

(IN)VISIBLE IMAGES:
SEEING DISABILITY IN CANADIAN LITERATURE, 1823-1974

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Abstract

Despite the ubiquity of images depicting disability in the narratives that have contributed to the shaping of Canadian national identity, images of unconventional bodies have not drawn critical attention. My study begins to address this neglect by revisiting selections from Canada's historical literary canon using Disability Studies theory. I examine eight Anglophone novels selected from the reading requirements list for field examinations in Canadian literature at the University of Saskatchewan. Because fictional representations inform the ways we interpret reality, I argue that the application of Disability Studies theories to a Canadian context provides new insights into the meaning of Canadian nationhood.

The study begins with Thomas McCulloch. His *Stepsure Letters* provides a counter-discourse to the commercialized ethos of his time. The disabled Stepsure exemplifies the ideal citizen. While Gwen, in Ralph Connor's *Sky Pilot*, presents a sentimentalized stereotype of disability, her role also foregrounds the imperative of human relationship. Connor's *Foreigner*, on the other hand, intertwines disability with ethnicized difference to form images of subhumanity that the novel suggests must be assimilated and/or controlled. Lucy Maude Montgomery's *Emily* trilogy echoes Connor's later use of disability to embody a sinister Other that threatens the British-Canadian mainstream. In *Such Is My Beloved*, Morley Callaghan realistically depicts the power investments involved in configuring difference as social menace, defying the eugenic discourse of his day. While Malcolm Ross's *As for Me and My House* seems to revert to the exploitation of disability as a trope for trouble, at the same time the story subverts convention by failing to affirm normalcy. In Ethel Wilson's *Love and Salt Water* disability signifies the complexity and depth of humanity. In Mordechai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, betrayal and rejection of responsibility to Other is the source of human suffering. The marginalized figures of Adele Wiseman's *Crackpot*, the last novel examined in this study, defy their abject roles, pronouncing the right of being within one's difference.

Defamiliarizing the function of portrayals of disability brings into consciousness biases that have been systemically naturalized. Exploring constructions of difference reveals constructions of normalcy. Just as interrogating Whiteness uncovers hidden processes of racism, questioning normalcy illuminates a discriminatory ableism. My reading reveals a struggle within

the national imaginary between ableism and a desire for inclusive pluralism. Disability Studies readings may help to liberate the collective psyche from tyrannical impositions of normalcy to a greater realization of the richness of human diversity.

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Academia attracts a vast range of talents but occasionally, rarely, individuals fulfil their role with a holism and rigour that transcend mandates. They embody an ideal that practical cynicism disavows. I am grateful to be mentored by such professors. Thank you Dr Kathleen James-Cavan for not giving up on me. Thank you Dr Susan Gingell for assuming co-supervision against the dictates of sanity. You have guided me with intelligence, wisdom, and kindness, not only rekindling my project but also rekindling my faith in humanity. Similarly, I am grateful to Dr Ray Stephanson who epitomizes the Platonic form of Graduate Chair.

Finally, inexpressible appreciation goes to my husband Myroslaw, and to our daughters Myroslava, Anastasia, and Aleksandra, who have unflinchingly supported the intrusion of my studies on their life.

Dedication

To my life-long teachers, Myroslava, Anastasia, and Aleksandra.

And to people with disabilities worldwide who champion every person's right to belong in this shared existence.

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Introduction

Adjusting the Focus: Disability Studies Theory

“A nation is a group of people who share the same illusions about themselves.” (Francis)

“Deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective.” (Arendt)

In the Western world, cultural productions have historically and pervasively engaged disability.¹ Despite disability’s omnipresence as a symbol of myriad versions of fallen humanity, the critical reception of disability has remained fairly static, bound to the conventions surrounding disability in lived society: namely the notion of disability as a medical concern, striking the ill-fated, troubling the coffers of social services, ultimately constituting a fate unconnected to those evoked by terms intended for the presumed majority collective such as we, citizens, students, children, women, and men. In fact conventional notions of disability inherently expunge disability from the presumed meaning of “all” and “humanity.” This may strike some as a gross overgeneralization; however, imagine any typical community playground for “children.” Is it wheelchair accessible? Does it include secure swings that would hold the unruly bodies of children with any number of physical conditions that may preclude a grip but not a joy of swinging? If you are familiar with such a playground you will know it is either “special” (read segregated) or it is an exception that proves the general rule about playgrounds. Because “child”-friendly environments are designed to accommodate a particular type of child, their design excludes all those children whose bodies cannot conform to the prevailing archetype of child, consequently attenuating their status as child.

The situation for most of these young people, barred from the monkey bars, as it were, may not improve as they grow into adulthood. To continue the analogy, the

playground built for adult society—our cities, roads, infrastructures—is similarly designed to accommodate a body that few conform to adequately. Our physical and socio-cultural environments expect the prototypical individual to be a young, male, athletic, fully-employed, white, university educated, heterosexual protestant.² While many succeed in making do in this environment, employing any and all means to approximate this standard that constitutes the “all” of humanity, there are also many of us whose bodies will not comply to any interventions intending to shape us into the prescribed form of what is, however ironically, configured to be natural: the normal.

The segment of the population labelled as having a visible disability comprises roughly ten to twenty percent of any demographic. Although this estimate is already significant, it would notably expand if it were possible to include those with “hidden” disabilities.³ Also, as the population ages and technological advances extend life expectancies, the number of people with disabilities increases. Work on disability issues frequently reminds us that, if not yet, we will all experience disability if we live long enough. Therefore, it is a formidable proportion of people that falls outside the ranks of the all of “all people.” Furthermore, inclusion into the disability sector is open to all other possible taxonomies of social identities. The white professional female may not easily become a black man on welfare but she may at any time wake up as a person with a disability. The social categorization perhaps most considered to be irrelevant to considerations of “all” is possibly the only one that potentially includes “all.” Whereas disability has functioned in North America as a signifier of Otherness, a mark of the “special” necessarily exempted from the normal, the phenomenon of disability is universally human. The American sociologist Irving Zola “argued for the need to respect human difference and variation by widening the range of the normal, creating, so to speak, an inclusive sense of normality. Disability is a constant in human experience, a fundamental feature of the human condition, in the sense that no human being can be said to have a perfect repertoire of abilities suitable for all contexts” (Bickenbach 580). However, a conscious effort is required even to fathom this notion of the normalcy of disability. Western perceptions of disability as defect have been so deeply entrenched, so naturalized, that they have acquired the status of objective fact.⁴ And as Said demonstrates in his *Orientalism*, systems of thinking that proceed unanalyzed inform

perception to an extent that belies material and experiential reality.⁵ Like Western constructions of the East, the production of disability requires investigation, investigation which demands a concerted process of unlearning generations of systemically enculturated bias.

Hence, Disability Studies endeavours to recover what has been proscribed in the cultural psyche. The absence of analysis of disability in the liberal arts creates an astonishing gap in the academic imperative to understand what it means to be human.⁶ Disability Studies scholars from across disciplines are asking not only what this cultural assignation of disability is, but also how and why it has operated in socio-cultural systems throughout history.

My project takes me into this still new and vibrant arena of study to consider Canadian novels from a Disability Studies perspective. Reading literature through this lens opens an interpretive door to a whole new world of narrative meaning. Focussing on the literary portrayal of disability not only promises to deepen critical understanding, it also can inform public perceptions of people with disability. As Michael Bérubé observes, “The cultural representation of people with disabilities not only affects our understanding of what it means to be human; in more practical terms, it affects public policy, the allocation of social resources, and the meaning of ‘civil rights’”(4-5). The purpose of this study is to reread canonical Canadian works through the lens of Disability Studies. The selection is necessarily limited (two nineteenth century novels and one twentieth-century novel a decade until 1974) but my hope is that this work will help to remove the door-lock so that others will continue the inexhaustible explorations engendered by Disability Studies.

Disability is a term that conjures a host of demons. The nature of these particular creatures depends entirely on an indeterminate number of shifting variables, rendering only ambiguity and uncertainty to what we call “disability.” Despite this fuzziness, the term synchronically and paradoxically retains a sense of knowability, permanence, and unquestionable dread. The noun “disability” evokes the notion of a concrete object, a thing to be had, and once in a person’s possession it becomes a thing to be: disabled. Nevertheless, having and being this thing describes an acquisition that is a subtraction or a negation. Dis-ability. Dis-abled. Tanya Titchkosky discusses the particular oddity of

defining through lack, comparing this phenomenon in disability to identifying a man as “a person without a vagina” (*Mapping* 103). Her work demonstrates the perversion inherent in the oppositional positioning of dis/ability. The word itself has generated an ongoing polemic and has propelled investigations into the sources, implications, and ramifications of this tag as it performs in human society and culture. Unravelling the tangled discourse of disability is among the tasks confronting Disability Studies.

Because *disability* is a term fraught with contention, it is important to engage in the ongoing process of clarifying its use. The negative connotations inherent in *disability* have compelled attempts at more positive descriptors that with time invariably devolve into pejoratives (*moron*) or jokes (*vertically challenged*). Disability rights activists, struggling towards social agency and political voice, have reclaimed *disability* not as a medical label but as a political identity that can serve to unite people to resist ableist discrimination.⁷ Despite misconceptions to the contrary, the one common denominator for people with disabilities is the social stigma of defect and deviance.⁸ Otherwise, “having” a disability remains a dynamic position inflected by socio-spatial contexts involving gender, race, class, and the like.

The disability movement is not entirely in agreement with the use of disability as a modifier since, as Michael Oliver explains, the terms are about the crucial “issue of causality; the question of conceptual consistency; the role of language; . . . and the politicization of the definitional process” (29).⁹ Generally, the American disability movement has been characterized as centring on the civil rights of individuals through legislation and therefore prefers to use “people with disabilities,” emphasizing the equality of personhood by placing “people” first, with disability as merely an attribute among others. The British Disability Movement, focusing primarily on a minority group identity, prefers the term “disabled people.” The aim is to underscore society’s disabling imposition on people, rendering them disabled (Albrecht, Seelman, and Bury 3).¹⁰ “Disabled people” is distinguished from the objectifying and reductive term produced when an article precedes the participle, yielding “the disabled.” In this work I will use the first two terms interchangeably, recognizing that both are vexed by a history of accumulated negative associations. Until we can individually and collectively acknowledge the commonplace of unique bodies and physical conditions, the labelling of

unconventional bodies will be problematic and derogatory. Unlike most working in Disability Studies, I will deliberately use “disability” to refer to any condition perceived as anomalous, whether it is an intellectual or physical impairment. I believe this distinction is constructed from an outdated body/mind dichotomy that can no longer be supported in experience. A brain injury for example, while perhaps only affecting cognitive function, is none the less still situated in a physical brain. The critical factor regarding disability that a global disability movement has illuminated and Disability Studies has taken as its springboard is the shift from a medical to a social model: from locating disability in a pathologized individual to locating disability in a society that privileges some bodies and rejects others. Acknowledging disability as a socio-cultural construct shaped and exploited to buttress mainstream power structures provokes an explosion of questions regarding human relationships, socio-political power, cultural taxonomies, human material reality, and conceptions of identity and worth.

Significantly, theorizing disability from the social model, theorizing the social model itself, exemplifies the mutual debt between academic theory and popular praxis as well as the place and responsibility of the university in society. Asking how, why, and to what effect our culture and society have responded to the reality of some manifestations of human variation as disability, directly addresses the concerns of those advocating for the human and civil rights of people who are disenfranchised through prejudice towards anomaly.¹¹ Social policy and popular attitudes will be informed by scholarship exploring disability not as a private dilemma to be overcome or patiently accepted but rather as a construction of otherness produced through a multiplicity of dominant discursive and relational practices that privilege some bodies and disqualify others, thereby legitimizing established structures of power. Indeed, Disability Studies introduces a previously unexplored territory of social hierarchical power characterized as ableism, heretofore hidden in the way such states as whiteness and maleness had evaded critique as ideological standards. Vera Chouinard discusses an ethos of intolerance towards bodily diversity that “amounts to a kind of corporeal ‘class system’ in which value assigned to particular kinds of bodies by powerful groups . . . depends on whether and how these bodies can be exploited in order to further the accumulation of wealth” (292).

The university is among the “power groups” involved in the construction and exploitation of disability and, hence, the “disabled” population. Recent historical research into sources of current attitudes towards disability indict academic institutions as major players in promoting a modernist agenda dependent on the formation of disability as a menace to social progress.¹² Until the emergence of the field of Disability Studies, university curricula sustained and generated damaging stereotypes of people with disabilities, generally erasing disabled people as subjects while deploying “them” as objects of study and occasions for professional advancement. Social sciences extended this medicalized notion of abnormality with research devoted to deviancy and the social problems it spawns. The person labelled with disability provided material for inexhaustible work assigned to address the need to fix an historically recurring dilemma of ostensible human and social defect. Longmore argues that the centrality of disability in human existence has resulted in its ubiquity in academic study: “The danger is not that we will ignore disability, but that we will reach intellectual, socio-cultural, ethical, political, and policy conclusions about disabled people without examining the ignorance, fear, and prejudice that deeply influence our thinking” (*Why* 3). Acknowledging the medicalization of approaches to disability extends an imperative to interrogate and unpack conventions of disability knowledge across disciplines.¹³

The study of disability, relegated to specialists in medical and applied sciences, mirrored the fate of the majority of people with disabilities for most of the twentieth century. Segregated into institutions, excluded from civil society and the quotidian experience of those without a disability label, people with disabilities became a receptacle for society’s fears and anxieties rather than being recognized as fellow citizens. The less non-disabled individuals encounter disability in the grocery store or the classroom, the tighter the grip of disability stereotypes on the collective imagination and the more easily culturally rejected aspects of embodiment are projected onto the produced Otherness of disability.¹⁴ Similarly, far from the concerns of textual theorists, the figure of disability thrived as a conventional trope of language and literature. Disability’s ubiquitous narrative presence as metaphor has become so habitualized it evades notice. Simi Linton describes the use of disability in the liberal arts as “a guest invited to a party, but never introduced” (88). In my own experience, without exception, whenever I

described my project to colleagues in English literature, they wondered if I could find enough figures of disability in Canadian literature to warrant a dissertation. Invariably, subsequent encounters with these academics elicited comments regarding realizations of disabled images in texts they know well. Until my project topic raised the issue, the presence of disability in texts scholars of literature taught and researched went unnoticed. Thus, in Viktor Shklovsky's terms, Disability Studies is working to defamiliarize the conventional presence of disability in narrative, placing it under a spotlight and asking how it got there. In this way, Disability Studies responds to both a theoretical imperative and a political one. Disability Studies, in its current time and space, obliterates any remaining vestiges of academic pretence that theory resides in the purity of an ivory tower, uncorrupted by pedestrian politics.

Scholarship in Disability Studies points to what Rosemarie Garland Thomson describes as a "traffic in metaphors" (10) whereby imaginary discourse spills into real time, confirming popular misconceptions about people with disabilities and translating into repressive policy.¹⁵ Disability Studies illuminates the postmodern notion of theory as narrative and reveals the intimate play between academic theorizing and public policy. While this connection is already evidenced by work in cultural and gender studies, a Disability Studies lens can help describe how academic theory, in its shaping of standardized disability knowledge, becomes most pernicious or alternately emancipating for society at large.¹⁶

The genesis of Disability Studies is often located in the 1960s era of social protests. However, the struggle for justice of people labelled as disabled diverged significantly from the struggle of those who opposed other social categorizations used to justify unjust social relations, categorizations such as race or gender. The medicalized status of disability isolated and blamed individuals for a dependency that competed for private and public funds. Imposed collective identities based on pathology and need, together with the internalized shame accompanying social stigma, complicated the formation of a collective identity as disabled. The amorphous and contingent labelling of disability imposed by social and health institutions precluded the emergence of a leader akin to Martin Luther King or Gloria Steinem, and inaccessible environments prohibited the demonstrations required to protest the oppressiveness of those environments.

Conceptually, the disenfranchisement of people with disabilities had been so naturalized in the collective psyche of Western culture that disability sooner served as a signifier of the abasement of minorities or marginalized groups, rather than as its own politicized status and perspective.¹⁷ Nevertheless, people with disabilities have resisted and continue to resist injustice, despite the Sisyphean struggle. A burgeoning scholarly literature details the development of the Disability Rights Movement over the globe.¹⁸

The questions raised by public protests against disability discrimination compelled analysis, and scholars with disabilities began to research and publish their investigations of disability, much like gender studies rising from “women’s liberation” movements and African-American studies from Black civil rights activity. These scholars began to use disability as a legitimate standpoint from which to analyze society. In the prologue to his cultural analysis of disability from his own experience of paralysis, *The Body Silent*, anthropologist Robert Murphy explains how he “looked for human beings reduced by physical incapacity to a struggle for survival . . . and found Society” (5). Because the university is a primary social institution, examining its complicity in the degradation of disability offers new ways to uncover interlocking systems of oppression whereby personal privilege and gain complicate the categories of oppressor and oppressed. Similarly, as Sherene Razack contends, we must take individual responsibility for oppressive institutional practice where we may be complicit in the subordination of others (12). Disability Studies presents yet another hermeneutical pathway towards justice by defamiliarizing systems of injustice perpetuated through our valued institutions. In this way, Disability Studies enhances the exercise of academic critical analysis as a civic imperative. Once activated, disability as a critical stance within the liberal arts uncovers a goldmine of potential for explorations into elemental issues concerning the how and why of the socio-cultural configuring of difference.

While Disability Studies shares much in common with gender and cultural studies, disability is more than simply an additional social category of identity. Disability Studies’ inquiry into the phenomenon of disability destabilizes foundational precepts of many established identity theories in that it approaches largely uninterrogated socio-cultural assumptions about embodiment and constructions of normalcy. Disability Studies inherently becomes an enterprise of epistemology and hermeneutics. As Disability

Studies confronts the complex of meanings involved in relations founded in hierarchies of embodiment, revealing the investments made in privileging and invalidating bodies, it participates in the shaping of a disability identity of sorts that responds to imposed stigmatized identities. Davis contends that this minority “ethnic” identity, while pragmatic for people with disabilities, is nonetheless illogical. Since bodies are designed more by human attitudes than by biology, Davis argues for disability as a unifying concept for all human identities. In the way that the theory of universal design strives to conceive of public environments that are accessible for human diversities, Davis’s theory of dismodernism reconceptualizes “the” universal subject in the fluidity and indeterminacy of disability: a type of unity in diversity. The dismodernist subject is not autonomous but interdependent, disabled, openly acknowledging that all humans are “completed by technology and interventions” (*Bending* 30). Difference is common to all, and “what is universal in life, if there are universals, is the experience of the limitations of the body” (32). Davis calls for a revised emancipatory ethic of the body that would acknowledge the injustice of oppressive treatments of devalued bodies, regardless of socio-cultural, political identity categorizations. However, Davis’s attempt to create global solidarity from shared understandings of oppression risks erasing huge differentials in subjugation and privilege. Nevertheless, Disability Studies work is demonstrating that it is “paradoxically the most marginalized group—people with disabilities—who can provide the broadest way of understanding contemporary systems of oppression” (29). Although Davis’s dismissal of postmodernism is arguable, belying the understanding of the postmodern subject position as inherently unstable and self-reflexive, his focus on a disabled subject reclaims the necessity of addressing humanity as fundamentally embodied. Because as a term *postmodernism* is so overwrought, Davis’s neologism *dismodernism* helps to dislodge the notion of body from the image of a fixed ideal form to an image of disability as the universal human experience.

While reading Davis’s text, I heard a CBC interview of a business magnate who converted to environmentalism (Enright). In order to determine how to make his flooring industry environmentally responsible, he assigned workers to study the natural environment for ideas to improve production. The result was a discovery that in nature there is no uniformity, no identical replication of patterns. Consequently, the company

abandoned the conventional patterns to produce floor tiles without cookie cutter sameness. Together the irregular tiles produce a desirable aesthetic effect. Waste production is almost eliminated; profits are up. While carpets and people are not constructed in the same way, the point is that difference *is* natural and human beings are part of the natural world. The simple observations of the manufacturer's researchers effected a radical breakthrough when applied to the given context. So too, Davis's (and Disability Studies') reminder of difference as an inherently human quality, if applied, has potential to catalyze positive social change.

