its relations among tropes; all this happens from within in the very genre that seems to confine the subject and make it fixed.

II

In the following three chapters, I do not propose a new theoretical model for defining autobiography. Instead, I explore how bodies of the critical writings that address themselves to three very different texts offer us a range of possibilities for determining their generic status as "autobiography." Yet, through these responses, I propose to read each text as represention of different generic positions. My first chapter, "A Memoir Resisting Polyphony," examines the logic of generic determinacy as it is demonstrated by prominent critics of Michael Ondaatje's widely popular and influential "travel memoir," *Running in the Family* (1982). In this text, the speaker and author merge seamlessly; the speaker refers in his acknowledgements to those who helped him to compose his text, and his family's names are consistent with those Ondaatje uses in his autobiographical poetry and dedications published elsewhere. Most critics declare Ondaatje's work "polyphonic" because they argue that its narrative voice values all verbal sources equally so that there is no dominant discourse or "narrator." However, as my chapter argues, the text makes consistent and unambiguous references to Michael Ondaatje, a figure who exceeds the limits of the text, and thus the speaker who represents him dominates the narrative. *Running in the Family* resists polyphony by virtue of its narrator's ideological position as the text's prime voice,

and thus, the text presents a tragic but innocuous history of the author's family: the history is opened and closed in a concise fashion, from a stable perspective that does not change regardless of the emotional force of the stories told. It seems to me that given Ondaatje is the writer of this history, and not a product of it, his presence demonstrates a monologic quality to the text. A monologic presence, Ondaatje's textual representative tells *one figure's own view*, which demands that *Running in the Family* is essentially grounded in monologism: it is "an idea [that is] placed in the mouth of a hero who is portrayed as a fixed and finalized image of reality"(Bakhtin 78). As a memoir, the text shows the speaker's outward representations of the world, rather than in autobiography, where the text develops the author's view of him or her self.

My second chapter argues for John Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (1970) as a fictional autobiography because the dominant narrator, a writer who professes to be writing his memoirs, splits up into two characters: the protagonist who struggles to write his memoirs while living it up in Paris in 1928, and the bed-ridden narrator who writes retrospectively of the protagonist while he reflects, in the present tense, on his present condition (he claims to write at the brink of a premature death). I call the text a "fictional autobiography" because the text is an example of literary self-representation, despite the author's audacious prefatory note:

> I wrote the first three chapters of this book in Paris in 1928 when I was eighteen . . . The rest of the book was written in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal during three months of the winter of 1932-33 [. . . F]or reasons of discretion I have given several characters fictitious names. Nothing else has been altered or omitted[. This text] expose[s] the youthful memoirist in all his flippancy, hedonism and conceit. [W]hy change any of this? This young man is no longer myself: I hardly recognize him[;] he is less like someone I have been than a character in a novel I have read.
> *J.G.*
> *Foster, Quebec*
> *October 1969* (xiii)

Throughout *Memoirs*, the subject "J.G." proceeds to break this promise: his "recognition" of his past self is strenuously stylized and his commitment not to interfere in the 1932 narrative is reneged on. In this prefatory note, the narrator merges with the author: both claim to share the same name and, thus, author the same text. Yet, ironically, this strange declaration, along with its implicit defensiveness, promises the reader that the text will represent the author's past. The subsequent splitting of the writer into a self-reflective protagonist (who writes his own story) and the stable narrator who writes in 1928, is eventually double, creating two narrators: one is this split subject, and the other is the 1932 hospitalized memoirist. This "doubling" demonstrates a radical reneging on the autobiographical promise made in the preface, a promise that denounces any unwarranted intervention in the unfolding text. Although the textual subject appears to split and then

doubles, "J.G." never leaves the reader's side. As I argue in "Disclaiming the Autobiographical Promise of a Memoirist," the complex relationship between the author's tropes succeeds in producing an autobiography that is exemplary of Lejeune's theory, yet, the text deconstructs the integrity of the authorial subject.

My third chapter, "The Literary Life of a Fictional Text," proceeds to question the generic status of a text that claims to be autobiographical while it repeatedly refutes the fixedness of all literary signifiers. While Kristjana Gunnars entitles her 1989 prose work *The Prowler: A Novel,* the dominant narrator in her text insists on prosopopeic devices to illustrate the nature of the "hungry" text that "is self-deceiving [and] eventually rejects itself":

> There is always another author, behind the official author, who censors the text as it appears. The other author writes: that is not what you intended to say. . . . I think of a book that has left in the censor's words. A book that does not pretend it is not talking about itself. All books talk about themselves. (63)

Reading Gunnars' "novel," the reader is encouraged to actually repeat the kinds of linguistic games the protagonist must play in order to follow an unstable, distracted voice, and understand how the protagonist (a child) becomes the narrator (the young woman writer). The author and speaker's mutual, dialogical signalling constructs a subtle claim by the speaker that her father bears the same name as the person who is mentioned in the text's dedication to "Gunnar, my father" (94). Where Glassco's text represents the confusing nomenclature of autobiographical writing, Gunnars effectively *reproduces* the personified "text" as we read it. In effect, the text shows the unstable nature of literary signifiers when they are used between subjects. When the protagonist, a young girl, sits alone in the cold attic of her parents' home in Iceland, she soothes her loneliness by reading Russian books she does not "understand." "I discovered," the narrator says, "that if one reads slowly enough there was a peculiar pleasure to be had from meaningless words," a pleasure that might be solicited to the reader by the Icelandic text reprinted on *The Prowler*'s cover (159). In the text proper, the mergence of the speaker with the author demonstrates a complicated play between words and images that seems to disrupt the author's view of herself and her language: effectively, she finds herself absorbed in a project that would require her to describe her world with words that demand an avoidance of such disruptions. The implication, as I shall explain, is that postmodernist texts employ an anti-structuralist position: they demonstrate that literary tropes cannot really occupy a metaphoric position with respect to their "larger whole," i.e., the live author, because phenomenologically, the autobiographical text demands fluidity in its links to a stable referent.

One of the exciting benefits of writing about autobiography under the influence of deconstruction is that, because "there is no world beyond the text," we may openly include

in the analysis examinations of critical works that respond to the literary work at hand. For this reason among others, autobiography studies tend to evade speculating on the veracity of the texts under examination. My thesis is concerned, then, with how these texts might be treated, rather than defining, with stability, the history the texts may stand for. For if autobiography is the textual rendering of one person's memory, the genre is endlessly problematic; as Derrida laments the death of Paul de Man, he remarks: "There is no singular memory" because all narratives bear their own genealogies (1986, 14). Furthermore, while it is important for the critic to address the physicality of the text (when certain aspects of it were published, etc.), an issue I deal with throughout this thesis, the attempt to discuss an autobiography as "a finished product" that contains its "real message" is again problematic, and perhaps undesirable. As Derrida goes on to say, "one cannot and should not attempt to survey or totalize the meaning of an ongoing process, especially when its structure is one of transference. To do so would be to assign it limits which are not its own; to weaken it, date it, to slow it down" (17). Instead, this thesis attempts to illustrate the dynamics with which the author's tropes reveal unfolding visions of authorial self-representation.

Read as an autobiographical document, perhaps this thesis responds to those pre-graduate school peers, appealing for readers and critics to focus on their perceptions of the relations among the tropes and, thus, to avoid projecting their impressions onto the author, who really had only a small hand in producing these unending projects.

Notes

1 Jacques Derrida and Derek Attridge, "This Strange Institution Called Literature" 36. By "fictive," Derrrida means "an object that contains various fictions," as distinct from "fictional," which suggests that the object has no stable referent outside the text. Derrida uses the phrase *tout dire*, which roughly translates as "to say everything," but perhaps it could be more precisely but awkwardly translated as "to say it all without hindrance or constraint." The French verb *dire* allows for interpretations that incorporate liberation in speech, beyond the English verb "to say," and instead, "to say freely."

Throughout the following chapters I use "trope" according to the classical definition. The term derives from the Greek *trópos*, meaning 'a turn, manner, or style' (McArthur 1057). Leon Surette defines it thus: "a trope is a deviation, a 'turning' -- some alteration of standard linguistic practice so as to draw attention to the expression so denominated." "The explanation . . . here offered is, in my terms, a *cognitive* one. I call it 'cognitive' because the explanation appeals to the sense, meaning, denotation, or reference of the lex[icons] in question, and not just to their linguistic [i.e., semiotically prescribed] roles" (557).

2 Julia Watson's paper, and its accompanying endnotes, provide an excellent bibliography of the major souces in autobiography studies that have responsed to the influence of Lejeune's definition.

3 In "Formal Apparatus of Enunciation," Emile Benveniste identifies the specificity of the deictics in literary texts, arguing that because language has no objective referents, language actually alludes to itself. For this reason, deixis is problematic; meaning is determinable only insofar as the means of the instance of discourse is taken into consideration, thus discourse refers only to itself (Godzich xvi).

4 To use an extreme but timely example, Catherine MacKinnon's now famous "basis of harm" theory of pornography relies on the integrity of speech acts to justify the notion that the eradication of certain literary texts will effectively abolish certain behaviours:

> Empirically, of all two-dimensional forms of sex, it is only pornography, not its ideas as such, that gives men erections that support aggression against women in particular. Put another way, an erection is neither a thought nor a feeling, but a behaviour. It is only pornography that rapists use to select whom they rape and to get up for their rapes. (16)

For MacKinnon, reading seems to function as a form of sex, one which involves much more than integrating ideas. Unfortunately, however, the destruction of selected reading materials does not directly result in deterring people from committing undesirable acts. Reading is never a form of rape. If this were the case, then it would be much easier to hunt down potential rapists by virtue of their buying patterns, for example. However, as civil libertarianists remind us, books are read for many different reasons, and no common action guarantees common thoughts. All students who emerge from Sunday School at two-thirty do not go on to say more prayers, read more scripture, or beat up their little brothers afterward. Following MacKinnon's logic, her own book would be deemed illicit, since it quotes (i.e., reproduces) the pornography MacKinnon wants to censor.

5 In "The Rhetoric of Persuasion," de Man points out that the distinction between constative and performative speech acts is confounded by the fictionality, or constructedness, of both: ". . . the possibility for language to perform is just as fictional as the possibility for language to assert," and "considered as persuasion, rhetoric is performative, but considered as a system of tropes, it deconstructs its own performance"

(129, 130-131). Thus, those "actions" that are "performed" by speech acts are contingent on the fluid dynamics demanded by any usage of the said terms.

Works Cited

Barthes, Roland. *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. "The Idea in Dostoevsky." Ed. Wayne Booth. Trans. Caryle Emerson. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. 78-101.

de Man, Paul. "Autobiography as De-facement." *MLN* 94 (1979): 919-930.

————. "The Rhetoric of Persuasion." *Allegories of Reading.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1987.

————. "The Resistance to Theory." *The Resistance to Theory.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. 3-20.

Derrida, Jacques. "This Strange Institution Called Literature: An Interview with Jacques Derrida." Ed. Derek Attridge. *Acts of Literature.* New York: Routledge, 1992. 33-75.

————. "Mnemosyne." *Mémoirs: for Paul de Man.* Trans. Cecile Lindsay. New York: Columbia UP, 1986. 1-43.

————. "Signature Event Context." Ed. Peggy Kamuf. *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds.* New York: Columbia UP, 1991. 80-111.

Folkenflik, Robert. Ed. *The Culture of Autobiography.* University of Calfornia Press, 1993.

Glassco, John. *Memoirs of Montparnasse.* Toronto: Oxford UP, 1970.

Godzick, Wlad. "Foreward." Paul de Man. *The Resistance to Theory.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. ix-xviii.

Gunnars, Kristjana. *The Prowler.* Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 1989.

hooks, bell. "feminist theory: a radical agenda." *Talking Back.* Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 1988. 35-41.

Jakobson, Roman. "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances." *Language in Literature.* Ed. and Trans. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987. 95-120.

Levinson, Stephen C. *Pragmatics.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.

Lacan, Jacques. "Aggresivity in Psychoanalysis." Ed. and Trans. Alan Sheridan. *Ecrits: A Selection.* New York: Norton, 1977. 8-29.

Lejeune, Phillipe. "The Autobiographical Pact." Ed. Paul John Eakin. Trans. Katherine Leary. *On Autobiography.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. 4-30.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.

McArthur, Tom. Ed. *The Oxford Companion to the English Language.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

Moi, Toril. "Men Against Patriarchy." Ed. Linda Kauffman. *Gender and Theory.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1988. 181-188.

MacKinnon, Catherine A. *Only Words.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.

Neuman, Shirley. "The Observer Observed: Distancing the Self in Autobiography." *Prose Studies* (1981): 61-72.

Ondaatje, Michael. *Running in the Family.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982.

Seth, Vikram. *The Golden Gate.* London: Faber and Faber, 1986.

Surette, Leon. "Metaphor and Metonymy: Jakobson Reconsidered." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 56 (Summer 1987): 557-574.

Watson, Julia. "Toward an Anti-Metaphysics of Autobiography." Ed. Robert Folkenflik. *The Culture of Autobiography.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993. 57-79.

CHAPTER ONE

A Memoir Resisting Polyphony: Dominance and Anecdote in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1982)

> [Writing poetry] is a process of unfolding. If you already know the last line of the poem, how can you write the poem? You can't. But you can take the last line and make it the first line and go on from there. Anything else is boring . . . if you know where it's going to end.
> (Michael Ondaatje in Pearce 139)

I

Mervyn Ondaatje died shortly after his son Michael left Ceylon for England in 1954. Twenty-four years later, Ondaatje made his first return trip to his native country and began working on his first-person narrative *Running in the Family,* which in part describes this return journey. In the fifth section the author recalls a morning he spent with his sister at the house of Sir John Kotelawala, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka and one of Mervyn's old acquaintances.[1] As the three stroll out of Sir John's elaborate peacock garden and into the ornate breakfast room, Michael and Gillian ease their host into telling them stories about their father. Sir John tells of when both men were officers of the Ceylon Light Infantry during the Second World War. One night Mervyn, who was very drunk, returned to the base and announced to his company that the Japanese had invaded and that he had captured an enemy soldier. When he and Sir John climbed into a jeep and raced back to collect the intruder, they found that the man Mervyn had caught was not a Japanese soldier, but a terrified Tamil. Ondaatje recounts Sir John's memory:

> There was a man five yards out in the surf standing there like a statue . . . [Mervyn] had found him two hours earlier coming ashore, halted him, fired his pistol into the water between the man's legs and said, stay there, *do not move* till I get back, and [Mervyn] jumped into the jeep and came to get us at the base. (133)

In the paragraph that follows, the narrator describes the details of their extravagant breakfast. He writes about how the exotic sabhur has eaten the bananas and remarks that breakfasts at Sir John's are "legendary, always hoppers and fish curry, mangoes and curd." They sit and eat while Sir John finishes his story. Michael leans back in his chair and finds the "precise luxury" of a rushing cold breeze on his tired feet. He relaxes, and suddenly one of his sandals is wrenched off as he stretches his foot to the draft. When he glances beneath the table he is startled to find that he has placed his naked foot dangerously close to the spinning blades of a small portable fan. At the end of the paragraph he says, briefly as if it were only an afterthought, "I could have lost a toe during one of these breakfasts searching for my father."

Indeed, the speaker in *Running in the Family*, who attempts to represent the author Michael Ondaatje, could have been touched both physically and emotionally by the return trip to his native country. As in the case of Kristjana Gunnars' quasi-autobiographical "novel" *The Prowler*, Ondaatje's self-image as a self-reflective author may have been transformed by the somewhat autobiographical act of reporting his family history, and it is of course possible that the Sri Lankan experiences[2] and the writing of them have made their mark on Ondaatje. Yet, as the author who represents himself as an adventurous personality who by writing journeys through his family history, he does not offer any indications that the trip has affected Ondaatje's most highly suggestive metonymy: his voice as the first-person narrator. *Running in the Family* tries to stabilise itself by offering the reader certain promises in the form of a Lejeunian "autobiographical pact." This pact is comprised of several signposts in the text that guarantee the reader that the text's narrator, who is the writer of what are largely the recollections of his aunt and other relatives, will be protected from the gravitational pull of emotions generated by these stories. I agree with Douglas Barbour that the "focal autobiographical [that is, self-referential] action of this text" is "the translation of oral stories into written ones." As such, the speaker "see[s] others more often than he sees himself" (139). Ondaatje's approach to a source of origin will be like the fan that cools his feet -- it will come dangerously close, but he will not be harmed because his writing composes its action.[3] For this reason among others, *Running in the Family* is not Michael Ondaatje's autobiography.

I do not mean to suggest, however, that this text presents an easy case for generic categorization. Most of the critical attention paid to Ondaatje's book explores what Linda Hutcheon has called "[Ondaatje's] challenge to the boundaries of art in general with a defiance of the limits of conventional genres" (301). Smaro Kamboureli has argued that "*Running in the Family* keeps its final intelligibility forever at bay by practising a deferral of meaning and of generic definition related to the autobiographical elements of the book" (80).

In her view, the text is a "non-autobiography" primarily because, "although [Ondaatje] sets out to reinscribe himself into his past, [he] betrays his autobiographical project: he does not discover himself; instead he finds his father" (85). Wil Verhoeven strongly disagrees with the logic of Kamboureli's argument and disregards her main point, namely that Ondaatje's "substitution of subjects . . . marks the slippage between author and writer" (85-86). Instead, Verhoeven ignores the de Manian distinction between the live author and textual writer, claiming that "*Running in the Family* is essentially a son's anguished search for his lost father" (196), and as the protagonist who strenuously identifies himself as his father's son, Ondaatje's search for his father is by extension a search for himself.[4] These two views are incompatible primarily because the distinction illustrated by the "relationship" between the narrator (who is a memoirist) and Michael Ondaatje (who is, after all, the text's author), opens up a theoretical terrain these two critics will not share.

The autobiographical dimensions of a literary text construct themselves through particular narrative structures and textual thematic concerns. Here I explore the narrative dynamics which allow critics to argue *Running in the Family*'s generic indeterminacy as autobiography. The central object of the speaker's "search for his father" is hampered by the textual writer's reluctance to suspend his poetic license and present his family as vocal, polyphonic subjects and, as Glassco might put it, "characters in a novel [he] ha[s] read," (viii) namely, objects who speak in the author's voice. I shall maintain that Ondaatje's narrative is dominated by the voice of a writer (who seems to represent Ondaatje) who belies the chorus of his other subjects, even though these subjects were the original sources of the text the narrator writes. This chapter develops into a discussion of how the text's narrator gestures to anecdotal episodes as a way of enforcing his voice as the definitive, but not self-analytical, textual subject. I locate the narrator in Roman Jakobson's terms as "the dominant focusing component" in the text, who "dominate[s] all the remaining [textual] elements and exert[s] direct influence upon them" (41). Mikhail Bakhtin, who invented polyphony as a theoretical term, is clear: "the soil of monistic idealism is the least likely place for a plurality of unmerged consciousnesses to blossom" (26), and in my view, the speaker in *Running in the Family* provides a perfect example of narratorial monistic idealism.

The speaker is named after Michael Ondaatje, a personality who continues to maintain a renowned reticence to disclose any details about his personal life. Ostensibly, Ondaatje's refusal to speak candidly about himself invites readers to fill the obvious absence of a self-referential signifier with his text's first-person narrator (who is, after all, a brilliant writer). Nevertheless, no figurative persona speaks directly from the mouth of an author, no matter what its name is. This chapter looks at the strategy through which the

speaker asserts himself as the *locus in quo* throughout the book, arguing that the text casts a writer's travels into words by resisting the implications of polyphony. This posture enables the speaker to evade acts of self-description.

