

"Circling the Downspout of Empire": Post-Colonialism and Postmodernism

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THE SUBJECT OF Daphne Marlatt's phrase "circling the downspout of Empire" is "[C]anadians," and she is not alone in seeing Canada as still caught up in the machinations of Empire and colony, imperial metropolis and provincial hinterland (see Monk 14). Irving Layton once defined "Anglo-Canadian" in these terms:

A native of Kingston, Ont,
- two grandparents Canadian
and still living

His complexion florid
as a maple leaf in late autumn,
for three years he attended
Oxford

Now his accent
makes even Englishmen
wince, and feel
unspeakably colonial.

(Scott and Smith 75)

Whatever truth there may be in these accusations of *neo-colonialism*, there are many others who are coming to prefer to talk about Canada in terms of *post-colonialism*, and to place it in the context of other nations with which it shares the experience of colonization. In much recent criticism, this context has also come to overlap with that of postmodernism. Presumably, it is not just a matter of the common prefix or of the contemporaneity of the two enterprises. In literary critical circles, debates rage about whether the post-colonial *is* the postmodern or whether it is its very antithesis (see Tiffin, "Post-Colonialism").

Part of the problem in deciding which camp to belong to is that in many of these debates the term postmodernism is rarely defined precisely enough to be more than a synonym for today's multinationalist capitalist world at large. But it *can* have a more precise meaning. The architecture which first gave aesthetic forms the label "postmodern" is, interestingly, both a critique of High Modern architecture (with its purist ahistorical embracing of what, in effect, was the modernity of capitalism) and a tribute to its technological and material advances. Extending this definition to other art forms, "postmodern" could then be used, by analogy, to describe art which is paradoxically both self-reflexive (about its technique and material) and yet grounded in historical and political actuality. The fiction of writers like E. L. Doctorow, Graham Swift, Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, Toni Morrison, and Angela Carter might provide examples. I have deliberately included here writers who would be categorized by others as either post-colonial or feminist in preference to the label "postmodern." While I want to argue here that the links between the post-colonial and the postmodern are strong and clear ones, I also want to underline from the start the major difference, a difference post-colonial art and criticism share with various forms of feminism. Both have distinct political agendas and often a theory of agency that allow them to go beyond the postmodern limits of deconstructing existing orthodoxies into the realms of social and political action. While it is true that post-colonial literature, for example, is also inevitably implicated and, in Helen Tiffin's words, "informed by the imperial vision" ("Post-Colonialism" 172), it still possesses a strong political motivation that is intrinsic to its oppositionality. However, as can be seen by its recuperation (and rejection) by both the Right and the Left, postmodernism is politically ambivalent: its critique coexists with an equally real and equally powerful complicity with the cultural dominants within which it inescapably exists.

Those cultural dominants, however, are shared by all three forces. As Gayatri Spivak notes: "There is an affinity between the imperialist subject and the subject of humanism" (202). While post-colonialism takes the first as its object of critique and postmodernism takes the second, feminists point to the patriarchal

underpinnings of both. The title of a recent book of essays on colonial and post-colonial women's writing pinpoints this: *A Double Colonization* (Petersen and Rutherford). Feminisms have had similar impacts on both postmodern and post-colonial criticism. They have redirected the "universalist" - humanist and liberal- discourses (see Larson) in which both are debated and circumscribed. They have forced a reconsideration of the nature of the doubly colonized (but perhaps not yet doubly de-colonized) subject and its representations in art (see Donaldson). The current post-structuralist/postmodern challenges to the coherent, autonomous subject have to be put on hold in feminist and post-colonial discourses, for both must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity: those radical postmodern challenges are in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses.

Despite this major difference between the postmodern and the post-colonial- which feminisms help to foreground and which must always be kept in mind - there is still considerable overlap in their concerns: formal, thematic, strategic. This does not mean that the two can be conflated unproblematically, as many commentators seem to suggest (Pache; Kroller, "Postmodernism"; Slemon, "Magic"). Formal issues such as what is called "magic realism," thematic concerns regarding history and marginality, and discursive strategies like irony and allegory are all shared by both the postmodern and the post-colonial, even if the final uses to which each is put may differ (cf. During 1985, 369). It is not a matter of the post-colonial *becoming* the postmodern, as one critic has suggested (Berry 321), but rather that the manifestations of their (different, if related) concerns often take similar forms; for example, both often foreground textual gaps but their sites of production differ: there are "those produced by the colonial encounter and those produced by the system of writing itself" (Slemon, "Magic" 20), and they should not be confused.

The formal technique of "magic realism" (with its characteristic mixing of the fantastic and the realist) has been singled out by many critics as one of the points of conjunction of postmodernism and post-colonialism. Its challenges to genre distinctions and to the conventions of realism are certainly part of the project of both

enterprises. As Stephen Slemon has argued, until recently it has been used to apply to Third World literatures, especially Latin American (see Dash) and Caribbean, but now is used more broadly in other post-colonial and culturally marginalized contexts to signal works which encode within themselves some "resistance to the massive imperial centre and its totalizing systems" (Slemon, "Magic" IO; also "Monuments"). It has even been linked with the "new realism" of African writing (Irele 70-71) with its emphasis on the localized, politicized and, inevitably, the historicized. Thus it becomes part of the dialogue with history that both post-modernism and post-colonialism undertake. After modernism's ahistorical rejection of the burden of the past, postmodern art has sought self-consciously (and often even parodically) to reconstruct its relationship to what came before; similarly, after that imposition of an imperial culture and that truncated indigenous history which colonialism has meant to many nations, post-colonial literatures are also negotiating (often parodically) the once tyrannical weight of colonial history in conjunction with the revalued local past. The postmodern and the post-colonial also come together, as Frank Davey has explained, because of the predominant non-European interpretation of modernism as "an international movement, elitist, imperialist, 'totalizing,' willing to appropriate the local while being condescending toward its practice" (I 19).