Despite Davis's critique, postmodernism legitimates Disability Studies' current academic and political urgency. Disability Studies is activated by the intellectual recognition that "all reality is 'mediated' by human perception and interpretation. In this new view, the world we generally take for granted is not 'discovered' through science, but is 'invented' through culture" (Woodill 202). Also, disability is perfectly positioned to engage in the questioning of dominant ideologies from the peripheries of power, that so readily characterizes the postmodern stance. Postmodern perspectives regard formerly uncontested metanarratives as imposing fixed paradigms of social interactions by failing to acknowledge the existence of alternative patterns of viable human relations. People with disabilities, delegitimized as complete human beings by totalizing discourses of power, emerge from a muzzled subjectivity to engage in the interrogation of the progressivist ideals enabled by twentieth-century post-war disaffection. Postmodernism creates a climate for the inspection of modernist structures erected on the control and repression of anomalous bodies. In Corker and Shakespeare's edited volume, *disability/postmodernity*, Disability Studies scholars explore disability's inherent connection with the postmodern embrace of the multidimensional complexity of the human condition and its organizing systems of knowledge and power. By adopting postmodernist positions, the scholars included in Corker and Shakespeare's volume present disability as "the ultimate postmodern concept" (15), resistant to any unifying models and dynamically challenging sedimented ways of thinking or perceiving reality.¹⁹

Not only do postmodern theories shed light on the construction of disability, but disability theories legitimate and clarify what is so amorphously known as postmodernism. Disability, in generating Davis's dismodernist ethic, suggests that there

cannot be a post-postmodernism any more than disability can be eradicated from the human condition. Ironically, the first connection between the postmodern and disability is the dispute surrounding its existence and meaning; simply, like disability, postmodernism has no fixed definition yet is ubiquitously vilified, misrepresented, misunderstood. Postmodern positions have become irreversibly part of contemporary experience, consciousness, and discourse even for those who have no notion of postmodern theory, or vehemently oppose it. Disability too, despite contrary mythologies, is here to stay: the abnormal is most normal. What is termed disability, but is better understood as human variability, is part of the human condition. Postmodernism embraces paradox. It admits both/and rather than either/or. Disability, too, is and is not.²⁰ However, while postmodernism's resistors decry its uncertainty as irresponsible relativism and apolitical self-indulgence, bodies labelled as disabled provide material substance not only to postmodern thinking but to theory itself. Disability heralds material corporeality. As James Porter reflects in the Foreward to *The Body and Physical Difference*, a person with a disability seems at once "too much" and "too little a body" (xiii). Disability's socio-cultural positioning demands an unpacking of its contradictory yet reductive constructions in order to understand social attitudes to embodiment and the impact of these attitudes on public life.

The social model's introduction of the idea of disability's social construction generates endless debate over the crucial role of flesh-and-blood in disability identity and the fear of a constructionist elision of corporeal experience. However, postmodern positions clarify both the contingent and discursive nature of identity. Matter is not created by discourse; it is interpreted and given meaning through discourse. I have my body but how I understand its function and value depends on the interplay between the personal context I was born into, including my genetic inheritance, and my social, cultural, and political contexts and relationships. The social phenomenon of disability played out on various bodies demonstrates that we are both/and rather than either/or biological and social beings. The process through which society shapes unconventional bodies as defective foregrounds the textual nature of everyone's reality. The artificial dualism of the normal/abnormal binary binds both poles to dependency on perpetuating its myth (Silvers 238).

My understanding of Disability Studies does not arise solely from scholarship, but from my personal experience as well. I initially discovered the social model of disability, and disability theory in the humanities, during seemingly unrelated research for a paper while taking courses towards a Master's degree. I had returned to graduate studies in English in my middle-age, the parent of three daughters, the first and third with disability labels, the second struggling with a feeling of "difference" for not having a disability.²¹ The disability theories emerging from scholars world-wide were formulating a new discourse of human interrelations that resonated in my family experience. Disability Studies presented perspectives of disability that abrogated the ubiquitous disability narratives of tragedy, pity, and inspiration and explored the historical sources for the deeply rooted cultural ambivalence towards anomalous bodies. The concept of the social construction of deviance, or defect, reiterated to the extent of being naturalized, shed light on the quotidian discriminatory practices surrounding disability that our family encountered. I was continually appalled by the absence of popular outrage in the face of the systemic and personalized bigotry against disability. Similar treatment targeting women or visible minorities would surely provoke some protest.

Disability Studies provided a language that acknowledged and articulated the critical fact that my children were not the burden I was told they were. The way most people and all social institutions treated my family frequently drove me to despair, and yet these very people and systems attributed any and all hardship to my children first, and then to me. Ostensibly, my children were obliged to act as if they were not "disabled" and I was obliged to function as if they were not disabled. If we failed at this social task, we were at risk of being categorized as "needy" and dysfunctional. Actually, proof of this type of failure was requisite to being eligible for most "disability services."

Our eldest daughter, Myroslava, did not know she was "disabled" until she was in grade four. Until that time she was chronically ill, she used a wheelchair, she could not straighten her arms and she experienced periods of extreme pain. At the same time, in her home environment, she was able to get around anywhere she wanted. She was the oldest sister of two adoring siblings, she went to dance classes, sang in a choir, cooked meals with the family and so on. In other words, Myroslava's body was as it was and she did what she could, with and in, not despite, her body. If her body was "different" from mine,

for example, it was not “abnormal”; it was very normally hers. In grade four, however, the teacher saw Myroslava as the “special needs” student and treated her accordingly.²² Eventually students followed suit. It was a devastating, crippling experience for our daughter. Myroslava’s body at home was clever, flexible, exciting in its extraordinary angles and curves. Myroslava’s body at school was deformed, deviant.²³

The home environment has, for me, brought into relief the profound depth of social inscriptions on a person’s reality. When our third daughter was a toddler, she began to lose her acquired skills: speech, manual dexterity, and sociability eroded alarmingly for a year before she was diagnosed with a neurodegenerative condition called Rett Syndrome. There is no space in this work to describe the planet onto which these events transported us, as a family, but it is important to note the process of Othering that accompanied the shift from our position as a family with a child with a physical disability to a family who had a child with a developmental disability. Whereas Myroslava’s capabilities and articulateness underlined the attitudinal exclusion of people with disabilities from our society through inaccessible built environments, Aleksandra’s loss of language and body control revealed a systemic exclusion that spelled something more chilling: a rejection of the perceived “Other” from the human category. Aleksandra’s body relegated her to an entirely separate standard of treatment that would be unthinkable for the “average” person. Her experience, and ours as her family, is immersed so thoroughly in a narrative of abnormality that it borders on the impossible to envision an alternative text.²⁴ A multilayered discourse of monstrosity permeates the environment around those labelled “severely disabled,” justifying their alienation and subhuman treatment. Care for Aleksandra’s needs necessarily is characterized as a hardship, both socially and personally. Even after decades of policies of deinstitutionalization, professionals and popular opinion urge parents to “put away” their “defective” offspring for the good of the family and the child involved. If “kept” at home, the situation is deemed successful only if the family presents a normal façade, erasing traces of dis/ease for those around them, carrying on with schedules of work and recreation as expected. Failure to do so marks a failed family, a parent, especially a mother, unable to cope, a family destroyed by the burden of “dependency.” Social service agencies exist to support families. A typical service is respite provision, whereby a worker comes into the home to

perform care-giving duties to give the care-giver a break. The concept is commendable; however, the more intense and unusual the needed care, the less likely it is to find an adequate worker. Furthermore, respite services are often not easily accessed and have waiting lists that render the notion of service ludicrous. In my region, in-home services have a waiting list of two to three years. If a family member requires constant care, while parents are expected to pursue careers, either extended family networks must be activated in full force or the expected framework collapses. The cared-for person, under these circumstances, becomes the source of problems: ruined career, income loss, burnout, need for “charity.” The logical solution to this dilemma justifies the removal of the problem to an institutional milieu that will control and manage the disturbance, so that normalcy can be restored. The unforgivable sin in this societal event is that the family has failed to pretend to be “normal”; the child with disabilities has failed to disappear within family management.

The fact is that Aleksandra has done nothing to occasion her prohibition from the community relationships and activities that would give her a life less attached to me, her mother. The real “burden” for our family is not Aleksandra but the systematized social arrangements that refuse to value her enough to provide the relationships she needs. The grief generated by our ongoing struggles with the educational and health systems that mistreat our daughter is matched by the effect of an ostensible majority of non-disabled people who treat Aleksandra either as a pariah or a pet gerbil.

At home with her parents and sisters, with some close friends, Aleksandra too is able to be as she is. Her lack of control over bodily functions is not embarrassing; her drooling is neither shocking nor repulsive. She is wholly unknowable in her unusual body with its deteriorating systems, yet, at the same time, she is simply one of us. When a number of people respond to her with the care she requires, no one needs to be over-worked or deprived of other pursuits. This idea of cooperative care is activated in the L’arche communities established for and with people with disabilities by Jean Vanier. I have witnessed this community effect in some large families. However, we have no extended family willing to engage actively with Aleksandra. While my single, thirty-six year old niece is a wonderful “sitter” for the daughter of another sister, she has ignored Aleksandra and avoids our home altogether. If we lived in a society that accepted and

valued the unpredictable variety of human embodiment, there would be more people who would want to understand and appreciate Aleksandra's unique way of being. More people would want to be with her, to be her friend. I could conceivably leave my house without "burdening" someone or fearing abuse.²⁵ I could be Aleksandra's mother rather than the reluctant martyr, necessarily foregoing career possibilities, consumed with exhaustion and frustration, fighting the same battles for Aleksandra's inclusion over and over again each time we move, while others shake their head at the folly of refusing institutionalization. Aleksandra's body *is* dysfunctional when measured by social ideologies of individual independence, but it is a contrived imperative for a norm of sameness that configures her as abnormal and worthless. Society has not allowed discursive space in dominant narratives for Aleksandra's attributes as a unique human being or for her place in community life.

These reflections, for me, erase the fears of the social model's potential erasure of bodily experience. On the contrary, acknowledging the social shaping of disability difference unpacks notions of *the* body so that we can begin to explore corporeal reality beyond the limiting ideology of "body" as a known homogenous experience. The following is only a small excerpt from Cal Montgomery's critique of Martha Nussbaum's *Disabled Lives: Who Cares?*²⁶ In protesting her representation of "dependency," he compellingly describes the construction site, as it were, of his reality, articulating a process rarely put into words:

I know I am impaired by looking to others. I have looked to those who write psych, neuropsych, PT, OT, speech-language reports. To those who write books about people like me, who make careers working with people like me. I look to my interactions with nondisabled people, to the social and physical worlds they build for one another. They teach me about myself. They tell me what about me is strange to them, what makes them uncomfortable, what makes them laugh. They tell me *I am different*. They tell me how. And they tell me which parts of that difference are valuable, and which are emphatically not. They tell me about impairment . . . Disability is about a re-imaging of what it means to be treated differently.

If it is true that I know my impairment by looking to others, it is also true that I know my disability by looking to others. I look to those

who attempt the same things I do, I look at the barriers they face, and I judge my set of barriers against theirs. If I cannot get into the meeting room, can they? If I cannot find meaning in my teachers' sounds, can they? If I cannot get people in power to pause while I make my points, can they? I look to others to tell me what about my life is limited, constrained, disabled. They tell me *my life is different*, and they tell me which parts of that difference should be accepted, and which should emphatically not. They tell me about disability.

Montgomery encapsulates a process of meaning-making, illustrating the imposed value of various bodily behaviours.

The social situatedness of disability both as a construction and as a repressed corporeal reality generates an inherently postmodern perspective, able to be paradoxically both in and beyond the ideological norms, enabling views that direct the dismantling of entrenched boundaries of knowing. Jean François Lyotard describes postmodernism as a process, a condition, rather than a discrete period chronologically following the modern. Western history is brimming with postmodern “moments”—events, or individuals, who clearly challenged the status quo by consciously subverting established ideology, even while they participated in it.²⁷ Lyotard contends that world events in the first half of the twentieth century so disillusioned people that the most secure metanarratives came under scrutiny and collective certainty shattered. Enter postmodernism with its limitless questioning that continues to blur boundaries and shake cultural complacency.

As people with disabilities begin reclaiming voice and place, rejecting the repressive structures that largely determined their life trajectories, their appearance in the political arena currently serves the postmodern mandate by bringing into question naturalized assumptions about what is normal. In itself the disabled body—perceived as “the”—exposes the plethora of metanarratives that conduct consumerist culture. Manufactured standards of beauty, income, education, and recreation drive individuals to spend relentlessly in order to approximate the requisite norm, forever self-vigilant, practicing Foucauldian regulations of the self, policing ourselves to conform to imposed standards of normalcy while maintaining a discourse that values distinctiveness and uniqueness. The derogation of unconventional bodies labelled with disability subverts the

value our culture purports to place on individuality. Interrogating disability complicates social presumptions of “natural” human characteristics. Excavating notions of difference destabilizes ideas of sameness. When does difference pass from desirable to repulsive? Why do we normalize the risks of aesthetic surgery to achieve a look similar to that of (idealized) others and prosthetize unconventional bodies to hide their outstanding features while we praise diversity and originality?

Robert Murphy concluded that people with disabilities “are subverters of an American Ideal, just as the poor are betrayers of the American Dream” (116-17). Disability erodes the security sought in our hallowed mythologies of personal control and independence. The postmodern problematizing of these types of fundamental beliefs is incarnated in disability as an activated subject position. A naturalized idea of normalcy, based on an artificial binary subordination of disability as abnormality, begins to waver when the marker of the abject claims authoritative voice even while remaining abject, that is, without claiming normalcy in normalcy’s terms. What does it mean when the Bell Curve is exposed? What might it mean when knowing that the “fate worse than death” is not—that maybe death also might not be preferable to disability?²⁸ Certainly the questions Disability Studies poses in our culture are critical to the process of deconstructing the world that has created the human systems within which we function. Disability Studies, then, can be understood as Derridean deconstruction—not destruction—but rather “a pressing up against a limit in order to disturb its tranquility” (Caputo 32). Deconstruction, according to John Caputo, always addresses the other, always seeks to invite the other in and thus can never be completed. The process of deconstruction is a process of justice, as defined by Emmanuel Levinas: “justice is the relation to the other” (Caputo 17).²⁹ Because relationships are dynamic and reciprocal (open to the unknowable possibilities of one beyond myself), the openness to other always involves respect: “a respectful, responsible affirmation of the other” that subsequently reins in self-obsession (44).

It is noteworthy that contemporary influential thinkers such as Derrida, Levinas, and Ivan Illich illuminate the centrality of relationship towards other in notions of justice and ethics, yet this critical focus is largely occluded by their culturally more popular

work. A Disability Studies perspective gives material context to a philosophy that proposes radical shifts in cultural thinking.

The postmodern concept of the world as text in a continual process of being written, consciously and unconsciously, individually and collectively, creates another imperative as well, observed by Marshall McLuhan decades ago: every individual must recognize her/his authorship and hence, responsibility, to write with intention instead of being a blank slate to be written upon. A conscientization of “disability” in culture facilitates an understanding of this textualized nature of our social existence and the concomitant responsibility for individuals. The disability movement works to resituate disability as a marker of ordinary human diversity and people with disabilities as ordinary citizens who have a place and a right to be accommodated in ordinary social systems, rather than bearing the weight of metaphoric significance imposed on disability over time. Again, because the processes of negative configuration of disability have been so thorough, reconfiguration of this category enforces fundamental transformation of the collective psyche—the socio-cultural approach to our humanity. Paul Longmore warns that dominant ideologies threaten to “shackle” our “efforts to think in new ways about disability . . . and about ‘normality’ too.” He advocates for everyone to “examine what we think we know” if we are to progress in understanding of difference (*Why* 14).

As people with disabilities emerge from the accumulation of stereotypes that have governed their being, the texts that rely on disability’s symbolic mileage to achieve their intended impact must be revisited. New understandings of the metaphorized figures of disability will inevitably result in altered responses, fresh possibilities of meaning. Patrocínio Schweikart considers the permutations of consciousness required in the highly socialized institution of reading, whereby the reader with a label of disability is forced to identify with the able-bodied protagonist, endorsing the “equation of able-bodied with the universal” (163) in the way that not long ago the female reader was expected to think like a “universal” man. The literary enterprise, in this way, has been disabling for people with disabilities and for the collective imagination of readers.

In my family, typically, from the time our children were born, especially when our first daughter spent weeks and months confined to a bed, books and stories comprised a great deal of our world. As a young mother, I remember the fervour with which I

sought to read the old “favourites” out loud. I also remember the growing discomfort I suffered as I reiterated the tales of physical perfection as moral goodness and the crippling effect of moral depravity. Oops. And the tales of miracle cures as rewards for good behaviour or sincere prayer. What am I teaching my daughter whose body will never conform to the narrative heroines and heroes who populate the children’s section of the library? For whose sins is she suffering, hers or mine? It did not take long for story reading to be accompanied by mama’s critical commentaries. It was also not long before Myroslava was choosing and reading her own books. Our youngest, however, after losing her speech and control of her body movements, could not read on her own. Hence, I was reading not only story-books but also young reader’s chapter books and eventually teen and young adult fiction out loud to her. I have repeatedly found myself censoring material in mid-read but not because of graphic sex or obscene language. I recall my weary outrage when, this time in the *Baby Sitter’s Club* series, I encountered, once again, an image of a nuisance sibling with a disability.³⁰ How to circumvent these repeated images that seem to invade every other kid’s popular paperback? How is Aleksandra to interpret her place in the world when every image in her books that describes a body somehow similar to hers characterizes a tragic, pathetic, or unwanted individual? How is she to respond to her grade-ten class study of *The Miracle Worker*, named for the teacher, Anne Sullivan, who tames the wild, animalistic Hellen Keller and forces her into the human species by making her speak?³¹ I was exceedingly troubled by the dilemma of fictional representations of disability encountered by my book-loving family; but I had no idea that these issues were being acknowledged and analyzed by literary scholars equally concerned. I was riveted by Deborah Kent’s paper “In Search of a Heroine: Images of Women with Disabilities in Fiction and Drama,” describing her futile search for a literary heroine with whom she could identify. This led me to the prolific work of Disability Studies and literature, and its exploration of the representation of difference in text.

Lennard Davis has identified the evolution of Disability Studies scholarship in the humanities as participating in a pattern of developing cultural analysis created by emancipatory movements. He observes a three-step pattern involving, first, the exposure of negative stereotypes in cultural productions; second, the identification of historical

representations that are positive or subversive; and third, the theoretical phase addressing the need to reshape the cultural understanding of disability (“Enabling” 249).

David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder’s chapter “Representation and Its Discontents,” in *Narrative Prosthesis*, provides an overview of modes of literary criticism in Disability Studies, identifying five primary methodologies that follow the pattern Davis outlines. These methodological categories illustrate the development of analysis in literary studies as Disability Studies expands as a discipline in the liberal arts. Although the categories, as with any historical classifications, are not as discrete and chronological as presented, they represent a valuable range of insights into disability portrayals that synchronically facilitate interpretation of disability’s function within texts.

According to Mitchell and Snyder, research using the first model, Negative Imagery, has revealed a predominance of negative portrayals that correspond to the demeaning social stereotyping of people with disabilities in lived experience. Work such as Leonard Kriegel’s “Disability as Metaphor in Literature” demonstrates that habitualized portraits and plots in narrative historically represented a medicalized view that reduced the disabled figure to an impairment that evoked either inspiration through heroic transcendence or pity for the failure it signified. Disability is revealed as being relentlessly represented as an isolating individual blight, devoid of social and political contexts. This critical model condemns “the metaphoric opportunism of literature as a form of public slander” (197) and calls for awareness of the powerful and pernicious conventions used by mainstream media. It is important to underline the distinction made between stereotypical portraits and positive ones. Positive representations are equally fraught in the processes that reify figures of disability. Mitchell and Snyder point out that although the Negative Imagery model is too reductive and decontextualized, it has disclosed the textualized process of disability construction in culture (*Narrative Prosthesis* 20).

Because currently the concept of disability is still anchored to a discourse of misfortune and need, there has been no ready language to convey experiences of disability that belie the existing paradigms circulating in mass media, cultural productions, and social policy. Whereas the encounter with gender or race stereotypes in literature and popular culture can be readily contradicted through encounters with those

who do not fit the picture, disability experience is still shrouded in mystery and segregated to the extent that stereotypes that fit our expectations are not as easily identified or acknowledged, even to the person labelled with disability. Carol Poore discusses the “grave consequences” a cultural heritage of negative images of disability has had on disabled people’s lives, concluding that not only is the exposure of stereotypes and negative metaphors necessary, but the identification and creation of disability representations that defy stereotype is “central to the liberatory project” of Disability Studies (261-62).

The second model, Social Realism, identifies a need for realistic representations of disability rather than the sterile metaphors that occupy both fiction and non-fiction. Social Realists are concerned with the lack of representation of disability in its troubled relationship with physical and attitudinal environments. The popular life-writer and scholar, Nancy Mairs, observes that “the mediated picture of disabled life is so untrue to that life’s realities as to encourage the view that disabled people constitute sores on the social body to be eradicated rather than ordinary wens and freckles to which any flesh is heir” (Linton 114). Again, this model distinguishes between “acceptable” portrayals and “positive” ones. According to David Hevey “acceptable portrayals entail the refusal to disavow or suppress the site of struggle and oppression that characterizes a contemporary experience of disability” (24). This critical model is openly politicized and necessitates the engagement of people with disabilities in the construction of their own images as a strategy for claiming civil rights.