II

> [Postmodern enterprise] is neither uncertain nor suspending of judgement: it questions the very bases of any certainty (history, subjectivity, reference) and of any standards of judgement. Who sets them? Where? When? Why? (Hutcheon 1988, 57)

> The world of poetry, no matter how many contradictions and insoluble conflicts the poet develops within it, is always illuminated by one unitary and indisputable discourse . . . In poetry, even discourse about doubts must be cast in a discourse that cannot be doubted. (Bakhtin 1981, 286)

At the outset, I agree with Barbour's claim that "*Running in the Family* . . . simultaneously allows and denies conventional readings, drawing us in to its apparent representation even as it reveals the deeply fictional agenda of all writing" (136). The next stage in his argument, however, confuses his position. He shares a critical reading of the text with numerous other critics,[5] namely the view that "in this text memories are the basic documents the writer has to work with. All are of equal value, including his own, and in their juxtaposition he creates a deeply dialogic text" (136). This argument poses a basic problem for Lejeunian autobiographical analysis -- which insists on locating a unifying voice of the central author in the text -- because a truly dialogic text contains no dominant narratorial voice that will mediate such "juxtaposition" of memories. Juxtapositions of voices -- by far the most common vehicle in the book for representing memory -- require us to address the narratological status of the text. How can a text that privileges its narrator represent discourse polyphonically? According to Barbour, the speaker articulates and establishes the "collective" nature of his family's history early in the text, thus suggesting that dialogism pervades the very source of the speaker's impressions. Early in the text, Ondaatje writes:

> No story is told just once. Whether a memory or funny hideous scandal, we will return to it an hour later and retell the story with additions and this time a few adjustments thrown in. In this way history is organised. (19)

Linda Hutcheon, in her paper entitled "*Running in the Family*: The Postmodern Challenge," finds that this text emphasises the reader's role in the construction of Ondaatje's "dialogical" historical record. She stresses that the act of "writing" history by recording shared memories is a "performative act" indicative of a postmodernist strategy that necessarily includes the text's reader, who here forms "the first-level link between life and art" (304). John Russell pays homage to Hutcheon's argument, with his claim that

"[s]*earching* takes place in life, *ordering* in the mind. [Ondaatje as] writer invariably, unlike a journalist, is attempting to meld himself with his material, not report on it" (39). None of these arguments states (although each implies) that, although Ondaatje describes his physical presence as a writer and listener, there is really only one voice (i.e., "his") that the reader ever reads; there is no interaction among peripheral subjects, and no story is "returned to" again or recorded in the text more than once.[6] Yet, it is only through our sanctioning the speaker's privileged position that we learn how "history" is "produced." None of these critics refers to another narrator or a narrative voice that is attributed to a writer who is not Ondaatje, nevertheless "dialogical" and "polyphonic" are prominent adjectives critics use to describe the text's narrative structure and the author's ideological conscience. Ondaatje locates his text precariously between a contrived representation of a real journey home and highly stylized accounts of his family's history. Within that, he creates a text that avoids self-description and instead entertains the reader with what Arun Mukherjee calls "a collection of anecdotes which may or may not be funny depending on one's own place in the world" (57). As I develop an analysis of the text, however, we might come closer to finding the function of those anecdotes for the speaker's written world.

Although only one of the critics who responds to *Running in the Family* cites the work of Mikhail Bakhtin in his respective essay, almost every critic who writes about the text uses the rhetorical term "polyphonic" when describing it. Bakhtin coined the term as a specific reference to "the new novelistic genre" of Dostoevsky.[7] In his seminal text entitled *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin explains that the polyphonic novel, as a distinctive genre, requires a new critical framework because it challenges or evades "historico-literary schemes that we usually apply to the novel." He continues, explaining that the polyphonic novel distinguishes itself in one central way:

> [In the polyphonic novel, a] character's word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author's word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character's objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author's voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, *alongside* the author's word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters. (7)

Notice the emphasis on language ("word") as the determining indicator of a subject's epistemology. Bakhtin clarifies his coinage by describing critical essays which, in his view, neglect to point out that Dostoevsky's novels distinguish themselves by displaying "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices." This is a characteristic that many critics find in their readings of *Running in the Family*. I take the contrary view: because there appears an unambiguous mergence of

the author and speaker in the text, the narrator (a trope) is none other than the author's intended textual mouthpiece and therefore, for both a structural and ideological analysis, the text cannot be polyphonic in an important way. The text's speaker -- who is both author and narrator -- exceeds the status of "character," even though we may maintain that the elitist position does not offer a veracious sampling of Ondaatje's voice. The pretense of author-ity is enough to elevate that trope. Bakhtin's emphasis on the character's "voices" is important, especially in a critique of a first-person narrative because the narrator here insists on representing a real person. Thus, any voices besides Ondaatje's will appear as direct speech. In a fictional text, that is, a novel in which the reader understands that no persona is epistemologically dominant, analysis of direct speech is less important for locating polyphony. Yet, because *Running in the Family* merges the narrator (the writer who speaks as the "I') with the author, the writer is not one character among others and all text, besides text appearing as direct speech, descends from his voice.

A crucial grounding point in Bakhtin's logic is the Russian Formalist notion of "the dominant," or *dominanta*. Caryl Emerson explains that Bakhtin's usage refers directly to Roman Jakobson's formulation of *dominanta* in poetry (13n).[8] The formulation is comprised of formal qualities that imply an ideological position:

> The dominant specifies the work. . . . It might seem that this is simply a tautology: verse is verse [for example]. However, we must constantly bear in mind that the element which specifies a given variety of language dominates the entire structure and thus acts as its mandatory and inalienable constituent, dominating all the remaining elements and directing direct influence upon them. (Jakobson 41)

For Jakobson, generic categorization is determined by a reader's detection of a distinct "verbal message" in the text, which is the ideologically controlling element. The dominant in certain lyric poetry, for example, is its rhyming scheme; in prose it is the message indicating an authorial referent (43). More specifically for Bakhtin's theory of polyphony, the function of a narrator (or "character") in a novel or any prose work is to indicate a mode of authorial predestination: might the speaker allow characters "their freedom *vis à vis* the usual externalising and finalising [of] authorial definitions"? (13). As most critics point out (Hutcheon 1985, Barbour 1993), the textual writer in *Running in the Family* resists what Bakhtin would call a "monolization" of his subjects (such as his aunts, to whom he pays homage) because the speaker appears not to reduce them to mere sources of "monological sermons" (13-18). The most obvious indication of a polyphonic novel is a range of narrative voices, yet it would be misleading to term a text polyphonic simply by virtue of its generous representations of direct quotes or speeches. It must not be "a philosophical monologue unfolding dialectically" (26); a polyphonic text must do more than just offer a

sample of various personalities: it must also contain an ideological message. Its "dominance" must reveal "concrete artistic links between the various planes of the [text], their combination in the [structural and thematic] unity of the work must be explained and demonstrated by the material of the [text itself]" (27). Yet, the speaker in Ondaatje's text articulates the text's only voice, representing a stable and unquestioned epistemology. Thus, it seems to me that "just as the complex of idea-forces ruling the hero serves as the dominant in an artistic representation of him, so the point of view from which the hero observes the world serves as the dominant in the representation of surrounding reality" and because the speaker merges with the author, Ondaatje produces his "surrounding history," his family's history (Bakhtin 23). Because the sparse self-references in that history are merely fragmentary anecdotes, it seems that Ondaatje excludes himself from the history he tells: his dominance enables him to feign an escape from the formative nature of family history.

Running in the Family emphasises Ondaatje's literary construction of history, demonstrating that the textual writer writes history as a means of celebrating oral stories and making his family more "real" by "touch[ing] them into words" (22). In a 1992 radio interview, Ondaatje said: "writing links up one's own life with the history of our time . . . You place yourself against a cave wall, where hundreds of years of art have been inscribed, then you link yourself to it in some way. For me, that's the relationship between history and writing, all contemporary writing" (Wachtel, 1993). This provocative linking scheme does not entail, however, that the act of writing elicit in the reader (or the speaker) a self-reflexive interrogation of the speaker's epistemology. Such an interrogation could make way for a polyphony of speaking subjects. However, in fact, the text's speaker internalises the voices of his stories' sources, which enables him to recall their experiences without quoting from them directly. This allows him to retain a monologic tone even when quoting from them. Thus, the text sets peripheral voices aside to allow the speaker to dominate the narrative.

While it may seem that the internalization of dialogue is a polyphonic device (since the stories derive from a multitude of sources), its mode of enunciation tells all. Barbour writes that the first section of *Running in the Family* is "a fragment of autobiographical story, [. . .it is a] reminder that we are engaged in a textual endeavour" (138), and that history's textuality, which demands the subjectivity of speaker and reader, is acknowledged. The section recalls a dream the speaker had of his father and he cites this as the impetus for his return journey: "What began it all was the bright bone of a dream I could hardly hold onto . . . my father, chaotic, surrounded by dogs" (21). Barbour rightly concedes that "dreams are always potentially predictive," and that the speaker's acknowledgement, that he "was always running . . . back to the family I had grown from -- . . . I wanted to

touch them into words," (22) indicates that framing the family in a literary text will satisfy Ondaatje's deep wish to find his family. That this running must take the speaker in a retrospective or backward direction, to the people he had "grown from" suggests, moreover, that the writing will either be deeply introspective or monologically historical, and rooted in a stable temporal location. Yet, Kamboureli states, and Barbour agrees, that "the writer's language makes itself part of what it refers to, it speaks of the scandalous, of the slippages from genre to genre, from subject to subject" (87), a modality that requires a shifting temporality. More specifically for Barbour, "[Mervyn's] scandal[ous] behaviour can stand as partial explanation for the scandal in literary form that the writer has perpetuated in *Running in the Family*, a book that breaks literary codes the way the father's behaviour broke social ones" (153-154). In my view, however, it is a mistake to compare the scandalous deeds of the father with the scandalous narratorial acts of the son, because one encloses and thus eclipses the other. We simply do not know the deeds of the father: we only know certain accounts of them, as they have been rendered readable by the son and *for* him by others. The proleptical opening to *Running in the Family* misleads the reader: the speaker does not write retrospectively of *his* own past as he has experienced it, rather he treats his genealogy as anecdotes that are told by others. This strategy masks his relationship to his family and to his past; thus the narrative advertises his position as the family's narrative voice.

Kamboureli's contention, that "the registers of [the text's] many genres deconstruct the autobiographical privileging of self-referentiality" (81), is demonstrated when Ondaatje's attempts at "autobiography and biography overlap in ways that cancel out each other's generic distinctiveness" (86). Because "Mervyn Ondaatje emerges in the text as a figure composed of oral accounts, written documents, photographs, memories [. . . t]he polyphonic structure of the biographical endeavour . . . expresses the impossibility of spelling out the self in a monologic way" (86). I disagree, because the polyphonic aspects of Ondaatje's research are represented by a text that encloses all media in a grasp which depends upon a single, self-acknowledged, perspective. Even the photographs that appear between sections are labelled by the speaker with names that resound throughout the passages that follow them. The photographs offer visual illustrations of the narrative, and because these illustrations structure the narrative, they pay an implicit homage to the speaker who not only participates in the "collective" process of "organising" oral history but succeeds in the primary undertaking he bestows upon himself: "touch[ing]" these objects "into words" by producing for himself and his reader a literary articulation of the past. Kamboureli argues that because "the writer himself relinquishes authenticity and factuality" he elicits in the reader "the writer's own perplexity about his [generic and genealogical]

code" (86). While this is indeed so, I find that the relinquishment of a stable literary style only further emphasises the speaker's agency and calls attention to his stylistics rather than question, or share, his status.

Barbour writes that "like the stories of Lalla, the stories of Mervyn Ondaatje are as delightful to read as they would be appalling to experience" (153). Yet, reading them is not an appalling experience specifically because he who tells their stories did not experience them. As Mundweiler has pointed out, "the oral history which Ondaatje recorded is the *sine qua non* of the book, the narrative motor, even in edited or translated versions. Yet, it must be contained within or interpreted through his literary observation language, the hypostatizing of the present" (139). It is precisely because the speaker substantiates history through his own language that *Running in the Family* assures its reader of a single and stable narratorial point of view, cancelling out possible dialogical shifts in epistemology, marking itself as a monologic narrative. Important shifts in the speaker's literary style, such as in the magical realist sequences discussed by Mundweiler (135), Barbour (152), and MacIntyre (317), illustrate how the speaker may very well be "perplexed" about his generic codes but he is not at all confused about his role as the stable narrator of a history he has not witnessed. MacIntyre finds that the text's unifying subjectivity is brought to the fore when the reader learns that "the whole work is invested with this magical transformation of the germ of a fact into some of the finest scenes of the imagination, not soaked in the gin of the father but in the poetry of the son" (317). In "The Passions of Lalla," a dramatic example of the speaker's imaginative substantiation, the speaker records in vivid detail his maternal grandmother's last days and "her last perfect journey" (128) to "the great death" she seemed to have been searching for (125). As Lalla and her brother Vere rode off to Nuwara Eliya to live in the abandoned boarding house she had once lived in, a tropical storm brewed overhead. Barbour describes the passage that follows:

> Without telling us what they actually say [to each other, the writer] suggests with deep compassion how "they talked as they never had," (127) and the implications are more moving that any listing of facts would be. When [Lalla] steps outside and into the flood she didn't know was there, the narrative flows with her[.] The sentences expand, gather in a mass of details just as the flood gathers in everything it passes. Repetition and syntactic parallelism reinforce the sense of inevitability as she rushes onto her apotheosis in the trees. The sentences enact the movement of the flood in terms of perception of places [*sic*], so that although the narration is outside her, the focalization is within. [The narrator's descriptive analogy] appears to be hers while the comment on its continuing terror for her grandchildren is his. (151-152)

Ideologically, the polyphonic novel creates cosmological representations that derive from the perspectives of more than one subject. For Bakhtin, "the world is present to each character in a particular aspect -- and in keeping with that aspect its representation is constructed" (23). The speaker's mode in recreating Lalla's death, however, records a solipsism: the

narrator's own imagination's flamboyant impressions, which show his grandmother peacefully gliding on waves of a chaotic force that will kill her, refer solely to the speaker's powers of authorship. The reader learns details of Lalla's death through the magical realist sequences which allow Ondaatje to relinquish, self-consciously, his self-professed role as the person who retells his family's stories. This functions as a prime example of how the text's playful fictionalization of "the past" further reinscribes the speaker's central role as the memoirist. Throughout "Decentering the Postmodern" Hutcheon explains that the "contradictory nature of postmodernism involves its offering of multiple, provisional alternatives to traditional, fixed unitary concepts in full knowledge of (and even exploiting) the continuing appeal of those very concepts" (1988, 60). She finds that the dynamism of the dialogical narrative thrives in texts which "challenge" the "physical book," and she cites *Running in the Family* as a text in which "fiction looks like biography." The explicitness of the narrator's intrusive fictionalization here, however, achieves the opposite. The reader knows that because no one could have possibly seen or been privy to the details of Lalla's procession toward death (she died alone, we are told, silently and in darkness), the passage re-emphasises the speaker's literary agency. The book does not contain a "contradictory" device that "works *within* conventions in order to subvert them," (1988, 6) rather the text guarantees itself a generic location as a memoir because, as throughout, the speaker represents his experience -- as listener, reader, writer -- as he perceives (or imagines) it.

Dialogic narratives demand "a fundamental open-endedness of dialogues," "words and plot situations that provoke, tease, extort, dialogize" (Bakhtin, 39). They are comprised of a "world of a multitude of objectively existing and interacting psychologies," in which each individual's self-representation is recognized in order for the polyphony to be organized as a single text (Kirpotkin in Bakhtin, 37). Ondaatje's formal presence is problematic in this respect because it controls all verbal discourse that "involves" more than one subject. With the exception of the breakfast scene at Sir John's, the text is almost devoid of direct quotes from voices that are not the narrator's own, except in the chapter "Final Days / Father Tongue."[9] However, even here, where various subjects offer emotional recollections of the speaker's father, each voice is named by the speaker's arching voice before the "quotation" appears; this shows that the reader is expected to rely on the writer to identify who speaks. Once those subjects do "speak," their voices fade away and henceforth we learn nothing more from or about them. Ondaatje appears to view the sources of his stories as mere extras who play their prescribed roles, complementing the speaker, and then recede into textual irrelevance, such as the speakers in "Final Days/ Father Tongue." The characters Jennifer, V.C. de Silva and Archer Jayawardene appear in this section only; their identities are not substantiated by dialogue with other subjects and they

have no recognizable connection to the rest of the narrative, other than as useful voices that punctuate Ondaatje's quest. In "Dialogues," the only other space in the text that allows an other character to speak, the voices appear in quotation marks but their sources are unnamed. Consequently, the reader may speculate matching the words with a personality, but the speaker offers no assurances and thus he allows the words to supplement his narrative in the absence of a textual referent. I do not mean to suggest that *Running in the Family* is a libellous text that implies a negative attitude toward those speakers; rather, arguments for the text as polyphonic bring to light the centrality of the single speaking subject who does not always indicate his relation to his sources.

Throughout the text, subjects speak to the reader through the speaker. Direct quotes are, of course, the clearest indication of a subject's verbal presence but, since there are so very few in this text, the sources of the speaker's knowledge are at times ambiguous, and this ambiguity calls attention to the speaker, not his sources. At his rare best, the narrator dominates by default as most of the subjects in this text who recall their pasts recede into anonymity after their stories are told.[10] Nowhere in the text do those subjects interact with each other without the speaker present. Hutcheon observes that in *Running in the Family*, "[h]istory, like narrative, becomes . . . a process, not a product," (1985, 306) yet the narrator does not represent his act of listening as an act distinct from his writing. Process emphasises stages in development, but in most cases the reader is not informed of the text's material basis: Who, exactly, speaks to whom, and when? What were the circumstances of the text's composition, or, how can polyphony emerge from a text that clearly favours the authorial perspective of a single subject? What do the "characters" author? These questions go unanswered by the text; hence for me, while *Running in the Family* includes "performative acts" such as travelling, listening, writing, as a representation of history the composition process, which leaves no citations for the reader to sort out, is finished by the time the record of it reaches us. The history has been acted out beyond and before the text.

III

Ironically, when critics mistakenly view Ondaatje's text as an audacious literary representation of his family's "scandalous" history, they take their cue from Bakhtin, who wrote that Dostoevsky's epoch made the invention of the polyphonic novel possible (27, 31). He writes that among social elements, "the objective complexity, contradictoriness and multi-voicedness of Dostoevsky's epoch . . . prepared the soil in which [his] polyphonic novel was to grow" (31). In response to *Running in the Family*, most critics find that the fragmentary appearance of certain passages shows the speaker's "schizophrenic sense of simultaneously belonging and not belonging" to the places and people he writes about,

suggesting that the text displays a tension between Ondaatje and his subject (Barbour 145). In a section entitled "The Karapothas," which is formally structured like an academic essay, the narrator begins by identifying himself as "the foreigner," and then recalls how other speakers from abroad have experienced Ceylon (70-73). For the first time in this text, he writes briefly yet quite explicitly about the country's history of political turbulence. Given its vivid evocations of violence and its self-reflexive associations, in addition to its lack of any substantiation on the distinction between Ceylon and Sri Lanka, the piece reads like a lost fragment of text. It appears just after the narrator explains that in the fifth century B.C. the indigenous peoples of Ceylon etched short poetic verses into rock, verses inscribed to mythological women. Many centuries later,

> When the government rounded up thousands of suspects during the insurgency of 1971, the . . . University of Ceylon was turned into a prison camp. . . . When the university opened again the returning students found hundreds of poems on walls, ceilings, and in hidden corners of the campus. Quatrains and free verse about the struggles, tortures, the unbroken spirit, love of friends who had died for the cause. The students went around for days transcribing them into their notebooks before they were covered with whitewash and lye. (70)

Hutcheon finds that the "author's choice of presentation by fragments is a hermeneutic strategy that suggests a . . . parallel between the acts of reception and production" (311). This strategy shows the arbitrariness of textual production. Nevertheless, when one composes a history that deals with personal memories, a narrative structure composed of self-reflexive literary fragments may risk disguising the stories' origins. As a consequence, the author becomes a memoirist – one who writes *his perceptions* of what might have been a collective, "parallel" process of storytelling (or, in this case, story-making). This kind of authorial posture occupies an epistemological position which gives the speaker the liberty to represent only what he has chosen to see.[11] Such writing, which represents the one perspective that does not include direct input from other sources, cannot be a collective activity where all speakers are represented equally. The "scandalous" connections made between historical periods belong to the speaker, not the historical figures.