In postmodern response, to use Canadian examples, Margaret Atwood rewrites the local story of Susanna Moodie, Rudy Wiebe that of Big Bear and Louis Riel, George Bowering that of George Vancouver. And in so doing, all also manage to contest the dominant Eurocentric interpretation of Canadian history. Despite the Marxist view of the postmodern as ahistorical - because it questions, rather than confirms, the process of History - from its roots in architecture on, postmodernism has been embroiled in debates and dialogues with the past (see Hutcheon). This is where it overlaps significantly with the post-colonial (Kroller, "Politics" 121) which, by definition, involves a "recognition of historical, political, and social circumstances" (Brydon 7). To say this is not to appropriate or recuperate the post-colonial into the postmodern, but merely to point to the conjunction of concerns which has, I think, been the reason for the power as much as the popularity

of writers such as Salman Rushdie, Robert Kroetsch, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and so many others.

At this thematic and structural level, it is not just the relation to history that brings the two *posts* together; there is also a strong shared concern with the notion of marginalization, with the state of what we could call ex-centricity. In granting value to (what the centre calls) the margin or the Other, the postmodern challenges any hegemonic force that presumes centrality, even as it acknowledges that it cannot privilege the margin without acknowledging the power of the centre. As Rick Salutin writes, Canadians are not marginal "because of the quiriness of our ideas or the inadequacy of our arguments, but because of the power of those who define the centre" (6). But he too admits that power. The regionalism of magic realism and the local and particular focus of postmodern art are both ways of contesting not just this centrality, but also claims of universality. Postmodernism has been characterized as "that thought which refuses to turn the Other into the Same" (During 1987, 33) and this is, of course, where its significance for post-colonialism comes in. In Canada, it has been Quebecois artists and critics who have embraced most readily the rhetoric of this post-colonial liberation - from Emile Borduas in 1948 to *Parti Pris* in the sixties. However real this experience of colonization is in Quebec, there is a historical dimension here that cannot be ignored. Quebec may align itself politically with francophone colonies such as Algeria, Tunisia and Haiti (Kroller, "Politics" 120), but there is a major political and historical difference: the pre-colonial history of the French in Quebec was an imperialist one. As both Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* and Hubert Aquin's *Trou de memoire* point out, the French were the first imperial force in what is now Canada and that too cannot be forgotten - without risking bad faith. This is not to deny, once again, the very real sense of cultural dispossession and social alienation in Quebec, but history cannot be conveniently ignored.

A related problem is that postmodern notions of difference and positively valued marginality can themselves be used to repeat (in a more covert way) colonizing strategies of domination when used by First World critics dealing with the Third World (see Chow 91): the precise point at which interest and concern become im-

perializing appropriation is a hotly contested one. In addition some critics, of course, see postmodernism as itself the dominant, Eurocentric, nee-universalist, imperial discourse (Brydon 5; Tiffin, "Post-Colonialism" 170-72). There are no easy solutions to any of these issues raised by the perhaps uncomfortable overlap of issues between the postmodern and the post-colonial, but that in itself is no reason not to explore that problematic site of interaction.

Besides the formal and thematic areas of mutual concern that I have already mentioned, there is what could be called a strategic or rhetorical one: the use of the trope of irony as a doubled or split discourse which has the potential to subvert from within. Some have seen this valorization of irony as a sign of the "increasing purchase of post-structural codes of recognition in Western society" (Slemon, "Post-Colonial" 157), but post-structuralism can also be seen as a product of the larger cultural enterprise of postmodernism (see Hutcheon). In either case, though, as a double-talking, forked-tongued mode of address, irony becomes a popular rhetorical strategy for working within existing discourses and contesting them at the same time. Its inherent semantic and structural doubleness also makes it a most convenient trope for the paradoxical dualities of both postmodern complicitous critique and post-colonial doubled identity and history. And indeed irony (like allegory, according to Slemon) has become a powerful subversive tool in the re-thinking and re-addressing of history by both postmodern and post-colonial artists.

Since I would like to discuss this point in more detail with particular reference to Canadian art, I must first make what might seem a digression, but which is, I believe, crucial: one of the lessons of postmodernism is the need to respect the particular and the local, and therefore to treat Canada as a post-colonial country seems to me to require some specification and even explanation. This is not to deny in any way that Canada's history and what have been called the "psychological effects of a colonial past" (Keith 3) are not both very real and very important. Indeed, parts of Canada, especially the West, still feel colonized (see Harrison 208; Cooley 182). It is almost a truism to say that Canada as a nation has never felt central, culturally or politically; it has

always felt what Bharati Mukherjee calls a "deep sense of marginality" :

The Indian writer, the Jamaican, the Nigerian, the Canadian and the Australian, each one knows what it is like to be a peripheral man whose howl dissipates unheard. He knows what it is to suffer absolute emotional and intellectual devaluation, to die unfulfilled and still isolated from the world's centre. (Mukherjee Blaise 151)