The overlapping issues of these two models strain the need for separate categorizations. Identifying the pervasive stereotyping that is mistakenly presumed to be realistic participates in the political process of the disability movement. Without the dissenting voices of disability activists, stereotypes would continue to masquerade as realism. Mitchell and Snyder contend that the models of both Negative Imagery and of the social realists fail to historicize interpretations, thus depreciating their value. Correcting this lacuna is the New Historicist model, whereby scholars situate disability images within their historical context and examine that culture’s response to human variation. Lennard Davis’s *Enforcing Normalcy* exemplifies this category. Disability

New Historicists have shifted the academic gaze from disability as pathology to the non-disabled “normal” as the “producer of pathology” (29).

In *Bending Over Backwards*, Davis argues that the novel genre is created as a means through which sameness is fashioned and deployed by a growing European middle class in the eighteenth century. A rising middle class consolidated their social hegemony by establishing an image of normalcy, in narratives purporting realism, that vilified divergence from a narrow prescription of roles and behaviour. Deviance from mandated design was portrayed as criminal, and the criminal received recognizable substance in the figure of the non-conforming body. Davis contends that literature responds to the need to ceaselessly reiterate an ableist myth of normalcy in order to sustain normalcy’s primacy. He describes the novel’s requisite conjuring of a spectre of non-conformity embodied in recognizable “difference” that endangers the protagonist. Davis argues that by narratively eliminating the threat posed symbolically through disability by its cure, death, or banishment, normalcy (conformity and order) is restored.³² Leslie Fiedler identifies this pattern as a method of appeasing a primeval desire to murder what is viewed as abnormality. He presents Dickens’s Tiny Tim as an archetypal example. This iconic character, Fiedler argues, is eliminated twice: first in the dream sequence and then by Scrooge’s transformation (66). Paul Longmore describes how this ubiquitous tale has spawned a lucrative industry of telethons founded on the display of “defective” children compelling charity, which provides a ritualized display of public virtue (136).

The most pernicious consequence of this literary pattern of conjuring and erasing disability is, without doubt, its ramifications in lived experience. Once disability is firmly embedded in text as a trope so standard its presence registers its metaphoric significance on readers’ subconscious but eludes their conscious recognition, the readers are drawn to participate in the effective reification of disability. Conditioned by a standardized system of education in English, readers learn to respond appropriately to literary conventions. How can we begin to distinguish when our perception/reception of lived reality, of real people, has slipped from a page of fiction? When learned literary associations of disability have become a naturalized reflex, the imperative then is consciously to unlearn the enculturated sentiment that is, in the main, still unacknowledged. New knowledge cannot be garnered without denaturalizing the prejudicial perceptions of disability as

inherently negative, aesthetically and socially undesirable, and onerous for both the individual and society. Without careful vigilance the medicalized understanding of disability may obscure potential insights of a Disability Studies approach. Literature provides historical evidence of norms that alter through time and place, demonstrating “concepts of the norm as not only flawed and artificial, but feeding a eugenicist mindset” (Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 29) in order to validate their “normalcy.” Unravelling the opposing binary constructions of the ab/normal potentially liberates cultural perception to receive all bodies as legitimately human.

The next model, Biographical Criticism, a subset of New Historicism, is innovative in that an author’s personal experience of disability is probed. This school of criticism investigates “the inevitable impact of disability upon the creator’s worldview” (30), revisioning disability as a fertile source of creativity. In its varied forms, Biographical Criticism involves a “coming out of the closet” for disability perspectives either in historical texts or situated within the critical perspective. In this approach, scholars apply their experience of disability to (re)analyse historical texts that portray disability or are written by disabled authors, such as Helen Deutsch’s *Resemblance and Disgrace*. Another particular concern of this critical model is the illustration of medicine in literature. Like the movement to undermine mythologies of normalcy, Biographical Criticism implies a view beyond the conventional invalidation of difference to an affirmative discovery and acknowledgement of disability subjectivity.

The final category, Transgressive Reappropriation, encompasses a radical approach to the history of dehumanizing treatment of disability in cultural texts. This model strives to embrace, as a source of power, the facets of disability that have been systemically contained and controlled. Since literature is often a venue for social critique, the preponderance of portrayals of unconventional embodiment needs to be inspected from the vantage point of desirable resistance to imposed norms. While alerted to the danger of romanticizing the “possibilities implicit in disability’s transgressive ‘outings’” (40), this critical perspective seeks to find ways that disability is inscribed as a subversive confrontation to normalizing pressures.

Mitchell and Snyder’s review of literary Disability Studies methods of critique is most valuable in illuminating the multifaceted trajectory of disability as a modality for

reading text. The blurring of these categories demonstrates the developments in an intellectual project that introduces and builds on fresh discoveries and ideas.³³ Representing disability as a complicated and complicating lens through which literary meanings are found is in itself transgressive—politically, socially, culturally, aesthetically. Mitchell and Snyder argue that the historical pervasiveness of figures of disability “situate disability as both origin and end—its desired eradication in each generation is countered only with the ferocity of an ultimate recalcitrance to such violent ‘utopian’ programs” (41). Studying these textual narratives of disability provides insight into a “surprisingly uneven and multifaceted” history of dynamics between cultures and individual differences (43) suggesting possibilities for building a society we desire rather than perpetuating the society we imagine we have (45). In this way Mitchell and Snyder demonstrate the engagement of theory in social ethics.

Mitchell and Snyder’s theory of narrative prosthesis illustrates a process of Transgressive Reappropriation. The authors argue that throughout the history of literature, because the disabled figure signals any deviance from norms, it serves as the “the master trope of disqualification” (3). This valuable position of non-compliance renders disability “a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight” (49). Mitchell and Snyder’s use of the metaphor of prosthesis is variegated, drawing on theoretical concepts from other scholars, exposing the “prosthetic nature of all intellectual endeavor” (xii). Mitchell and Snyder describe their own academic and personal collaboration as “reveal[ing] the interdependency of independence” (xii). Their argument resonates profoundly in my own life as it would for anyone who has struggled to incorporate caregiving with other responsibilities. The authors’ notion of prosthesis derives from David Will who conceives of the gap between language and the material world as irrecoverable.³⁴ Therefore, the relationship between bodies and external language is one of pretense: a prosthetic relationship that presumes a grasp of materiality that is never complete, just as a prosthetic presumes to “normalize” a defect but serves to sustain the contrived differential between ab/normal, since the normal body is itself “an unachievable theoretical premise” (7). Thus, Mitchell and Snyder argue that disability, as narrative prosthetic, serves as the reason for telling a story, but the conventional resolution of the

disabling factor reconfirms the normalcy imperative by creating a (prosthetized) illusion of wholeness after eliminating the “defect.” While Davis presents as a socio-political technique to maintain a hegemonic norm, this dependency on writing images of disability in order to erase them, Mitchell and Snyder perceive this phenomenon of disability as a fundamental element of the narrative genre, central but hidden—prosthetic. According to Mitchell and Snyder, the role of Disability Studies is to uncover this prosthetic relationship between disability and literature, subsequently unleashing the socio-political dimensions of disability that disappear in light of its symbolic tasks.

Eva Darius-Beautell’s Bakhtinian approach to text outlines a process that supports the notion of *narrative prosthesis*. Beautell argues that ideological meaning must be penetrated through a dialogical approach to language that “includes evaluation and response” (352). By searching out and articulating an “interplay of differences,” the critical enterprise creates a language for new social relations, thus reinscribing narrative meaning. She points out that meaning, always complex and multiple, is determined “by the interaction of specific discursive practices; it becomes the product of an endless dialogue of social languages, ... unitary only in the abstract” (Bakhtin in Darius-Beautell 356). Narrative, then, is more than the sum of its parts, and literary critical theory shackles or frees the textual voices inherent in a social heteroglossia. Disability Studies in literature is positioned to release narrative from the stagnating impulse towards homogeneity and to engage in the “theoretical dismantlings of the subject of the enlightenment” (26). By dissolving the glue holding the image of disability to the isolating determinism of medical pathology, literary criticism can undertake an ethical practice of confronting diversity. By liberating voices not tethered to metaphors of defect, literary criticism widens the scope of human experience in the collective imagination. Textual encounters with the “Other” may become desired encounters with ourselves that in turn may uncover our social dependence on difference, not as a buttress to a tyrannical homogeneity or norm, but as a deeper understanding of interdependence and the wonder of human diversity.³⁵ Perceiving disability as an analytic stance from which to understand human culture and social concerns with difference reveals critical reading as an ethical as well as a political exercise.

Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price discuss the moral imperative that exists within the phenomenon of difference and culture.³⁶ They contend, along with other Disability Studies theorists, that the modernist notion of what is right is founded on “a model of equal, autonomous and fully self-contained subjects” that disavows difference; consequently, “[w]hat is morally expeditious falls short of ethical responsibility in relationship” (73). These authors argue for a Derridean approach to ethics that is activated in the face of the other: the “response/ibility” to the unknowability of the one who is not me. Derrida rejects the delimitation of moral codes that presume advance knowledge of a categorized other. “Instead, ethical engagement—what he sees as the moment of decision between self and other—can only claim that name if it opens itself to radical difference and undecidability” (73). Price and Shildrick maintain that the lived experiences of people with disabled bodies in their incommensurable fluidity explain this ethical imperative of attentiveness and response to situated difference: “The disintegrity and permeability of bodies, the fluctuations and reversibility of touch, the inconsistency of spatial and morphological awareness, the uncertainty of the future, are all features that may be experienced with particular force in the disabled body, but they are by no means unique to it” (74). This approach demands an acknowledgement of otherness that necessitates a conscious attentiveness to each particular other before knowing or guessing how to respond (Derrida 71). Derrida’s ethics of responsibility corresponds with Ivan Illich’s description of sin as a betrayal of relationship, a “denial of your dignity” rather than a transgression of rules (62). Both philosophers focus on the socially neglected imperative of acknowledging the uniqueness (differences) of individuals and the context of interactions among individuals.

A situation at our daughter’s school illustrates this institutional betrayal of relationship that can be seen as emblematic of systemic treatment of individuals with anomalous bodies. Aleksandra’s degenerative condition has resulted in a loss of steady control over her movements. After she lost her speech, she spelled out words by pointing to letters on an alphabet board or sheet. As her control decreased she required increasing assistance to steady her hand to spell. This type of communication assistance has been used and documented in various contexts and is called Facilitated Communication.³⁷ Because the process necessitates a facilitator, who might guide the spelling rather than

provide the required support for the individual's hand, Aleksandra's communication is particularly vulnerable to abuse or error. Nevertheless, currently, this is the only method that enables Aleksandra's verbal expression, and albeit strenuous, minimal, and imprecise, it is invaluable. After a cross-country move, Aleksandra began grade twelve in our new city. I spent many hours at the school to "train" facilitators, without whom Aleksandra is, in effect, muzzled. She understands when people talk *at* her and ask her questions without allowing her to answer. It must be like one long dentist's appointment. After many weeks, the school administration informed me that Facilitated Communication was not sanctioned by the provincial association of speech and language pathologists and therefore it is forbidden within the school system. Period. However, the administrators assured us that Aleksandra is welcome to use any other "official" communication.³⁸ They had not even met Aleksandra, nor had they any knowledge of her particular situation. Her files clearly show that there is no better alternative to the system Aleksandra now uses. There was no encounter, no reading and response. There was only institutional policy driven by "health-care" professional opinion that had nothing to do with education. Outraged, we pressed for an assessment by their own Board speech and language pathologist. The specialist's assessment concluded that it would be "inhumane" to remove Aleksandra's mode of communication, since it was the only way she could possibly express words. After months of wasted effort, frustration and humiliation for Aleksandra, the glaringly obvious (her need to communicate as she could) was pronounced and authorized by the system.

This reductive, systemic medicalization of people with disabilities is not only unethical but their categorical excision from normality also betrays the fullness of our humanity. Thus, a disability perspective provides a paradigm not only for openness to unique variabilities of individual others, but also for the current struggle to negotiate global and systemic interrelationships, just as attention to the social model of Disability Studies may facilitate an understanding of the human diversity in our global culture by highlighting the vertiginous processes of shaping difference. While Canada overtly struggles to create a political national unity in the absence of one shared historical culture and language, the need to live together as collectives of "others" is plainly no longer seen as exclusive to Canada.

The intricate web of issues surrounding fundamental individual and collective interrelationships in society, which Disability Studies probes, is critical to issues of democracy and citizenship. The Canadian social policy researcher, Michael Prince, warns that “in the face of persistent inequalities, disadvantages and numerous forms of discrimination, the issue of disability remains a profound challenge to the ideal of citizenship in liberal democratic states. People with disabilities . . . still are among the most vulnerable, at risk of poverty and exclusion around the world” (466). In the contemporary global arena, Disability Studies interests are increasingly salient. Nevertheless, Disability Studies inquiry into what appears to be a national impulse towards homogeneity is particularly suited to issues in Canadian studies.

In Canada, we have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that affords basic human and civil rights to all people regardless of gender, race, class, or ability. The murder of children by parents is considered particularly abhorrent, transgressing a vulnerable child’s right to protection. Yet, when a father in Saskatchewan deliberately planned and executed his daughter’s death in 1993, he was configured as a folk hero in the media and subsequently garnered mass popular support providing money and opposition to his incarceration. Ruth Enns in *A Voice Unheard* details the blatant yet unexamined bias that pervades the vast majority of representations of the daughter as “severely disabled,” effectively portraying not a human being but a mass of suffering.³⁹ The Supreme Court of Canada has upheld this killing as murder, but an openly unrepentant Latimer continues to generate support for what has become a campaign defending his right to “merciful” killing. Would we Canadians, proud of our Charter of Rights at home and abroad, perceive Latimer as anything but criminal if our encounters with textual representations of disability did not resolve the disability through erasure? Might our unquestioning reception of literary figures of disability in Canada participate in an unwitting genocide of sorts? These questions may not have satisfactory (indisputable) answers, but raising them serves an important purpose.

Anglo-Canadian literature is distinctive in English literary history in that it has evolved self-consciously as a national voice in the midst of an ongoing identity crisis. Significantly, the original self-deprecating tone of Northrop Frye’s famed query “Where is here?” can resonate proudly in a postmodern milieu, with its implications of self-

reflexivity, recognition of context, situatedness, limits. Canada's identity dilemma that demands ongoing negotiation has been central in Canada's development as a global model for cooperative politics.⁴⁰ In *The Canadian Postmodern*, Linda Hutcheon positions Canada as genetically postmodern, unable thoroughly to impose classic metanarratives of power since its inception as a country not only with an Aboriginal population, but with French as well as British colonizers. Also, the early colonizers' maintenance of colonial status and mentality blurred discrete boundaries between power and victim. While the various historical interpretations of Canada's beginnings are arguable, there is no doubt that Canada's overt multiplicity is among its most remarkable features.

While diversity is a Canadian geographic and cultural commonplace, the relatively recent entrance of what was formerly conceived as "ethnic" and "Aboriginal" writing into the mainstream national oeuvre has troubled the placid vision of "multicultural" harmony.⁴¹ Work such as Erin Manning's *Ephemeral Territories* argues for vigilance against mollifying policies that purport equality in diversity while asserting control over otherness by reducing it to sanctioned rituals of display. The claim to centrality of formerly marginalized identities provides a lush climate for understanding wholeness as process, for resisting a desire for fixedness and sameness that has maintained controlling power for the arbiters of who enters the roster of approved difference. Canada and Canadian literature provide an arena to negotiate harmony amid diversity rather than neutralizing otherness into a British power status that Daniel Coleman terms "White civility."⁴² Since disabled experience has been omitted from this fluid process of negotiating Canadian identity, its introduction will unfetter our conceptions and negotiations of difference, revealing more clearly the forms of interlocking systems of oppression that prevent socio-political equality. If both Canada and disability are inherently postmodern, then it is time to bring both into a common discourse, which will facilitate the process of responding to Frye's "Where is here?" by deepening our imagining of *who* is here.

The Canadian national "Who's who?" of the past was largely informed by the programs of difference control promoted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the scientific strategy for social reform: eugenics. Eugenics was widely accepted in Canada until the exposure of the Nazi extermination programs precipitated its

fall from grace (Enns 72-4). Legitimated by science and in some areas by legislation, eugenicists believed in the creation of a superior race of people through selective “breeding.” Since the science of the day believed social ills to be hereditary, as well as the exclusive domain of “defectives,” the eugenics project was to identify, isolate and sterilize those deemed unfit. Disability Studies suggests that the eugenic impulse continues, similarly legitimated by the sacred powers of science and progress, under the revised label of genetics and prenatal testing.⁴³ At the same time, literary images and interpretations of anomalous bodies fortify the eugenic distortions of society.

Davis delves into the “national project” of literature “in which representative character types are emplotted into narrative situations” (*Bending* 44-5). He considers the national interest in marking the figures of “non-nationals, women and minorities” as anomalous as well as the conflation of bodily traits and moral virtues. The Disability Studies arguments linking texts, readers, ethics, and society suggest that readers are involved in the enterprise of nation building and hence have a moral obligation to ask what kind of society we want and why. The French historian, Henri Jacques Stiker, emphasizes the need to recognize the difference labelled as disability not as “integrable” into society, but rather as “integral” to society. Disability needs to be acknowledged as a universal human reality not to be perpetually rehabilitated or prosthetized before it can be “tolerated.” He poses the challenge:

Whatever you do, whichever battle you fight, whichever course of action you attempt, with what are you going to inform it all? The love of difference or the passion for similarity? The former—especially if it becomes socially contagious (through education, cultural action, political action)—leads to *human* life. The latter leads, in full-blown or latent form, to exploitation, repression, sacrifice, rejection. Yes or no, can we live together in fundamental mutual recognition, or must we exclude one another? (11)

Stiker’s query is of particular concern to Canada’s sustained status as a work in progress, an identity in formation. Canadian history can be viewed as a struggle between the forces of difference and similarity articulated by Stiker. A focus on disability illuminates formative Canadian attitudes to difference that need addressing if Canada’s pluralist

vision is to materialize. "When devaluation and discrimination happen to one person, it is biography, but when, in all probability, similar experiences happened to millions, it is social history" (Longmore, "Re: H-Dis").

Education and immigration policies throughout Canadian history reflect a mandate to homogenize a Canadian population into an arbitrary norm that necessitates the rejection of people with disabilities as resisters to enforced conformity. Eugenic perspectives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries still inform the practice of current school and border systems despite generations of changing philosophies towards social configurations of Otherness. Judith Mosoff from the law faculty of the University of British Columbia argues that "[e]xclusion from the mainstream of Canadian social and political life has been the historical norm for persons with disabilities" (150). Furthermore, she demonstrates that this endemic discrimination is clearly evident in immigration policy and practice: "The same ideological mechanisms which keep Canadians with disabilities and their families 'outsiders' to the benefits of the Canadian state operate in a more direct way to keep people with disabilities outside of Canada" (150).

The intentional nature of Canada's political construction as a country has been mythologized as engendering national traits of communal responsibility and respect for difference. The strength of this metanarrative is evident today in the prevailing popular misconception that the Canadian military is in Afghanistan for peace-keeping. Although "Canadian" humanitarian ideals are worthy of promotion in any society, contemporary scholarship reveals a Canadian society that historically has not always functioned according to its ideologies of justice. Current perspectives confronting history from formerly marginalized and silenced perspectives shatter the dominant romanticized illusions of our Canadian heritage in order to re-form a more inclusive nation whose legitimized multiplicity strives towards the practice of Canada's ideals of equality. Michael Ignatieff argues that the project of sustaining a state-nation instead of what was presumed to be a nation-state (with a pre-existing shared history, culture, and language) hinges on an ongoing effort of imagination whereby all individuals can be understood as having innate rights as human beings (128).⁴⁴ When rights are unequally distributed, they are privileges (55); and, as Peggy McIntosh argues, certain groups or types of people

enjoy unearned advantages that, albeit unacknowledged, are typically requisite for positions of power. But by mid-twentieth century, the vision of Canada as a sovereign state also included the vision of Canada as a classless state of equal opportunity. The disclosure of Canada's history of abuse of Aboriginal populations, the assimilation policies for non-British immigrants, the federal apologies for internment camps of Japanese and Ukrainians, as well as the Chinese head tax, demonstrate a national failure to understand that equality does not entail sameness (61). The fallacy of equality as sameness is a crucial barrier obstructing the implementation of Canadian ideals founded on the protection of rights to be different. The issue of disability, therefore, presents the linchpin to Canada's identity as a nation of pluralism and diversity. The histories of disability experience in Canada are only beginning to be told. But the systemic, institutionalized exclusion of people with disabilities illustrates the crux of our national struggle as a state-nation. National policies towards the difference marked as disability suggest that our ideology of equal rights for all human individuals is subordinate to economic concerns. Judith Mosoff argues that the economic justifications for excluding people with disabilities from full participation in Canadian society "mask a more fundamental stereotype" that degrades the humanity of people with labels of disability (149). The federal institutions of immigration and education that participate in the shaping and monitoring of the national body have privileged the potential for income generation over the concern for acknowledging equal human value.