The memoirist's posture shows itself in the text's "autobiographical pact" which suggests a point of view bearing a specific ideological position. In a telling chapter entitled "Aunts," the textual writer pays homage to his aunts, expressing "how I have used them . . . They knit the story together, each memory a wild thread in the sarong" (90). His aunt Phyllis says to him, "God, if you quote me I'm dead. I'll be caught for libel and *killed*," as she describes the marital infidelities of Lalla, Ondaatje's maternal grandmother (91). This passage is paradoxical because while it signals appreciation for Phyllis' storytelling, the fragmentary nature of it minimises her underlying but explicit intent: she does not want to be

quoted. In effect, the narrator folds her speech into an anecdotal contribution to his own narrative, a technique that breeches a confidence: Phyllis may now be held responsible for her story. As she walks Ondaatje to the door he notices that although Phyllis is nearly blind (and is without her glasses) she has studied a certain photograph on her wall so carefully, and so many times, that although she can hardly see it anymore she has "memorized everyone's place in the picture." His meditation ends with a revealing note of self-acknowledgement:

> She reels off names and laughs at the facial expressions she can no longer see. [The photograph] has moved tangible, palpable, into her brain, the way memory invades the present in those who are old, the way gardens invade houses here, the way her tiny body steps into mine as intimate as anything I have witnessed and I have to force myself to be gentle with this frailty in the midst of my embrace. (92)

The speaker's appreciation of his intimate connection to his aunt reifies his position as the teller of her tales. His need to be gentle in their embrace indicates his responsibility as both an exuberant nephew and a public literary figure. After the text's closing chapter, in the speaker's acknowledgements, the speaker thanks his sisters and brother "for helping me recreate the era of my parents. This is their book as much as mine" (175) although the majority of the stories collected were probably told by Aunt Phyllis (Kamboureli 85, Barbour 141). The speaker does not include Aunt Phyllis as a contributing author for reasons that suggest his monologic ideology (unless she is the Phyllis of the mysterious "Phyllis and Ned Sansoni"). The text privileges the quasi-autobiographical act of "historical recreation" by casting the oral into written text, an act that Aunt Phyllis does not do. There is no other writer present in *Running in the Family* other than the narrator, which is why others are cited as having helped the speaker to recreate, not as having taken a more collaborative role as having "written" episodes or aspects of the text themselves. The nature of this text, according to the speaker, is "not a history but a portrait or 'gesture'" (176). The speaker accepts responsibility for any misunderstandings the readers may have concerning the "air of authenticity," saying that if those listed as people who provided the "[r]aw material" for *Running in the Family* "disapprove of the fictional air I can only apologize and can only say that in Sri Lanka a well-told lie is worth a thousand facts" (175-176). This is a strange clarification, given that the people he lists have all lived in Sri Lanka for decades longer than he and, according to the earlier explanation of how history is organized, each would have already understood that fictionalization is a requisite aspect of their history. The speaker makes these clarifications as a defence of his narratorial presence, stating what Kamboureli calls "[the biographer's] seemingly redundant activity, for what he reveals about his father is already public property" (86).[12] The speaker's stature as the narrator of other

people's stories entitles him to represent their collective oral history, "a communal act" (175), while he emphasizes, throughout, an exclusive writing process that is unique to him. The speaker's gentle embrace with Aunt Phyllis allowed him to hear her story, but not record her words in a way that would include an integration of her own voice, or at least indicate either implicitly or explicitly which parts of the narrative derive from what is distinctly her own memory. It is important to distinguish between Ondaatje's adventurous narrative technique and a true polyphony of unmerged, clearly distinctive voices.

The speaker's "material world" -- by this I mean the fixed environment in which Ondaatje writes -- is unambiguously and unilaterally declared in the opening chapter, unquestioned throughout the text, and confirmed in the Acknowledgements which clarify the single-authoredness of the text. A fundamental difference between *The Prowler* and *Running in the Family* is that the literary devices used in Ondaatje's text do not unsettle or disrupt the consistency of Ondaatje's narrative voice. In his essay on the critical response to Dostoevsky, Bakhtin points to one of his colleagues who "monologically formulate[s the] authorial world view [of Dostoevsky's texts by referring to] the point of view of a monologic authorial consciousness" (11). Similarly, Ondaatje monologizes his text by insisting that his perspective as its speaker entitles him to act as its self-acknowledged narrator who mediates other voices and arranges the representation of visual media (i.e., photographs). Bakhtin writes that in the polyphonic text, "[t]he position from which a story is told, a portrayal built, or information provided must be oriented in a new way to this world -- a world of autonomous subjects, not objects" (7). The most explicit example of the liabilities inherent in the speaker's self-acknowledgement as the literary mouthpiece of the "collective" appears on the first page of "Jaffna Afternoons." This passage calls attention to itself stylistically because it marks an immediate shift from all earlier text which recalls the trip to Asia in the past tense; and in the case of the even earlier "exergue," which address the speaker in the third-person (Kamboureli 82). This passage represents the precise "present" and is loaded with points of literary self-acknowledgement:

> 2:15 in the afternoon. I sit in the huge livingroom of the old governor's home in Jaffna. The walls, painted in recent years a warm rose-red, stretch awesome distances away to my left to my right and up toward the ceiling. When the Dutch first built this house egg white was used to paint the walls. The doors are twenty feet high, as if awaiting the day when a family of acrobats will walk from room to room, sideways, without dismantling themselves from each other's shoulders.
>
> The fan hangs on a long stem . . . The air reaches me unevenly with its gusts against my arms, face, and this paper. (17)

This highly detailed description of the speaker's physical location allows him to inscribe his concern for prioritizing the uniqueness of his authorial perspective. The chapter also

foreshadows the Acknowledgements which appear at the end of the book. Here, the speaker describes where he is in relation to geography and his genealogy; he says he is closest to Aunt Phyllis for, in literary terms, she is the "minotaur of this long journey back . . . who inhabits the place one had years ago, who surprises one with conversation about the circle of love." In Greek mythology Minos, the king and lawgiver of Crete, imprisons the Minotaur in the centre of the Labyrinth palace. Perhaps Aunt Phyllis reminds the speaker of the minotaur because he thinks his literary product might restore her ability to see herself and set her free from the blindness that restricts the contents of her visual memory. The speaker senses discomfort as he describes the mansion's living room. The room disturbs him because it is "so huge that all talk evaporates into the air before it reaches the listener," and at the end of the day he senses "a noisy solitude -- all the new stories in my mind and the birds totally compatible but screaming at each other, sweeping now and then over the heads of drowsy mongrels" (19). This noise, which marks what is distinctly his writerly solitude, shows us how important it is for the speaker that he find a way of making sense of the new stories. He conceives of (but does not identify as) a listener and he feels the pressure of having to write the new stories (however loquacious they may be). This is a self-reflexive passage because it elicits in the reader an understanding that the text we have before us is the product of the speaker's struggle to compose. Although this self-reflexivity calls attention to the speaker's narratorial authority it does not present for the reader a polyphonic example of contradictory subjectivities. Barbour states that all of "Ondaatje's texts are indeterminate, and . . . nothing, not even the documentation upon which they are based, escapes the rough if loving hands of change and chance" (180). But does this not heighten Ondaatje's authority as the omniscient author who belies the independence of his "autonomous characters"? It must, else in his acknowledgements Ondaatje would not have apologized, anticipating that his organization of "raw material" will be perceived as a questionable representation of history, bearing a possibly "fictional air" (175-176).

IV

> Poems, even when narrative, do not resemble stories. All stories are about battles, of one kind or another, which end in victory or defeat. [. . . Poems] bring a kind of peace. Yet the[ir] promise is not of a monument. (Who, on a battlefield, wants monuments?) The promise is that [poetic] language has acknowledged, has given shelter, to the experience which demanded, which cried out. (Berger 21)

For John Berger, the basic distinction between language which gives shelter and language that bears a monument is the function such language has for those who speak it or hear it. What of language that gives shelter because it bears a monument? No analysis of *Running in the Family* can guarantee the reader a precise indication of what the text's

language means for its author, but the text does acknowledge how the speaker wishes to situate himself as a figure who records his listening experience. Although Ondaatje establishes his outward gaze as the dominant focus of *Running in the Family,* and even though the reader "hears" history in only his voice, Ondaatje's resistance of polyphony has enabled him to stand at a distance from the objects of his narrative. The distance is initiated and maintained through the sustained and skilful representation of vivid anecdotes; it is precisely because the speaker illustrates his family history through the recasting of anecdotes told (at least) second-hand that he avoids self-description and hence self-analysis. While Ondaatje's mission at the outset was to cast his family into words, the text does not reveal any change in the way the author views himself. In Berger's terms, *Running in the Family* brings a recognition of the speaker's role as such; it does not give shelter to his experience or offer us an autobiographical dimension of Ondaatje's gaze. The dominance of his anecdotes betrays an ideological conscience at odds with Bakhtin's democratic notion of polyphony.

Perhaps the clearest example of how Ondaatje uses anecdote to distance himself from the possessive nature of his past appears in the two chapters recalling his traumatic childhood. "What We Think of Married Life" is a very disturbing chapter in which the speaker reveals how his mother tried to "cure my father from alcoholic consumption" by "instilling theatre in all of us" (144). When Mervyn became so drunk "he could hardly speak, let alone argue," the mother would send each of the children, alone, into the father's room where they had to plead the line "Daddy, don't drink, daddy, if you love us, don't drink," while the mother and the other child listened from outside. At the time, Michael was "asleep - too young and oblivious" to actively perform the role for his mother. However, although Michael had apparently not participated in these abusive episodes (the mother would award the best performance a decorous compliment), he writes that it allowed his mother to demonstrate to him her "determin[ation] that we each be as good an actor as she" (144). In those "moments of total war," the children were made to feel "terribly embarrassed," "guilty," and "miserable." After the father's bouts of drinking stopped, the mother absolutely furious and, presumably, the older children both terrified and resentful of them both, the father would induce the mother to make self-demeaning displays in public, at a ludicrously exaggerated pitch; only then would the mother avert any jealousy of the father: she knew her displays were contrived in a way the father's drunken equivalents were not. "Rather than being jealous, my mother was never happier and for the next six months or so they were delightful company, wonderful parents" (145). Because the drinking "could never stop," the mother eventually divorced the father and moved away to manage a hotel. At

this point a psychic advised her that she would never see all her children together again: a prediction which turned out to be accurate.

The other significant recollection of the speaker's traumatic childhood appears in "How I was Bathed." When five or six years old, at his first school, Michael was forced to undergo a cruel ordeal of stripping naked, being herded into a cold corner of a stone room, and having buckets of water flung over his "cowering screaming body":

> Another bucket was filled and hurled toward us as hard as a police hose. Then [the matron] strode forward, grabbed [us] by the hair, pulled [each] to the centre, scrubbed him violently with carbolic soap and threw him [aside]. Bleary-eyed, our bodies tingling and reeling, our hair curved back from the force of the throw, we stood there shining. She approached us with a towel, dried us fast and brutally, and threw us out one by one to get into our sarongs and go to bed. (115)

Ondaatje fixes the horrible experience in a double frame: the speaker is recording a story told at a formal dinner by Gillian, who in turn heard it from Yasmine Gooneratne, who was a fellow student and bath prefect at the boarding school. Although the story is told in stunning detail, recalling the experience from a perspective only the child could have known, Ondaatje seeks to distance himself from the event in a way similar to how he divorces himself from the child victim of his mother's sadistic theatricalities. In the case of the bathing episode, Ondaatje emphasises his participation as a listener of the tale, conceding "it was the kind of event that should have surfaced as the first chapter of an autobiographical novel," which, then, this is not; the protagonist does not tell his story and, moreover, the story does not focus on the protagonist's experience of the episode (115). Why does Ondaatje imagine its place in the genre of fiction? Is it because the episode is too painful to write in the autodiegetic first-person, or because Ondaatje simply wouldn't include it in his autobiography? The chapter is introduced with a description of the dinner and ends with a question: "why did *she* [Yasmine] not tell me the story"? The speaker distances himself from his past by emphasizing the anecdotal quality of his history: he dwells on the circumstances of how the story is "organised" and this is presented as his reaction to the recollection. The abuse is minimized by the speaker's interest in the nature of its telling, and in the case of his parents' dysfunctional treatment of themselves and their children, Ondaatje leaves out an explanation of how he was implicated in it. Since he was "too young" and "oblivious" at the time, how has he learned of the events? Resisting polyphony by framing history as anecdotes shelters Ondaatje from the compassionate self-scrutiny demanded by the autobiographical endeavour. Apparently, the "collective" mode of making history, which valorized the theoretical remarks made early in the text (19), enables Ondaatje to escape the role of protagonist while it protects him from writing his self.

The speaker's retrospective position and hence the form of "autobiographical pact" established in *Running in the Family* does not lead the reader to expect any real transformation of the author's self-image, nor do we find that Ondaatje's privilege as a distanced narrator is threatened by the potentially serious implications of the stories he tells. In fact, due to repeated indications of retrospection in the main text, *Running in the Family* assures the reader that the present writing is a linear event: it shall begin in one place and end in another with no interruptions laden with speculative or introspective concerns. Michael Ondaatje is neither the protagonist nor autobiographer, yet he dominates the narrative in a monologic way by denying his reader the circumstances of the text's literary composition, which in turn masks the writing process in what becomes an attempt to re-order past experiences. The speaker reveals his bias toward privileging written language by using it as the signifier of the self while, ironically, his resistance of polyphony denied the reader the chance to interpret how the text's order relates to the text's descriptions. *Running in the Family* is in the speaker's own "confess[ion,] not a history but a portrait or 'gesture' (176). Michael Holquist writes that "dialogism is a phenomenon that is . . . very much an open-ended event," yet, because Ondaatje articulates a careful control and marked closure of the memoir, a memoir that records a "history" that he is author to but not a product of, his text cannot be open ended (vii). In light of this, any argument for the text as autobiography must swerve around the speaker's self-representations and settle instead on his narratological framework. As the monologic narrator of *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje's textual representative masterfully avoids including the dialogical voices of his relatives, and hence neither those subjects nor the narrator allow for a disclosure of the speaker's past or present self.

Notes

1 Readers who are familiar with Ondaatje's earlier works will not find his genealogical identity as Michael Ondaatje in *Running in the Family* surprising. Ondaatje's collection of poems *There's a Trick With a Knife I'm Learning to Do: Poems 1963-1978* is inscribed "in memory of my parents -- Mervyn Ondaatje and Doris Gratiaen" (vii), who are named as Ondaatje's parents throughout *Running in the Family*. Readers familiar with Ondaatje's poetry will recall his early autobiographical poems: "Letters & Other Worlds," "Dates," and "Light" (which is dedicated to his mother), each of which appears in *Trick With a Knife*. The three poems reveal the poet's interest in his parents' (specifically his father's) tragic history as it derives from a range of sources. Readers will find that certain episodes in *Running in the Family* were foreshadowed in "Letters & Other Worlds," yet the narrator's posture in the poem is remarkably distinct from that of our present text. In contrast to his textual perspective in *Running in the Family*, which I analyze in the following sections, notice in this excerpt how the writer's narrative voice attempts to empathize with the figures he narrates. Simultaneously, his own understanding of the events, and his genealogical link to the literary figures, is made very clear. The reader is not confused about who fictionalizes or who speaks. The poem identifies, unambiguously, the speaker and child as the same subject:

> My father's body was a globe of fear
> His body was a town we never knew
> He hid that he had been where we were going
> His letters were a room he seldom lived in
> In them the logic of his love could grow
>
> . . . . . .
>
> His early life was a terrifying comedy
> and my mother divorced him again and again.
> He would rush into tunnels magnetized
> by the white eye of trains
> and once, gaining instant fame,
> managed to stop a Perahara in Ceylon
> -- the whole procession of elephants dancers
> local dignitaries -- by falling
> dead drunk onto the street. (44)

As I point out later, in *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje seems to overlook the political transformation of Ceylon to Sri Lanka and, hence, he uses the names interchangeably.

2 There seems to be unanimous agreement among critics that Ondaatje did in fact make the two trips to Sri Lanka (1978 and 1980) that are cited in his "Acknowledgements" section.

3 For instances where spinning blades actually do inflict damage to authorial figures, see Ondaatje's 1976 novel *Coming Through Slaughter*. Sam Solecki writes:

> [I]n [that text], "The slight silver key" to the "maze" of the novel is in the description of Bellocq, the photographers of Storyville's whores, some of whose photographs have knife slashes across the bodies (55) of the posers. The presence of the slashes indicates, according to Ondaatje, that in Bellocq "the making and

> destroying [came] from the same source, same lust, same surgery his brain was capable of." When Bellocq later commits suicide we realize that the "destroying" did not refer solely to his slashing of the pictures but also to the potential for self-destruction on Bellocq himself. (246)

4 Verhoeven's conclusions seem to be at odds with his logic. Two pages earlier in his paper he concedes the writer's own claim that his text is not "an anguished autobiographical novel," (115) yet Verhoeven identifies the text as autobiography precisely because he perceives the main subject of the text as Ondaatje's "anguished search" for his father (193, 196). In no place does Verhoeven attempt a distinction between the genres of autobiographical novel and autobiography.

5 Ernest MacIntyre points to the narrator's affirmation that he has "the mercy of distance" in composing his text, a distance which has empowered him to take up the search for his father by recasting a history shared with others (318). He suggests that Ondaatje's meeting with his father occurs in the act of literary composition, which is achieved "outside of time," so that he can look on his father with "kindness and even respect .. a dignity he would not otherwise have in real existence" (318). Although in her article Hutcheon argues that Ondaatje's project is to "touch" his familial history "into words" (Ondaatje 22), "the act of reading is as important to this book as the act of writing" (310). The crucial premise is that it is Ondaatje's history and his actions which are at issue here, not the past or present actions of a collective. See also Ajay Heble's article, which suggests that *Running in the Family* is a dialogic text and, as his article claims relentlessly, this poses a "problem of history."

6 Lalla's death, which is alluded to in several sections, is in fact "recorded" or "turned to" only once. I will go on to discuss at length the stylistic and narratological significance of this story later.

7 In an important footnote to the introductory chapter of *Michael Ondaatje*, a text I address throughout this chapter, Douglas Barbour writes:

> In my "Transformations of (the Language of) the Ordinary: Innovation in Recent Canadian Poetry" (*Essays on Canadian Writing* 37 [Spring 1989]: 30-64), I argue that the innovative poetry of our century "is 'novelized,' in Bakhtin's sense of the term: it is a poetry of voices in concert and argument, not a singular voice speaking a centripetal 'unitary language,'" and I suggest that heteroglossia "emerges most strongly in the long poem" (31). But my other major point is that poetry also insists on being read as poetry, not as novel, and it does so by taking heteroglossic, dialogic "speech, with its reflection of the social languages around us, and render[ing] it mysterious, delivering the word as simple signifier back to its numinous position as object. The poetry of innovation does so most often by engaging the signifier as an open space of possibility beneath which the potential signifieds slide but never come to rest: the poetic word as heteroglossic speech rather than polysemic trope" (32). As I will argue in later chapters, Ondaatje's longer works [which, according to the organization of this book, includes *Running in the Family*] are "open" in precisely this manner. (216)

Thus, whenever Barbour uses the term "polyphony" or "polyphonic," I assume he is referring to Bakhtin's coinage although Bakhtin always couples "polyphonic" with "novel," in a theoretical manoeuvre contemporary critics seem to ignore. Thus, I do not address the

problems arising from the critical tendency to apply Bakhtin's theory of polyphony to texts that are not novels.

Hutcheon also claims Ondaatje's text as occupying a "middle ground" between real history and fictional narrative. The historiographic "referent here is a dialogic entity, in Bakhtin's sense of the word, partaking of two ontological realities" (1985, 305-306) but, as I shall point out in detail later, those ontologies exist within the textual writer's mind, a lexicon which is carefully represented by the text; so for me, while the relationship between history and narrative is dialogical, the text itself is not. See page 86 of Kamboureli's essay for her reference to *Running in the Family* as a polyphonic text.

8 Jakobson's "study" of Russian Formalism, "The Dominant," is interesting both as an insightful reflection on his school and as a piece of revisionist literary theory which was written from a viewpoint the author contrived as retrospective.