But to say this is still not the same as equating the white Canadian *experience* of colonialism, and therefore of post-colonialism, with that of the West Indies or Africa or India. Commentators are rather too quick to call Canada a Third World (Saul 53) and therefore post-colonial culture (SIemon, "Magic" 10). Yet, they have behind them the weight of the famous pronouncement of Margaret Laurence that Canadians are Third World writers because "they have had to find [their] own voices and write out of what is truly [theirs], in the face of an overwhelming cultural imperialism" (17). While this may be true and while certainly Canadian literary "models remained those of Britain and more recently of America" (18), I cannot help feeling that there is something in this that is both trivializing of the Third World experience and exaggerated regarding the (white) Canadian. Of course Canada was politically a colony; but the consequences for white (not Native) *writers* today of that past are different from those for writers in Africa, India, or the Caribbean. The structural domination of Empire (see Starn and Spence 3-4) - not to mention the racial and cultural - differs considerably, as even thinking about something as obvious as economic "under-development" (Dorsinville, *Pays* 15) would suggest.

As Helen Tiffin and Diana Brydon have pointed out, there are different types of colonial conditions even within the British Empire. On the one hand, in countries like Africa and India, the cultural imposition associated with colonialism took place on "the homeworld of the colonized people" (Tiffin, "Comparison and Judgement" 31; Brydon 3). On the other hand, in countries like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, the English language and culture were transplanted (by settlers, convicts, slavemasters) to a foreign territory "where the indigenous inhabitants were either annihilated or marginalized" (Brydon 3). If Canada is any ex-

ample, these settler colonies meant the near destruction of the indigenous culture (and people): it is one thing to impose one culture upon another; it is another thing practically to wipe out what existed when the colonizers appeared on the scene. From this perspective, it could be said that the British relation to the Native peoples in Canada and their culture was almost more destructive than that relation of imposition that took place in Africa or India. To relegate a culture to secondary status is not the same as making it illegal. But when Canadian culture is called post-colonial today the reference is very rarely to the Native culture, which might be the more accurate historical use of the term. The culture referred to most frequently is the English-language one of the descendants of the whole colonial settlers. (The fact that this is not quite accurate is important - given Canada's pluriculturalism - but I will return to that later.) Native and Metis writers are today demanding a voice (Cuthand; Armstrong; Campbell) and perhaps, given their articulations of the damage to Indian culture and people done by the colonizers (French and British) and the process of colonization, theirs should be considered the resisting, post-colonial voice of Canada. Or perhaps the best model is that of Helen Tiffin: the aboriginal writing should be read as standing in what Richard Terdiman calls a counter-discursive relation to the settler literature, just as that settler literature stands counter-discursively against the imperial culture (Tiffin, "Post-Colonialism" 173; "Post-Colonial Literatures" 20). Nevertheless, there is still a difference in the degree and even kind of colonization endured. As Coral Ann Howells puts it:

Colonization of the prairie was in the deepest sense a power struggle between whites and Indians over possession of the land complicated by the clash of irreconcilable values, for possession of the land meant very different things to the two parties in conflict. In [Rudy Wiebe's novel, *The Temptations of Big Bear* the process of colonization is presented in precisely these terms of cultural clash and eventual imperial domination. To the whites land ownership meant exclusive possession of the prairies through the signing of land treaties with the Indians which "forever extinguished, as the Prime Minister like [*sic*] to say it, all native rights".... For them land spelt economic and political power, an extension of the British Empire. For the Indians however the land was life itself, necessary to their physical, cultural and spiritual survival. (149)

This is not quite the genocide of the Caribs or Arawaks in the West Indies, but it is still something which must be considered when dealing with the specificity of *Canadian* post-colonialism (see Pons and Rocard on the Canadian Native as an issue of colonization).

This important difference in the various histories of colonialism can be seen clearly if we extend even briefly this comparison of the Canadian experience with that of the West Indies, which some also see as examples of settler colonies (although to others slavery or "exile in conditions of bondage" [McDonald 78] remains the dominant heritage). Both the Caribbean countries and Canada shared that European colonization which more or less effectively destroyed certain Amerindian cultures. In Wilson Harris's words: "this aboriginal conquest exists like a ruin of psychological premises and biases in our midst" (3). But Canada had no imported African slave labour and no indentured workers from India or China to replace them after Abolition (though the usually ignored Chinese railway workers in Canada might be a close approximation). The racial composition of the two countries has therefore been different, and so too has been the different races' sense of belonging. Indentured labourers, unlike slaves or settlers, were always considered itinerant; they never belonged to where they worked and lived. In the West Indies, the fact that these Indian "servants" were often poor and caste-bound contributed to the ease with which their own culture could be suppressed. While culturally a hybrid, like all post-colonized nations (Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures" 17), Canada has experienced no actual "creolization" which might have created something new out of an adaptation process within a split racial context (see Brathwaite). Without this racial mixing, Canada's colonial culture lacked some of the sense of a "civilizing" mission, but still defined itself in terms of values which can, today, be seen as British, white, middle-class, heterosexual, and male, and it passed on these values most obviously in its educational system. In her novel, *Cat's Eye*, Margaret Atwood offers a child's view of what was learned in Canadian schools in the middle of the twentieth century:

In countries that are not the British Empire, they cut out children's tongues, especially those of boys. Before the British Empire there

were no railroads or postal services in India, and Africa was full of tribal warfare, with spears, and had no proper clothing. The Indians in Canada did not have the wheel or telephones, and ate the hearts of their enemies in the heathenish belief that it would give them courage. The British Empire changed all that. It brought in electric lights. (79)

The irony of the child's perspective underlines the politics of colonialism - in Canada and in the rest of the Empire. Singing "The Maple Leaf Forever," thinking it is the Canadian content to balance singing "Rule Britannia," the young girl notices that it too is really about England: "Wolfe, the dauntless hero, came / and planted firm Britannia's flag / On Canada's fair domain" (80).