The institution of public schools providing free and compulsory education not only created a venue for standardizing the knowledge of future citizens but also facilitated the creation of the "feeble-minded" as a social classification (McLaren 91). Intelligence Quotient tests which "relied on cultural experiences and the verbal skills and practices of the cultural elite" (92), together with medical examinations and teacher observations of "deviant" behaviour, became the means to identify the "abnormal" children in order to remove them from classrooms where they might contaminate those worthy of instruction. "Special" classes have remained the standard for students unable to conform to expectations of normal performance, despite a period beginning in the 1980s when inclusive classrooms were purported to be the best pedagogical option.⁴⁵ Mandatory inclusion policies by some ministries of education in provinces such as British Columbia

and New Brunswick have most often not produced classrooms where students with anomalies are in fact included as valued members. My family's experience as well as my involvement with national disability organizations suggests that students with disabilities, particularly in secondary schools, continue to be segregated, not to improve the disabled students' quality of education, although this is the premise, but rather to protect "superior" learners from the problems the disabled students ostensibly present.⁴⁶ Since the addition of disability to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1985 (Roehrer 10), families have legally challenged their child's exclusion in schools as an infringement of justice and civil rights (63-77). Nevertheless, inclusion continues to be a contentious issue in Canada's system of education.

Similarly, immigration policies discriminate against people with disabilities, despite dramatic reforms in federal attitudes towards difference. During the earliest years of colonization, before the erection of asylums, persons identified as mentally or physically incompetent were deported to their country of origin. Nevertheless, Canada's first *Immigration Act*, 1869, did not openly forbid anyone entry into Canada. Disability was monitored, however. Section fifteen of the Act stipulates that a ship-master is obliged to "report in writing to the collector, the name and age of all passengers of such vessel on such voyage, who are lunatic, idiotic, deaf and dumb, blind, and infirm, stating also whether they're supported by relatives able to support them or not." However, future legislation regarding immigration became increasingly selective, denying certain groups entry while encouraging others. By 1906 the *Immigration Act* specified who was not welcome in Canada. Among these were prostitutes, persons judged insane, and epileptics ("A Historical Overview"). Individuals with a mental or physical disability were also deemed "undesirables." In 1976, immigration laws changed from prohibiting specific types of disability to refusing those "expected to be a drain on state resources" (Mosoff 153). Currently, a medical examination still determines eligibility. Admission is denied to any one predicted to cause "excessive demands" on Canadian social service systems. Typically, undefined "excessive demands" are presumed to accompany a label of disability even in a context of family reunification. Mosoff argues that the exclusion of disability from Immigration policy demonstrates the persistence of eugenic stereotypes of people with disabilities as "contagious, dangerous, not quite human, or non-persons"

(155). The current biased practice “is really a new twist on an old policy that is based on even older stereotypes” (157).

When two physicians practicing in Saskatchewan for seven years applied for landed immigrant status, their application was denied because one of their children had a disability label. Since both parents were medical doctors, they enjoyed highly preferred status and a lucrative income; there were no indications that this family would strain the social system. Yet they were to be deported on the basis of disability (“Living in Limbo”). Hence, even though the human rights code precludes disability as a basis for discrimination, systemic practice demonstrates otherwise. Mosoff concludes that the present immigration system’s discrimination against people with disabilities and their families is “unjust and inconsistent with Canadian values” (154). Recognizing the disjuncture between the Canadian metanarratives of hospitality and celebration of diversity and institutionalized discriminatory treatment of people labeled as disabled presents a venue for reconstructing national meaning.

It is through stories that we make sense of ourselves and our surroundings, and it is the collective understanding of given stories that form disciplines of knowledge. Like science, critical theory has formed its own narratives that legitimate meaning in literature. Expanding the repertoire of interpretation to incorporate a Disability Studies perspective broadens the critical narrative to incorporate new voices that can speak to a re-visioning of images and re-symbolizing of tropes that can transform social policy and practice. As Garland Thomson observes: “Realism depends on rules of everyday experience and a shared interpretive perspective for its effect. It relies on a recognition and agreement with the dominant order” (“Speaking” 246). The task, therefore, is to inject the open-ended variability of disability experience into the realm of the ordinary, into the realm of the real, without retreating into homogenizing conventions. James Wilson and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson suggest using the postcolonial notion of “third-space” as a method for interpreting cultural meaning and symbols as malleable. They contend that activating a Disability Studies critical awareness in literature classes can vitalize our capacity, at once “historical, ethical and aesthetic,” to reimagine other people and ourselves, actively reconstructing society through interpretation (302).

Similarly, in a politicized call for social reconstruction, Tanya Titchkosky argues for the importance of disability as a voice of culture from the space removed from culture: “the whisper of that seemingly unsayable that resonates with new content, new meaning, inserting itself into our understanding of the social significance of the situation of disability” (*Reading* 236). Wilson and Lewiecki-Wilson’s “third-space” of disability parallels what Titchkosky terms a “potentially radical space of between-ness” (237) where conventional values meet the personification of their resistance, offering “alternative ways of being-in-the world” (237). The very “lack” with which disability is stigmatized, Titchkosky concludes, lends it the ambiguity of liminality, “and this ambiguity ironically clarifies our understanding of the body and how it might speak to the human condition” (239).

Disability Studies scholars frequently evoke the notion of disability as liminality. This anthropological concept, explored by Victor Turner, signifies the ritual space of transition between social identities. The participant figuratively and often literally leaves the community to enter into an ambiguous space beyond the known order in order to reappear transformed. (For Example, a child leaves his family home for a period of wilderness training with elders. He returns no longer a boy, but a man.) This concept of liminality is salient on multiple levels in a Disability Studies perspective that invites a transformation of the dominant order that has served to repress the richness of human corporealities. Contrary to Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s interpretation of disability’s liminal situation as one of “pure possibility” (249), Murphy describes the liminal status of people with disability as “ritually polluted” (133), signifying a type of death to former social status, trapped in a state aptly encompassed in the title of Turner’s essay “Betwixt and Between” (131). According to Murphy, disability equalizes those affected and subordinates them to the “authority” of medical professionals, paralleling the “complete authority and complete submission” that Turner observed between elders and neophytes during the isolation and instruction phase of the ritual (131). Murphy’s observation and experience sees the disabled person imprisoned in the in-between, neither dead nor alive, but forbidden to re-emerge into the requisite wholeness of the mainstream. In contrast, the liminal space delineated by disability scholars such as Rosemarie Garland Thomson and Tanya Titchkosky entails an ongoing process of emergence for the person with a

disability, not as an assimilated sameness or tolerated difference but rather as a transformer, a valued member of a society who draws on “incoming” perspectives for meaning. The social nature of disability suggests that, when brought to consciousness through the writing and reception of literature, disability awareness will invariably inform political and material structures. In other words, disability as liminality can entail re-entering the mainstream refigured as a viable member of the community (through text); the re-entry necessarily shifts the space entered.

Thomson suggests that this incorporation of perspectives from discounted forms of embodiment revitalizes all perception, defamiliarizing habitualized practice and bringing it into renewed being. The “rejected body” (Wendell), while suffering the disenfranchisement of a stigmatized identity, has the ironic potential benefit of a somewhat perverse freedom that illuminates the limitations of normalcy (Thomson, “Speaking” 250). Perhaps the national impulse to control and contain disability is less a fear of contamination than a fear of the incommensurability of the power in “difference” that Mitchell and Snyder view as the source of disability’s power as “narrative prosthetic.” I propose that reading from a Disability Studies perspective draws the reader into the liminal space of possibility, stretching our awareness of human capacities in relationship. I emphatically affirm Davis’s conclusion “that a Disabilities Studies consciousness can alter the way we see not just novels that have main characters who are disabled but any novel” (*Constructing* 23). Once this consciousness changes the way we read novels, then inevitably it will change the way we interpret and understand our lived experience.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson discusses nationalism as a phenomenon made possible by conceptual shifts engendered by capitalist print culture. Disparate readers could imagine solidarity with others who shared the knowledge imparted by the printed material. Imagined solidarities are manipulated by political powers through deliberate official nation building, which Anderson terms “russification” after the Czarist colonizing paradigm of catalyzing all public systems of education to impose Russian language and culture as the mandatory homogenizing norm (140). Homogeneity is imagined as natural while difference is vilified.⁴⁷ In the eurocentric (reading) world, disabled people have not been imagined as readers and speakers. The

russification of normalcy has created disability as the abnormal Other to be feared and destroyed. The disabled body is constructed as a symbol of Otherness and is repeatedly used to signal the menace of the foreigner. Western nationhood, and specifically Canadian nationhood, has in the main deliberately imagined disability outside of community.⁴⁸ Textual images of disability are interpreted typically in keeping with the enculturated national imagination that removes disability from the community of ostensible sameness into the realm of Otherness. Therefore, as Davis asserts, if “a Disability Studies consciousness can alter the way we see” (*Constructing* 23) and hence the way we read, then the reinsertion of disability as human diversity into readers’ imaginations actively participates in the reinvention of Canada as a more inclusive nation, less fearful of difference.

Building on Anderson, Homi Bhabha focuses on the creativity inherent in understanding nationhood as a fiction that, to maintain essentialist identities, relies on the reiteration of a totalizing pedagogical narrative for imagined communities. The official pedagogical narration of nation erases uncomfortable histories that belie imagined uniformity of knowledge and experience. Bhabha distinguishes between a taught curriculum of normalization and the performative reality of voices that do not conform to the official national narrative. He contends that minority and marginal voices provide a consistent counter-discourse to the norm, which necessarily undermines and shifts its boundaries. The performative resistance to the pedagogical imposition can be seen in novels where meanings cannot be controlled and standardized.

Disability embodies not simply the cultural difference, but rather the human difference that belies sedimented homogenizing ideologies of modernist nationhood. The “performative” presence of disability in national literature provides a location where “forgotten” subjectivities may undermine the modernist myth of a national cohesiveness. Disability in Canadian literature provides the “subaltern voice that speaks betwixt and between times and places” (309), occupying a liminal space on the margins of imagined boundaries of nationhood. This liminal territory becomes a creative force that participates in the ongoing process of negotiating national identity by representing integral difference which cannot be assimilated but must be addressed as a perspective from within the borders of an imagined nation.

Reading disability as a signifier of national ambivalence unleashes its transformative potential. Re-defining the symbolic structuring of disability in narratives of nationhood reshapes the cultural imaginary to recognize and include insurmountable human variation. When reading Canadian literature through a Disability Studies lens, “we encounter the question of cultural difference as the perplexity of living, and writing, the nation” (311). In other words, reading disability provides a means to address the issue of difference as a human constant within a national body, rather than as a threat to a constructed fiction of sameness.

Canadian identity, just like personal identity, emerges from the stories that take up residence in our imaginations and through familiarity become instilled there as if a natural essence. The narratives examined in this dissertation are among those that have given shape and meaning to being Canadian. Each text includes images of disability and these portraits inform national attitudes towards normalcy and difference. However, the novels were not selected because of their disability portrayals. They were chosen from the University of Saskatchewan field examination reading list for Canadian literature because of their prominence in our Canadian literary heritage. I was interested in applying a Disability Studies reading to our canonical oeuvre of national literature and discovered that my most random searches yielded rich material for consideration. Consequently, the works examined are merely samples of Canadian novels that have enough historical significance to qualify as mandatory reading for graduate students of English Canadian literature. The first two novels discussed in the dissertation represent the early and late nineteenth century, while the others span the decades of the twentieth century until the seventies. I end this work in the seventies because this period seems to herald a growing change in approaches to difference in Canadian fiction. For example, a burgeoning “minority” literature begins to shift from the margins to the mainstream of Canadian culture. Thus, novels written since the nineteen-eighties warrant a separate study. I want to emphasize that any work from Canada’s literary history could be analyzed from a Disability Studies perspective. Because difference and disability are socially negotiated, examining the narrative use of disability can reveal much about society. My analysis and choice of texts is not definitive; disability may function differently in other selections of literature. My goal is to defamiliarize portrayals of

disability and to point to their role in shaping Canadian attitudes towards corporeal diversity and, consequently, towards social relations.

Thomas McCulloch's nineteenth-century story of Mephibosheth Stepsure uses disability to illuminate human corporeality and the resourcefulness generated by acknowledging one's limitations. In the *Stepsure Letters*, disability compels a perspicacity in relationships, exposing superficiality and facilitating opportunities for enriching connections. The image of the disabled figure as exemplary and instructive in life persists in Ralph Connor's early best-seller *Sky Pilot*. The injured Gwen symbolizes the need for and service of a tamed wilderness that retains its beauty while submitting to the dictates of an advancing civilization. However, a decade later, in *The Foreigner*, disability becomes a sign of defect requiring repair. In keeping with eugenic ideologies, Lucy Maude Montgomery's Emily Trilogy demonizes physical disability and safely erases it at the end of the narrative. Morley Callahan's *Such is My Beloved* resists the devaluation of Others so prevalent into the Thirties, but Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House* re-inscribes disability as a trope of defect. In the decades that follow, disability images represent the need for society to recognize human interdependence and the complexity of human relationship. Disability, in these national stories, calls readers to the communal ethos that Canadians believe distinguishes us from the individualism associated with Americanism. The stories here suggest that, despite possibilities of stereotypical readings, disability presents a powerfully subversive, albeit unarticulated, opposition to the tyrannical impositions of normalcy. Disability's illumination of communal responsibility, human interdependence and personal connection suggests how these Canadian ideals might be realized when translated into embodied experience.

Once the shroud veiling the visibility of disabled figures in our midst is lifted, the issue of determining what is unique to Canadian identity is sharpened. Do we "write off" anomalous bodies or do we risk venturing into unexpected relationships with our humanity? Can we "read into" our stories, looking for the difference that delineates the norm? Can we interpret the presence of disability as a venue for critiquing culture and society? Or must we continue reading the same stereotypes into whatever image of disability we encounter?

I'll conclude with an example of story-telling I have frequently used when speaking to groups about disability issues. I tell two stories, both very similar but at the same time radically different. The stories are factual. The people are real; I know them personally.

The first story is extremely difficult to tell. It is one of deep tragedy and loss. It outlines the life of a woman who was born prematurely and traumatically due to an auto accident. The mother was in shock and seriously injured. The child was born dying with multiple complications. An uncontrollably high fever was immolating her tiny body which was so deformed it seemed the bottom half was on backwards. The neonatologist pronounced her survival unlikely, but added that if she should live, she would have myostrophic dwarfism and severe mental retardation, and she would be confined to a wheelchair all her life. According to the medical staff, it would be better for her and all involved if she would die. Nurses and visitors found it hard not to weep when they were with the young family that had held so much promise and excitement anticipating their first child. Their world had collapsed. Should she survive, institutionalization was recommended. The bewildered parents began their family life moving their medically fragile infant to Sick Children's Hospital in Toronto where specialists took charge of their baby, whose life did continue, as did the assessment that death would be preferable to her existence of suffering. She endured interminable hospital stays, repeated surgeries marked by complications, infections and additional problems. She spent years in body casts that caused her bones to be so fragile they snapped during surgeries. At twenty-three, despite a lifetime of medical intervention, she is physically impaired, scarred and expecting more surgeries. She is unmarried and unemployed. Her school years were marked with exclusion from sports and peer activities. In caring for her, her mother was unable to pursue her career; her own health suffered; she became chronically depressed. For years, the family lived well below the poverty line. Of course these circumstances led to marital tension between the parents, adding exponentially to the stress and worry around their daughter's condition. What future can this family have? Would you want to exchange places with them?

My heart aches to describe this young woman and her parents. Her story inevitably draws tears from audiences who are involved with people with disabilities,

because her story is too familiar and, for many, additional heart-wrenching details make this story a personal one. Fortunately, I have a contrasting story that despite remarkable parallels is considerably brighter.

This story is of a young family whose first child was also born prematurely because of a car accident. Her birth elicited indescribable joy and relief because the severity of the accident could well have caused everyone's death. The baby's arrival was interpreted as nothing short of miraculous and despite the bleakest medical prognoses, she survived. Her refusal to die reflected a tough spirit—a fighter. Her parents, proud of their tiny baby's stubborn, clearly precocious personality tried everything within their power to improve their child's chances at life. The mother stayed with her daughter in hospital around the clock. This little one couldn't stand or even sit independently at the age of three, but she was beginning to read in two languages. At the age of seven, her inability to walk did not prevent her from taking ballet lessons. Years of hospital stays and illnesses gave her the opportunity to develop an indomitable curiosity about the world and the people in it. Her parents ensured she experienced as much as possible, despite limited resources. She became a very young environmental activist. The family grew to five. People often envy the vibrant closeness of this family and the children's care for each other. The first daughter has travelled, worked and studied in many places in the world. She is considering medical school. A family acquaintance in a Faculty of Education whose assignment was to profile a person who had significantly influenced his life (such as, for example, Gandhi or Mother Theresa) chose to write about this young woman, since she had inspired him more than any other individual.

Clearly, these stories describe very different lives. The facts in both stories are accurate, but it is the omissions from each respectively that shape each family into a neat stereotype of disability as personal tragedy or cultural inspiration. An additional “fact” is that the above families are, in fact, one—my own. The woman is my eldest daughter. Her reality navigates among the above extremes while a kaleidoscope of “facts” of context shift according to endless variables and endless perspectives that result in a very ordinary life with very extraordinary features. How open and how exciting the future story is for us also depends on who and how many can read its variety without locking us and themselves into one of the predictable stories above.

¹ The knowledge encompassed in this paper refers to English-speaking, Euro-centric, highly technologically developed nations and societies.

² Rosemarie Garland Thomson uses the term “normate” to refer to “the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them” (*Extra* 8). Thomson cites Erving Goffman’s observation that a very limited minority of people actually fit the profile of what constitutes a normative human being. Significantly, the normate is exclusively male: “young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports” (8).

³ The feminist philosopher, Susan Wendell, deeply engages the complexity of identifying and defining disability in *The Rejected Body*. She observes that statistics related to disability do not take into account the socio-political, cultural and environmental factors that inform the estimated incidence of disability worldwide. Furthermore, the definition of disability involves a troubling power differential: “the power to define is not necessarily in the hands of those who are most affected by the definitions” (24). For instance, service providers for people with disabilities define who needs their services. Self-identification also involves the negotiation of an intricate tangle of stigma, systemic regulations and personal and social context. Consequently, one may be defined as “disabled” in one context and not in another.

⁴ The naturalization of a devalued perception of disability in culture can be compared to Simone de Beauvoir’s observation in *The Second Sex* that a woman is not born but made. De Beauvoir describes women’s subordination to men as an oppressive social construct, a

deliberate “Othering” that has been historically enculturated. Just as this notion illuminates a differentiation between biological sex and gender, so too the notion of disability as a phenomenon relative to socio-political systems of power and control suggests a difference between the anatomical body and the meanings ascribed to it by dominant thinking. De Beauvoir’s analysis participates in the exposure of patriarchal investments in the subordination of the female as an inferior version of the male.

However, while feminist theories reveal processes of discrimination at work in disability bias, fundamental differences exist between sexism and ableism. The constituency of disability is fluid and dependent on a complex interaction of economic and socio-political variables. The privileges of wealth, for instance, conceivably may erase the social assignments of disability. With enough social power and access to technological assistance, a disability does not assume significance (for example, American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s disability was kept hidden by the press until after his death), whereas the same corporeal condition in another context might subsume any other personal attributes. The predominantly medicalized reception of disability individualizes defect as personal misfortune demanding rehabilitation or cure. Hence, whereas sexism involves gender exploitation, which the powerful benefit from keeping in place, ableism strives towards disability eradication. As the historian Douglas Baynton argues, “the *concept* of disability has been used to justify discrimination against other groups by attributing disability to them” (33). When “women” were deemed “disabled” and therefore undeserving of political and social equality with men, the suffrage movement used disability to illustrate the difference between women and those who did not warrant equality. Again, as Baynton observes, “[r]arely have oppressed groups denied that

disability is an adequate justification for social and political inequality” (34). Currently, although there are exceptions, mainstream feminisms have generally taken part in disability bias, rejecting the particular insights women with disabilities bring to social analyses. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, Adrienne Ash and Michelle Fine, and Susan Wendell are among the growing number of scholars who examine the intersection of feminist and disability theories.