9 From a postcolonial perspective, it is interesting to consider that Ondaatje seems to draw no self-conscious parallels between his family's history and the transition of their native land from Ceylon to Sri Lanka; one might ask what the implications are of having the character Sir John, the future Prime Minister of the newly independent nation, as the text's most prominent and direct "indigenous" voice.

10 For more specific examples where "what is taken from recollection is not used to illuminate the past of those characters who offer it," see "Throes of Modernism" in Leslie Mundweiler's study, esp. 138-139.

11 David Stouck approaches this idea through linguistic pragmatics:

> Pastorals are narratives of remembering, wholly personal, dealing with deeds and ideas that can no longer be contested. Voices in dialogue may be recalled, but they are wholly subject (limited) to the shaping imagination and control of the speaker/narrator. This monologic position is linguistically demonstrable in the diectic markers of the text. Deixis . . . is speaker-centred; by these markers, the world is rendered from the point of view of the speaker. With one important exception, this is the case in *Running*[*in the Family*]. That exception is on p. 188 where a voice said [*sic*] "Tooby, Tooby, you should see your school friend now," a voice that would seem to be the father's and which seems to take over for one more sentence of the text. Then the speaker asserts his control again, but in that moment perhaps the father and son enter a dialogue . . . But it is a mute dialogue, without quotation marks to enable the father to be heard in his own voice. (1)

12 Kamboureli states that these stories, which are "public property," have "already been read," as a premise for her earlier claim that the writer's "polyphonic" fictionalization of these stories "expresses the impossibility of spelling out the [writer's] self in a monological way" (86). However, there is no evidence in the text which confirms that these stories have already been read by anyone other than the writer, or overheard by anyone outside his family. The only exception which might precipitate Kamboureli's argument appears in the chapter entitled "St. Thomas' Church," where the writer finds decomposed text which traces parts of his genealogy. Yet, even in this case, the chapter is for the most part about the writer's emotional reactions to locating the sources, and not about the documentation. Even in the case of Mervyn's "literary war" with Mr. Bandaranaike (which Kamboureli cites in her argument), it unfolded gradually, in an exclusive hotel guest register (in "Dialogues") and not as a cohesive, polyphonic, publicly disclosed narrative. The story

of the war was not revealed in the fragments of angry text in the same way that the stories of a divorce are not revealed in the snippets of a recorded argument: in order for a story to be heard it requires a storyteller and although the Bandaranaike story has been told orally, by friends and relatives, it is only through Michael Ondaatje that anyone, we are led to believe, reads it. That "dialogue" between the two rivals was not storytelling; it was an ongoing dialogic argument. Anyone who read it did so while it was in process, and never in finished form. Moreover, Ondaatje's text does not reveal the exchange.

Works Cited

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. and Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

———. "Discourse in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans M. Holquist and C. Emerson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. 256-422.

Barbour, Douglas. *Michael Ondaatje*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992.

Berger, John. *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*. London: Granta Books, 1992.

Glassco, John. *Memoirs of Montparnasse*. Oxford UP: Toronto, 1970.

Heble, Ajay. "Michael Ondaatje and the Problem of History." *Clio* 19 (Winter 1990): 97-110.

Holquist, Michael. *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*. London: Routledge, 1990.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988.

"*Running in the Family*: The Postmodernist Challenge." Ed. Solecki, Sam. *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje*. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1985. 301-314.

Jakobson, Roman. "The Dominant." Ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy. *Language in Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987. 41-46.

Kamboureli, Smaro. "The Alphabet of the Self: Generic and Other Slippages in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*." Ed. K. P. Stich. *Reflections: Autobiography and Canadian Literature*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988. 79-92.

MacIntyre, Ernest. "Outside of Time: *Running in the Family*." Ed. Sam Solecki. *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje*. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1985. 315-320.

Mukherjee, Arun P. "The Poetry of Michael Ondaatje and Cyril Dabydeen: Two Responses to Otherness." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 20.1 (1985): 49-67.

Mundweiler, Leslie. *Michael Ondaatje: Word, Image, Imagination*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1984.

Ondaatje, Michael. *Coming Through Slaughter*. Toronto: Anansi Press, 1976.

———. *Running in the Family*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982.

———. *There's a Trick With a Knife I'm Learning to Do: Poems 1963-1978*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979.

Pearce, Jon. "Moving to the Clear: Michael Ondaatje." *Twelve Voices: Interviews with Canadian Poets*. Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1980. 129-144.

Russell, John. "Travel Memoir as Nonfiction Novel: Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*." *Ariel*. 22 (April 1990): 23-40.

Solecki, Sam. "Making and Destroying: *Coming Through Slaughter* and Extremist Art." Ed. Sam Solecki. *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje*. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1985. 246-267.

Stouck, David. Letter to the author. 23 October 1994.

Verhoeven, Wil. "(De)Facing the Self: Michael Ondaatje and (Auto)Biography." Eds. D'Haen, Theo, et al. *Postmodern Fiction in Canada*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992. 181-200.

Wachtel, Eleanor. "Michael Ondaatje." *Writers and Company*. Toronto: Knopf Canada, 1993. 49-63.

CHAPTER TWO

Disclaiming the Autobiographical Promise of a Memoirist: John Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (1970)

> [G]enuine autobiography is not an act of egotism or vanity, for it sets the observing eye within its world and produces its own prints of what is observed. Reflection, indeed, is far from self-absorption; it is the release of what one has observed in life. (George Woodcock 16)

> At the edge of every experience is the refracted light of recollection, snagged there like an image in a bevelled mirror. (Carol Shields 175)

I

> *Only now, when I have the leisure, the brightness of my memories, and the unutterable boredom of hospital life to drive me back to writing, have I resumed this chronicle of my dead youth. My dead youth, yes.* (John Glassco 72)

As Paul de Man observed, the fundamental distinction between the fictional and non-fictional text is the level of ambiguity between an author's authentic, literal voice and the textual subject's tropes (919-921). It comes as no surprise, then, how analyses of self-reflexive texts that call themselves "memoirs" create problems of authorial integrity that are particularly complex. What is a reader to assume when a memoir appears to be authored by two distinctive subjects who pretend to be both fictional and historical figures? If a memoir represents a "real life," then where must an author's inventiveness exclude fictionalization? Must the first-person of autobiography remain singular? Canadian literary critics have shown a growing interest in what appears to be John Glassco's deceitful claim that *Memoirs of Montparnasse* is his memoir: that Glassco is the text's narrator. Yet, when we follow the narrative discrepancies arising from Glassco's claims to historical veracity, as the text unfolds we witness certain narratorial conflicts that query the generic status of the text.

Even when we leave aside issues pertaining to the accuracy of Glassco's reminiscences of historical events, we must grapple with a stream of logistical presumptions that are elicited by the text's narrative structure. As critics attempt to clarify how that structure works, the autobiographical pact, which is initiated by the text's title and understood by its reader, is pulled into question. In other words, *Memoirs* begins by initiating a promise, but progressively turns its back on that promise. Perhaps it is as a consequence of the text's repeated reneging on its articulated promises that critics do not agree on the text's proper generic location.

Read without reference to archival material, *Memoirs of Montparnasse* is neither an autobiography nor a memoir belonging to the author named on its title page. In my view, Glassco's book is indeed an autobiography -- it is an example of literary self-representation -- but its reference to John Glassco is inconsistent and unreliable. If we read *Memoirs* as the autobiography of a fictional subject (i.e., the memorist), who is a far-flung past self of the hence disguised author, we might better appreciate the quality and range of play among the text's tropes. Glassco establishes his authorial role in the Prefatory Note as the editor who wrote the preface and made "minor revisions" in the text proper. Glassco uses what appears to be a clearly autobiographical "I" in the Prefatory Note, an "I" which may mislead readers into believing that his text maintains the integrity, or an integrity, of his authorial persona which will eventually reconcile the voices of his past self and conclude by reintroducing himself as the subject who professes to have written the text in 1928 and 1932. But this never happens.

This narratological dynamic is set up in which the Prefatory Note appears to directly address his reader. Here, Glassco distinguishes between his present self, the self named on the title page, and those past selves represented by the personae of memoirist and protagonist in the text:

> Why change any of this? This young man is no longer myself: I hardly recognize him, even from his photographs and handwriting, and in memory he is less like someone I have been than a character in a novel I have read.
> J.G.
> *Foster, Quebec*
> *October 1969* (xiii)

What are the implications of such a disclaimer? By examining in the text the dates of the project's conception, production, and publication -- a task required of all readers willing to make sense of the various narratorial switches -- it becomes apparent that the text stakes an unambiguous claim to autobiography. However, given the fact that the Prefatory Note is the only place in the book where John Glassco signs his name (and even then, it is only his initials), the reader is invited to distinguish between the author of the preface and the

narrator of the main text. As I will proceed to show, Glassco does not write this text from his 1969 retrospective vantage point at all, and the suggestion that the young protagonist once was Glassco is misleading. Glassco breaks the autobiographical promise that he is the memoirist who recorded his memories without fictionalising the authorial voice. In *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, this promise is broken over and over again and apparently, by the time critics finish Glassco's book and compose their responses to it, Glassco's tacit and most basic promise -- that he is the central authorial figure of this text -- is not taken to task. Thus, I respond to Glassco's broken promises by way of his critics' explanations of how the text presumes a stable generic location.

II

In the years between the release of Glassco's text in 1970 and his death in 1981, scholars regarded *Memoirs of Montparnasse* as a highly accurate and carefully detailed memoir of a precocious young man's two years in the famous expatriate literary communities of Montparnasse and Côte d'Azure during the late 1920s.[1] Evidently, Glassco took great pains to make his book appear as historically accurate and discursively dependable as Alice Toklas' *What is Remembered* (1963), Morley Callaghan's *That Summer in Paris* (1963), and Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* (1964) seemed at the time (Gnarowski 5). Michael Gnarowski, who was a close friend of Glassco at the time, reports that Glassco asked Leon Edel to write a favourable introduction testifying to his text's historical credibility, and that Glassco went so far as to recommend to Edel precisely what he should say in it (2). It is surprising, then, that when Glassco died he left his manuscripts and unpublished papers to the Canadian Public Archives, thus incriminating the authorial stance he declared in his preface to the text. Thomas Tausky illustrates clearly, throughout his essay, the dubious nature of the manuscripts. As he points out, the earliest draft of the book is signed by John Glassco and indicates a completion date of 1934, but it is obvious that the "3" had been scrawled over a "6" (60). Contrary to what is stated in the Prefatory Note, *Memoirs* was not written in hospital during the winter of 1932-33 while Glassco suffered a dangerous bout of tuberculosis.[2] Although different versions of the first three chapters were originally published in 1928, the published version of the book was conceived, drafted, and written between 1960 and 1969 while Glassco had access to a wealth of historical texts which helped him compose his "memoir." Stephen Scobie and Thomas Tausky attempt to identify which aspects of the narrative were falsified as one way of determining if the text is an "objective literary commentary," or merely an "I-witness account" respectively (Tausky 80, Scobie 61).[3]

The French critic Phillipe Lejeune and the late Michel Foucault agree that both a memoir and an autobiography have an integrated narrative structure orchestrated by a stable narratorial voice that refers principally to an author who has a presence external to the text. From my perspective, *Memoirs of Montparnasse* does indeed maintain a unity of subjective presence, but its principal referent is problematic. The text pretends to be about a cohesive autobiographical subject, but the text develops a fictional figure who cannot be John Glassco. After considering the text's preface and the logic of its narrative strategies, it becomes apparent that identifying the text's split narrative voice with that of the author named on the cover is a mistake.[4] In order to identify the text as an autobiography, Scobie and Timothy Dow Adams call attention to statements that the hospitalised writer of 1932 uses to characterise the youthful "Glassco" of 1928, even though both personae are fictional constructions that were created by the Glassco of 1969. Should one cite the words of literary figures to support what are, at best, the vague pretences of an autobiographer who confesses an ambivalent attitude toward his history? Glassco takes many noisy steps to estrange his present self (the subject called "J.G.") from his fictionalized selves who appear in the text as the "author" who wrote in, appears in, and narrates, the text. The text's narrative splits as the authorial subject takes on a fragmented state: as the text unfolds, the narrator who writes retrospectively about his past becomes increasingly independent of the 1969 author. Perhaps this is an example of what Scobie calls a "belles-lettristic ambition," or an ironical twist that reveals Glassco's wish to elicit an eminence from readers who long for juicy 1928 Paris gossip (44). While Scobie may be right, the text's narrative strategy nevertheless functions as a device that isolates the authorial Glassco from his fictional authorial subject, and hence the possibilities diminish for arguing logically that this text is indeed autobiographical, or that its fictional subject corresponds to the John Glassco who published in 1969.

Adams, confident that Glassco never meant to fool his readers, finds support from Tausky who argues that "Glassco's admission [in the *Memoirs*] that 'I was always .. a great practitioner of deceit,' is certainly the central autobiographical truth of the *Memoirs*" (75). Presumably, these fictions represent truth because they serve to invoke the atmosphere of an historic period, thus presenting a literary record of the author's memories. Yet, what's most provocative for me is the presence of the authorial subject who also writes of himself. Conventionally, autobiographies are unique because their dominant narratorial presence pretends to exceed the status of the text by residing outside the fictional work, "a real person." Glassco's brilliant autobiographical creation is the 'memoirist' persona, who says he authors, but who seems to ingenuously falsify both his recollections and his "status" as

John Glassco. Autobiography, I shall argue, might include an author's literary representation of a past self even when the author refuses to identify with that constituted persona.

Adams argues that Glassco never really meant to mislead his readers by having them read his memoirs as historical accounts. The notion of "historical accounts" implies that the narrative records, but does not create, events. Adams repeats the citations used by Tausky: "If Glassco were trying to defraud his readers," then "he would never have stated openly, [in his own book] that he was . . . 'an accomplished liar at an earlier age'"(21). For Adams, the text succeeds as a memoir because Glassco's narrative fixates on an outward focus which presents history as he saw it. "He lies deliberately and openly within a memoir with the intention of representing the spirit of the age," Adams argues (21). Whether or not the scenarios ever really happened is not the issue for Adams because Glassco's memoirs succeed in representing his memories, memories of "a period marked by grand and vainglorious designs . . . in which no one was certain who . . . was phoney and what was genuine" (22). In this sense, the 1969 Glassco is true to the perception that his text represents the given historical period and its avant-garde impetus; he demonstrates this by deliberately falsifying his recollections so that he may remain consistent with his carefree peers who share a tenderly solipsistic view of history. This perception is misguided, however, because the claim Adams cites was not made by J.G., but by a fictional characterisation of a younger self who, at publication time, Glassco rejected as being no longer himself (xiii). As additional "evidence" Adams also cites a letter Glassco wrote to Kay Boyle in March 1969, in which he valorizes the memoirs of George Moore, Rousseau, and Casanova for their authors' talents of invention, suggesting that the best memoirs are composed of events that never happened.

Scobie takes a similar tack by arguing that the text charts a stern preoccupation with the 1969 Glassco's emotional and physical state, a state made metaphoric by his dialectical and self-consciously meditative narrative structure. "For all [of Glassco's] disclaimers," Scobie explains, "it is primarily as a writer, as an autobiographer, that Glassco presents his own character" (53). Given the introspective nature of this examination of the subject's own development, Scobie argues that *Memoirs* is, more properly, Glassco's autobiography. Scobie finds in the text a sincere consideration, on Glassco's part, of his literary construction of a protagonist who is a signifier of "alterity," a mirroring of his past self. The recognition of Glassco's present self reflecting inwardly on his past authenticates for Scobie the historicity of the memoirs in such a way that settles *Memoirs* as Glassco's autobiography. Scobie's reading of this text relies on his assumption that J.G. is primarily concerned with his developing self as the author, narrator, and protagonist.

The critical argument, however, loses its force when we call attention to the fact that the person these critics refer to makes only two brief appearances in the book, these being in the Prefatory Note and the Postscript. In the preface, which is endowed with the J.G. signature, Glassco offers the reader two disclaimers that should direct the reader's perception of the narrative. First, he indicates the times and places of the text's original composition. "I used," Glassco writes, "such [compository] notes, taken on the spot [in 1932-33], as were spared from the holocaust mentioned in the final chapter; by then my intention was altered, and all I desired was to record, and in a sense re-live, a period of great happiness" (xiii). Glassco here offers the reader a guide to the structure of his "memoirs" by admitting that the writing process, which leads up to the "holocaust" recorded in the last chapter, has had an effect on his choice not to edit the text substantially. The second disclaimer distances the 1969 Glassco who wrote the preface from "the young man" who is the protagonist of the main text. This statement is made after Glassco claims to have changed very little of the original manuscript, thus indicating to readers that the preface is written as the text is being sent to press. Glassco's central claim, that the young protagonist is "less like a person I have been than a character in a novel I have read," reveals that the act of revising the text, however minimal the project, has affected the author's self-perception (xiii). But what of the "holocaust" spared to the 1969 Glassco? Analysis of this event, when Glassco professes to have witnessed the burning of his poems, unveils a self-referential gesture linking editor, memoirist, and protagonist as one real person, an authorial authority the reader can clearly identify and thus "read." Yet, the author of the preface claims to bear no resemblance to his past selves who reside in the main narrative. Indeed, J.G. suggests that the protagonist is more like a character in a novel he has read than a past self recognizable to him by that subject's handwriting or photographic image. This is an ironic slip from his memory, and this slip indicates to us that the memoir does not belong to Glassco, but to that fictional hero he has so casually dismissed. Fictional heroes leave behind no archival material.

At the opening of the fourth chapter, the text initiates a split-narrative technique. This style allows the author to speak from two different perspectives, and encourages the reader to assume that the 1969 author has a more reliable perspective than the "novelistic" character of the memoirist, as suggested by John Glassco in the preface. Lejeune would call this the ambiguous positioning of an autobiographical author's relation to her or his own story "autobiographic space" (26-28). Until we reach the end of the third chapter, the reader understands that the writer of the preface is, possibly, a distinct subject who restricts himself (or is restricted) to the realms of preface and epilogue. The declarative "memoirist," whom the preface writer identifies as being in historical terms the same person

as the protagonist, claims this text as a testament to his authorial authority. After all, the "memoirist's" subjective voice is integrated into his narrative, and the preface has already explained when and where these early chapters were produced. Given these disclaimers, which situate the so-called original drafts of the text in a historical context, the reader is assured that the narrator and protagonist will eventually join up as an integrated, present (i.e., 1969), author. If the book were to remain consistent with the split-subjective narrative technique characteristic of the first three chapters and identified by Lejeune as "autobiography," then the determination of the text as either a memoir or autobiography would depend on the amount of attention the narrator pays to the recording of either external "facts" or the development of his own personality.[5]

However, technically and thematically, this pattern is disrupted and cut short by the emergence of a seemingly independent narrative at the start of the fourth chapter. Technically, the new narrative takes the form of a personal diary note and establishes a different narratorial voice, one which alters our evaluation of authorial intent. This older subject, writing in 1932, is occupied by intriguing and radically divergent thematic concerns. *"I am taking up this book again four whole years later,"* an alien voice proclaims, *"only anxious to preserve its continuity"* (27). This important indication, that the memoirs are being written "again," settles the fact that the narrative that follows was composed from the perspective of one whom I propose to identify as the memoirist, in hospital, one who is four years older than the author of the first three chapters. Literary preservation, and the wish to re-live the past, are offered as the reasons for continuing the project. This is ironic, given the 1928 protagonist's revulsion from rationality, seriousness, and responsibility. Previously, the protagonist remarked "that if I could only rid my itch for writing, I might be quite happy," (67) and in the first chapter he recalled Graeme's dream which, it now seems, foreshadowed his wish to translate his history into art: "I just saw you [the protagonist] in a dream -- as an old man with whiskers, writing . . ." (5). With the appearance of this slightly older memoirist who insists on proclaiming his dates of composition, geographic location, and emotional state, that open space, where the reader is given agency to discern the relationship between author and narrator, is firmly closed. The earlier narrative structure that involved a split narrator now becomes one that involves a double narrator. It becomes clear at this point, then, that what we read is the memoirist's story of his present and past selves.