As David Amason explains the history of this neo-colonialism, Canada was settled by "immigrants who did not regard themselves as Canadians, but as Englishmen living in a new land. The sense of history of this first generation of immigrants is the sense of history of the mother country, not of Canada" (54). As writers, these immigrants, not surprisingly, wrote in the tradition of Britain - at least until the reality of the Canadian experience began to force alterations in the inherited forms. The influx of British Loyalists at the time of the American Revolution further enforced the values of Empire. According to one view, Loyalist myths

have encouraged us Canadians to honour colonial symbols instead of adopting our own, and to substitute for nationalism a peculiar form of coattails imperialism. Loyalist myth-makers have never been able to imagine a Canada disentangled from Britain. Perhaps this is why, for a long time after Confederation, few Canadians could think of Canada as a nation, and no longer as a mere colony.

(Bell and Tepperman 79)

The nostalgia for the British Empire which was inculcated in Atwood's character has its echo in another typical cultural irony pointed out by Arun Mukherjee: the equestrian statue of King George which sits in Toronto's aptly named "Queen's Park" was brought to Canada from India "after the latter decided to discard all visual reminders of its colonial masters" (88). This example only confirms the long history of colonialism in Canada: from the *British North America Act* (passed in Westminster, not Ottawa)

to the very recent repatriation of the Constitution itself. After all, until 1947, Canadians were defined as "British subjects."

This perhaps long, seeming digression is intended to make the point that one can certainly talk of post-colonialism in Canada, but only if the differences between its particular version and that of, especially, Third World nations is kept in mind. Two other distinctions must be made, however, which further condition the use of the term in a Canadian context. The first is the pluri-ethnic (and lately more multiracial) nature of Canadian society. Some of the immigrants who populate this country are not from colonized societies and they often consciously resist being labelled post-colonial. Filippo Salvatore, an Italian Canadian writer living in Quebec and writing in French, states: "the defeat of the Plains of Abraham and that of the Patriotes in 1837 did not leave indelible psychic scars on me. Psychologically I am not part of a colonized people" (203). For him and others, the immigrant experience can even be seen as a reverse of that of colonization, a conscious decision to change culture (Caccia 164).

But there are other immigrants who do not share this element of choice, who come to Canada from the West Indies, Asia or Latin America and see it as "a necessarily occupied territory because land was denied somewhere else" (Davies 33). This is largely non-European immigration, and the historical and political contexts of post-colonization cannot usually be ignored, as they might in an Italian or other European perspective. The specificity of *Canadian* post-colonial culture today is being conditioned by this arrival of immigrants from other post-colonial nations. To be educated, as Atwood described, in a British-inspired school system in Canada is still different from being so educated in Jamaica, where the system is seen, by black writers who were trained in it, as even more obviously and "proudly geared towards the needs of the British economy" and as clearly maintaining "the social stratification" that denigrates the living language of the people (Allen 66). Immigrants with this experience, who then come to Canada, bring with them an extra-acute sense of colonialism which is bound to change the nature of post-colonialism in Canada itself. Witness Cyril Dabydeen's poem, "Sir James Douglas, Father of British Columbia," which opens with

You were born where I was born.
 Demerara's sun in your blood,
 Guiana's rain on your skin.
 You came from Creole stock
 taking a native wife. (41)

The Guyanese Canadian poet addresses Douglas as "part of my heritage too / despite colonialism." The piece ends with the poet pouring (demerara) sugar into his tea and "thinking if you were more Scottish / I'd be less of the tropics" (42). This is the doubled sense of post-colonialism that is part of some of the writing we now call Canadian.

There is yet one other specific factor of Canadian experience which cannot be separated from the notion of what post-colonial means to it. For years now (see Morton 150), Canadians have felt that they are being "colonized" by American capital. The use of the term "colonization" is not totally metaphoric, for Albert Memmi defined it as "above all, economic and political exploitation" (149), and there are many Canadian economic nationalists who would claim that this is precisely what the United States is doing to Canada. Even if one does not agree with the extremity of such an evaluation, it is still the case that Canadians often feel at least culturally colonized by American mass media. They also often feel somehow politically threatened by the constant reminders of the power and imperialist impulses of our neighbour to the south (for a classic Canadian view of American power, see Grant). And speaking the same language as both the real historical colonizers and the present-day would-be colonizers has created problems for Canadian writers trying to hear their own "English" tongues (Kroetsch 1; Haberly). With these additional issues of the often doubled post-colonial focus of many Canadians and the sensitivity to American imperialism, the very use of the word "post-colonial" cannot help but be a complex issue in a Canadian context.