⁵ The Euro-centric perceiver of the Orient is so thoroughly steeped in Western ideological constructions of Eastern culture that “[h]is [sic] Orient is not the Orient as it is, but the Orient as it has been Orientalized” (104).

⁶ See Simi Linton’s chapter “Disability Studies/Not Disability Studies” in *Claiming Disability*.

⁷ Wendell’s definition of the term “people with disabilities” draws on Linda Alcoff’s definition of “woman” as “a position from which a feminist politics can emerge rather than a set of attributes that are ‘objectively identifiable’”(n.17 183).

⁸ Wendell lists a wide range of the types of social oppression people experience because of “disability-phobia” (32). “This overlap [of patterns of oppression], combined with the awareness that many things happened to them because they are identified *by others* as members of the group, can motivate people of diverse experiences to work together for their common welfare, to identify themselves willingly as members of the group, and to redefine for themselves what being one of the group means” (32).

⁹ This emphasis on the political intonation of “disabled” can be compared to the shift in terminology from “race” to “racialized.”

¹⁰ The divergence between the British and American disability paradigms is not as clear as Oliver suggests. Longmore, in *Why I Burned My Book* (2003), describes disability activism as a collective, political response to “deep-seated, pervasive cultural devaluation and systemic institutionalized discrimination.” Longmore describes both constituencies as locating disability in the cultural space created by “interaction between the social and built environment as presently arranged and individuals who look or function in non-standard ways, rather than in individuals with perceived anomalies.” While “both paradigms shift the focus from individuals and pathologies to institutions and ideologies,” Longmore assigns the “minority model” to the US and the “social model” to Britain (2). The British model generally separates the notion of biological impairment from that of social disabling; however, critics of this dichotomization argue that the delineation between anatomical reality and social construction is not clear. Nevertheless, the social model’s location of disability in social relations rather than simply in an individual does not intend to negate particular realities of corporeal pain and suffering. Rather, the social model illuminates society’s narrow interpretation of anomalous bodies as signifying defective lives.

¹¹ The *Encarta World English Dictionary* (1999) defines *anomaly* as “something that deviates from the norm or from expectations” 2. “something strange and difficult to identify or classify.” The *Gage Canadian* defines *anomaly* as “a departure from a general rule; irregularity.” Because a person’s “disability” refers to a trait that marks a specific difference from expectations of a norm, the term *anomaly* seems suitable in that it does not carry the negative associations of terms such as *abnormal* or *deviant*. Zola’s argument for disability’s normality does not deny the existence of anomalous bodies. He

suggests rather that anomaly should be acknowledged as a “normal” human occurrence that does not automatically disqualify a person from “normal” human concerns.

¹² John Radford explores the relationship between the university and the asylum as the polarized boundaries within which modernity advanced. He contends that the university, “at the crux of modern society,” symbolized the ideology of modernism, which promoted the authority of scientific professionalism. Whereas the university epitomized the progress towards knowledge and truth, the asylum represented “a closed world of ignorance and failure” (11). Radford suggests that the professional control over the institutionalization of people with disabilities and their objectification as research material stemmed from their refusal to comply with the promise of science to perfect human existence. Similarly, Wendell argues that “people with disabilities are constant reminders of the failure of that promise, [of control over nature] and of the inability of science and medicine to protect everyone from illness, disability, and death. They are ‘the Others’ that science would like to forget” (63).

¹³ For an analysis of how disability is constructed as a medical problem in mass media, see Titchkosky, *Reading & Writing Disability Differently*, 79-107.

¹⁴ Susan Griffin explores this exploitation of Other in *Pornography and Silence*.

¹⁵ See McDonagh for an example of how fictional portrayals of disability shape perceptions that inform political realities. McDonagh demonstrates how MacMurchy used literary representations of “idiocy,” primarily in Dickens, to corroborate her conception of a “feeble-minded” population that threatened the social fabric. McDonagh argues that MacMurchy’s eugenically informed character analyses demonstrate how literary works serve to illustrate the social construction of disability and the expedience

of this construct in specific historical contexts, namely, in MacMurchy's case, the justification for increased government paternalism.

¹⁶ This is true particularly when scholarly work acknowledges or ignores the powerful influence of eugenic ideology on attitudes towards disability.

¹⁷ Not only has disability been used to justify and maintain cultural hierarchies, as the historian Douglas Baynton demonstrates, but people with disabilities have been systemically segregated and isolated from what could be characterized as discourses of empowerment and solidarity. Whereas racialized groups may share a cultural, historical, or linguistic background, as many theorists assert, the binding factor between people with disabilities has been discrimination based on social stigma without the possibility of a countervailing positive identification with a collective sharing culture, history or religion, for example. Because the effects of stigma rely on dynamic interactions of an individual's specific socio-cultural positioning, a person with disabilities does not automatically identify with others in an oppressed category as someone might in a Jewish or an African community in Canada. This does not imply that other groups are not stigmatized. The difference lies in the potential positive identification with others for reasons other than the imposed stigma. The polluted identity that stigma entails is not mitigated for people with disabilities by the possibility of relating to others in an oppressed group. Until the activism of the disability rights movement, the concept of people with various disabilities as a minority community was not evident. Service systems designed to support people with disabilities were organized around diagnosis and were operated paternalistically for, not by, people with a given condition. Consequently, disability groups often competed for public funds, precluding a pan-disability consciousness.

¹⁸ See, for example, Diane Driedger's *The Last Civil rights Movement*; Joseph Shapiro's *From Pity to Civil Rights*; Paul Longmore's *Why I Burned My Book*; Richard Scotch's *From Goodwill to Civil Rights*; Fraser Valentine's *The Canadian Independent Living Movement: An Historical Overview*.

¹⁹ For other applications of postmodern methods in disability theory see Mark Sherry's *If I Only Had a Brain* and Shelley Tremain's *Foucault and the Government of Disability*.

²⁰ The phenomenon of disability as a relationship among bodies and multifaceted environments, both physical and attitudinal, compares to the process of racializing some types of bodies, while others are considered outside of race, in a positive, neutral space. Difference, in this way, is entirely dependent on an assumption of "sameness" self-designated and therefore self-evident as well as self-sustaining to the established power.

²¹ At the time of this writing, our eldest, Myroslava, is twenty-four, Anastasia is twenty-two, and Aleksandra is nineteen.

²² When I first heard the term "special" used to signify my child, I imagined the speaker could have as easily substituted the label of "leper." I have found that the "special" label satisfies many people's need to distance themselves from the individual with a disability while feeling kind and virtuous. However, many parents of children with disabilities I have met found comfort in the "special" label; I imagine this was because it was, at least superficially, positive. Simi Linton verifies my reaction to this label. She observes that "special education" is a euphemism for "the reality that neither the children nor the education are considered desirable"; nor do they conform to dictionary definitions of special as "surpass[ing] the uncommon" (15). She argues that the term characterizes a Freudian "reaction formation, ... the unconscious defense mechanism in which an

individual adapts attitudes and behaviours that are opposite to his or her own true feelings, in order to protect the ego from the anxiety felt from experiencing the real feelings” (16). In my household “special” is used sarcastically as a pejorative.

²³ I have been asked if I have idealized the home pole of the inside/outside binary presented here. It is a reasonable question. I feel certain that I have not. The “outside” discrimination greeted us daily and outraged me. Happily, Myroslava was too busy staying alive, with extremely precarious health, to notice how many people treated her. If she was excluded, we were excluded as a family, so the impact on her, as a small child, was not obvious. Perhaps because Myroslava was our first child, together with the knowledge that she was not expected to survive the car accident that precipitated her premature birth, we were extraordinarily grateful for and proud of her survival. Because the specialists in the Emergency department predicted her death, her life became a “miracle.” I do not mean that in a pious religious sense. There were many “faithful” who presumed her suffering set the scene for a divine “cure.” We were kindly given a whack of “miracle makers”: holy water from Lourdes, holy sand from New Mexico, a saint’s clothing from Rome, to name but a few. But the real miracle was Myroslava’s tenacity at breathing, when we knew we might lose her anytime. My life revolved around mitigating her suffering and maintaining her breathing. Physical impairment paled next to imminent death. At home Myroslava’s body was extraordinary. She was unable to walk but she could bend her limbs in directions no one else could. She delighted us as she discovered unpredictable ways to move in her environment. If it seems unlikely, it is nonetheless true that Myroslava did not feel hampered or devalued for being as she was, until her grade four teacher treated her as a pariah. Contrary to many people’s presumption, the question

“Why me?” was not a preoccupation for Myroslava and, consequently, not for me. Living with Myroslava illustrated, for me, the disjuncture between what a non-disabled mainstream presumes is self-evident about disability and the experience of living in an unconventional body. I do not presume to speak from Myroslava’s subjectivity, but rather from my experience of living with exposure to both views.

²⁴ Linton observes the value-laden differential between the poles in the function of the normal and abnormal dichotomy. Not all deviations from the “average” constitute abnormality. Higher IQs and height, for example, can be considered desirable. The devaluing of disability as abnormality essentializes the category as subnormal and, therefore, subhuman, thereby delineating the boundaries on which the “legitimate” person rests (23-25).

²⁵ All people with disabilities, but especially girls and women with disabilities, are at an increased risk of abuse compared to a non-disabled population. For an example of research on disability and abuse see Dick Sobsey’s *Violence and Abuse in the Lives of People with Disabilities*.

²⁶ <http://www.raggededgemagazine.com/0501/0501cov.htm>

²⁷ In this way Socrates and Jesus exemplify a postmodern stance.

²⁸ I am referring here sarcastically to the notion in society before 1960s second-wave feminism that for a woman to “lose her virginity” would be worse than losing her life.

²⁹ Derrida describes *justice* as indescribable because it involves a performance of relationship to another that necessarily transcends the fixity of laws and knowledge of what is clearly right or wrong. Justice is what is sought in judgements of law and rights when particulars of context are considered and questioned (deconstructed). Human

relationship involving the uncategorizability of individual realities is acknowledged and honoured. Justice cannot be reduced to calculation, in the way of laws, but appears in the unpredictability of openness to the otherness present in relationship: “Once you relate to the other as the other, then something incalculable comes on the scene, something which cannot be reduced to the law or to the history of legal structures. That is what gives deconstruction its movement, that is, constantly to suspect, to criticize the given determinations of culture, of institutions, of legal systems, not in order to destroy them or simply to cancel them, but to be just with justice, to respect the relation to the other as justice” (Caputo 17-18).

³⁰ See *Kristy and the Secret of Susan*.

³¹ The short video spoof of *The Miracle Worker, Annie Dearest* by Terry Galloway, is one example of a disability movement’s response to oppressive stereotyping.

³² This narrative pattern is discussed by other Disability Studies scholars such as Mitchell and Snyder in their theory of *narrative prosthesis*.

³³ For example, the Negative Imagery and Realist school can be read as uncovering subversive potential in the deployment of “monstrosity”; Mitchell and Snyder’s interpretation of Fiedler’s psychoanalytic analysis can be read as romanticized or as an example of Negative Imagery rather than Transgressive Reappropriation.

³⁴ This dilemma of language applied to narrative is expressed beautifully by Howard O’Hagan in *Tay John*: “Indeed, to tell a story is to leave most of it untold. You mine it, as you take ore from the mountain. You carry the compass around it. You dig down—and when you have finished, the story remains, something beyond your touch, resistant to

your siege; unfathomable, like the heart of the mountain. You have the feeling that you have not reached the story itself, but have merely assaulted the surrounding solitude” (167).

³⁵ See Julia Kristeva’s *Strangers to Ourselves* for a psychoanalytical approach that perceives the configuration of the Other as an element of self that must be reconciled for personal and collective wholeness.

³⁷ See Rosemary Crossley’s *Speechless* for an account of the effectiveness of Facilitated Communication and the controversy surrounding it.

³⁸ The irony of this situation cannot be captured within the context of this paper, but the school administrators were unaware of their presumption that one could simply choose `a la carte, as it were, how to communicate. These officials were responsible for the education of students who fell within the category of “exceptional needs”; yet they extrapolated Aleksandra’s “needs” from their own privileged subjectivities. Why use the controversial method of Facilitated Communication when sign language, for example, was acceptable to the school system? Aleksandra’s loss of fine motor control is not a choice, but it is her reality.

³⁹ This image of Tracy conveyed by the media evokes, for me, Faulkner’s description of Benjy’s (the idiot’s) cry at the close of *The Sound and the Fury*: “the grave hopeless sound of all voiceless misery under the sun” (395).

⁴⁰ In *The Rights Revolution*, Ignatieff argues that Canadian championing of the rights of difference is what makes the country exemplary on the world stage and, therefore, this distinction must be honoured and nurtured (passim).

⁴¹ Postcolonial studies is producing vibrant critiques of the shaping of Canadian literature and the nation. For example, see *Floating the Borders: New Contexts in Canadian Criticism*, edited by Nurjehan Aziz.

⁴² For example, the first waves of Ukrainian immigrants were considered primitive and feeble-minded by the British colonial establishment (Petryshyn 94-107). In time, assimilation granted a place for spectacles of Ukrainian folk art in the Canadian mainstream. In contrast, the East Indian community in Canada currently has entered the popular establishment to an extent. Indian food, dance, films once considered exotic became trendy, and now inhabit and inform the mainstream, lending a distinct Indian flavour, among many, to Canadianness.

⁴³ An growing body of literature examines the possible eugenic process of reproductive technologies. For example, see Wasserman, Bickenback, and Wachbroit.

⁴⁴ Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* has cast serious doubt on the existence of homogenous nation states.

⁴⁵ See Skrtic's *Disability & Democracy*. There is a vast amount of literature that examines inclusive education.

⁴⁶ In 2004 representatives of families with disabilities from each province and territory met in Prince Edward Island to discuss disability issues and compare the states of affairs concerning disability across the country.

⁴⁷ Rogers and Swadener argue that the disability/ability binary is extended to aesthetic worth as well: "In the Western tradition, evaluations of health and illness came to be related to images of beautiful and ugly bodies. Healthy and beautiful bodies signify what is erotic and good, while in binary opposition, ill and disabled bodies imply what is ugly

and bad. Symbolically, the former preserve the collective, while the latter are a threat to it” (77).

⁴⁸ Daniel Coleman, in *White Civility*, traces how the construction of a White British model of civility became naturalized as the norm for English Canadian cultural identity. Although Coleman does not mention disability, his description of the enculturation of White British normativity in Canada reflects the cultural processes that shape disability as human defect. Coleman describes “books and the imaginative worlds they present” (3) as primary vehicles for instilling normativity. Also, just as bias towards disability is so naturalized it is generally invisible, so too the privilege of normalcy evades notice through its sheer ubiquity. Coleman argues that “we cannot begin to combat everyday racism in Canada until we unearth, rather than suppress, the history of White supremacy and colonial racism that are fundamental to the establishment of Canada as a nation” (8). I agree and contend, together with the Disability Rights Movement, that this statement must be repeated with the addition of the imperative to unearth colonial ableism as well. As long as bigotry against physical anomaly persists, anti-racist efforts are incomplete.

Chapter One

Enabling the Land: The Dismodernist Stride of *The Stepsure Letters*

The assumption that a life dedicated to the accumulation of wealth or to the consumption of luxuries . . . is a valuable life for people given only one chance to live . . . comes as close as any theory of the good life can to naked absurdity. (Dworkin)

In a column of our local Kitchener-Waterloo newspaper, *The Record*, dated April 21st, 2006, Kwasi Pepra writes: “Many people, like me, living with disabilities, could attest to the fact that we are faced with two major challenges.” After identifying the first challenge as determining how to learn necessary skills, Pepra continues: “Second, we have to be aware and learn to cope with societal attitudes and misconceptions about disabilities, more so, as they permeate every aspect of social behaviour and thinking” (A13). Pepra contends that the first challenge is not a difficult one; the real challenge, therefore, is not the impairment or incapacity of the person with the disability, “but rather the misconceptions and the lack of knowledge and understanding that exists in the minds of many.” Pepra’s article essentially describes the social model of disability, whereby the unenlightened attitudes of people without disabilities towards those labelled with disability are by far the most crippling. He calls for greater awareness of disability bias in society as well as effective anti-disability-discrimination legislation.

One hundred and eighty-five years ago, in Nova Scotia, Thomas McCulloch wrote satirical letters to the editor of his local newspaper, *The Acadian Recorder*, that illustrated the entrenched bias against disability that people of his day faced. Pepra’s column illustrates that for all the vast world-altering changes that have occurred in the past 185 years, oppressive attitudes towards people with disabilities have persisted in Canada. Furthermore, McCulloch, like Pepra, uses what we currently understand as a social model of disability (recognizing disability as a socially negotiated identity) in order to mobilize social reform through a conscientization of attitudes towards others and

community.⁴⁹ The “Letters to the Editor” genre that McCulloch employs is also consistent with a desire to effect social change as people write in on matters that seem to them to affect the quality of life in their communities.

The Stepsure Letters (1862) was initially published as letters to the editors of *The Acadian Recorder*, in sixteen instalments, from December 1821 to March 1823. *The Stepsure Letters*, written anonymously by Thomas McCulloch and narrated from the point of view of the fictional character Mephibosheth Stepsure, humorously chronicle the life and times of a Halifax community. As Marjorie Whitelaw points out, despite their roster of stock comic characters, the epistolary chronicles refer to real events that took place in Pictou County: “McCulloch’s writings . . . grew almost entirely out of the circumstances of his life and work” (138). The letters were popular and garnered vociferous response because their readers recognized portrayals of themselves in highly unflattering satirical caricatures that exposed rural Nova Scotians as lazy, greedy, and pretentious, so intent on avoiding the responsibilities of farming the land that they plunged headlong into ruin. Thomas McCulloch’s son, William McCulloch, published his father’s biography almost a century after these events to avoid “those whose feelings might be painfully excited” (*Life* 73). William describes the anger, indignation, and threats engendered by the anonymous work, which was understood as an indictment of specific individuals. A contemporary of his father recalls: “We looked with great anxiety for the arrival of the ‘Recorder,’ and on its receipt used to assemble in the shop of Mr _____ to hear ‘Stepsure’ read, and pick out the characters, and comment on their foibles, quite sure that they and the writer were among ourselves” (73). Not only were the chronicles closely followed, they also generated a wealth of literature that participated in the “Stepsure” ethos (Davies 92). An anonymous critic of the Stepsure letters, writing to the paper under the pseudonym of “Censor,” affirms the accuracy of the author’s rendition of characters: “Ample and unqualified praise is justly due to our author both for the conception and development of these characters. They were copied so exactly from nature, that in every county of the province their prototypes were found; and men everywhere discovered among their neighbours and acquaintances the very individuals who were so admirably hit off” (*SL* 133-34). That being said, the Censor proceeds to castigate the author for his lack of taste, decency, and writing ability. The Censor’s

disparagement of the style but not the intent of the letters suggests that the extreme moralism of the satire was not as offensive to McCulloch's contemporary readers as it is now. The Censor concludes that "On the whole these letters are praiseworthy in the design, and are calculated to do good by applying a wholesome corrective to our manners: but the execution betrays neither a chaste imagination, nor much power of language" (135).⁵⁰ Current critical reviews of McCulloch's *Stepsure Letters* also situate their value beyond literary style, recognizing the ways this work has informed our national literature.

Gwendolyn Davies cites McCulloch as among those authors who developed an enduring "context of social activism in literature" (90). Indeed, McCulloch (1776-1843) was an ordained minister of the Secessionist Presbyterian Church and a zealous social reformer. On his way from Scotland to work as a minister in Prince Edward Island, he was delayed in Pictou County, Nova Scotia, because of bad weather, and stayed there for the rest of his life. He grew to love his new home and became a passionate advocate for economically accessible, non-sectarian education. Daniel Coleman describes McCulloch's activism as a direct challenge to Nova Scotia's ruling class and the English Anglican elitism of King's College (106). McCulloch wrote *The Stepsure Letters* as cautionary tales seeking to divert an economically depressed Nova Scotia from a downward plummet towards ruin, through American-style commercial trade schemes, back to what he believed was the security and integrity of sustainable farming. Beverly Rasporich identifies the fictional author of the letters, Mephibosheth Stepsure, as McCulloch's "satiric mask and potent voice for reform and recovery" (229). She argues that the humour of *The Stepsure Letters*, springing from where "the dream of a new world utopia meet[s] reality," typifies a source of early Canadian humour (234).