> Here in this awful hospital [1932-1933] I can still savour the sweetness of our transports on that morning two years ago. This is saying a good deal, for two years is a long time in my life these days . . . It is only the remembrance of such moments that sheds any brightness over the interminable days and nights I am now going through. (236)

The final chapter, where this quotation appears, employs an eulogistic, reconciliatory tone that attempts to identify the hospitalised memoirist writing from his death-bed with the protagonist of the main narrative preceeding it. Until this point, *Memoirs of Montparnasse* has been structured like a diachronic text, the memoirist having kept his voice quite separate from that of his past self. Until now, when the memoirist spoke, his voice appeared in isolation, and was marked by italics; and his reflective voice was separated from the main narrative -- the memoir he composes -- by two blank lines. The 1932 memoirist is thus kept outside the memoirs he writes. Remarkably, the last chapter, which shares the main-narrative typeface, begins with a jarring statement that, in effect, forges a union of what were previously distinct narratives. This is achieved by formally aligning the memoirist's voice with the protagonist's. The ponderous, reflective voice of the narrator is synthesized with the lively, novelistic tone of the protagonist, most of whose narrative was taken up by representations of dialogue. This last chapter, then, integrates the mood of a retrospective memoirist with the presence of the protagonist, thus eliminating the formal, structural, and temporal distance which formerly separated the two subjects.

Even the thematic concerns, which were previously attended to with severe urgency, are merged and compromised in this final chapter. The memoirist calmly describes how his doctor told him he has an even chance of surviving his surgery and that the hospital administrator has advised him to write a will (237). No longer worried about whether he will complete the memoirs, the memoirist/protagonist records his "impulse to leave things tidy behind me, which is after all the whole duty of man when faced with death" (237). He summons Graeme, his best friend, to whom he gives his six scribblers which are the early manuscript of *Memoirs*. The two friends chat about their years in Paris, and the memoirist prepares for his death (by metaphor the end of this autobiography) by explaining the break-up of his liaison with Mrs. Quayle, the onset of his tubercular infection, his passage back to Montréal, and his arrival at the hospital. In effect, he tells us how he has developed into the present writer. When John Glassco announces his escape from the holocaust mentioned in the final chapter, it appears that he may be signalling his identification as the memoirist who survived his illness. But if this were the case, why does Glassco refuse to recognise this "past self" as the memoirist in photographs, handwriting, and most crucially, his memory (xii)? Why does he make his past self visible?

Adams cites "the author's" choice of ending as a justification for the generic determination of the text as memoir. Responding to Scobie, Adams states: "That the adult Glassco needed to continue the story of himself in Paris rather than bring his life up-to-date, . . . also the ending of the story of himself in the hospital, is ample evidence that this book

was conceived from the start to finish . . . as a memoir" (21). But to invest in the notion that the text indeed ends in the hospital and that this choice of ending is an indicator of generic determination is to miss Glassco's own prefatory suggestions and to overlook the present degree of self-conscious fictionalisation. The prefatory disclaimers confirm an actual, historic connection between the John Glassco of 1969 who edits the memoir and the memoirist of 1933 whose task it is to construct a narrative about 1927-1928 with his earlier self as the protagonist. While the present (i.e., 1969) author/editor is grateful for having been spared the anticipated death of the memoirist, an event which enables the publication of an "untouched" account, this escape from the clutch of death sheds light on how the 1969 author views both his recovery and the literary significance of his authorship. Of course, the issue of where to end an autobiography is never settled; the self is hardly able to write its own death. Scobie addresses this, and in the process bends Adams' argument the other way by pointing out that the objects of Glassco's memoirs are so significant in his subjective, authorial development, that his very documentation of them serves as a paradigmatic autobiography. The memoirist's accounts of the anxieties and recollections of that time in hospital seem to "prove" his final claims that "everything a man writes is instructive," given that "nothing can be proved about a man until he is dead," or, his autobiographical narrative ends (237).

III

> Memoirs are never more than half sincere however great the concern for truth may be: everything is always more complicated than we say it is.
> Perhaps we even come closer to the truth in the novel. (André Gide in Lejeune 26)

> Indeed, at the very moment when in *appearance* Gide . . . deprecate[s] the autobiographical genre and glorif[ies] [the reliability of] the novel, *in reality* [he is] drawing something very different . . .: [he] designate[s] the autobiographical space in which [he] want[s] us to read [his] work. (Lejeune 27)

By openly declaring that his memoirs are representations of an "unrecognisable" past self, while maintaining that in fact it was he who wrote them, Glassco invites the reader to assume a particular mode of spectatorship. Referring to similar disclaimers made by Gide and Mauriac, Phillipe Lejeune notes that such claims serve primarily to establish the notion that an aspect of autobiographical truth is sought by the production of the authors' texts, whatever their self-disclosed generic location (27). John Glassco, who makes his precarious claim to be recognized as the primary author of *Memoirs*, asks the reader to reconcile this claim with the author's disowning of his own past self (the writing "memoirist") even before the reader begins the first chapter. The first three chapters describe the protagonist's and Graeme's trip to Paris, clearly indicating their mutual wish to acquaint

themselves with the renowned literary community in Montparnasse and to begin, precociously, to write their memoirs. A narratorial pretence is thus constructed which places Glassco, the editorial presence, as the younger protagonist who narrates his life from a split-subjective vantage-point. For example, at the end of the second chapter, the narrator shifts from the retrospective voice to the present, "1932": "O Paris dawns," the narrator declares, "you are always beautiful, I think, no matter what the weather, but there was never one more beautiful than on that bitter morning in early March 1928 . . ." (19). What was a retrospective voice that narrates the past suddenly becomes an emotional voice coming forward with a present-tense lament. The ambivalence of the 1969 author toward his past self, whom the reader presumes to be the protagonist, is further confused. Which past self is disowned by the 1969 author, that of the 1928 protagonist, or that of the dejected 1932-1933 narrator? Moments after this outburst, in the same paragraph, the narrator withdraws from speaking directly from his own standpoint and recommences his retrospective analogue, describing the protagonist's life as if his narratorial presence were transparent.

From this point on, the narrative chronicles the protagonist's expatriate life in Paris but without the split narratorial voice of the first three chapters.[6] The memoirist now stands apart from the protagonist as a distinct narrator, and confines himself to an italicised narrative that refers to the former. By speaking in the present tense as a memoirist who resides in hospital, the narrator invites the reader to assume that the memoirist and the protagonist are the same person, that he is the author of the first three chapters. In the sixth chapter, the protagonist indicates that while in Luxembourg he was working on "the third chapter," thus supporting the presumption that in fact the protagonist was writing memoirs in 1928. This reference closes the four-year distance between the "memoirist" in hospital and the 1928 memoirist because, theoretically, here the two meet. In the eighth chapter the protagonist mentions the publication of the first three chapters of his "memoirs" in the avant-garde literary journal *This Quarter*.[7] This reiterates the retrospective position of the 1932 memoirist, and proves that he is temporally distinct from the protagonist-writer who wrote a different text at an earlier time (1928) and from a different perspective (that of "youth"). Thus, the protagonist of the events described in the fourth and subsequent chapters is the precocious "writer" who wrote the earlier chapters, but not those subsequent to them. The protagonist of the events described from the fourth chapter onward memorialises the earlier protagonist. Never again does the 1928 protagonist refer to writing chapters subsequent to the first three, nor is there any connection made on the protagonist's part -- indirectly or otherwise -- toward the memoirist in hospital. This preserves the temporal authority of the 1932 memoirist as the primary authorial referent. By keeping his "voice" distinct from all others in the text, and by articulating a clear temporal and thematic

distance between his writing self and a past self who also wrote memoirs, this authorial figure achieves licence to use these two selves -- the 1928 protagonist and his present self as memoirist -- for his autobiographical paradigm.

Shirley Neuman argues that the important points made in the introduction to Stephen Spender's autobiography *World Within World* provide a useful commentary on the difficult connection between the autobiographical author and her/his protagonist:

> An autobiographer is really writing the story of two lives: his life as it appears to himself, from his own position . . . and his life as it appears from the outside in the minds of others. : . An account of the interior view would be entirely subjective; and of the exterior, would hardly be autobiography but biography of the self . . . [the] great problem of autobiography remains, which is to create the true tension between these inner and outer, subjective and objective, worlds.[8]

The authorial Glassco of 1969 displays a kind of tenuous relationship toward his past selves. Both the protagonist of 1928 (the hedonistic writer) and the 1932-33 "memoirist" -- each a representation of a past self -- is ambivalently at odds with a central narratorial subject who would be the "author," presented as the prefatory "editor." The lucid divorce of the "author" from the memoirist is complete in every sense except the historical: we know that these figures are the same person at different times, yet, the 1932 persona is cast aside by the 1969 figure. The real tension in this autobiographical work is located in the mind of the lamenting memoirist as he looks back at his younger self, as if from the grave, who aspires to write his memoirs but prefers to engage "in greed, sloth and sensuality -- the three most amiable vices in the catalogue" (147). The tension between the self-reflective memoirist and hedonistic protagonist is animated by the use of literary device and thematic concerns. The central, autobiographical subject in Glassco's narrative is the "memoirist" who writes his past to immortalise and (thus) mollify himself.

The 1928 protagonist seems to be caught in a kind of narcissistic straitjacket which complicates his concepts of self-definition when in the company of others. For example, upon arriving in the cafés and taking up work on his memoirs he is pleased because "when anyone asked me what I was doing in Paris I was now able to say I was writing my Memoirs" (28). As Scobie notes, there is no doubt in the protagonist's mind regarding the virtuosity embodied by the ambitions of a man of letters. The protagonist's main reason for rejecting the philistine standards imposed on him by his stern father and the unbearably boring life at McGill stemmed from his desire to be a writer, like George Moore, and productive, like the American expatriates. Each piece of writing produced by the protagonist comes out of an autobiographical itch: his surrealist poem traces unconscious preoccupations, and his big project is the proposed memoirs. His other projects include the typing out of other people's manuscripts, a job which does not satisfy his goals as a writer

and makes him depressed. The dilemma of wanting to be a serious writer while simultaneously indulging in a passionate rebellion against self-discipline carries on in the protagonist's mind. The integration of a "future" memoirist persona, himself writing in 1932, profoundly affects the literary construction of the protagonist as a real hero who ends up accomplishing both goals.

IV

> [S]*ince I know my survival is mainly a matter of luck, I would like to continue my record of those years . . . this is to be the book of my youth, my golden age.* (27)
>
> I was so perfectly happy that writing did not interest me at all. (28)

Perhaps the most difficult problem the protagonist suffers from, when he is not busy distracting himself from his writing, is deciding whether he should continue work on his surrealist poetry or switch to writing autobiographical prose. His decision to write prose is confirmed after he discusses modern and Romantic poetry with the popular aesthete Narwhal, a friend of the great W.B. ("Willie") Yeats, who argues successfully that modern poetry can only accommodate depictions of "the reality of existence" in terms of unnatural fevers and hysteria and that the true poet is "more at home in sorrow" (37). This argument makes a strong impression on the protagonist, who, after mulling over Narwhal's words, becomes further resolved to write prose. The protagonist faces a recurring problem, typical of Montparnasse life: how to manage the committment to apply oneself to writing and at the same time live the sybaritic life of self-indulgence. The protagonist is not able to resolve this conflict. Whenever he sees signs of his friends' prolific output, he is haunted by recurring feelings of intimidation, shame, and jealousy.

Arguably, the protagonist believes that his rebellion against his father's "ferocious attachment to truth" which "made [him] an accomplished liar at an early age [and] in fact sharpened [his] invention" (38) is responsible for his internal struggle to take up writing seriously. At the same time, however, he willingly partakes in the seduction made possible by the anarchic decadence of his fellow expatriates in France. Still, the primary reason why he went to France was to escape the scrutiny of his father's gaze and situate himself in a literary community. His inability to produce written work illustrates to him his failure to succeed as the literary expatriate he wants to be. This construction reassures the "memoirist," who of course, writing this, valorizes his present self as the wiser and more learned writer who has the wisdom of experience necessary to write his life as a memoir.

The document before him proves that, in the "end," his problematic idealism is resolved: he is realised as his own hero.

While on a weekend trip to Luxembourg with Graeme and McAlmon, the protagonist becomes at first energized by the expeditious sounds of McAlmon's typewriter. He reflects on how McAlmon has already published nine books and has more than three in preparation. "Life seemed very pleasant to me," he reflects while looking at the contented old men in the town square, "and I began to feel that if I could only get rid of my itch for writing I might be quite happy" (67). As he starts work on his own memoirs, the protagonist becomes distracted by the notion that perhaps he is "too close" to the present events to properly record them (69). He leaves the room and walks down to the river, feeling dejected because he suspects he doesn't have the wealth of experience necessary to compose, "in the literary way," work that is not "boring" (70). The 1932 narrator interjects, and in a sober paragraph laments that he had such a lack of confidence in his literary abilities back in 1928. The paragraph ends with the narrator composing a prayer to God, thanking him for this belated opportunity to write his memoirs, although he feels "*no deepening spiritual apprehension*" as he writes (70). Although the retrospective writer regrets that his protagonist hadn't the discipline to do the work back at the time recalled ("*I was not, to use the theological phrase,* receptive"), he consoles himself and ends the paragraph with the telling statement: "*All I can do is record the thoughts of a young man as he sat on the bridge of Luxembourg on a warm summer day*" (70).

Walking back to the town centre the protagonist ponders how, in a melodramatic comparison of himself to Wordsworth, he "has only ten years of creativity left" and has "barely started" on the big project (71). His only "rescue from utter despondency" brought on by his feeling of inadequacy comes as he watches a milkman's dog, deliriously happy in its work. Once again, the memoirist breaks in and offers prayers, this time in praise of that dog -- "*Dear dog of Luxembourg, where are you now? My prayers, for what they are worth, are given to you tonight*" (71). Later that day, McAlmon recommends that the protagonist destroy his dilettante poetry and continue work on the memoirs. The memoirist intercedes to explain that his past self was too busy living to continue writing, that he was not as serious about writing then as he is now -- "*I am now more serious and my chief concern is not to die if I can help it*" (72). This, again, signifies the autobiographer's stage in the process of self-analysis. At this point in the narrative the "memoirist" desperately wishes not to die before completing the "memoir," yet by the time he reaches the end of his final chapter he is satisfied with his work.

Throughout the text, the memoir project has been expounded as the most important goal for establishing recognition in the artistic community as well as providing a sense of

self-valorization in the protagonist's own mind. The "memoirist" continually laments his failure to complete the project earlier, and is frustrated by the fact that his past self was too preoccupied with youthful vices to do the "serious work" he had always meant to do. After all, it was his firm resolution to write memoirs which provided the excuse for receiving funds from his father and self-justification for fleeing Montréal in the first place. In the final chapter the "memoirist" admits to the pretentiousness of his past self while acknowledging his present success:

> Literature had been for me simply an instrument of self-assertion, an excuse for leaving home, a pretext for idleness. I really had nothing to say. . . . Now, of course, it is different. I keep on writing this book for the best reason in the world: to recapture a little of the brightness of those days when I had health and spirits; for that brightness even seems to gild these long dreary days. (239)

The autobiographical act, enacted and achieved while the memoirist anticipates a premature death, brings to him a moral and personal victory. The writing process allows the memoirist to "savour" the "sweetness" of his memories which have, up until the time of writing (1932-33), been blocked by two years of "boredom, pain, fear, and sobriety." The glory of self-recognition is achieved during the writing process: the memoirist finally sees himself, without disclaimer or elusive aside, in the same light as other memoirists such as the celebrated Pepys, Rousseau, Casanova, and Harris (236). Eliciting a sympathetic response from the reader, the memoirist describes how significant this literary composition is for improving his health.

> Dr Archibald approves my industry. "What chapter are you on now?" he asks, or, "I can tell you have done a good day's work today, your colour is improved." The nurses also marvel and twitter at the pile of scribblers that is growing on my bedside table. (239)

This is an explicit elicitation because the memoirist indicates that he wants Graeme to keep his text safe, presumably, in the interest of future readers. It is remarkable, then, that the John Glassco who appears on the title page and writes the preface so casually dismisses this evasion of death and the significance of what it meant for his past self to have finally succeeded in getting his memoirs down before it was too late to re-live them, and to attain for himself self-recognition as a "memoirist" after all.

In this same passage, the memoirist compares his present memoir to the earlier works written by the protagonist, calling them "those abortive poems, plays and stories [that] had hung around my neck like millstones" (239). Such a reference reveals a solidarity with his earlier self who felt an ambivalent state of frustration and vindication over his not being able to complete the memoir while living in France. It is important to note that it is after he

comes to terms with the virtues of a life lived by the whims of impulse and not reason -- a validation of the behaviour characteristic of his past self -- that he can recount how the protagonist of the main narrative has developed into the "character" of memoirist. The narrative ends with the recollection that Mrs. Quayle had burned his poems and stories he had left in her apartment. The recollection is presented as a dialogue between the young protagonist and Mrs. Quayle, as it took place on the rue Galilée. There is no longer a need at this point to isolate the two personae of memoirist and protagonist because the autobiographical project has been achieved. The act of composing it, which allowed for a celebration of his past and present self, thus allows the "memoirist" to narrate both selves in one voice -- the voice of an integrated subject.

Despite the sense of fulfillment derived from the autobiographical project and the deep sense of elation expressed by the "memoirist," whose project finally gives his life meaning, "J.G." remains indifferent. Foucault reflects on the necessity in literary texts for a "return to the origin" of authorial design, for the construction of a connecting link between a presumed authorial identity and the real person writing (116).

> My manuscript ended at this point. The operation was suddenly set forward a week, and there was no time to start on Chapter 27, much less to write the final one. I can reconstruct the bare memories themselves only from a very distant memory. (240)

What might this chapter have been? John Glassco's text ends with an articulation of a displaced authorial identity, which is neither valued nor validated as having a direct influence on how John Glassco perceives himself. Yet why would this not be so? *Memoirs of Montparnasse* is the autobiography of an entirely different self.

V

"Throughout the *Memoirs*," writes Adams, "the primary subject is the creation of the *Memoirs*. We are constantly reminded that the narrator . . . is always aware, not only of his own economy, but also of his autobiographical economy, of his using up material faster than he could live it . . . The author is always seeking material for the *Memoirs*, defining himself as a memoir-writer, structuring his life in chapters . . ." (18). Adams italicises the word "memoirs," suggesting that it is for our text that the undesignated "subject" seeks material. The critic's statement blurs the crucial distinction between the protagonist who plans to write his memoirs and the memoirist who writes the protagonist. No doubt the creation of a memoir is a "primary subject" in the text. However, to confuse the memoirist who writes his own self with the gallavanting protagonist who only aspires to write, is to mistake the most essential promise of this text, made early in the Prefatory Note, and reinforced by the

memoirist's final words. There is no "given bewildering variety of personal narratives that deliberately confuse" the generic determination of this text (Adams 18). On the contrary, these voices are radically distinct and the generic determination as autobiography declares itself over and over again, as one appreciates the difference between a living "I" (a present self seeking to attend only to his past), and the present "I," a trope who declares to write himself. Such a literary construction exists only to operate as a figuration of a past self for the sake of the memoirist's literal compositions.

In his essay establishing the theoretical and historical problems posed by his reading of Glassco's text, Tausky rightly points to Phillipe Lejeune's claim that the falsification of the relationship between the author and protagonist of an autobiography is a lie, not a fiction (34). Readers may have access to the new paperback edition which, aided by the privilege afforded by a decade of research into Glassco's private letters and original manuscripts, enabled Oxford University Press to announce on the back cover that the Prefatory Note is a lie. It is simply not true that the memoirist wrote in hospital, or that the first three chapters have been only slightly revised. Nevertheless, for Scobie, this action provides further insight into Glassco's literary self-representation. Moreover, Scobie sympathizes with Glassco's second prefatory disclaimer -- that the author feels distanced from the young man he "was," and closer to the protagonist as a literary construction. Glassco knows that the protagonist is a character in a novel he has read, and written.