The fact that postmodernism is alternately claimed as an invention of either Latin America or the United States (d. Tiffin, "Post-Colonialism" 170) is interesting in this light, for it indirectly points to the intersection of the concerns of postmodernism and post-colonialism that interests me here. Both terms, whatever their

geographic origins, are tethered to earlier entities - colonialism and modernism, respectively. Some Canadian artists have addressed this double tethering, most notably photographer Geoff Miles in his *Foreign Relations: Re-Writing a Narrative in Parts*. A series of texts and photographic images "about" colonial relations, this work offers a view of Canada, not as the Third World, but certainly also not as the First. In his catalogue, Miles notes that to discuss the photograph as a postmodern art object in Canada is "to do so within the confines of colonialism and the colonising power of the gaze of the other(s). For is it not true that we are in the unique position of being colonised by three gazes all at once; that of France, Britain, and the United States" (2). Neither postmodernism nor post-colonialism can go backwards; both by definition contest the imperialist devaluing of the "other" and the "different." But Miles feels that the discourse of photography in Canada is still very much caught within the limits of the colonial and the modernist. But in a way this also describes *any* post-colonial or postmodern art, insofar as both (as the very semantic composition of the adjectives suggests) operate in terms of that which they oppose: both contest from within. The question Miles asks himself is one which has a number of possible answers: "How do we construct a discourse which displaces the effects of the colonising gaze while we are still under its influence?" (3). These answers include, as he notes, deconstructing existing myths which support the discourses of colonialism (including modernism) and constructing different ones to take their place. They would also include irony - that strategic trope that allows a work to address a culture from within, while still articulating some challenge.

When I began this discussion of irony as a discursive strategy of both postmodernism and post-colonialism, I suggested that, not unlike allegory, irony is a trope of doubleness. And doubleness is what characterizes not just the complicitous critique of the post-modern, but, by definition, the twofold vision of the post-colonial - not just because of the obvious dual history (Slemon, "Magic" 15) but because a sense of duality was the mark of the colonial as well. Doubleness and difference are established by colonialism by its paradoxical move to enforce cultural sameness (JanMohamed 62) while, at the same time, producing differentiations and dis-

criminations (Bhabha, "Signs" 153). This is the doubleness often represented in the metaphor of Prospero and Caliban (Mannoni; Dorsinville, *Caliban*; for a critique of this see Baker, especially 190-96, and Donaldson). It is the doubleness of the colonial culture imposed upon the colonized (Meyers vii). But it is also the doubleness of the colonized in relation to the colonizer, either as model or antithesis (Memmi 140). As Raymond Williams has argued, however, all national literatures develop in this sort of way - up to a point: from imitation of a dominant pattern to assimilation or internalization of it (see also Marchak 182), but then to a stage of open revolt where what was initially excluded by the dominant pattern gets revalorized (12 1-28). Is the last one here the post-colonial stage, as most critics suggest? If so, then it can still be argued that its revolt continues to operate within the power field of that dominant culture, no matter how radical its revalorization of its indigenous culture (Tiffin, "Post-Colonialism" 172). This is why irony, the trope that works from within a power field but still contests it, is a consistently useful strategy for post-colonial discourse.

Nevertheless, Homi Bhabha has argued in a series of influential articles that irony and mimicry are the modes of the colonialist, not the post-colonial: "The discourse of post-Enlightenment English colonialism often speaks in a tongue that is forked, not false" and this, he feels, is the strategy of "colonial power and knowledge" ("Of Mimicry" 126). Bhabha sees irony as appropriating the colonized Other, and implicitly therefore as part of the ambivalence and hybridity that characterize the colonial ("Representation" 93; "Signs" 154; "The Other Question" 18) in what both Edward Said and Albert Memmi have seen as its inescapable and complex mutual interrelations with the colonized. In Memmi's words: "The bond between colonizer and colonized is thus destructive and creative" (89) Without denying any of this doubleness of the experience and literature of colonization, it is still possible to see a different and consequent doubleness as characterizing the *post-colonial*: what has been called its "bicultural vision" (Parameswaran 241) or "metaphysical clash" (Tiffin, "Comparison and Judgement" 32; see, too, "Comparative Methodology" 29). And the way post-colonial critics talk about this literature

suggests the potential importance of irony as the subversive force operating from within: "the challenge is to use the existing language, even if it is the voice of a dominant 'other' - and yet speak through it: to disrupt . . . the codes and forms of the dominant language in order to reclaim speech for itself" (New, *Dreams* x). Irony is one way of doing precisely this, a way of resisting and yet acknowledging the power of the dominant. It may not go the next step - to suggest something new - but it certainly makes that step possible. Often combined with some sort of self-reflexivity, irony allows a text to work within the constraints of the dominant while foregrounding those constraints *as constraints* and thus undermining their power.