Along the same lines, Northrop Frye honours McCulloch as the "founder of genuine Canadian humour," which is a sense of humour that implies a social "vision" (*SL* ix). Janet Kulyk Keefer, on the other hand, interprets McCulloch's conception of community, rather than his satire, as fundamental to Canadian literature. She contends that the call to communal responsibility inherent in *Stepsure* outlines a vision of community that informs succeeding generations of Maritime literary creativity and ultimately exemplifies community as a "Canadian paradigm" (33). McCulloch, Keefer

argues, uses earthy humour to mitigate his “turgid sermons,” which are “suggestive not of satire’s sword, but duty’s plough” (43). Thus despite the critical objections to *The Stepsure Letters*, there is no doubt that this work is foundational to Canadian culture.

There is also no doubt that McCulloch, grounded in the Scottish Enlightenment’s ideology of improvement (Coleman 106), was unswerving in his desire to steer his society in a particular direction, evoking what Keefer characterizes as “the queasy or revolted feelings that Stepsure’s morality inspires in the average reader” (41). Coleman discusses Stepsure as a type of the enterprising Scottish orphan that recurs in nineteenth century Canadian fiction (104-13). Significantly, *Stepsure* relentlessly reminds readers that true success in life depends on industry and interdependence, rather than on hereditary claims to status. Mephibosheth Stepsure’s disability, therefore, signals the morality McCulloch wishes to instil in his society. Stepsure embodies disadvantage. He is orphaned and dismissed by his community because he is physically impaired. The advantages Stepsure garners from his forced liminality illuminate the flaws of the mainstream society. Rejected by a shallow and pretentious community, he learns to be resourceful and wise. He who has difficulty walking knows best how to advance in life.

Just as Stepsure’s name indicates his stability, in contrast to the connotations of his physical condition, the other characters’ names mirror their occupation or feature their foible. Mr Holdfast, the sheriff, for example, provides the destination for townsfolk who cannot manage agreements with Mr Ledger and Mr Balance, but are frequently in the company of Mr Tipple or Soakem. The letters record the paths taken by sundry enterprising townsfolk who pursue riches, but find ruin. These tales of idleness and folly are contrasted with the stories of a small group of exemplary characters: the narrator of the letters, Mephibosheth Stepsure, and his few friends, the longwinded Parson Drone; Saunders Scantocreesh, the honest, no-nonsense Scot; Squire Worthy, Stepsure’s benefactor; Stepsure’s wife, Dorothy; and her mother, Widow Scant. Mephibosheth Stepsure, however, is *the* industrious apprentice, the self-made man, who, through hard work and clean living, achieves the good life. Nevertheless, Vincent Sharman argues that this character informs “a legacy of literary puritans” that manifest a rigid provincial outlook, self-sufficiency, and narrow-minded religiosity (618). On the other hand, Robin

Mathews argues that Stepsure is hardly the stereotypical Calvinist hero, since his values of interdependence and social responsibility challenge the status quo (130).

The critical ambivalence surrounding the character of Stepsure is worthy of note. He seems to be a character whom readers love to hate, albeit for different reasons according to different time periods. Undoubtedly, McCulloch sets him up as the standard to emulate in order to establish a desirable society. As Frye maintains, Stepsure provides the paradigm of decency that McCulloch fears might be abandoned in the materialistic ideology of American-style progress (vii). What is astonishing about the figure of Mephibosheth Stepsure, presented as the most desirable type with the wisest behaviour—a sure step—is that he is “lame in both feet.” Although this aspect of the narrator has received little notice in critical commentaries, Stepsure’s disability functions as the vehicle by which the satirical project of *Stepsure* is carried. If the objective of satire is social reform, then Stepsure’s disability offers concrete substance to the process of engaging in that reform. McCulloch mobilizes disability to embody a discourse of social relationship as responsibility between family and community that, in turn, informs the Canadian communal ethos mentioned by Keefer above.

Criticism on *Stepsure* generally acknowledges McCulloch’s use of disability as a trope to elicit sympathy, attenuating what is otherwise smug self-righteousness: “a kind of lightning rod to deflect the envy [of Stepsure’s material success] of others” (v). Frye points out that Stepsure’s disability clearly foregrounds the moral that “it is only deformities of which one is unconscious that are ridiculous” (v). Stepsure, according to Frye, is also a classic figure of satire. And yet, critics such as Sharman do not include the letters describing Stepsure’s life and philosophy as satirical or humorous: “When Stepsure parades his own virtues, or when Parson Drone is sermonizing, irony is absent, and the narrative plot [sic] becomes tedious. The metaphor falters, and instead of Mephibosheth as the favoured servant of David, or as the voice of Wisdom, or even as fallen man making the most of his limitations, we get in the non-satiric letters a self-righteous, miserly materialist” (625). On the other hand, Gwendolyn Davies sees the last laugh to be on Stepsure who, she imagines, exhibits the same vanity he ridicules in his neighbours, becoming, therefore, not only the voice but also the object of the satire.

From a Disability Studies perspective, the above conclusions are arguable. Frye's estimation, to begin, characterizes Stepsure's "lameness" as deformity, albeit one that is not ridiculous in contrast to the deformities of character portrayed in the townspeople. Thus, Frye interprets Stepsure's disability stereotypically—as functioning to supply the bottom rung of measured value. By conjuring the presumably "real" defect of disability as a metaphor signalling social or individual distortions of any kind, Frye ensures that the construction and exploitation of disability itself remain unproblematized. Accepting conventional stereotypes of disability, Frye presumes the trope of disability elicits charity and deflects envy, even though the letters present the townsfolk as being particularly envious of Stepsure's success, because for them his lameness signifies that he does not warrant prosperity. Stepsure's disability does act as a lightning rod, but one that attracts scorn from his fellow colonists. Significantly, despite his community's expectations of him, he manifests his own subjective reality, presenting a counternarrative to the presumed norm. By creating his model citizen as disabled, McCulloch gives body to the radical reform he advocates in his writing. Stepsure's lame feet signify a body that is "naturally occurring" and therefore more down to earth or authentically human than the affectations of the mainstream community. Stepsure's embodiment induces a self-revelatory imperative to work the land. His mode of living, his success, his morality, all derive from his embodiment. His unconventional body exemplifies not deformity, but unique individuality. Stepsure's contentment with himself, as he is, illuminates the vain presumptions of his neighbours' view of themselves as superior simply because they are not disabled.

Contrary to the notion that Stepsure typifies a puritan work ethic that amounts to "self-righteous, miserly materialis[m]" (Sharman 625), Stepsure describes his fortune as proceeding from the practical necessities created by his disability. However, his circumstances delineate the disabling process of collective ableism. Stepsure's unconventional feet garner derision and exclusion. He admits that his disability is congenital: conferred on him by "Nature," unlike the god Vulcan, whose impairment resulted from landing on his feet after being hurled to earth by Jupiter (59). Stepsure's tale values Vulcan's disability as adeptness. Despite the violence done to him, Vulcan managed to land on his feet: "But even though he was a god, such a terrible fall could not

be experienced without some damage” (59). Similarly, Stepsure is forced figuratively to “land” on his own two feet. His statement admitting his lack of Olympian heritage is a reminder of his Christian context, suggesting that a fallen humanity will exhibit some damage but that disability, as a mark of authentic humanness, can set a person on the right track to godliness. Furthermore, unlike in a medical model of disability that interprets disability as a personal misfortune requiring cure, Stepsure’s impairment is merely a part of the human condition; there is no fault in Stepsure or his parents that would render him disabled. Yet, he is generally rejected by his community, simply for having the body that is his. *Stepsure* demonstrates the arbitrary nature and absurdity of this disability bias. I suggest that the critical response to Stepsure’s character participates in this unexamined bias towards disability, and because of this critical bias, the satirical impact of the tales and its radical implications are attenuated or lost altogether.

From his beginnings as an orphaned child, auctioned in the town square with his cousin Harrow, Stepsure is unwelcome: “Nobody would bid for me: for who, it was said, would take the trouble of bringing up a creature that would never be worth his victuals” (60).⁵¹ No one will “buy” a child who is “impaired” and therefore perceived as a burden. With characteristic polite understatement, which Frye observes requires a slow reading no longer typical for contemporary readers, McCulloch points to the practice of a type of human trafficking and exploitation of the poor, damning it all the more through Stepsure’s mention of it as a commonplace. Far from being “non-satirical,” the letters chronicling Stepsure’s life are permeated with a subtle irony that perhaps criticizes McCulloch’s Nova Scotia more acutely than the exaggeration, slapstick, and scatological humour of many of the tales. Not only does McCulloch’s Stepsure articulate a consciousness of his own embodiment, he also keenly observes the injustice rendered by the stigma and prejudice imposed on him because of his unconventional body.

The story of Stepsure’s beginnings indicts the commercial utilitarianism of society, and his repeated insistence on *home* as the focus of the good life advocates caring for others above the acquisition of wealth. Since the home is a metaphor for the soul (Sharman 622) and the soul is where the human finds God, Stepsure’s disability enables a godliness, a morality, discovered through embracing his human embodiment. McCulloch, through Stepsure, evokes the philosopher Susan Wendell’s theory whereby a knowledge

of transcendence (or an experience of being beyond the body) is experienced through the body, collapsing mind-body dichotomies (165-79). Thus, Stepsure's narrative is not one of transcending a fallen state of humanity; it is rather about embracing the human in its inescapable fallen-ness in order to accept and enjoy God's grace. Stepsure's disability is a sign of ordinary life: a chance omission of Nature, which had otherwise been "sufficiently bountiful" (59), resulting in an awkward gait that does not preclude being "pretty sure footed" (59). He is indebted to his feet's formation for many of the blessings he has sustained in life; nevertheless, he does not define himself by his disability, nor does he see his life as particularly special, burdened, or charmed for having legs that hurt if used frequently.

In stark contrast, Stepsure's community cannot see him beyond his anomalous feet. His neighbours reduce him to a defect and accordingly alienate him. McCulloch, notably, outlines the refusal of Stepsure's community to accommodate his limitations in mobility. His farm chores require a great deal of movement that is difficult and painful for the young servant, so of necessity he devises working methods that reduce excess walking. Stepsure's need compels his resourcefulness. Consequently, his efficient farming practices increase the Squire's prosperity to the extent that the Squire openly admits indebtedness to Stepsure. Stepsure, on the other hand, while grateful to the Squire, recognizes the value of "the apprenticeship which I had served to my lame legs" (67). Necessity shaped his course. It is Stepsure's usefulness as a worker that spurs "the very man who had declared [him] to be a creature not worth [his] victuals" (63) to court Stepsure with high wages so that he might leave the Squire and work for him. Stepsure's presence is desired only when "lucrative" outweighs "lame" as his perceived essence.

Thus, Stepsure's disability starkly illuminates a human readiness to devalue and to exploit the other for one's own benefit. Histories of disability in the modern industrial era uncover a similar pattern of power establishment and maintenance of social control through the identification and vilification of the "Other" symbolized and embodied in the very idea of disability. The segregation of difference in the Western world has spawned an industry of the maintenance and management of "Others," granting many professionals careers, status, and wealth. Disability scholars argue that not only is the notion of disability as abnormality exploited by modern culture in this way, but also the

culture of normalcy is dependent upon the stigmatized image of disability for its existence. In highlighting the townsfolk's insistence on "lame Meph's" inferiority despite all evidence to the contrary, *The Stepsure Letters* defamiliarizes naturalized presumptions of human value, demonstrating that the normal is an artificial construct that needs persistent reinforcement. McCulloch asserts Stepsure's legitimacy as a human being and a citizen at a time when the concept of normalcy was just beginning to be applied to human populations (Davis, *Enforcing* 23-39). The contemporary critical readings that fail to recognize McCulloch's contrasting delineation of attitudes towards disability demonstrate Clifford Geertz's description of cultural programming whereby the repetition (over a few generations) of the idea of disability as aberration has created a category of "disability" that is culturally anticipated and received despite, as in the representation of Stepsure, evidence to the contrary.

McCulloch wrote before a eugenics craze shaped the way Canada's nation-builders imagined a normalizing of citizenship. Although for almost two hundred years various configurations of British poor laws legislated anomalous bodies from public spaces, McCulloch's biography suggests that he envisioned a more diverse society in the new land.⁵² He championed literacy for people of all economic strata and religious affiliations. The philosophy espoused by Stepsure reflects McCulloch's fervent convictions about the need to redirect Nova Scotians through a classical education towards an appreciation of what he believed were basic human values of work and community responsibility. McCulloch's choice of situating his protagonist's voice in a disabled body spotlights his view that the imperative norm for the Nova Scotian citizen is neither what is usually expected nor what may be only superficially considered attractive. Stepsure's narrative also rejects the possibility that his model of living is exemplary only of necessity, and can or must be, in better circumstances, superseded with the more tempting profiles the townspeople follow. More than simply a fable indicting idleness, *The Stepsure Letters* targets the pretence that accompanies a colonial impulse to import the trends of dominant cultures into the new territory where they neither fit nor belong. The illumination of people's demeaning attitudes towards disability encapsulates the detrimental ramifications of a growing American capitalism. The foolish behaviour of the neighbours repeatedly results in the neglect and/or abuse of children and spouses. This

abuse resounds in the attitudinal mistreatment of Stepsure who, ironically, is the one to whom the neglected children come for food (24). Stepsure, thus, reinforces an ideology of social responsibility. In contrast, the townspeople persistently ignore or malign Stepsure, unless he might be of use to them. Their refusal to acknowledge their obligation towards others (in pursuing American style self-betterment) is most detrimental to themselves. Stepsure recognizes his neighbours' deceit and does not allow himself to be exploited in order to appear included within the mainstream.

From the opening letter, we learn that Stepsure's only invitation to dine with his neighbour, Gosling, comes from prison when Gosling expects Stepsure to bail him out. Similarly, those who are indebted to him flatter him with empty nominations for public office. As a young person, he is excluded by his peers when they are partying, but called upon in times of need:

To be overlooked by the young folks in this way, was to me a great affliction; and I would often wonder whether it was that I was a bound servant and could not dress very finely, or because, being no great hand at the dancing, it was supposed that a frolic could not give me much enjoyment. I must, however, do the young people the justice to say, that, though I was overlooked at their frolics, I was not always neglected; for I recollect that, when any of them were sick or dying, they would often send for me to come and chat with them, which the rest of the youngsters had seldom leisure to do. (64)

Stepsure's tongue-in-cheek recollection of his isolated youth encapsulates additional aspects of disability bias that endure to the present. Not only is Stepsure rejected from activities and exploited when he can be of use, his musings over whether he is discriminated against because of his poverty or because of his disability highlight, in his situation, the social imposition (and social conflation) of both. Furthermore, Stepsure's ironic suggestion that his exclusion might have arisen from the benevolent intentions of his peers' believing he would not enjoy the fun underlines a prevalent paternalistic justification of discrimination that, in essence, blames the victim for being victimized.⁵³ Stepsure's subjectivity locates disability in a context of social relationship, revealing and ironizing the vexed nature of this interface. Hence, McCulloch portrays disability with a

realism seldom found in contemporary texts. Stepsure's sardonic accounts of the discriminatory treatment he encounters prefigure current transgressive portrayals of disability in Canadian fiction. Stepsure's personal narrative is imbued with accounts of disability bias all relayed with the same polite irony that at times sustains hints of bitter sarcasm. However, McCulloch shifts the most overt judgements of people's ableist attitudes to Stepsure's friends, avoiding what might appear as vengeful gloating on Stepsure's part.

It is through the "rough, good sense" (115) of Saunders Scantocreesh that the narrator is vindicated. Unlike Stepsure, who purports sympathy for the misfortune of his neighbours, Scantocreesh has no qualms about "telling it like it is." In an inversion of future eugenic ideas that will advocate for the genetic elimination of unfit bodies such as Stepsure's, Scantocreesh argues that the self-destructive behaviours of the non-disabled townsfolk should not be corrected, so that they will justifiably perish, leaving the devalued Stepsure to carry on: "He says that the calamities of the ne'er-do-well villains, are the dawning of a bright day for Nova Scotia, when every huckstering, swapping, cheating, running-about vagabond will be driven into the woods, and a race of decent, industrious folk, like Mephibosheth Stepsure, will inherit the land" (86). In a land where, a century in the future, measures will be taken to attempt to ensure that athletic bodies people the growing nation, McCulloch establishes the "lame boy" as the new Adam, the desirable norm for the nascent colonial society. The Edenic image is portrayed unmistakably at the end of Letter 8, when Stepsure accepts his Master's offer of a plot of land, and in the spring, the archetypal season of new life and hope, Stepsure sets out on his own—not despite his disability, but with it: "...and next spring, with my lot of land, a few acres chopped, and my lame legs, I began the world" (66).

Significantly, the obstacles Stepsure encounters are imposed by his fellow townspeople, not by his impairment. Letter 9 begins with a direct deromanticizing of the Edenic image that closed the preceding correspondence. Stepsure assures his audience that his life story includes no heroics or extraordinary adventures like those of Robinson Crusoe (67). McCulloch painstakingly attempts to disenchant the reader from any proclivity to reify Stepsure into a character from whom readers could distance themselves.⁵⁴ He is shaped as a norm, not to be idealized, but to be followed. Stepsure's

physical impairment, while used as the marker for the fictional contemporaries to dismiss him as “Other,” is not the lowest denominator with which readers can compare themselves in order to ratify their superior “normalcy,” as do the fictional townsfolk. His disability is used to mark normal human diversity.⁵⁵

As a new homeowner, the difficulties Stepsure first encounters are social, in keeping with the taunting he endured as a child. Youths visit his home, looking for a lark, as it were. He sees through their pretence and bores them into giving him up as a source for their amusement. McCulloch’s contemporaries in Britain and America could, for a fee, be entertained by a visit to the asylum where “abnormality,” kept away from public areas, was put on display.⁵⁶ Stepsure’s effective deflection of the pranks of the young people therefore metaphorically addresses and dismisses the cultural practice of using people with disabilities as spectacle and entertainment. Stepsure’s embodiment of disability in *The Stepsure Letters* also subverts the cultural shaping of the disabled body as unattractive and asexual, a notion still prevalent today. Stepsure recognizes that the Squire’s family’s jokes about Stepsure’s interest in Widow Scant’s daughter come with the knowledge that “a lame lad like me, who was another man’s servant, had no use for a wife” (65). In the townsfolk’s perception, Stepsure’s candidacy for marriage only surfaces because he is presumed to be willing and grateful to marry anyone who would have him. Hence, Mrs Grumble views the wealthy Stepsure as an expedient match for her overbearing and unattractive daughter, whom no one can abide.

Stepsure resists the proposal and in time weds the less than fashionable, but wise and practical, daughter of Widow Scant. Their love and caring for each other create the home McCulloch advocates as mandatory for a good society. Although Stepsure’s choice of Dorothy for his partner appears too sensible and pragmatic for modern Western ideals of romance, ultimately their life together is described as a source of energy and joy for them and their family: “My neighbours remark that, when I am going home, I gradually quicken my step; and, when I arrive, Dorothy and Mephibosheth are always glad to see one another” (90). Not only does Dorothy not reject Stepsure because of his disability, she recognizes his attributes as conducive to a good match for her. Notably, Dorothy does not *overlook* Stepsure’s disability; she champions the very feet that others deride. Dorothy, in valuing Mephibosheth as a human being, perceives his ostensible

“deformity” as a “seemly” feature of her husband with clear advantages. Her “good nature” is disrupted only when anyone “meddles with the configuration of [Stepsure’s] feet” (86). For Dorothy, her husband’s feet are as they should be. McCulloch uses her, as he does Stepsure, to re-conceive radically Nova Scotians as able and ready to perceive their own quality and potential value, rather than simply falling for the surface attractions of the larger neighbouring state or the ill-fitting dogma of the “mother” country. Dorothy’s reception of her husband’s feet catalyzes a questioning of the aesthetic standard that judges Stepsure’s unconventional lower limbs as unattractive: “she has discovered about them so much decent seemliness, that she has no great opinion of the judgment of the graces” (87). Dorothy demonstrates Anita Silvers’s argument that disability consciousness in art would expand creative possibilities to re-conceive ideologies of beauty and meaning (238).