However, such information is merely an accessory part of Glassco's text. The personae used to illustrate Glassco's past selves do not demand, by speech or gesture, to be interrogated by the tools of posthumous insight. Texts take on entirely different meanings depending on the concerns of the given readership. While Glassco's actions (made on his real death bed, to real executors) may encourage us to compare the memoirist he created with the person he really was, such comparative studies violate the appeals pronounced by the text, and only serve to drag issues of interpretation out of the discourse of narrative studies in autobiography and into the bowels of the National Public Archives in Ottawa. The 1969 author published a highly sophisticated text, rich in graphic detail and full of retrospective observations recalling an era belonging entirely to the reliable author we come to know best. That broken promise of autobiography, forged by the real author and delivered to the reader, is the most immediate, obvious history the reader takes away. This history belongs to the far-flung, fictionalised "memoirist." I end this with the second half of the passage quoted at the beginning of this paper:

> *I am twenty-one now, and have put aside the pleasant foolish things that amuse a young man, such as fornication, clothes and night life. I am more serious and my chief concern is not to die if I can help it.* (72)

Memoirs of Montparnasse functions as this subject's successful autobiography: serious work and the vices of youth are appropriately therapized and framed in this written testament to the process of 'serious' life-writing and 'serious' life-living. John Glassco breaks his autobiographical promise, and in the shards of this broken promise his other authority has emerged and been produced.

Notes

1 See John Lauber's untimely essay published just three years before the manuscripts went public, "Liberty and the Pursuit of Pleasure," and Adams, 17-18. It is interesting to consider that even Kay Boyle, who raised violent objections to Glassco's sense of portraiture, and the recollection of certain key facts, never took issue with the claims to authorial integrity as stated in the Prefatory Note (Lauber).

2 Evidently, John Glassco did in fact incur a tubercular infection in Paris in 1932, although there is no concrete documentation testifying that he was healthy enough to write so prolifically while in hospital (Moritz 56).

3 Both Stephen Scobie and Timothy Dow Adams shift intermittently between analyses of the published edition of *Memoirs* (the reader's text), and the Glassco Papers, housed at the Canadian Public Archives in Ottawa. While I appreciate the research that reveals the geographical and biographical inaccuracies of the published text, I leave little space for the manuscript in my argument beyond a brief introduction to it. As both Scobie and Adams would probably agree, the Glassco Papers represent a text quite different from the published *Memoirs*. My argument in this section utilizes the Lejeunian model for identifying autobiography; given that authorial consciousness is never fully unveiled, we must rely on textual identification based on formal characteristics that are endemic to the text. Hence the comparative validity of Glassco's recollections between drafts is inappropriate in my discussion.

4 For an excellent discussion of issues concerning the formal difference between a fictional and non-fictional autobiography, see Neuman's essay "The Observer Observed: Distancing the Self in Autobiography."

5 Scobie refers to both M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1981) 15, and to Lejeune (45) for establishing the generic distinctions addressed here: Autobiography for Abrams "is to be distinguished from the memoir . . . in which the emphasis is not on the author's developing self, but on the people he has known and the events he has witnessed," and for Lejeune: "a retrospective account in prose that a real person makes of his own existence and especially the history of his personality" (44).

6 This double-narrative technique is carefully maintained throughout the text with the exception of the description on p. 49 in which the protagonist describes the studio he and Graeme move into after leaving their room in the Hôtel Jules-César. The protagonist writes:

> This place was to be our home on and off for the next year and a half. It was here that I tried seriously to write for the first time, here I brought my two or three girls, and here I met the woman with whom I at last fell in love and whom, however the outcome of that love, I shall always remember it in this setting as she undressed one night in a luminous haze of gaslight . . . It was the theatre of my youth. (49)

It is, of course, logically impossible for the protagonist to "remember" events he has not yet experienced. Apparently this is an instance where the 1932 memoirist merges himself with the protagonist, defying his tacit (but typographically implied) promise to maintain a distance from the past. Arguably, the 1932 memoirist does not merge here; rather it is the Glassco of 1969 who here suggests the artificiality of his implicitly defensive promise not to have "changed any of this," despite his mysterious wish to vocalize the historical status of the text (xiii).

7 In fact, a portion of John Glassco's text did appear in a 1928 issue of *This Quarter*, albeit the said piece bears only a vague similarity to the first three chapters of *Memoirs*. Tausky's essay compares both texts and discusses this not entirely libellous lie.

8 Stephen Spender. *World Within World*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951. viii.

Works Cited

Adams, Timothy Dow. "The Geography of Genre in John Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse.* Ed. K. P. Stich. *Reflections: Autobiography and Canadian Literature.* Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988.

de Man, Paul. "Autobiography as De-facement." *MLN* 94 (1979): 919.

Foucault, Michel. "What Is an Author?" Ed. Paul Rabinow. *The Foucault Reader.* New York: Pantheon, 1984.

Glassco, John. *Memoirs of Montparnasse.* Toronto: Oxford UP, 1970.

Gnarowski, Michael. "Notes Toward a Sometime and Probable History of John Glassco." Ed. K. P. Stich. *Reflections: Autobiography and Canadian Literature.* Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988.

Lauber, John. "Liberty and the Pursuit of Pleasure." *Canadian Literature* (1981): 61-72.

Lejeune, Phillipe. *On Autobiography.* Ed. Paul John Eakin. Trans. Katherine Leary. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Moritz, Albert and Theresa. Eds. *The Oxford Illustrated Literary Guide to Canada.* Toronto: Oxford UP, 1987.

Neuman, Shirley. "The Observer Observed: Distancing the Self in Autobiography." *Prose Studies.* 4 (December 1981): 317-336.

Scobie, Stephen. "The Mirror on the Brothel Wall: John Glassco, *Memoirs of Montparnasse.*" *Canadian Poetry.* 13 (Fall/Winter 1983): 43-58.

Shields, Carol. *The Stone Diaries.* Toronto: Vintage, 1993.

Tausky, Thomas. "*Memoirs of Montparnasse*: a Reflection of Myself." *Canadian Poetry* 13 (Fall/Winter 1983): 59-84.

Woodcock, George. *Walking Through the Valley: Autobiography.* Toronto: ECW Press, 1994.

CHAPTER THREE

The Literary Life of a Fictional Text: "Autobiographical" Tensions in Kristjana Gunnars' *The Prowler* (1989)

[F]or poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches itself to the idea; the idea *is* the fact. (Matthew Arnold 299)

I know something good is going to happen.
I don't know when,
But just saying it could even make it happen.
(Kate Bush "Cloudbursting")

I

Everything, I told myself, depends on the vantage point.
All that a story is, I thought, is a way of looking at things.
(Gunnars 90)

In my last chapter I analysed the narrative structure of John Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse* and concluded that autobiography might include an author's literary representation of a past self even when the author refuses to identify with that constituted persona. I proposed that as readers of Glassco's book, we follow a clearly defined narratorial voice and although the narrator's attitude toward his subject is at times ambiguous, he appears as a distinctive figure who speaks to the reader in the present tense and in the first person. In naming himself, this narrator presents John Glassco at once as the author of the book and as its protagonist (who is the narrator, only younger). This "memoirist" has a contiguous presence in *Memoirs* and strives to provide his reader with a step-by-step guide to his unfolding autobiography. He states, for example: "I keep on writing this book for the best reason in the world," a gesture that refers to the text's preface where the date and place of composition are explicitly named and signed by the author (239, xiii). These statements, and others like them, formally indicate that the narrator in *Memoirs* strives to present the verifiable history of a real person: one who lives, breathes, and writes in the world external to the text.

This, my final chapter, will take a very different approach to the text at hand. Compared to Glassco's book, which I have defined as a fictional autobiography because the

"memoirist" John Glassco is a fictitious, fantasized persona, Kristjana Gunnars' *The Prowler* offers no formal gestures that indicate a stable connection between Kristjana Gunnars and any of the text's characters. As a result, the text does not offer reliable assurances that the narrator, who speaks as a declarative "I," is meant to represent, explicitly, the voice of the author. Indeed, one may argue with good reason that Gunnars is not represented with serious veracity here at all -- either by the novel's narrator or by the peripheral characters. Like much of Gunnars' writing, *The Prowler* reverberates with moving recollections, all told in the first person, of the traumas caused by the cultural disorientation and ensuing dislocation that a young girl must face as she tries to attune to her expatriation from Iceland to North America. The text's narrator is a young woman who attempts to reconcile her history by writing autobiographically about her childhood, her present writing process, and the effect such writing may have for her reader. Although it is tempting to align the speaker with Gunnars and link the implied reader to us, nowhere in the text do any of the text's "characters" admit that *The Prowler* is in fact the text the narrator writes. We have only ambiguous and tenuous indications that this text is anything other than a narrative describing a narrative. The narrator is like an anonymous traveller who writes with meticulous detail about a place that becomes well known, but is never named. As readers, we may assume that the place the speaker describes does indeed exist, but that referent can not be exposed with unambiguous precision because its most accessible metonymy -- its proper name -- is left out. In the case of *The Prowler*, the autobiographical pretence is cut short by the narrative's emphasis on certain inevitabilities: the crucial gaps in a speaker's memory and the nearly impossible connection between a life that exists before writing takes place (the name that stays regardless of the subject's activities) and a life that is constructed through language (its name a fluid and problematic construct). In *The Prowler*, the narrator remains without a stable referent because the text deconstructs autobiographical pretentions while it reproduces an autobiographical process which does not require Kristjana Gunnars to name herself as the autobiographer. Autobiography as a generic construct marks itself in two ways: the dominant narrator shares the same proper name as the protagonist, and the text documents the experience that inspires the autobiographical action.

Curiously, the text's dustjacket announces that Gunnars is, like the figure in her novel, an Icelandic immigrant who moved to the US in 1964 and then to Canada in 1969. Despite the suspiciously close resemblance between the dustjacket's plot summary and the biographical note on Gunnars, the text's title page defines *The Prowler* as "a novel." Even before the reader begins reading the novel proper, problematic ambiguities around authorial reference and the "truth" of this fiction are already formed. The reader is invited to consider

these ambiguities, and thus to create an intellectual justification to mediate the historical significance of the life the text tells.

The novel's narrator describes her childhood as a young woman, but that narration entails a positing of the present writing self as the prime object of scrutiny. I find that the protagonist the narrator describes functions as an illustration of the narrator's self-analysis rather than as a personality in her own right. At times, the narrator's self-consciousness becomes so acute, her self-reflexiveness so piercing, that her voice splits. An early example: "The person writing these words is probably the one who sits beside hospital beds, not knowing what to say. It is an occupation I began at the age of twelve" (18).[1] This kind of split in writing from the perspective of both first and third person occurs so that the narrator may discuss herself as a subject engaged in literary self-representation ("I am writing me") while maintaining the authoritative voice of the persona who narrates the text we read ("I am the author"). As the present narrator who writes her own life story, her voice is both the recorder and the record of a difficult history. The protagonist -- although she is the narrator's past self -- functions as a trope who illustrates the narrator's reflections on writing. This is why it is imperative that we distinguish between the protagonist (the narrator's past self) and the speaker (who narrates the text); later on I discuss the connection these personae may have to Kristjana Gunnars.

Formally speaking, the text's focus on an author's writing process presents a case of autobiography because the text documents a period in an (albeit fictional) author's life. Yet in this novel, there is a serious break from the conventionality of the definition of autobiography put forward by Phillipe Lejeune, who argues that in autobiography the author named on the title page is assumed to represent the irreducible authorial "I" of the text (7). Although Gunnars is reluctant to name herself in the text and thus here ossify Lejeune's "autobiographical pact," I shall argue for the text as autobiography because it communicates the life-writing of an other, still "real" author who attempts, in a special sense, to sign her name to the narrative.[2] Although the narrator's self-referential signature is not "real" in the formal sense (aligning the character's name with a real person), the authorial persona in *The Prowler* personifies herself by manipulating autobiographical conventions. During the course of narration, the narrator endows the text with human attributes such as longing, desire, and hunger. To locate the narrator we follow the novel's theoretical logic, which is relentless in its self-preoccupation, and discover that the narrator and protagonist function as tropes who illustrate their reliance on the historical development of a single author's personality. The past-self and present-writing-self are fictional figures which create a set of "stories" and construct a third figure which refers to itself as "text": this figure seems to control the text's tropes.

In this chapter I argue that by employing a range of allusive and theoretical devices, Gunnars' novel successfully interrogates the conservative notion that life-writing must emerge out of a life experience that is lived before writing takes place. James Olney remarked in 1972 that "autobiography and poetry are both definitions of the [writing] self at a moment and in a place" (44), and Philippe Lejeune's often-quoted explanation, that "autobiography is a retrospective prose narrative" (4), is notorious (as he has later admitted), for its strict reliance on the notion that life experiences may be contained by a "transparently" linear narrative structure (120). Gunnars' novel challenges these conventional definitions because its narratorial process *is itself* the locus which informs the perception of protagonist and authorial self-reference or, in Lejeune's terms, "perspective." For example, this connection is illustrated by the child protagonist: discomforting linguistic codes distort her perception of the world because words direct perspective. The narrator recalls that "[e]verything, I told myself, depends on the vantage point [and a]ll that a story is, I thought, is a way of looking at things" (90). This is a recurring problem for both the child and the narrator and it opens up the greater implication that the writing subject -- the narrator representing the text -- must actively respond to and be influenced by her own act of producing autobiography. I also find that, as an unpaginated text whose sole indicator of an assumed direction is located in its numerical section headings, *The Prowler* is constructed in a way that elicits in the reader an experience resembling the struggles of the narrator: she becomes a prowler who steals from the text which is her life-story (59), acts like a detective to piece the stories together, "looks for clues," and recognizes that each time history is represented a new text emerges (81). In sum, this novel is an actual demonstration of autobiographical writing that is itself the primary referent of the narrator. Gunnars, then, does not exist independently of the text or, in Glassco's terms, outside of it. The text is an autobiography of its self-composition, which takes place as the reader reads.

I wonder if, by implication, storytelling in *The Prowler* functions as an innocuous form of self-representation or whether it poses a serious threat to the integrity of the real writer's, and perhaps even the real reader's, self-image. Must autobiography induce its author to analyse her experience from the perspective of both author and narrator? I argue that Gunnars, who we might presume to exist beyond the constituted world of the literary work, is not distinct from the speaker in the text. For this double figure of the speaker, the act of writing, and indeed our act of reading, creates the speaker's identity in the text. The figure who constructs the narrator and protagonist depends on the performance of these roles, and on the reader's process of interpretation, to determine whether she be perceived as a representation of a real person.

To clarify, in the following sections I argue that this "novel" is, more properly, an autobiography because the text's narrative describes the historical development of a conscious self, although this self might or might not correspond to one real person. Unlike a conventional novel, which by definition is not meant to document a verifiable history, *The Prowler* addresses the problems of authorial reference in terms that do correspond to real people -- people such as Roland Barthes, James Joyce, H.D., and others who are not explicitly named by the narrator -- and thus the text maintains, by implication, a tenuous tie to Kristjana Gunnars. Second, I will explore how the narrator uses her recollections of a past self (the protagonist), as a means of constructing, and indeed paying homage to, what I will call the "third figure," namely the text. The self-consciousness of the textual process, and the reader's critical insight, brings this "other" narrator to the fore.

II

At its most basic level, *The Prowler* evades the conventional Lejeunian model of autobiography because the narrative unfolds in terms that have no direct relation to a single protagonist's age, as Lejeune's "retrospective prose narrative" insists. The "beginning" of the protagonist's history is not initiated by a recollection of her actual birth, nor does the "end" of her "story" arrive when she develops into the narrator who writes.[3] Contrary to the seven out of eight periodical reviews of *The Prowler* which introduced the book as the story of a young girl's life, I find that the novel focuses on how that life will be told, rather than how it was lived.[4] As John Moss has pointed out, the narrator refuses to be identified as the persona who "controls" how the text unfolds (31). This means that, like any successful autobiography, the text contains its main subject incidentally, and reading and writing the text in a sense decide its existence. As Smaro Kamboureli has stated in her essay describing postmodern autobiography as "a non-genre," "[a]utobiography, no matter how we define it, is accomplished [as entering the public realm] only when the writing of the subject's life finds a reader" (86). *The Prowler*'s means of literary construction avoids making an entrance into the popular public realm by disavowing linearity and conventional chronological sequences. Moreover, the very idea of linearity in reading and writing is both questioned and subverted by the text as it theorizes its own production.

The narrator opens the novel with a reference to another writer: "Perhaps it is not a good book, he said, James Joyce said, *but it is the only book I am able to write*" (1), implying that even while she begins to "write" her text, she recognizes that the text may not be under her control. Later in this first paragraph the narrator develops this idea further by suggesting that the text she produces does not represent her. She declares she "would never again stand in front of people, reading my words, pretending I have something to say," that the

pretense of authorship, meaningful authorship, is "humiliat[ing]." She refuses to be recognized as the source of textual production by stating that "I am not a writer," yet the formation of the text has a corporeal effect on her, the writing lodges itself inside her body: "[The writing] is in my throat, stomach, arms." Thus, the narrator is introduced as a figure who functions both as an artifice, the medium of an utterance she is not in real control of, and as retainer, as one who records memories which are not "stories." While preparing the ground for introducing her past self, the narrator sustains a confessional tone throughout the next five sections. When the protagonist's story finally does appear, it is so saturated with the narrator's own self-scrutiny that the protagonist seems to be an extension of the narrator's own struggle for literary self-consciousness.

At the point of the protagonist's introduction, the narrator asks both the reader and protagonist, "when does your story start?" and in a new paragraph she responds but does not make clear whether it is the protagonist or narrator who speaks. This indicates that the split between the protagonist and narrator allows for the narrator to record her process of self-identification as one who makes stories:

> [It might have begun when my father] brought in his suitcase chocolates and stories of gypsies. But my father . . . did not tell stories of gypsies. My sister and I made up the stories. (6)

The protagonist creates fictional interpretations of the world, sometimes in various versions, to serve her need for comfort in self-rumination. The passage indicates to the reader that the split subject -- who authors this text and indeed her own past -- fictionalizes herself even as a child. The child told stories in the hope that they would resituate her in a less hostile world; the present narrator describes her writing process to confess the indeterminacy of her status as an author. Both figures speak from the guise of a single, hence split, subject. Unlike the Lejeunian mode of autobiography, which relies on the assumption that the speaker in the text represents the author of the text, this narrator's admission opens the possibility that not even the narrator knows for certain her role as the "writer" of her history. The passage elicits our sympathy for the children who wished to believe that their father was attentive. Simultaneously, this dynamic acknowledges the narrator's agency to write her "fictional" perceptions of the world rather than repress (hence erase) them for the sake of validating the "true" historical record. In sum, the acts of reading and writing demystify the complexities of fictionalized experiences from the past .

Inevitably then, the text's notion of storytelling as a self-reflexive act, together with the role authorship plays in the life of the protagonist, calls into question the narrator's reliability. Although at this point in the text the narrator has not named herself as Kristjana Gunnars, we would assume that the narrator always has a privileged knowledge of her

subject (the protagonist), which derives from an intimate relationship to her. Yet this narrator addresses and demystifies this expectation: "[N]othing I can say says anything"; she admits that "the story intrudes" as her writing breaks the "ordinariness" which "marks" her comfortable mode of narration. If the narrator does not command the content of her utterances when they are loaded with "stories," then who authors the text? A careful reading of these early passages reveals that neither the narrator nor the protagonist consciously controls the formation of their stories. Although the narrator's voice occupies a considerably vocal presence in the narrative, her admission that "If there is a God, it is God's story" is significant because it disowns her as the controller or referent of the text (11). In another place, the narrator states that the literary production of meaning ("writing") is somehow disciplined, which directs the reader's gaze inward:

> It is in the nature of writing to contain a note of defiance . . . A form of cold war, where the ink that is directed into patterns is carefully watched so that it will not spill over and spread out, uncontrolled. (105)

This passage serves both as confession and as commentary, reflecting on the stories which preceed it, defining a stylistic technique endemic to the novel. In sections 93-97, the narrative continues to alternate: one section presents a commentary that develops theoretically the relationship between the writer and the writing, while the next records episodes from the protagonist's life. The passages are numbered and hence are to be read in succession, so the reader may expect these stories to signify the literary acts of a single author, one who had the means and authority to assign an order to the text. As we shall see, a metaphor of corporeality bears a crucial significance to the text's reader, who must excavate meaning, or "play detective" because the text refuses authority of any sort. Imposing a Lejeunian expection on it, such as "this text must know where it's going," abuses the indeterminacy of the text's personified subject. How do readers resolve this problem?