On the level of language, irony becomes one of the chief characteristics of what Bharati Mukherjee calls the "step-mother tongue" in which post-colonial writers write, "implying as it does the responsibility, affection, accident, loss, and secretive root-quest in adoptive-family situations" (Mukherjee Blaise 147). Irony is thus one way of creatively modifying (JanMohamed 84; New, "New Language" 363) or even twisting the language so as to signal the "foreignness" of both the user and her/his experience. W. H. New has traced, as one common thread in Commonwealth literature, the *sense* of irony, the sense of being caught between two worlds: "Though dualities abound in the ironist's world, the stances he may take range from parody and innuendo through sarcasm and self-disparagement to absurdity and nihilism. . . . At its best, the ironic stance provokes a serious deliberation into the problems that led to dualities in the first place" (New, *Among Worlds* 3). This involves a re-viewing of colonial and post-colonial history through the doubled lenses of ironic defamiliarization: in Canada, Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* remains perhaps the most powerful example of this process. The contradictions and heterogeneous dualities that make up the post-colonial experience also resonate with the paradoxes and multiplicities of the post-modern and, in both, irony seems to be a preferred trope for the articulation of that doubleness. The postmodern challenges to humanist universals come together with post-colonial contestings provoked by statements like A. J. M. Smith's famous valorization of those Canadian poets who "made an effort to escape the limita-

tions of provincialism or colonialism by entering into the universal civilizing culture of ideas" (xxiv). Such a description can today be seen as pure neo-colonialism, looking as it does to Arnoldian standards for validation, standards which have been argued to be anything but universal - but rather the product of specifically nineteenth-century British, middle-class, white, male values (Belsey).

Because irony is also the trope of the unsaid, it becomes as well a possible way to encode a subtext which will deflect the risks of "[f]ull visibility and accessibility ... [which] constitute an inherent danger for the colonized" (Weir 61). As Lorraine Weir argues, irony

in the hands of those who exercise genuine power is very different from the same device in the hands of those classified as powerless. Among those whose basic communication may frequently depend upon the skilled use and reception of ironic utterance - that is, among the powerless - irony will be all the more powerful. The Irish, as is commonly known, are masters of irony and invective; so is the primary community of women. (67)

Joining women and the Irish here would be ironic post-colonial writers as obvious as Narayan and Rushdie, each in his different way, and others perhaps less immediately obvious: Ruth Praver Jhabvala (see Gooneratne 65-78) or Ngugi and Tayib Salih (Said 54).

Irony is the trope of the redeployable and the refracted as well as simply of the double, but doubleness seems to provide fertile ground for its usage. This makes Canada - as a post-colonial nation (in the very specific sense offered above) and as part of a general postmodern culture - rich terrain indeed:

Canada est omnis divisa in partes duo: all Canada is divided into two parts. We used to have Upper and Lower Canada, but, with the settling of the plains beyond Ontario, this division is now expressed as East and West. There's also North and South and lots of divisions not based on geography: a political division between the Provincial and Federal governments; an economic one between the have and have-not provinces; a sectorial one between industrial regions and agricultural; a linguistic one between English and French. And so on. (Pechter 291)

But the multiplicity of these dualities does not always make the

often resulting ironies easy to interpret, for these are frequently double-directed ironies. For example, James Reaney's poem, "The Royal Visit" (in Barbour and Scobie 58), uses repetition to signal irony: the repeated line that both those in Stratford, Ontario, who were slighted by *not* being presentable and thus presented to royalty *and* those who did not manage to see the Queen because the train moved too quickly through the town would remember the event "to their dying day." But is the irony directed against colonial royalists in Canada? against an inculcated neo-colonial mentality? against royalty for not caring enough for those who cared for them? or against all of these simultaneously? What about the subtle, self-reBating Canadian ironies of Miriam Waddington's "Back at York University" (271-72) where the narrator confronts the dual colonization of Canadian culture:

I am walking back
to an English colony,
watch me change into
an American aspiration,
look, I'm whispering into
a Canadian answer-box ...

But neither Waddington nor Reaney are usually considered post-modern writers, and so it is hard to see from these passing examples where irony actually marks the overlapping of concerns for which I have been arguing. But in order to show that, instead of looking to the writing of Atwood, Ondaatje, Kroetsch or other writers in Canada who are generally seen as both post-colonialist and post-modern, I would like to change media and investigate briefly the intersection of the post-colonial with the postmodern in Canadian visual art and film which are usually labelled as postmodern, but which I think ought to be viewed in the light of post-colonialism as well, especially in their use of irony in the negotiation of the aesthetic and historical heritage within which they work.

Some Canadian artists *do* see themselves as working within the bounds of a historically determined colonialism. London artist Greg Curnoe writes: "the artists who are original, who break out of the colonial mode, are the ones who really affect our culture ... because they develop out of their whole background" (quoted in Theberge 17). None of Smith's universalism for Curnoe! Post-

colonial art, he implies, would be that which derives directly from its own local and particular situation. This too is a tenet of post-modernism, of course. Another example of the kind of artist who might be simultaneously post-colonial and postmodern is Charles Pachter. Like many other Canadians (such as Margaret Atwood and Joyce Wieland), Pachter's time in the United States seems to have sharpened his sense of what constitutes both the historical and current nature of colonialism in Canada. His 1972 series of paintings and prints on the theme of *Queen and Moose* chooses deliberately provocative subjects and forms: the Queen as the symbol of nostalgic neo-colonialism meets the Ur-cliche of the Canadian wilderness experience. His ironic portrayals and situations explode both myths, or rather, he makes them implode under their own accumulated cultural weight.