Rather than simply being a joke, Dorothy’s alignment with Stepsure as the moral paragon helps to subvert the status quo. She, the daughter of the wise Widow Scant, manifests her own wisdom in recognizing Stepsure’s value as a man and a mate. She is actively involved in making the home they share a microcosm of an ideal society, content to accept its material reality and to cooperate in the development of its resources, valuing all members for their contribution, even if that contribution is to provide the family with a focus of caring, as does the elderly widow Scant. Rather than being a burden for Stepsure, caring for the dependent, elderly mother-in-law is a source of strength:

[M]aking the widow comfortable was my principal enjoyment. Many a time when I was working about the farm, the wish to keep her, as good old people ought to be kept, has strengthened my back and made it willing to run faster than my legs could carry it. Indeed, almost the whole symptom of hurry which ever appeared in our family, was when the children knew that grandmother wanted anything; and then, there were more servants than jobs. (83)

In this vision of society, represented by Stepsure’s home, reciprocity and interdependence are not limited to the context of pursuing financial gains. Caring for others promotes contentment and therefore better working conditions and ultimately a better community. On the other hand, the townspeople’s attitude towards Stepsure’s disability manifests the

dangers inherent in community when it strives to homogenize its citizens. Keefer discusses the achievement of community through the exclusion of outsiders evidenced in *The Stepsure Letters* by the ominous story of the hungry traveler killed by cabbage (39). It is imperative to recognize that McCulloch, through Stepsure, warns of the process of marginalizing or dehumanizing not only “the most blatant outsiders” (Keefer 39) but also insiders such as Stepsure, whose disability is a synecdoche of a lack of conformity to the mainstream. It is noteworthy that Keefer writes of McCulloch’s conservatism as being opposed to the faith in industrialization as progress (35), since industrialization has been cited as the age and ideology that have created the phenomenon of disability as it is known currently (Davis, *Enforcing* 24).

McCulloch’s portrait of Stepsure as a man with a disability is less one of self-making and more one of survival in an ableist world of bigotry against human diversity. The joke is that the very reason that Stepsure is shunned and exploited is the reason he prospers, resulting in a satisfying vindication for the reader who follows the narrator’s exposure of the hypocrisy of Nova Scotian society. The mocked airs of the community are accompanied by mocked pretensions of community spirit that expose the hypocrisy of the town’s moral self-righteousness. Ultimately, Stepsure’s tale demonstrates the biblical proverb that “the last shall be first” (Matt. 20. 16). However, significantly, Stepsure’s disability is not a superficial symbol of abjection justified but a subversion of the value system that arbitrates abjection.

McCulloch’s positive valuation of disability, which recognizes its social construction as defect while acknowledging Stepsure’s material reality of pain, limitation, and social stigmatizing, is further strengthened by the biblical context evoked by Stepsure’s first name, Mephibosheth. The allusion to 2 Samuel 9-19 would have been familiar to McCulloch’s contemporaries and makes his name resonate more deeply by providing biblical grounding for Stepsure’s figure and a reference for his “two lame feet.”

Mephibosheth is translated as “one who scatters shame” or “exterminator of idols.” The name derives from and is interchanged in English translations of the Hebrew bible with Meri-baal which means “beloved of the Lord” (“Mephibosheth”). By choosing to name Stepsure Mephibosheth, McCulloch positions his narrator as the authoritative observer of others. His name suggests he is on God’s side and has found favour in God’s

eyes, and his disability suggests that he has learned this divine wisdom through the embodiment that has prevented him from being misled by material riches or artificial gods. His disability situates him on the periphery of the mainstream where he, nonetheless, belongs. McCulloch creates for Stepsure the liminal space of possibility that Disability Studies work has identified; he is both within and without his community. His distance offers a crucial, missing perspective on society, one that disrupts the status quo and presents alternatives for social order that include the marginalized. Contrary to the conventional use of disability as a literary trope, while the townsfolk are represented by humorous stock figures, Stepsure, with his disability, represents a person in the flesh—the everyman—to be emulated. McCulloch creates his figure of disability as a universal human image proposed by many Disability Studies scholars. While Stepsure’s disability includes the material realities of pain and slow pace that render him enfleshed, having a biblical counterpart lends him a sacred ethos as well, thereby creating another layer of in-between-ness or liminality that offers hope for the readers who would take the instructions of *The Stepsure Letters* to heart.

The lineage and relations of the biblical Mephibosheth are also salient in the understanding of McCulloch’s mobilizing of Mephibosheth as narrator of his satirical work. The Mephibosheth of Samuel 2 is the grandson of King Saul, and contemporary of the young future King David. Saul betrays a covenant made to the family of David and, during the ensuing battle, both he (Saul) and Mephibosheth’s father, Jonathon, are killed. While fleeing with the five-year-old Mephibosheth, Saul’s servant drops him, paralyzing both his legs. Hence, the biblical character is disabled by a fall, but the fall is an accident, a normal event in the course of human existence but one that happens while trying to escape from the scene at hand. The Nova Scotian Mephibosheth must deal with the territory he is in, without escaping to “some other country better worth the living in” (114) as many of his neighbours dream of doing. The biblical Mephibosheth’s lack of mobility does not seem to erode the expected trajectory of his life. While in exile, he is cared for appropriately because when David becomes king and seeks out Saul’s family, Mephibosheth is well and has an infant son. Mephibosheth’s disability attenuates neither his worth nor his sexuality. David honours the covenant between the families.

The association between the biblical narrative and Stepsure's life story brings social responsibility into focus. Although the biblical Mephibosheth "fell prostrate in homage" (2 Samuel 9. 6), David brings the "lame" Mephibosheth into his kingdom as his equal, not as a subordinate. "Fear not,' David said to him, . . . I will restore to you all the lands of your grandfather Saul, and you shall always eat at my table" (9. 7).

Mephibosheth, therefore, lived in Jerusalem with David. Fully cognizant of the king's beneficence, Mephibosheth repays him with loyalty: "For though my father's entire house deserved only death from my lord the king, yet you placed your servant among the guests at your table" (2 Sam 19. 29). The lesson is one of enduring mutual love and loyalty rather than strategic war alliances or accumulation of wealth and power. The biblical Mephibosheth is not expected to "repay" with service or goods. He is welcomed as family although he is not self-sufficient and needs specific care and accommodation. McCulloch's satire of Squire Worthy depends on the reader's familiarity with the narrative in Samuel. He would be paralleled with King David in that he magnanimously carries the "lame boy" to his home, but morally he "drops" the child like the biblical servant who caused Mephibosheth's disability.

Squire "Worthy" is the tagged paradigm of virtuous living. By taking the disabled toddler into his home, he demonstrates to the town that "they had yet some humanity to learn" (60). Stepsure's sustained praise and gratitude when describing the Squire and his household betray details that simultaneously subvert this ostensible adulation, creating a subtle contrast to the prevailing style of humour as well as a clever satirical edge that seems to have been overlooked in commentaries. The worthy Squire is portrayed as a "promot[er] of good neighbourhood" but his generosity is explained as affordable given his considerable wealth. His apparent absence of materialism—having no "worldly wish"—is in reality the result of "his family always enjoy[ing] abundance." Unlike David, who restores all his grandfather's kingdom to Mephibosheth, the Squire buys the child for a "reasonable sum," telling his neighbours that "if the poor boy was deformed, he had the more need to be taken care of"; however, the Squire does not accept Mephibosheth as an adopted son, but rather as a "bound" servant to his four children, who cause the orphan "youthful grief" by labelling him "lame boy" and "lame lad." In what is ostensibly an illustration of the kindness of the Squire's offspring, Stepsure reveals a childhood of

servitude to demanding young masters in which “of course where one was pleased, there were three angry” (60-61), while their mother, the “good lady,” drilled him with the knowledge that, due to his abject state, nobody will help him, and he must help himself.

Consequently, Stepsure, who was rejected as a useless feeder by the townsfolk, grows up learning to be most resourceful. In contrast, the scriptural Mephibosheth is sought out by the greatest power of his time and place, the king of Israel. The adoption of Mephibosheth into the royal family is represented by his presence at meals. There is no prior service required to warrant food. The place at the table is held through mutual love and generosity. Interestingly, although the reception of the two Mephibosheths radically differs, they do share similar discriminatory treatment because of their disability.⁵⁷ In the biblical narrative, when Jerusalem is attacked, Ziba, Mephibosheth’s servant, reports to the fugitive King David that Mephibosheth has deceived the king and transferred allegiance to the victor. Consequently, Ziba inherits all of Mephibosheth’s royal property. After his kingdom is restored and David returns, Mephibosheth meets him and reveals Ziba’s betrayal. Ziba had refused to help Mephibosheth, and because, unlike Stepsure, he was unable to walk, he was trapped in the city and could not follow his king. Ziba had taken advantage of Mephibosheth’s disability to profit from his ruin. David again embraces Mephibosheth, glad of his love and fidelity.

The Canadian Stepsure has worked for his land, and the Squire is eager to display him as a lesson of “what industry could do.” In a hilarious portrayal of classic ableist views, the neighbours attribute Stepsure’s success to anything but his own ability: “lame people are lucky.” The exasperated Squire instructs them not to look enviously at Stepsure’s wealth but to notice the man himself. Starkly illustrating the proclivity towards reducing individuals to their perceived impairment, the neighbours immediately direct their gaze to Stepsure’s feet. Telling them “that was not what he meant,” the Squire proceeds to spell out his demonstration of Stepsure as a model to them all. The people are incensed to be compared to “a lame creature” and insulted by the injustice that a disabled man should prosper when “other decent men” did not (70). The townspeople justify their derision and peripheralization of Stepsure by his disability at the same time that they envy his success. They want what he has but not what he is, while *The Stepsure Letters* manifest that what he has is the result of what he is. Here too we can recognize the in-

betweenness or liminality of the disability position: neither in nor out of society, and therefore well positioned to observe its direction.

In this context it is understandable that McCulloch would feel the need to make Stepsure so relentlessly upright and resourceful that reactive efforts to undermine his position would not be credible. McCulloch deliberately subverts the conventional literary response to disability by outlining and mocking it. Stepsure gets the last laugh at his derisive neighbours since he provides them with the produce they need.

McCulloch grants Stepsure the most sardonic wit through his satirizing of ableist attitudes that symbolize the foolishness of the townsfolk. Davies misses the humour altogether, much like the people gathered by the Squire to look at Stepsure; both miss the point. In describing his absence from the political arena, Stepsure expresses indignation that verges on sneering. Public office, we learn, “is never entrusted to either blind or lame” (100). Knowing that he would not have a voice in court, he focuses all the more on the development of his home, where he is sheltered from the bigotry of his community. Stepsure highlights the irony of his name growing in proportion to his wealth. The name shift, however, signifies public status and honour. These elements are only actively sought by the vain and foolish. Stepsure points out that he was suggested for Magistrate only by those indebted to him. The idea was dismissed, however, because “blind Bartimeus Beetle, our townsman, was fitter to distinguish colours, than a lame creature like me to sit in judgment between man and man” (101). Stepsure’s disability alone bars him from public office, regardless of his capacities and experience. Recognizing the hypocrisy and emptiness of these honourable positions, Stepsure attends to his family which is, according to Parson Drone, the microcosm and foundation of the society at large.

The final line of the sixteenth letter summarises Mephibosheth’s life story in relation to his fellow townspeople: “They are not willing to be like lame Meph, whom everybody despised, nor like lame Boshy, whom nobody cared about; but, before they have well fixed themselves upon a wood lot, and raised a few potatoes, they wish to be like **MEPHIBOSHETH STEPSURE, Gent.**” (131). Since the length and respectability of his name correspond to his accumulation of money, in wishing to be “Mephibosheth Stepsure, Gent,” his neighbours only want to emulate his prosperity without the work it

entails. Because of his disability, they revile and devalue him just as they depreciate honest labour. Far from succumbing to their fawning, Stepsure remains confident in the experience of his “lameness” and in his gratitude for the position it has rendered. Davies writes that “He who had castigated Halifax as a centre of pride, frivolity and government patronage at the beginning of the series was himself fawning on the Attorney General by the end. He who had railed against the social pretensions of his fellow townfolk in the opening letters was himself signing ”Gent.” after his name at the conclusion of the first series” (91). However, Stepsure mocks the irony of his arrival at respectability by imagining himself “seated in style, with a table before me covered with a green cloth reaching down to the floor, so as to keep my feet out of the way” (129). The mainstream construction of “gentleman” does not admit disability. Stepsure’s greatest asset, his unconventional feet, must be hidden from view, thus denying his philosophy of living and the embodiment from which his moral stance derives. Stepsure’s disability has given him a life-long context from which he is able to recognize the relative emptiness of social honours when they discriminate against an individual’s effort and merit on the basis of superficial characteristics. Stepsure sees his success not in being perceived as a gentleman, but in achieving the comfort of a happy home. His feet, as a symbol of an existential imperative for work and creativity to achieve a good life, merit acknowledgement, not disguise. Stepsure points out again the hypocrisy of those who hold the public honours from which his legs have “saved” him. McCulloch thus skewers the political establishment of his time. The very people, such as his fictional Stepsure, with the moral standing and wisdom that would fit them for positions of leadership are the very people who are barred from participation.

Thus, Parson Drone’s assertion that Stepsure’s disability is his greatest gift is ironic in that Stepsure’s feet are a source of limitation in mainstream society, but mainstream society is so troubled that marginalization becomes beneficial. The point is that the mainstream is defective and in need of a literal “rehabilitation,” a restoration of a good way of living: Stepsure provides the therapeutic strategy of looking to one’s home—literally and figuratively. All would benefit from emulating the interdependence manifested by Stepsure’s community of family and friends. The knowledge of experience that derives from “being true to oneself” would not require every individual to have a

disability if we valued the experience of life at hand rather than seeking to avoid “reality” by pretending it must be an imagined ideal. Stepsure’s green cloth is a “swipe” at the establishment that is dressed up with nowhere to go, as it were. McCulloch has deployed the anomalous body to speak for an evolving idea of democracy that obliges citizens to work together to enable security and stability by capitalizing on the natural resource of land, which is being neglected to the community’s detriment. McCulloch makes clear that Stepsure’s exclusion from active civic participation on the basis of disability diminishes his community; yet, currently in Canada disability remains a barrier to active citizenship. Re-interpreting *The Stepsure Letters* from a Disability Studies standpoint raises the fundamental question, in a Canadian context, posed by Stiker in his *History of Disability*: In what kind of a society do we, as Canadians, wish to live? (11). In 2004, Michael Prince writes in the *Canadian Journal of Sociology*: “In the face of persistent inequalities, disadvantages and numerous forms of discrimination, the issue of disability remains a profound challenge to the ideal of citizenship in liberal democratic states. People with disabilities, estimated to number five hundred million globally, still are among the most vulnerable, at risk of poverty and exclusion around the world” (466). Thus, McCulloch’s illustration of disability bias in both the public and private arenas deserves a more respected place in the Canadian canon as an ethically visionary work. McCulloch’s dramatization of the experience of disability as an injustice rather than a misfortune demonstrates an undercurrent of resistance to disability oppression in Canada even before Confederation.

Contrary to Lennard Davis’s assertion that in Anglophone literature “[t]here is virtually no major protagonist in a novel written during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who is in some way physically marked with a disability” (*Bending* 95), disability is the most significant feature of the person who acts as the fictional author’s voice in McCulloch’s *Stepsure Letters*. The morally superior satiric voice that describes Stepsure’s townfolks’ follies springs from the subject position of a citizen not only who has a disability, but also whose disability is presented both from a personal and public view, rendering a distinct portrayal of disability as constructed by societal discrimination.⁵⁸

The critical evaluation that generally interprets Stepsure as irredeemably priggish and self-righteous inevitably shifts when looking through a Disability Studies prism. As Disability Studies scholars observe, despite the pervasive discursive presence of disability within academic research, the function of disability is rarely treated as a construct that requires unpacking. However, if disability prejudice is not scrutinized in *The Stepsure Letters*, not only is much of Stepsure's satire lost, but the remedial goal of the satire fails as well. The defamiliarization of disability issues that Disability Studies introduces to literary interpretation can be compared to the feminist critical discovery of counterconventional discourses provided by women's voices in canonical literature; similarly, Queer theory in literature recognizes sexual discourses previously unacknowledged by the critical endeavor. If the literary critic participates unconsciously in disability bias or fails to examine McCulloch's focus on the discriminatory treatment that Stepsure's disability garners, Stepsure's superior position loses its particular irony and his character figuratively does drown in self-righteousness. However, Stepsure's moralizing tone is relieved by his subversive embrace of (what is conceived as) defect and by his achievements that arise *from* his disability. Rather than a conventional inspirational tale of overcoming impairment, Stepsure's story recounts an overcoming of prejudice that could have destroyed him. Incessant priggishness becomes biting satirical insight, such as in the recounting of Stepsure's development in the home of his benefactor, Squire Worthy.

By configuring his exemplary character as disabled, McCulloch creates a powerful symbol of resistance to the trend of American progressivism that he believed was mesmerizing Nova Scotians towards self-destruction. He wrote at a time when disability had been conflated with poverty and was increasingly seen as a barrier to ideologies of individualism and personal profit requisite to the rise of commercial capitalism.

The Stepsure Letters can further be interpreted as a protest against the social trends of a growing system of industrialization that commodified human lives and eroded family and community interdependence in favour of economic efficiency. Philip Ferguson traces an early nineteenth-century trend towards increasingly centralized institutions of welfare and education in northeastern America that relegated people with

disabilities to “segregated warehouses for the inconveniently old and ill” (53). He demonstrates how almshouses replaced social home support (outdoor relief) of families with members who had disabilities, thereby establishing a conceptual split between productive individuals, essential to the labour market, and unproductive beings, whose need for care was perceived as a burden to society. In this context, Stepsure’s childhood disability both marks him as, and blames him for, being a social burden. Ferguson argues that the ideology of the marketplace promoted the shift from social to individual responsibility for any existing social inequality and thus justified “abusive custodialism” (60). Because disability, poverty, and state incarceration become steadily conjoined in the cultural psyche of North America, McCulloch’s inscription of disability can be read as a radical counter-discourse. While the Stepsure character appears to promote a puritan work ethic, neither his motives nor his ends promote a simplistic accumulation of money. His prosperity shatters the myth of pauperism as inherent to disability while revealing that the link between the two is socially imposed. Far from taking personal blame or shame for his disability, Stepsure is confident, comfortable, and grateful in his physical being. Clearly his figure is meant to be emulated rather than erased. Within the historical context of the narrative, readers of the time would be aware that without Squire Worthy Stepsure’s fate would be the almshouse, where he would become a ward of the state and hence a burden to society.⁵⁹ But McCulloch advocates for the social responsibility of the home—where Stepsure flourishes, where his family is enriched through caring for the elderly Widow Scant, and where his children will care for him when he can no longer care for himself. This promotion of home as the central foundation of society directly challenges the new individualism of a market economy.

McCulloch does not employ the literary trope of disability as the bottom line of devalued status, thereby shaming the presumably non-disabled readers into recognizing that if *even* an “impaired” person can be successful through diligence and hard work, anyone can. Radically, McCulloch shapes his disabled Stepsure as the archetype for a new and better society, not eschatologically but as a concrete model symbolizing what could be a universal norm. One of Canada’s first fictional texts, therefore, manifests Davis’s theory of dismodernism, where the disabled figure represents, in essence, the postmodern universal person (*Bending* 27-32). McCulloch’s satirical narrative of his

Nova Scotian community sows the seeds for a vision of Canada as a nation of diversity and interdependence that springs from a material reality that is universally human and particularly Canadian.

While interested in investing in the farming potential of Nova Scotia, McCulloch also responded to the literary potential of the new colony. When seeking publication with a British publisher, McCulloch was asked to curb the coarseness of his style in order to conform to the sensibilities of British readers. Just as his character Mephibosheth refuses to compromise his integrity by pretending to be something he is not, McCulloch refused to compromise his narrative to suit European tastes. Hence *The Stepsure Letters* and its narrator, lame in both feet, represent a step towards the conception of a nation of democratic diversity rooted in an ethos of communal caring and responsibility that we continue to imagine today. Rereading *The Stepsure Letters* through a Disability Studies lens reminds us that McCulloch's vision of inclusive Canadian communities is still to be realized.

⁴⁹ Paulo Freire's term *conscientizacao* means "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (19). Conscientization differs from consciousness-raising in that the former term denotes a process of social transformation through a politicized knowledge of, and action against, forces of oppression. Conscientization incites a counter-hegemonic discourse that empowers disenfranchised subjects by affirming the experiences and histories of devalued populations. For a comparative study of disability conscientization in Zimbabwe and the United States, see "Conscientization and the Cultural Politics of Education" by Peters and Chimedza.

⁵⁰ See Coleman on the elite classicist roots of the Censor's criticism. Stepsure's ridicule of Censor's pretentiousness further emphasizes the main character's exemplary practical sense (110-12).

⁵¹ This same sentiment, characterizing people as 'useless feeders,' was used to justify the mass murder of children with disabilities in Nazi Germany. See Rogow's "Lessons from the Past."