The mode of communication orchestrated in *The Prowler* between the young protagonist and the narrator who frames her produces a kind of literary reproduction -- one which demonstrates that the symbolic order of language may be changed when the dialectical relationship between the young protagonist and the texts she reads is addressed directly. Early in the novel, as the narrator explains that, when she was a child, Danish schoolchildren persecuted her because she was Icelandic, the narrator speculates that the relationship between the child's mode of self-defence (she read books and contrived a foreign accent) and the narrator's speech carries with it implications for textual production:

> Perhaps the person telling these stories is a little older. The distinctly lonely girl in Rungsted, Denmark, who had been made to understand that Isak Dinesen lived next door. Perhaps it is someone older still. The girl who lived in the

> Mosfellssveit hills in Iceland, who was told repeatedly that Halldór Laxness lived on the next farm. The white house you see from your window. (17)
>
> The person writing these words is probably the one who sits beside hospital beds, not knowing what to say. It is an occupation I began at the age of twelve. (18)

The descriptive narratorial monologue is cut short by the narrator's self-reflexivity, which enables her to address herself in the second person, thus displacing what appears to be the painful memories of childhood to a context that she creates by imagining and then writing. In effect, this technique lifts the present self (the narrator), out of the realm of recalling difficult experiences and into the guise of a past self (the protagonist) who appears to "rewrite" her experience; hence the narrator's uncertainty around precisely who it is that writes her words. By disrupting the narrative account of the protagonist's experience to ask "who tells my story?" the narrator implies that by identifying her "authorship" she might establish how much agency she has for determining, or negotiating, her fate. Both the narrator and protagonist draw a tight link between one's control over the composition of one's text and the life experience that those stories implicitly reveal. This is a flexible and two-way connection: the child protagonist is convinced that she can defend herself against hostile surroundings by speaking and reading foreign languages, and the narrator conceals her past by refusing to locate or explain how the protagonist has developed into the narrator. Consequently, the narrator appears to exist ahistorically, as an author who writes her self into history as if she were a fictional figure, and not a living, breathing person. However, this strategy enables the text's authorial subject, who is cloaked in the problematic guise of "the text," to display a considerable agency over how history will be told. The strategy is ingenious because it empowers the narrator to comment on the protagonist as a means toward theorizing her own acts of narration. This theorizing forms a bridge over the fictional stories, enabling the reader to see that there is an author here who struggles to make her process of self-representation visible. As the narrative progresses, acts of narration become metaphors for acts of living. Remember the early instance of foreshadowing:

> [The book which is "a relief to be writing" (2)] is a book marked by its ordinariness. That knows there can be nothing extraordinary in a life, in a language. (5)

In later sections the narrator appears to identify with the protagonist's loneliness, but is reluctant to state precisely why, or how, this is. For example, when the narrator again recalls her difficult childhood at the Danish boarding school, she becomes confused with her story and shifts her focus to remind her reader, and presumably herself, of her younger sister's anorexia. This puts an abrupt end to the passage (67). The narrator swiftly

interrupts herself to offer an abstract justification for the fragmentary nature of this and all stories, explaining that "there are theorists who say that all stories are lies . . . There are so many people vying for attention in the telling of any given story that they cancel each other out" (68). In this section the narrator does not claim a privileged understanding of the protagonist's experiences, yet she offers commentary which, again, redirects the focus of the narrative and calls attention to what are, theoretically, the concerns of a reader reading, a writer who writes in the present tense, and a narrator who looks back to her past as she tells her stories.

These personae are tropological extentions of a text that is endowed with human attributes: "The text desires to be true. It knows that what is written is not exactly true, so the desire goes unsatisfied" (69). The protagonist and the narrator address each other's concerns by insisting on naming problems that relate the act of story-telling to authorship. The protagonist's childhood is related directly to the narrator's uncertain control over her work and her fear of being imprisoned by the stories she tells. This provides a metaphor representing the text's ambivalence toward "stories," the versions of history that pretend to not be fictitious.

> Some of us receive gifts that seem to be open doorways out of dilemmas. It is a kind of CARE package from fate. I was one of the fortunate ones, for at the age of thirteen or fourteen my blond hair turned brown. When that happened everyone thought I was Russian because that is what I looked like. I was called the little Russian girl and was content with that. (19)

As an indigent girl living on a starving island during and after the Second World War, the protagonist developed a complicated strategy to defend herself against her fear of imminent malnutrition and to protect herself from sexist persecution. While men castigated young Icelandic women for being "American-soldier-whores," she created for herself a public persona which allowed her to dissociate herself from other girls. By learning to speak foreign languages and mimic continental mannerisms she convinced her peers, and to some degree herself, that she didn't belong to the suffering nation. Standing in front of her mirror, she rehearsed pinched eyes and Japanese words, telling herself "life is not enough," that "it has to be magic" (21). This desire to escape the reality of "life" (which is not magical) by feigning a false nationality and a culturally dislocated identity did not entitle her to healthier foods but it did enable her to dissociate herself, in her mind, from those who suffered all around her. The narrator makes a provocative speculation when she wonders if, because some Icelandic novels "make no sense" and "go nowhere, refuse to grasp reality, say there is no reality," potentially there really is no Icelandic reality and Icelanders actually do not exist (30). Similarly, the protagonist's construction of a new public identity, which is

defined by her being able to read, speak, and look "Russian," creates a new "reality" which is self-empowering. It gives her a unique perspective as she looks at others, while it permits her to prove that, as an *étrangée*, she may write herself into a different existence.

This problematizing of self-referentiality and self-expression is precisely how *The Prowler* manipulates the expectation that a text develop the protagonist through a linear logic. It comes as no surprise, then, that *The Prowler*'s protagonist wrote her first story "in bad English," shortly after leaving Iceland to live in Oregon (31). Playing on a wrecked tanker, the protagonist had been stranded as the tide rose around the fjord. She became isolated and immobile, frightened and unable to get back to shore. The narrator recalls another time when she was stranded as a child. While walking on a black sand spit, absorbed in her playful pursuit of taunting seals, the water level rose and she found herself totally alone. She found a small shack, and the passage ends with her entering it through an open door and discovering that the shack is filled with food for stranded travellers (32). Both the graphic imagery and location of this story in the narrative demonstrate the narrator's implicit claim to self-authorship as an act of resistance against social convention. In the narrator's words, her story "is about a girl who wanted to go home" even though the ironic twist is that the child's playground is familiar to her, it is a safe haven away from her family's house (30). The girl's inability to actually go home is caused by her being absorbed in her play (31). Her image of her past self being separated from her "home" illustrates the precariously plucky nature of her childhood personality and the ingenuity of the narrator who subtly deconstructs the literary construction of "home." The narrator wrote the story to remind herself of her origins ("it was written out of longing") and situates it immediately before recalling that Icelandic schoolchildren were taught by teachers that "the door to go through" is opened only when you have "composed poems long enough" (33). The narrator juxtaposes these three stories to show that writing autobiography is also a door, a door that is opened by setting oneself apart from others in relation to both geography and language. This writing, which comes out of longing, shows that the narrator is in possession of her own history and that the isolation of the past self, stranded on a peninsula, is finally vindicated in the act of retrospective narration.

> Anything that came from far away was good. Life elsewhere was magical. The further away it was, the more magical. (21)
> Materials for stories came from places so far away that people there had never heard of us. (83)

This is an interesting remark on how the protagonist's "contrived" identity and the narrator's metaphors of self-imposed isolation are not enough to inoculate the subject from physical trauma. The narrator as author demonstrates her agency by writing her present

situation but aspects of her corporeal existence are beyond her narratorial control. For instance, the protagonist develops a serious skin disease and is made to strip down for her doctor (37). Hearing the diagnosis, that she may be cured by bathing in the Red Sea (but because she lives in the North she is doomed to suffer for somewhat longer), she is forced to understand that her dreams of being Russian, or the daughter of an Hungarian gypsy and a Russian, will not come true. Consequently, this tragic revelation encourages the protagonist to ask questions about her true nation's history (44). She asks: Why are there no Icelandic dances? Why has there been such a long history of starvation? This prescient curiosity permits her to see the irony of Icelandic history and Icelandic character: she speculates that dreams are like mussels, shut up in their shells. She observes that the shores of her island are filled with nutritious mussels, but that the starving nation refuses to eat them. In these sections, the narrator shows that storytelling is an act of self-imposed isolation which protects the story's subject from literary erasure while the story enables that subject to locate herself in an historical context. As the protagonist grows older and eventually narrates this text, the early lies about her "expatriation" are vindicated because they provide the fictions, "materials," or "stories," that are needed for writing herself into both private and public modes of reality as they are perceived through historical awareness.

Like Judith Owens, who responds to readings of Gunnars' poetry that focus on estrangement, desolation, and loss, Diana Brydon interprets the very act of addressing these themes as a gesture suggestive, in Gunnars' mind, of essentially optimistic possibilities (74-77). Indeed, almost every section of *The Prowler* speaks to the implications of how the rewriting of one's own history, be it written by a present or past self, affects the subject's self-image. It follows, then, that the appearance of this novel signifies the attempt to negotiate the literary construction of self and to offer, by example, a document that announces the possibilities autobiography may offer to real readers or authors who suffer recollections of their pasts. For the narrator, literary representations of history may actually rewrite history:

> A text that is self-deceiving eventually rejects itself. There is always another author, behind the official author, who censors the text as it appears. The other author writes: that is not what you intended to say. (63)

As I will proceed to show, *The Prowler* elicits a mode of reading and demonstrates a kind of writing that offer a means of confronting one's origins by recasting them.

III

There appears a problematic paradox in the text when the "third figure" unveils herself. At the outset, the text declares itself to be "a novel" just as it announces Kristjana

Gunnars as its author (on its title page). This pronouncement identifies that Gunnars exerts a measure of authority over her text while its generic location as a fiction rescinds the accountability readers may demand: that she record her life in a form which can be compared, for veracity, with the accounts of others. The self-validation the "third figure" achieves by this act of life-writing is tantamount to the author's claiming of a visible self, yet the resulting document, *The Prowler*, insists on being recognized as fiction. Does Gunnars' project succeed in offering readers a theoretical possibility, only to fail in "real life" -- by not making an unambiguous link between the project and the real author?

In section 94 the narrator claims to exist in the world outside the text by recalling "my father, Gunnar." This passage echoes the statement, "for Gunnar, my father," a dedication that appears before the actual text begins. Perhaps this connection reveals how Kristjana Gunnars struggles with one aspect of what Michel Foucault called "the restrictive system of discourse" (the author who exists outside *The Prowler* might very well be the writing subject inside it) (216, 224). For Foucault, the text demands the use of written words governed by an obscure set of impersonal rules such as grammar, spelling, and, quite speciously in this case, numerical chronology. These create a closed "ritual system," similar to the model Foucault describes in his lecture "The Discourse on Language," a system that disables the author from offering a textual guarantee promising that the reader will perceive how that author perceives herself. Such guarantees are denied because the "ritual system" controls the story by framing it in a context that excludes the author from appearing as a real person in the story. Kristjana Gunnars, a real person, may be struggling to produce her autobiography because language forces her to tell her story in "ritualistic" terms, but as she writes, she identifies with the narrator, who is "crammed with culture," might create for her a particularly fabricated identity. Perhaps Gunnars' choice, in designating this text as a fiction, indicates that producing a consciously fictionalized text is, inevitably, the most honest form of literary self-representation; it appears that her wish for stable literary self-recognition, which would demand nothing of the reader and go unmolested by the semiotic freight of language, is not possible. This issue is dealt with thematically, as the narrator explores the protagonist's preoccupation with perspective, and her own relationship to the idea of "story" as it "affects" the actual stories she tells.

As a young girl, the protagonist spent "what would constitute a year of a person's life" in the loft of her house, playing with her dolls and inventing for them "an entire world." But, she says, it is not those things she loves: "It is a world that never was. Perhaps I love the aspiration. The fantasy. Perhaps it is only the desire that I love" (23). Later, as an adolescent, the protagonist sought refuge from her physical need for food and her emotional need for solace by reading to herself books written in languages she does not understand. "I

discovered that if one read slowly enough there was a peculiar pleasure to be had from meaningless words," a pleasure that might be solicited by the Icelandic text reprinted on the text's cover (159). This practice, of setting herself apart from others in order to derive pleasure from self-generated fantasies of escape -- an escape made possible by consciously "misreading" literary texts -- is a device for illustrating the narrator's desire to create a narrative which has the "desire to be true." The desirable truth would require a "prowler," in the guise of reader or writer (68), who would reenact the protagonist's wish to indulge in fantasy for the sake of enjoying a temporary escape. This solace would emerge out of the pleasure a "reader" derives from the audacious act of defining for oneself the dimensions of "truth" in fiction, despite possible clashes with "facts": "Then there were false stories that were nonetheless true," the narrator declares. This self-recognition is, of course not contained solely within the text. Truth is "a speechless thing" which must be read to be released (160, 156). After all, according to the narrator,

> The quest in literature is a mirror of the quest in life. It is possible to imagine a story where the protagonist is a reader, who is therefore also the author. It is a story where the boundary between that which is written and that which is lived remains unclear. (146)

Here, the narrator explodes the conventional notion that fiction is comprised of imaginary images and that these images do not correspond to the reader's world existing outside the text. The narrator conceives of the "prowler," who is a thief in the three guises: of an author who remarks that "Not to have rules perhaps means that you are free to steal from yourself,"; of a reader, who "desires to steal from the text"; and of a protagonist who "has bearing only insofar as one is contained in the things one loves" (59, 60). At issue here is the recognition that historical veracity is determined, in large part, by how written stories are produced by the dialogical relationship of a textual subject, its author, and their reader.

Throughout *The Prowler* the narrator resorts to describing events in the lives of unnamed characters to shed light on how events in her own life compare with others. A vivid example of this occurs immediately after the narrator defines by example and in theory who the "prowler" is. In section 60, after the protagonist "join[s] the prowler in his imagined activities," the narrator introduces a nameless character, "the one who I think would not want me to write this story," who as a young Hungarian boy is forced to flee his country during the Russian invasion. The allusion provides the narrator with an image she incorporates into her theorizing. She asks: "Did he know there was a border? . . . That story has a bearing on this book only insofar as one is contained in the things one loves" (60). Kristjana Gunnars, the real author, resolves the problems endemic to a text's repressive "ritual system" by refashioning the truth-content of her text: her "novel" appeals to the

reader's ability to discern those aspects of the text which hold personal appeal, and to recognise those elements as the "real," yet textual, truths.

The act of "stealing" from a text, then, is achieved by the reader who seeks out those aspects which reflect her or his experience. This is how the reader recognizes (by redefining) the truth of this text. "The prowler does not know he already has what is being sought" (110); in other words, truth is projected onto texts, it is not excavated from them. This is a remarkably democratic and revolutionary approach because it flies in the face of conservative, hierarchical conventions which declare that all stealing is wrong or socially irresponsible, or that the reader's self-projection onto the formal text reveals a disservice to the author. *The Prowler* suggests that for Gunnars such stealth (on the part of the reader) liberates the "third figure" because the prowler-as-reader questions the viscous relationship between the signifier (the author's words) and the signified (the objects of description) by inserting her/his preferences into the gap between them.

> The writer cannot escape repression. The text represses the writer. The text is the writer's prison.
> The words will not take the writer into themselves. The author is therefore locked out of the book. (93)

Hence Gunnars' motive behind her pronouncement that this text is a novel. By imprinting one's own preferences onto the text at hand, one becomes involved in the process of story making, which again is a form of self-authorship. When the narrator attempts to describe a difficult time in the protagonist's father's life she finds that because the protagonist discovered it by means of uncovering clues from other stories, this part of her father's life is "conspiratory": "This area of my father's life was never spoken of. It was never allowed to become a story" (153). The implicit question here is: Who does this novel, or for that matter any "story," belong to? The text does not merely tell Gunnars' story because it is the object of the author's telling. Gunnars offers an illustration of past selves by producing a text with a central character that bears her name and speaks in the first-person. But this subject is enclosed within yet another trope, which is the narrative format and the narrator's theoretical ideas. The protagonist confesses that she does not understand the languages in which the books she reads are written, which is an admission that literary self-identification transcends presumably ordinary "dictionary meanings," or language itself. Gunnars, in kind, produces a "novel" that does not refer directly to her own childhood experience but insists that as the novel is written (or read), an authorial subject is being changed. Similarly, the narrator wrestles herself out of the compulsory significations of language by resorting to theories which are inspired, for example, by the protagonist's concern for giving names to the flowers blooming all around her (a striking irony, given the island's desperate lack of

food). Afterwards, she completes the exercise, reflecting that "[w]ords are suitcases crammed with culture. I imagine a story of emptied containers" (52).

IV

In my analysis, Gunnars' text emphasises the ongoing process of negotiating literary representations of the past, while Lejeune assumes that the negotiations have reached a satisfactory conclusion even before autobiography is read. Not only is the narrator/author subject problematic in this text, moreover *The Prowler* refuses to record historical veracity independent of its reader. Rita Felski's discussion of women's confessional writing rightly points out an important inadequacy in Phillipe Lejeune's widely celebrated formulation of "the autobiographical pact." As I stated in my introduction, Lejeune's theory explains that readers enter into a tacit contractual agreement with autobiographical texts, consenting that the protagonist, narrator, and author represent the same subject and that the narrator's stories represent the historical development of that subject. Felski supports my earlier point, namely that Lejeune's formal demand for "a retrospective prose narrative" as the fundamental requirement for all autobiography disregards the changing expectations of a reader whose attention may shift from concern for the correspondence between author and protagonist to concern for the degree of unified identity of author and narrator (91). These "reader concerns" question the expected discipline that retrospection, from a single stable perspective, would have for the construction of an autobiographical narrative. In *The Prowler*, the text chronicles its own developing "self" (as a text), and this is done in the present tense, as the author composes it. Consequently, the text reproduces the protagonist's relationship to language and history. The narrator's concern for the reader's perceptions, together with her awareness of the text's evolution, functions as an example: history is produced dialogically, by writers and their readers. In effect, *The Prowler* shatters the Lejeunian ideal by deconstructing, thematically and structurally, the nature of an authorial presence that produces, and the narrative text which is produced.

In autobiographic forms that establish and maintain the Lejeunian contract, the search for a reliably contiguous narrator (who looks back at her or his past self) is of crucial importance for the reader, for without that presence (who represents a real person), the difference between a writer's memorialising of historical events and a casual fictional construction of a self is erased. In *The Prowler*, the issue of who really writes this history is never settled, but as we follow the chronological arrangement of events and the development of theme, as they are invested with certain narratorial ambiguities, the narrator's notion of the text as a personified figure provides its own logic for reading itself.

I knew only a few flowers by name then. . . .

> Much later in life I contrived a poetics of naming. Only that which is named is able to live in language. But I did not know many names at the time of my earliest discoveries. It was before language. (52)

For an author who demands the stability of a non-fictional document that maintains a direct connection between the real author and the narrator, relying on the reader is an unsafe gamble. The problem of maintaining a standard of historical veracity is also complicated by the narrator's tendency to personify the text as a human figure motivated by "desire," and empowered to "play its own game" (81), "defy[ing] its opposite" (105), bearing names and stains as a child carries illness (103), and "determined to act like a lover" (156). Like an autobiographical subject who translates her own experience into narrative, *The Prowler*'s tropes admit to its textual and corporeal self-consciousness:

> The text desires to be true. It knows that what is written is not exactly true, so the desire goes unsatisfied. The story repeats the attempt at telling itself. The text tells all other texts: there is only one of me. (69)

These allusions suggest that the text has a body of its own. When the book is opened, it offers itself (its "me") into a dialectical relationship whereby the reader, protagonist, and author rely on their reading of each other to produce mutual understanding. If we take this theory to heart, then our demand for veracity, rationality, and the presumably unified state of the autobiographical subject is what produces the recognizability of that subject. The author gives up her bid to control our perceptions by confessing her struggle for literary self-representation.