The entire question of Canadian identity has become a kind of playground - or battlefield - for the postmodern as well as the post-colonial defining of "difference" and value. As Laura Mulvey has written:

The question of Canadian national identity is political in the most direct sense of the word, and it brings the political together with the cultural and ideological issues immediately and inevitably. For the Canada delineated by multinationals, international finance, U.S. economic and political imperialism, national identity is a point of resistance, defining the border fortifications against exterior colonial penetration. Here nationalism can perform the political function familiar in Third World countries. (IO)

Mulvey argues that Geoff Miles's work, *The Trapper's Pleasure of the Text*, deconstructs the Canadian identity and reduces it to its male, Anglo-Saxon and capitalist defining essences. And it would seem to be irony that triggers and even enables this deconstruction. The title alone, with its incongruous juxtaposition of a well-known work by Roland Barthes and the notion of a trapper, sets up the possibility for irony. The trapper here is the original European, white, male traveller, exploiting nature for financial gain, who made colonization possible in Canada. But in conjunction with the photograph (of a street scene devoid of people except for the shadow of the photographer), the person who captures the visual image is also a trapper: also a white male, he has just

returned from studying in England; he too exploits external reality for potential financial gain (if he can sell his photographs). Like the trapper of old, he not only captures "reality" but fixes it and in that sense destroys its "life." This too is a form of metaphoric colonization, a taking over through representations. As Mulvey writes: "the metaphor ironizes and parodies the way that photographic aesthetics have apotheosized the decisive moment (the kill) and consequently the 'Trapper' himself as hero" (10). Further ironies result from the text which accompanies the visual image: one, positioned near the photographer's shadow, reads "Standing above it all / he sensed the power / of his position." The preying and the voyeuristic are clearly not absent from this awareness of position. On the other side, away from the shadow, we read: "The text needs its shadow! / This shadow is a bit of ideology, / a bit of representation, a bit of subject." And, of course, 'a shadow can, by definition, only ever be *a bit* of a subject and *a bit* of a representation. Without a shadow, that is, without a self-reflexively revelatory doubling, the text is in danger of replacing the photograph as a transparent realist medium presuming direct access to the "real." The deliberate echoing of Barthes, from the title to these texts, also recalls Barthes' own autobiographical and complex ironic use of photographs and text in both *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* and *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. In Miles's work too, the viewer must respond actively to decipher ironies and construct meanings in the relation of text to image. The post-colonial "Trapper" and the postmodern "Pleasure of the Text" overlap within the problematics of ironic doubleness.

The same dualities or perhaps, more accurately, the same unreconciled and unresolved contradictions that characterize both the postmodern and the post-colonial can be seen in Joyce Wieland's political film trilogy, *True Patriot Love*, a title whose echo of "O Canada" immediately foregrounds the significance of her Canadianness to her exploration of the intersection of the aesthetic and the political in these films. The first, *Rat Life and Diet in North America*, was made when Wieland was living in New York in 1968. But it is also subtly concerned with historical as well as current colonialism, for it is a loving parody of Beatrix Potter

narratives. It is about the rebellion of a group of rats (actually gerbils in the film) against the oppression of New York and the Vietnam War. These "political prisoners" escape to Canada where they live on an organic co-op farm. Some critics have argued that this idealistic and naive view of Canada shows Wieland to be "removed from the political mainstream" (Magidson and Wright 39), but perhaps it depends on *whose* political mainstream. What such a view misses are the ironies that perhaps only Canadians would notice: ironies of disjunction between the real and the ideal Canada, and ironies resulting from the view that, for a Canadian, even a less than ideal Canada might be preferable to the United States - a point American critics might be forgiven for missing.

The second film, *Reason over Passion* (1967-69) is an ironic reworking of the conventions of the travel documentary. It portrays the Canadian landscape as recorded by a hand-held camera through the windows of trains and cars. There are also freeze-frame pictures of the face of Pierre Trudeau, the man who uttered the rationalist statement that gives Wieland her title. This material is rephotographed from a moviola to get a grainy effect that self-reflexively serves to introduce an immediately noticeable visible mediation between the recording and the recorded. The images are accompanied by a variety of machine noises, a female voice, and 537 printed permutations of the title's letters, as selected by reason's instrument - a computer. This reappropriation of the landscape of Canada as the subject of art is a political and cultural statement of the value of the local and the particular over the universal and the eternal. It is not, as some critics have suggested, a nostalgic move, but a postmodern and post-colonial challenging that both contests nostalgia and postmodernly mixes elegy with exaltation in the viewing of the land. And it is the ironic juxtaposition of the title, the Trudeau shots, and the soundtrack with the landscape, as well as the self-reflexive mode of recording, that makes this double contesting possible.

The third film, *Pierre Vallieres*, is the most overtly political, as its title suggests, for it is a parody of the documentary portrait. Its three parts link Quebec colonization and search for liberation with that of women. The fixed camera frames the Quebec revolutionary Vallieres's mouth from which come the words we hear:

thirty-three minutes of monologue with subtitles. After a while the moustached mouth with its crooked, discoloured teeth goes beyond suggesting the paradoxical revolutionary folk hero and working-class victim imaged as one (see Rabinovitz, "Films" 168-69) to imply almost a kind of sex-inverted, ironic *vagina dentata*, the terror of which informs the messages of women's liberation as well as Quebec decolonization in the soundtrack.

Many of these same national and gender ironies are picked up in her 1971 National Gallery retrospective, also called *True Patriot Louef/Veritable Amour Patriotique*. The entire show was set up to feel like a country fair, perhaps in itself signalling a feminist subversion of the honorific retrospective format. She even sold bottles of a perfume she created, called "Sweet Beaver: The Perfume of Canadian Liberation." The beaver as sweet here suggests more than a "nostalgic longing for a Canadian wilderness past" (Rabinovitz, "Issues" 40). As a symbol of Canada, the beaver is "sweet" because it is both pleasurable and innocent, but also because it was an appealing lure to European fur-traders and colonizers, first, and then to American capital. As medievalists also know well, the beaver (*castor*) has traditionally in the West represented a gentle (male) beast and the secretions of its scent glands were considered important to medicine - while serving the beaver as a mode of sexual attraction. In various versions of myth, when hunted, the beaver is said to bite off its own testicles (mistaken for scent glands) and thus escape with its life. Wieland's Canadian beaver may also be self-mutilating but safe, attracting but medicinal. The link between castration and *castor* is also an evident one, offering another form of safety, this time from sexual vices and sins. But, as a number of critics have noted, *today* this image also cannot help connoting pornographic reductions of women as well: "Canada's history as a land raped and colonized by England and then by the United States parallels women's history of oppression" (Rabinovitz, "Issues" 40). Moreover, by ironically, if indirectly, pointing to the capitalist and patriarchal representations of women (in both pornography and in advertising - she did make the perfume a commercial object), Wieland adds another level of irony: perfume here is the very femininely coded medium that delivers a message which defies the trivializa-

tion it seems to invite. Perfume has traditionally been used to enhance women's sexual attraction to men, but here the "sweet" lure is loaded! The feminist, the environmentalist and the Canadian nationalist ironies here are at one and the same time post-modern and post-colonial.

Such is also the case in Fastwiirms' installation, *Father Brebeuf's Fugue State*. According to medical psychology, a "fugue state" is a state wherein awareness of identity seems to disappear. This work politicizes and historicizes- and thereby ironizes- this term in relation to the spiritual conquest of North America, which was the first step in the French colonization of Canada's aboriginal peoples and the destruction of their identity. Using industrial materials to create postmodern ironic incongruities in the representation of historical objects, this work suggests the juxtaposition of the Jesuit missionaries' colonizing quest with the resistance of the Native peoples, including their torture of Father Jean de Brebeuf in 1649. Tarpaper walls and fluorescent lights implicitly signal the loss and indeed the total destruction of one culture, the one close to nature; a charred wooden cross suggests the survival, despite many trials, of the other. As one commentator describes another part of the installation: "Heaped onto a pile of consumer kitsch and junk goods of Western culture are a few cobs of Indian corn and a complete deer skeleton, the leg bones of which prop up a barbecue grill topped with a steak - the stake of colonization" (Fischer 12). But it is also, most ironically and horrifically, the stake at which Brebeuf was burned - or barbecued. Yet the cross remains, however charred, and all that is left of the Native culture is bones. This is the loss of identity suggested by the title's fugue state: Brebeuf's loss of the memory of the act of colonization and its subsequent destruction of the identity of *others*.

The art of Geoff Miles, Joyce Wieland and Fastwiirms, each in its own way, confronts the amnesia of colonialism through the memory of post-colonialism. And all three use the discursive strategy of irony to underline the political dimension of that confrontation. But in each case, the contesting is done from within the dominant discourse, as may be inevitable given the structure of the trope of irony. The *post-colonial* is therefore as implicated in that which it challenges as is the *postmodern*. Critique may always be

complicitous when irony is its primary vehicle. For this reason, I would disagree with one important part of Simon During's particular definition of post-colonialism as "the need, in nations or groups which have been victims of imperialism, to achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images" (1987, 33). Most post-colonial critics would oppose this as an essentialist, not to say simplifying, definition, and I would have to agree with them that the entire post-colonial project usually posits precisely the impossibility of that identity ever being "uncontaminated": just as the *word* post-colonialism holds within it its own "contamination" by colonialism, so too does the culture itself and its various artistic manifestations, in Canada as elsewhere. Colonies might well speak "unreflectingly," as Dennis Lee has suggested (163), but the *post-colonial* has at its disposal various ways of subverting from within the dominant culture - such as irony, allegory, and self-reflexivity - that it shares with the complicitous critique of postmodernism, even if its politics differ in important ways. I return to this last point once again to emphasize the difference that the use of irony by both underlines. The post-colonial, like the feminist, is a dismantling but also constructive political enterprise insofar as it implies a theory of agency and social change that the postmodern deconstructive impulse lacks. While both "post-"s *use* irony, the post-colonial cannot *stop* at irony, as Ihab Hassan's exposition of the trope's postmodern features in the end suggests:

Irony. This could also be called, after Kenneth Burke, perspectivism. In the absence of a cardinal principle or paradigm, we turn to play, interplay, dialogue, polylogue, allegory, self-reflection--in short, to irony. This irony assumes indeterminacy, multivalence; it aspires to clarity, the clarity of demystification, the pure light of absence. We meet variants of it in Bakhtin, Burke, de Man, Jacques Derrida, and Hayden White. And in Alan Wilde we see an effort to discriminate its modes: 'mediate irony,' 'disjunctive irony,' and 'postmodern' or 'suspensive irony' 'with its yet more racial vision of multiplicity, randomness, contingency, and even absurdity.' Irony, perspectivism, reflexiveness: these express the ineluctable recreations of mind in search of a truth that continually eludes it, leaving it with only an ironic access or excess of self-consciousness.

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