The authorial subject is addressed by the narrator, and although as a subject the text "desires" a certain narrative dynamic (or mode of story-telling), it does not control the narrator or reader, and must rely on the narrator to reveal those wishes. The narrator admits:

> I imagine a story that allows all speakers to speak at once, claiming that none of the versions is exactly a lie (68). The text desires to be true. It knows that what is written is not exactly true, so the desire goes unsatisfied. (69)

Implicitly, then, the narrator functions as a mere speaker whose presence derives from the "third figure's" desire for truth. These references reveal the origin of both the narrator and the author, thus helping us locate the order in which the two fictional personae, if they are in fact separate, were composed. The text is unpaginated but is organized into sections that range in length from a few words to a full page. The numerical headings begin at 1 and end at 167, providing the reader with signs giving the text an immediately recognizable order, while it seems to parody conventional ordering strategies. Although the quest for the

historical development of a protagonist is delivered by a narrator who shifts perspective, unsettles chronology, and blends her impressions of the protagonist into the actual stories, what appears as a meticulous ordering of the text gives it the appearance of bearing an age and supposes that the reader will begin reading at the beginning and end when the numbers stop.

The text's emerging subjectivities, which are constructed by the narrator as if it were alive, create the illusion that the text has a distinctive voice, a voice emerging from a body that struggles for self-representation, relying on the voice of the narrator to satisfy its desires. The fact that this persona is a text deconstructs the Lejeunian assumption in autobiography theory that posits the autobiographical protagonist as a subject who may be adequately represented by the text. Although the text actually encloses both narrator and protagonist, it does not succeed in what Lejeune calls "literary self-enunciation" (21). Instead, the "third figure" must wrestle with its tropes, with no guarantee that its wish for satisfactory self-representation will be achieved, or even that its presence will be detected. In other words, *The Prowler*'s narrative structure calls into question the notion that the text exists for the sake of representing the author. In this case, both the narrator (who is an author), and the text's authorial subject (the "text" that speaks through its tropes) are figures controlled by the unpredictibility of readers and their arbitrary intepretations of language:

> The story is likewise arrogant. It talks back, claiming for itself a certain autonomy. The story tells its exponent: you do not know me. (96)

In her essay "Women's Time," Julia Kristeva identifies a kind of authorial resistance as being characteristic of women's liberationist writing, a resistance implicit in these early sections of the novel. Although Gunnars' text displays no immediate concern for drawing connections between the personal or political struggles of the female protagonist with those of other women (as the Kristevan model would profess), of interest is the way in which Gunnars' thematic development emerges from the literary construction of a young girl in terms of her implicit communication with the older self, the self-reflexive narrator. Kristeva's argument advocates a "new" kind of literature which would identify "women's desire to lift the weight of what is sacrificial in the social contract from their shoulders, to nourish our society with a more flexible and free discourse . . ." (50). For Kristeva, the major sacrifice demanded of women by the social contract is that they actively participate in a verbal symbolic order which, by organising language in a linear and spoken sequence, forces women to repress their desire to articulate and thus recognise their "enigmatic" selves. The narrative stategy employed by Gunnars identifies this repression, the self-imposed but socially

defined discipline that takes women's "voices" outside the dominant social discourse. Kristeva calls for an "identification with the potency of the imaginary" which would enable the female author to reproduce for the reader the self-representation experience, as writing the self entails collision with the linguistic order. That mode of "writing," which creates the autobiographical tensions of *The Prowler*, forms a text that elicits a special mode of reading, a mode that represents those aspects of experience which will not be expressed in conventional literary terms.

V

I argued in my opening section that, as an autobiographical text, *The Prowler* does not seek to maintain the illusion that a written narrative will contain and represent a unified subject in the guise of "author." Instead, the text reproduces the experience of bearing an unsettled understanding of how words might function to represent things. The unsettled, split representation of the authorial subject is comprised of the protagonist, the stories told, and the narrator. This split subject does not refer to an author, who exists apart from and thus untouched by the text she writes, but to a construct in the process of questioning its relationship to language and the inevitability of self-fictionalization. Stylistically and thematically the location of a central, definitive figure is endlessly problematic. The only figure which would attend to the narrative voices and appear to reconcile thematic concerns is the reader, who assumes the position of "prowler" and discovers those aspects of the text which may evoke the author's development as a subject of her own writing. Here, postmodern narrative strategy professes a modality of autobiographical speech: the text's self-referentiality is defined dialectically, engaging both the reader and the multi-layered literary work. Literary self-consciousness, then, is based on a history that is created, not recorded, by writing and reading the text. As autobiography, *The Prowler* is a tense, if circular, success.

Notes

All numerical references to *The Prowler* correspond to its section headings, since the text is unpaginated.

1 As an extra-textual reference to the relationship between a writer's internalization of a traumatic experience and its implications for literary genre, see Gunnars' second book of prose, *Zero Hour*:

> The decline and fall of my father is a story. *On the one hand, there is what it [sic] is possible to write, and on the other what it [sic] is no longer possible to write,* Roland Barthes said. My father's final story is no longer possible to write. It cannot be sentimentalized. It cannot keep its emotive qualities. It cannot be told as a story.
>
> . . .
>
> You are left with a story that is not a story. A novel that is not a novel, a poem that is not a poem. (29)

2 The narrator's actual identity as Kristjana Gunnars, the daughter of "Gunnar" who is named as the author's father in the dedication, is implied once (94). I come to this precarious instance of subtle name-dropping in the third section of this chapter.

3 As I discussed in my introduction, Lejeune's theory (as pointed out in "Autobiography in the Third Person"), suggests that the authorial split between active writer and detached "observer" (narrator) allows the author to control "the inevitability in the positioning of the autobiographer" (45). The author's mastery over her/his own subject and history is the measure of such control.

4 John Moss's review was the only review that questioned the link between the text's ambiguous authorial references and the textual location of Kristjana Gunnars, an issue all other reviewers either ignored or avoided. Instead, they assumed either that the narrator, protagonist, or both, are literal representations of the author.

Works Cited and List of Reviews

Anon. Rev. of *The Prowler*, by K. Gunnars. *Quarry* 40 (Summer 1991): 112-114.

Arnold, Matthew. "The Study of Poetry." Ed. Lionel Trilling. *The Portable Matthew Arnold.* New York: The Viking Press, 1965.

Baldvinsson, G. Rev. of *The Prowler*, by K. Gunnars. *Canadian Literature* 135 (Winter 1992): 157-158.

Brydon, Diana. "The White Inuit Speaks: Contamination as Literary Strategy." Eds. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin. *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-colonial and Post-modernism.* Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990.

Bush, Kate. "Cloudbursting." *The Hounds of Love.* EMI America, CDP 7-46164-2, 1985.

Felski, Rita. "On Confession." *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics.* London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989. 86-99.

Foucault, Michel. "The Discourse on Language." *The Archeology of Knowledge.* Trans. Rupert Swyer. New York: Pantheon Press, 1972.

Garebian, Keith. Rev. of *The Prowler*, by K. Gunnars. *Quill and Quire* 55 (Aug. 1989): 35.

Glassco, John. *Memoirs of Montparnasse.* Toronto: Oxford UP, 1970.

Gunnars, Kristjana. *The Prowler.* Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 1989.

———. *Zero Hour.* Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 1991.

James-French, Dayv. Rev. of *The Prowler*, by K. Gunnars. *Books in Canada* 18 (Aug.-Sept. 1989): 35.

Kamboureli, Smaro. "The Alphabet of the Self: Generic and Other Slippages in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family.*" Ed. K. P. Stich. *Reflections: Autobiography and Canadian Literature.* Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988.

Kenyon, Michael. Rev. of *The Prowler*, by K. Gunnars. *Malahat Review* 91 (Summer 1990): 100.

Kristeva, Julia. "Women's Time." *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology.* Ed. Nannerl Keohane et al. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1981. 31-54.

Lejeune, Phillipe. "The Autobiographical Pact." Ed. Paul John Eakin. Trans. Katherine Leary. *On Autobiography.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. 4-30.

Moss, John. Rev. of *The Prowler*, by K. Gunnars. *Canadian Forum* 69 (Sept. 1990): 30-31.

Olney, James. *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972.

Owens, Judith. "'Drawing/in': Wholeness and Dislocation in the work of Kristjana Gunnars." Ed. Kenneth James Hughes. *Contemporary Manitoba Writers.* Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1990.

Smith, Steven. Rev. of *The Prowler*, by K. Gunnars. *NeWest* 15 (Apr.-May 1990): 36-37.

Taylor, Peter. Rev. of *The Prowler,* by K. Gunnars. *Alberta Report* 17 (28 May 1990): 50-51.

CONCLUSION

Playing Within the Discipline: Dynamics of Authorship in Three Canadian Autobiographies

gg: *You* with your ascetic, totally withdrawn life and your almost pathological fear of closeness and physical contact?!
GG: You're exaggerating, Glenn: after all, I'm sitting here opposite you -- quite close to you. I can even reach out and touch you, if you . . .
gg: Don't, for Heaven's sake!
(Gould 11)

I

As I review my introductory chapter, I wonder about a certain question I proposed. The first part of that chapter seems to ask: "How can an author represent herself in a literary work with a stability that will not confuse her voice with that of an otherwise fictitious persona?" I began working on this thesis with the intention of undertaking a metacritical project, assuming that by examining the range of critical interpretations of various autobiographical texts, I would be better prepared to explain how a text's trope represents an author. However, as my chapters progress they make clear that the link between acts of language and acts of people is at best unclear and, indeed as my second and third chapters point out, proposing a theory that ossifies the metonymical relationship of a narrator to an author may not even be useful. It seems that literary signifiers often cry out for instability and deny a consistent and unambiguous connection to people who exist outside the text. Examining how that crying out is enunciated and understood allows us to analyse literary production as it occurs for both readers and texts.

(I suppose one might rightly ask why I say that tropes "cry out." Is it intellectually honest, in a deconstruction of the adjective "autobiographal," to suggest that textual personae bear voices that enunciate independent of the reader's presence? A voice suggests a speaker.)

The field of autobiography studies is defined by its implied demand for some stability in the relationship between "speaker" and "author." When we develop a healthy suspicion of texts that seem to claim to derive their meaning in isolation from readers, and direct the question concerning speech acts toward autobiography studies, we are led to ask how ideology informs critical positions on the reading activity. Whenever critics focus on a kind of narrator, and leave aside the reference that this trope might direct to non-textual objects, they are forced to disclose how a reader relates to the text at issue. Suddenly, discussions about the generic status of a text are shown to really be about how readers approach and engage with language.

My thesis evaluated several approaches to three "autobiographies"and proposed a new approach to each. Throughout, the thesis argued for an appreciation of the range of tropological play in a text by reading each work through a generic framework that moves beyond Philippe Lejeune's theory of the "autobiographical pact." In contrast to Lejeune, who suggests that readers merely *respond* to the text they read, this thesis proposed that critics of autobiography might derive a more interesting analysis by recognizing the *negotiation* of meaning, as it is produced between readers and texts.

Given the arguments I posed in the introductory chapter, especially with regards to a Derridean acknowledgement of the instability of literary signifiers and their problematic link to a world beyond the text, the thesis attempts to reconcile in its first chapter the significance of a "monologic" narrative, Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*. As the speaker in *Running in the Family* names himself after Ondaatje, and suggests that his narrative represents the author, ironically, the text shows the dialogical relationship of narrative to history while it denies a dialogical play among the text's tropes. The text offers little direct representation of any voices other than the speaker's own, and the speaker resists self-reflexive meditations by keeping a careful control over the anecdotes that at first seemed to elicit a spontaneous response from him.

The second chapter looked at the long stream of contradictions made by the memoirist of *Memoirs of Montparnasse*. The author opens his memoir by promising his readers that the text is a veracious representation of historical events the author has witnessed. However, as the text develops, it becomes increasingly clear that the Glassco of 1970 is at odds with the text's characterization of him as the memoirist who claims to have written the text in 1932. Consistent with Lejeune's view, *Memoirs* marks itself as an autobiography through its naming of its author as the narrator/memoirist. However, when we examine the tenuous relationship between the text's author and narrator, we appreciate the range of play each persona exhibits. The text at first seems to occupy a stable generic position as

"memoir," only to later refute that position and question the logic of Lejeune's theory when it turns its back on verisimilitude.

What happens when a text's narrator bears only a vague connection to the author who claims to have composed the work? The third chapter addressed Kristjana Gunnars' "novel" *The Prowler*, and showed how a narrative structure reproduces the implied reader's attempt to locate a stable referent perceived to be embedded in the text. The narrator in Gunnars' text is passionately committed to a reclaiming of her painful childhood through writing, yet the self-consciousness the project demands forces her, and her reader, to deconstruct the authority a present self wields over a past self when it is only the present voice that speaks (i.e., writes). This strategy, which questions relentlessly the role of the writer, encourages the reader also to question the "effect" reading has on her or his self-image. The author figure in *The Prowler*, then, is eternally elusive. It seems no single persona can claim responsibility for the literary construction of that text.

Through my analyses of these works, I argued that autobiographical writing requires a polyphonic element, incorporating a range of voices that will, in turn, enable the speaker/narrator to respond self-reflexively on her or his writing acts.

II

The possibility for arguing a given text as autobiography demands that the text represent a temporal location in relation to the time when writing takes place. Self-representation can exist only when the speaking voice claims to speak of a perceived past, even when the "I" speaks in the present tense, or claims to predict the future: the autobiographical subject must always negotiate the act of writing with the recording of memory. The project I have proposed problematises the notion of a universal reading experience and in turn explores the possibilities for divergent readings, even while the represented temporality of the narrator/speaker is challenged. As I wrote in my third chapter, the task for a sophisticated reader is not to discern with rigidity when the text was written, but to explore how a retrospective position might emphasise a range of critical interpretations. Challenging the status of the author places the presumed precision of a Lejeunian view under what I hope is a constructive interrogation.

These last two years have seen remarkably prolific developments in Canadian autobiography, where authors seem to trumpet the importance recognition of literary self-representation has for the writer while they challenge the viability of a veracious representation of history in narrative. A remarkable challenge to autobiography as such was posed by Carol Shields' ambitious novel *The Stone Diaries*, which appeared in 1993. In that text, Daisy Goodwill narrates the story of her life, beginning in the years leading up to her

birth in rural Manitoba in 1905, and ending several years after her death, which takes place sometime in the 1990's, at a retirement home in Florida. As the narrator describes episodes that seem central to the development of her personality, the reader must reconcile the fact that many of these events were never witnessed by the speaker, even though her narratological perspective implies an omniscient understanding of all surrounding circumstances and the intentions of people who never spoke their views. As the novel draws toward its end, well after the speaker has narrated her own death, we realize that in fact this brilliant narrator may not be a writer at all. The very implausibility of her epistemological view illûstrates the impossibility of autobiography for recording a life so divorced from the self-reflection and thoughtful patience life-writing demands. Basically, Daisy Goodwill was so oblivious to the richness of her experience as an orphan, then daughter, then grandmother, then dead matriarch, that her autobiography could not be written from any vantage point that would exhibit the albeit small measure of egocentrism life writing assumes. Perhaps autobiographical writing lends credence to the subject's fantasized view of herself. In Goodwill's case, life defies the accommodations offered by autobiography; indeed, autobiography, then, would not accommodate her life.

Dany Laferrière's 1993 "novel" *Why Must A Black Writer Write About Sex?* demonstrates how a reader's expectations concoct a text suitable to their liking. The text alternates between passages of witty critical remarks attacking "American" notions of success with autobiographical accounts of how the struggle for recognition as a Haitian-Canadian author has forced Laferrière to churn out books that must satisfy the wants of his readers. His is a self-reflexive text that applies its theory to its practice, placing the narrator under the gaze of formidable scrutiny. Laferrière's narrator writes:

> In general, the contemporary American novel is a collection of short texts strung together on a solid but flexible chain: the sense of being American. The American way of life is a collection of facts (the sensation of nothingness). This book is no exception. (25)

Although he has published numerous papers and given countless lectures on his experience in the fields of Canadian cultural policymaking and media, Mavor Moore's memoir *Reinventing Myself* (published in 1994) is the first book-length retrospective account of his life. The narration begins with a careful, and indeed scholarly account of his family history and his birth. Although in his preface Moore promises that "[t]his book is about my first fifty years [and] there will be no book about the next fifty," throughout the text the memoirist varies his tone to accomodate his subject, revealing how the present writer reflects on his past (ix). Moore has worked as a critic and sometime journalist for over fifty years, contributing hundreds of articles on art and culture; throughout *Reinventing Myself* he

samples the texts of his past to contextualize the memoirist of the present. Reading Moore's memoirs, one is struck by the meticulous attention to details of history, and comes to understand that although the text relies on this comparative intertextuality, its status as autobiography is enforced by our endowment of Moore's sincerity with our agreement that the writing subject is conscious of his voice and aware of his organization of the facts. Once the reader begins to doubt the authoritative status of the memoirist trope, *Reinventing Myself* loses its intertextuality, and dissolves its relevance as an historical document.

Mordecai Richler's *This Year in Jerusalem* is a remarkable memoir for its skillful rendering of political commentaries to recreate the world of the speaker's adolescence in the Jewish working-class neighbourbood centred around St. Urbain Street. As the adolescent children of newly arrived European Jewish immingrants, Richler and his friends had to reconcile the idealism of their Zionist heroes -- who insisted that a Jew's greatest calling is to fulfill the ancient dream of "returning" to Israel (called *aliyah*) -- with the still desirable wish to stay in Canada, make money, and yet manage the hangover of guilt implied in identifying as a diasporic Jew (who feels at home outside Israel). *This Year in Jerusalem* bears a close resemblance to Richler's popular novels: his protagonist is described chiefly through representations of dialogue with peripheral figures. Ironically, Richler's public voice as a Jewish writer and a conspicuous Canadian has allowed him to explore the push-pull effect of Jewish culture on its youth while it has alienated him from his childhood friends. Read as a political document, the memoir is a provocative text because it responds to that traditional Jewish adage, "Next year in Jerusalem," that has been shared with earnest among Jews for centuries. Toward the end of the memoir, Richler narrates his 1992 trip to Israel (a trip he has denied himself for three decades) and shows how deeply divided Jews are with respect to their presumably Zionist conscience. He does this by reflecting on his troubled detachment from his old friends whose political principles and chosen lifestyles seem as difficult to understand as the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. Richler seems acutely aware of how his words may be misunderstood by his readers and he recognizes that the very act of self-disclosure may threaten the public images Jewish Canadians have struggled to create.

Although Richler reconstructs his past without alluding to historical documentation, which enables him to take considerable liberties, *Next Year in Jerusalem* challenges the conventional genre because it politicizes the contentious diasporist persona. Like the most sophisticated autobiographical works, this text invites readers to consider how the text is both a product and source of the memoirist's self-image.

Works Cited

Glassco, John. *Memoirs of Montparnasse*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1970.

Gould, Glenn. "Admit it, Mr. Gould, You Don't Have Doubts About Brahms." Insert. *Brahms: 4 Ballades, Op. 10, Two Rhapsodies, Op. 79, 10 Intermezzi*. Sony Classical, SM2K-52651, 1993.

Gunnars, Kristjana. *The Prowler: A Novel*. Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 1989.

Laferrière, Dany. *Why Must a Black Man Write About Sex?* Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1993.

Moore, Mavor. *Reinventing Myself*. Toronto: Stoddart, 1994.

Ondaatje, Michael. *Running in the Family*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982.

Richler, Mordecai. *This Year in Jerusalem*. Toronto: Knopf, 1994.

Shields, Carol. *The Stone Diaries*. Toronto: Vintage, 1993.

VITA

Surname: Budd Given Names: Adam Russell

Place of Birth: Toronto Date of Birth: 7 January 1971

Educational Institutions Attended:

Trent University	1989 to 1991
University of Victoria	1991 to 1995

Degrees Awarded:

B.A.	Trent University	1992
Dip. F.A.	University of Victoria	1994

Honours and Awards:

University of Victoria Dean's Scholarship	1993-95

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant the right to lend my thesis to users of the University of Victoria Library, and to make single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the Library of any other university, or similar institution, on its behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or a member of the University designated by me. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of thesis: Playing Within the Discipline: Dynamics of Authorship in Three Canadian Autobiographies.

Author: [redacted]

Adam R Budd

27 April 1995.