⁵² For example, as the consequences of increasing industrialization (harsh working conditions, unemployment, overcrowding etc.) reduced many individuals to begging on the streets, laws in Britain and the United States were established that effectively criminalized indigence. Poor laws, Ugly laws, Anti-vagrancy laws are among the ordinances devised to remove undesirable bodies from public spaces: "Physiognomic practices became a staple of the new 'science of alms' and played a key role in an era that judged itself proficient at assessing citizens' worth on the basis of their possession of a

full range of normative bodily, sensory, and cognitive capacities” (Mitchell and Snyder, *Cultural Locations* 40-41).

⁵³ In conversation with a church minister working with marginalized communities in Saskatoon, I was told that it would not be sensitive to invite people with disabilities to the church activities, because they would feel “different” and out of place. Of course, he had not discussed this with people with disabilities nor had he considered the reasons why they would feel uncomfortable, nor how their discomfort might reflect an absence of accommodation and invitation, which might implicate him.

⁵⁴ This is like the label of “special” for a person or their family with a disability. Ranking someone as special removes her from the realm of the ordinary where the non-special reigns.

⁵⁵ Almost two centuries later, a global disability rights movement is working to re-assert this concept of natural corporeal variety in the face of an economic environment that still benefits from the ensconced ideology of disability as deviance.

⁵⁶ For studies of the display of people with anomalous bodies as entertainment in North America see Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s “The Cultural Work of American Freak Shows, 1835-1940” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*; “The Cultural Work of American Freak Shows, 1835-1940” in *Extraordinary Bodies*; Leslie Feidler’s *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self*; and Robert Bogdan’s *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*.

⁵⁷ This common discriminatory response resonates with Wendell’s observation that perhaps the only common element that people with disabilities share is social oppression (31).

⁵⁸ Although Davis specifically refers to the novel genre and it is debatable whether *The Stepsure Letters* constitutes a novel, it is nonetheless remarkable that the primary figure has a disability.

⁵⁹ Since the establishment of English poor laws in the seventeenth century, the people warranting state custody were differentiated as the worthy poor, from those merely unemployed, but the desire to discourage able-bodied indigence resulted in such severe conditions that those who were deemed “deserving” of their keep “tested the minimum required for survival” (Ferguson 60).

Chapter Two

National Body-Building: Disabling Wilderness and Wildness in Ralph Connor's *Sky Pilot* and *The Foreigner*

Canada is a fiction, ours to invent. (N. Richler)

Ralph Connor was the pseudonym of Charles William Gordon, who, like Thomas McCulloch, was a Presbyterian minister driven with a desire to shape the moral character of his nascent Canadian nation. Taken together, Ralph Connor's novels sold over five million copies, making him the "most widely read writer of his time" and "one of the most popular and best-selling novelists Canada has ever had" (New 52). Connor's immense popularity and his deliberate ambition to cultivate a national consciousness determine his place in my review of Canadian literature. I focus on *Sky Pilot* (1899) because it is among his first and most read books. In his memoir of growing up on the Canadian prairies, Wilfred Eggleston wrote: "Most homes had a few books, a Bible, a medical compendium, *The Sky Pilot*, perhaps a novel by Sir Walter Scott, a Sunday school prize or two" (qtd. in Coleman 249, n.30). I include a brief discussion of Connor's *The Foreigner* (1909) in order to suggest the development of Connor's influence on the Canadian psyche.⁶⁰

Unlike McCulloch's satirical account of colonial living, Connor's sentimental Victorian tales did not offend the delicate sensibilities of the English drawing room. According to Thompson and Thompson, in Britain and the United States as well as in Canada "[t]he books were devoured by shopgirls and society matrons, businessmen and theologians, academics and heads of state" (159). Consequently, Connor's particular idealized vision of society informed the prevailing mythos of Canadian identity that endures on some levels to this day, even while his novels are generally dismissed as dated sentimental fictions that no longer reflect the "Canada of popular imagination" (169).

Connor's phenomenal popularity is credited to his unequivocal portrayal of a Canadian identity that in reality was amorphous and contested. He narrated an emerging nation of people whose imported identities conformed readily to a model of an ideal citizen bearing the best elements of British gentility or civility, as Coleman discusses, further refined by the powerful force of Canada's natural environment. Connor's prototypical Canadian is purified by the Western experience that distills a person to her or, more accurately, his human essence (167). Women as well as Aboriginal people, Metis and non-British immigrants are portrayed as stereotypes formed by the English, each category inscribed with aspects attributed to biological heredity. Raw encounters with elemental life in Connor's novels intrinsically involve personal struggles to "civilize" one's inherited tendencies that might impede the progress of the building of the new nation.

Whereas McCulloch in the *Stepsure Letters* humorously depicted occupation as a vocation that determined character, and the cultivation of a good family farm as the mandatory moral foundation for his growing nineteenth-century colony, Connor brings a focus to the role of racial heredity as a player in the struggle to become a "true Canadian." McCulloch's Mephibosheth Stepsure, lame in both legs, attributes his wealth to his providential disability that facilitated his moral enrichment by precluding a preoccupation with superficial appearance. In Connor's 1899 novel, *Sky Pilot*, much attention is also drawn to appearance, but not as a subject of satire. The bodies of the ranchers and pioneers living in the foothills of Alberta are generally described as beautiful and fit; hence, Connor's use of disability provides a stark disruption to the physical standard he creates in his narrative, maximizing the disabled character's thematic and symbolic potency. Although the protagonist's role goes to the angelic and athletic missionary, affectionately dubbed "the Pilot" by his converted cowboys, Connor creates a counterpart for his hero who functions more like his twin than simply a foil. The character of Gwen Meredith is of particular interest not only for her mirroring of the protagonist, but also because she is young, female, disabled and yet, like McCulloch's Stepsure, she represents a Canadian ideal; she symbolizes Canada's Western frontier, which for Connor held the nation's future and its promise (Harrison 96). The West that Gwen embodies was for Connor "the cradle of the new Canadian race" (New 55). The

positioning of Gwen as disabled is further of note because, as Ronald Tranquilla observes, “social Darwinism was making headway in the United States at the time of the publication of the novels” (78). Canada too would soon be galvanized by the social Darwinist trend of eugenics that ultimately targeted people with disabilities as a national threat that demanded eradication. We must look to social history to explain a shift in Connor’s representation of disability. Credited with articulating the “popular imagination” of his time, Connor maintains a more complex characterization of disability in 1899, but by 1909 in his novel *The Foreigner*, the metaphoric possibilities created in Gwen are lost. Connor becomes unambiguous about the type of body that is requisite for being a “true” Canadian. While Connor exploits the conventions of the disability trope in Gwen, at the same time her character gains a centrality that suggests her impaired mobility marks her as the exemplary Canadian, holding promise for herself and those around her. As with Stepsure, physical prowess is not a prerequisite for participating in the “norm” of the emerging nation.

At first glance, Gwen’s disability blends predictably into the maudlin sentimentality of Connor’s writing. As Harrison observes, Gwen symbolizes the untamed wilderness of the West, throbbing with unrestrained power and sexual energy (96). Despite the narrator’s verdict that Gwen “was not beautiful” (119, 140), this is clearly only according to standards for English noblewomen, for Gwen is undeniably attractive to all who encounter her. Even the narrator, whose task is to teach the wild Gwen “something of the refinements of civilization” (113), in spite of himself finds that “the child, with all her willfulness, her tempers and her pride, made me, as she did all others, her willing slave” (123). However, her lack of self-control makes her dangerous. She very nearly kills her beloved dogs because they disobey her. Her skill as a rider is so extraordinary it transgresses gender boundaries. In apoplectic anger at the Pilot’s calling her “weak,” she challenges his masculinity: “I’m not weak! I’m strong! I’m stronger than you are! I’m strong as—as—a man!” (142). The ranchers’ accounts confirm her boast. Even the tall-dark-handsome-cool-hard-as-nails Duke has less nerve and courage than she. She is a child, but, for the ranchers, Gwen is a source of awe and wonder. The Duke, mysteriously configured as her best friend, concludes that she needs the refinement rendered by education and religion, and he therefore conspires with both the narrator,

who has become the local teacher, and the Pilot to introduce her to some civilizing influence. Hence, the subplot of Gwen's learning "civilization" becomes a crystallized micro-narrative of the larger process of territorial nationalization, through the encroaching influence of Eastern Canada on Western territories, via church and school.

The Pilot, Arthur Wellington Moore, arrives in Swan Creek Country from an urbanized Ontario. As a Presbyterian minister he is not simply a missionary of the Christian faith but also, together with representatives of the legal and school systems, an agent of English civilization. Moore arrives in the Alberta foothill settlement unbidden and largely unwelcome, poised to bring Christianity to misguided reprobates. He symbolizes the advance of nation builders, philanthropically bringing "progress" even where none is sought. Unlike those around him, he alone resists Gwen's imperious demands. He prophetically warns her that "Some day, Gwen, you will not be able to do as you like" (143). Soon after, during an extraordinarily heroic attempt to save Joe, her servant, from a charging herd of cattle, Gwen falls and is permanently disabled. Gwen's passion compels her to dare God to impede her independence, and just as her subsequent fall can be seen as a result of her "throwing down the gauntlet" before the Pilot's God, so too her fall can be seen as a consequence of challenging the Pilot's manhood. Evidently, God takes up the dare, although the seasoned doctor tending to the injured Gwen infers the arbitrariness of the event by noting that there is no accounting for the "[e]xtraordinary selection Providence makes." Gwen's young, white, girl's body garners more value than that of her Metis servant. The doctor notes that "we could have spared that lazy half breed with pleasure!" (149). Gwen's pride before an omnipotent power is broken by the breaking of her body. It is the Pilot who helps her overcome the despair of knowing she will never ride or walk again. Gwen's "conversion" to contentment with her lot is the Pilot's victory, not Gwen's. Her remarkable "masculine" strength and skill at ranching are matched by the missionary's extraordinary ability to reach Gwen and make her happy. His manliness is affirmed in this intangible strength. Gwen's disability, therefore, performs according to literary convention, intensifying the moral lessons of the story by highlighting the goodness and power of the non-disabled hero (Davis, *Bending* 45). Gwen's fall alludes to the biblical fall from grace. Her loss of freedom is tragic and elicits pity from readers and from the other characters in the narrative. Her tragedy presents the

ultimate challenge to the Pilot—to grapple with the human dilemma of pain. Disability as a trope for the pain of humanity’s fallen state or sinfulness is one of its most pervasive and most pernicious metaphorical uses, exacerbating popular associations of disability with pain, whereby the human aversion to pain translates into an aversion to people with disabilities (Wendell 92).

Connor portrays the prairie spark as bravely suffering and relentlessly longing for her lost freedom. The extreme injustice of her situation evokes a tragic pity, especially given her youth. However, wild broncos are reluctantly domesticated by force before they become an indispensable part of human culture. Thus, Gwen’s impairment—her unbidden “taming”—becomes a metaphor for the civilizing of the still youthful and rambunctious West. Her compliance to her position is as awe-inspiring as her former physical feats and a tribute to the equally amazing skill of the hero in whom even the roughest men had come to confide. Pilot convinces Gwen that her misfortune is permitted by a wise God who knows her suffering is for the best, a classic response to disability that contributes to notions of disability as justified punishment for personal shortcomings. Gwen’s disability then further functions as a metaphor for the inevitable suffering and restraint involved in the cultivation of the wilderness necessary for nation building.

Gwen’s “disabling” is heavily gendered as well. Gwen’s pride and self-determination befit Victorian notions of “femininity” as little as her tanned skin follows British fashion trends of the day. Gwen’s subsequent confinement to her bed glaringly, if perhaps unconsciously on Connor’s part, puts woman in her place. Her fall is a penalty advising against the crossing of gender boundaries. No longer able to be out of control physically, Gwen is now safely contained within her house, penned in like a domesticated farm animal. Tranquilla demonstrates how the house, in early North American literature, is a metonymic response to the environment, “representing man’s [sic] first cultural and imaginative assertion as well as his most immediate defense against his environment” (74).⁶¹ Enclosed within the house, Gwen is no longer one with the wild things but rather is claimed by the forces of civilization.⁶² Gwen must forego the masculine ranching activities she reveled in and be content to live vicariously through those who visit her. Harris points out the comic, blatantly sexual allusions surrounding Gwen’s canyon that permeate the plot, even if unwittingly inscribed by the author. Once Gwen is confined to

her bed, “her canyon” continues to blossom, emphasizing her sexual fecundity as one of the multi-layered passive roles for the woman in the “civilized” order. Once bedridden, Gwen’s colouring conforms to British standards of beauty. She loses the “brown” skin that associated her with her Blackfoot companions. As she listens to the Pilot describe the canyon, “the rapture of it drew the big tears down her cheeks—alas! No longer brown, but white, and for that day at least the dull, dead weariness was lifted from her heart” (166). Gwen, in essence, is a better person once she is immobilized. Her white face resonates with the whiteness that, within the narrative, is considered to indicate virtuous personhood. The cowboy Bronco Bill’s trustworthiness, for example, is demonstrated by the fact that his comrades say he is “‘a white man, white to the back,’ which was understood to sum up the true cattle man’s virtues” (211). Gwen’s impairment enables her entry into the white British aristocratic norm of “civilized” Canadian society.⁶³

Lennard Davis theorizes that disability is deployed strategically in literature as a primary method for maintaining the established able-bodied norm. Anomaly is introduced, disrupting what is valued. The requisite emotional turmoil wrought by the disabling complication is ultimately alleviated through its erasure, usually by cure or death. Although Connor draws on disability convention in his configuration of Gwen, reinforcing particularly a gendered, white, British norm, her character surprisingly also disrupts several of the standardized patterns of literary disability cliché.

Gwen’s physical disabling symbolizes the impossibility of her former position in the impending civilized order. In an ironic way, however, her lack of mobility (which forces her refining) is used similarly to Stepsure’s: illuminating physical restriction as informing life positively for the individual and the collective. Significantly, the limitation of both characters actively influences the community, rather than the individual exclusively. Gwen’s disability is not, according to the medical model, simply a personal misfortune necessitating inspirational will in overcoming. However, while Stepsure’s disability liberates him from the ridiculous trajectories of his society, Gwen’s confinement catalyzes her social engagement. Not only does she come to care for the community project of church building, but she draws community members into her life. In fact, despite the pathos Connor elicits through Gwen, he also repositions her into the role of his protagonist and hero, the Sky Pilot. Disabled, Gwen is positioned more

directly as the Pilot's mirror image, his counterpart. Where in literary convention the disabled figure is erased, it is critical to note that in this narrative the hero is the one who dies and the disabled figure continues his work. The Pilot can be read as a Christ figure who brings his transformative message to the people for a limited time and then must return to heaven. He commissions his disciples to carry on, but it is Gwen who is in the lead, assuring Bill that "we'll help each other" (298). Gwen's "fall" then evokes not a fall from grace but rather the biblical "fall" of Paul that signified his conversion and calling to discipleship. The biblical Paul powerfully shapes the emerging Christian Church through his letters, and Gwen exerts her influence on an emerging nation through the messages she sends through those who visit her.

The "twinning" of the Pilot and Gwen is apparent in their physical description, their exuberant stubbornness, and their charismatic effect on others. When the Pilot arrives on the Western scene, his physical appearance contrasts radically with the core group of ranchers, "the Noble Seven." These ranchers, all hailing from aristocratic British homes, are persistently described as having Hollywood movie-star perfection: they are rough, rugged, fit.⁶⁴ The head of the group, Fred Ashley, has "a magnificent physique," and the tall, dark and mysterious "Duke" is the "perfect picture of a man" (27). These hard-living, hard-working, hard-drinking models of masculinity are juxtaposed with the effeminate, university-educated parson. "He was very slight, very young, very innocent, with a face that might do for an angel" (46). His arrival is met with derision; he is called a "bantam chicken," a parody of a parson, likened to a "nursery kid foolin' round my graveyard" (45-46). He appears ill-equipped to survive the rigours of the frontier.

Connor is concerned not only with the appearance of his characters, but also with their class inheritance. All of the main characters in the narrative are descendents of good Brits, "[w]ell born and delicately bred" (25), albeit demonstrated in varying degrees. The missionary, too, as a Princeton graduate, embodies a New World education with Old World status. He wins over some of his greatest resistors with his Princeton-acquired ball-playing skills that bring victory to the ranchers' baseball team. In this way, the ranchers (and the readers) can recognize that outward appearance does not reveal the extent of a person. The Pilot, young and girlish as he is, ultimately demonstrates that living a Christian (protestant) faith renders a real man: "Men can't live without Him, and

be men!” (65). Thus Connor at least begins to subvert his own ostensible insistence on physical perfection. His protagonist is no Olympian; he is “tender as a woman and with the heart of a hero” (244). The Pilot’s unswerving determination to uphold what seems right to him demonstrates a courage that surpasses the courage of brawn. Instead, the Pilot’s strength is portrayed through his unflinching gaze. Similarly, Gwen’s eyes “looked straight at you” (119).

Gwen is also a character with unusual and awe-inspiring strength, not of the testosterone variety. She too is referred to as “good stock” (110). Like the pilot, “she’s just a kid.” She is a “child” of fourteen or fifteen but as the cowboy Hi observes, “Tain’t the bigness of her, it’s the nerve. She’s got the coldest kind of nerve you ever seen” (109). The ranch workers have difficulty describing her: “she ain’t like nuthin’” (108). The Duke, however, finds an analogy in wildlife: “wild and shy as a coyote, but fearless, quite” (111). In contrast to the Pilot’s angelic air, she is called a “little Lucifer,” “hardly civilized (112), “a pagan” (113), “willful and wicked” (139). In short, she begins as the preacher’s dark side. After threatening to kill the narrator for wanting to harm her dogs, she almost kills them herself, for disobeying her. But her proud imperiousness is coupled with “dignity and graciousness,” and her wild golden-red hair does frame her head like a halo. Her eyes, “blue-black with grey rims,” (119) command an authority matched only by the Pilot’s “luminous” eyes (48). Much is made of Gwen’s foot-stomping willfulness, but the Pilot is also accustomed to getting his own way: “the feeling of failure was upon him, and failure to his enthusiastic nature was worse than pain” (185).

The Pilot’s and Gwen’s doubling is most evident when he first meets her at the river crossing on his way to her home. Their argument over whether he is capable of crossing without Gwen’s intervention illuminates their mutual dependence on each other. She insists that she has saved him, while he equally stubbornly insists that he would have been able to cross without her. They engage in an infantile contest of wills that quite predictably concludes with the conversion of both Gwen and her father, the Old Timer. The Pilot arrives to redeem Gwen, but his immersion in the river suggests Gwen as a John the Baptist, bringing the Pilot into a rebirth of sorts, once their lives intertwine. They complete each other. The narrator explains: “They were much alike, in high temper, in enthusiasm, in vivid imagination, and in sensitive feeling” (127). Gwen’s virility and

the Pilot's femininity meet and shake hands, as it were. Their extraordinary capacity for conveying intensity of emotion is the same. They radically affect each other and those around them.

Gwen's initial encounter with the Jesus story enralls her and inspires the Pilot's own faith. By opening this new world for Gwen, the parson in turn finds a source of "cheer" in her company (185). When others are at a loss to know how to raise Gwen's spirits after her accident, Pilot succeeds by putting himself in her place and physically immersing himself in the "wild" splendour of the canyon. Just as the narrator saw his natural surroundings come alive "through the luminous eyes of The Pilot" (49), the young parson sees the canyon in a fresh way through Gwen's eyes. Imbued with the natural environment that sustained Gwen's being, he brings it to her not only with his words but also with his body: "like a summer breeze he burst into the little room" (165). The features that most required restraint in Gwen are the features that make the Pilot most attractive and powerful—passion, honesty, innocence, fearlessness. Thus, the two characters present one personality formed by two major agents: Gwen's instructors are "the cattle on the range, wild as deer, the coyotes, the jack-rabbits and the timber wolves" (139), while the Pilot is trained in the institutions of Western civilization, church and school. The pairing of Gwen and the Pilot suggests that both influences would ideally coexist. Since both personalities draw loyal followers, and both characters are described as outside the norm, Connor implies that this new frontier can shape a new citizen that does not conform to convention. Although the Pilot arrives as the "civilizer," he is removed from the scene; he dies. Gwen, immobilized, survives. Not only does she live, she and hence the new West look towards the future with hope.

Both characters attract disciples. Gwen is worshipped by those around her: "Of course, all spoiled her. [The servant] Ponka and her son Joe groveled in abjectest adoration, while her father and all who came within touch of her simply did her will" (140). Likewise, the missionary wins everyone's trust and affection just as, by his own testimony, he beguiled the narrator on their first meeting: "his enthusiasm, his deference to my opinion, his charm of manner, his beautiful face, his luminous eyes, made him perfectly irresistible" (48). Significantly, after the accident, neither Gwen's temper nor her popularity wanes. The doctor is the only character who suggests Gwen might be

better off dead than disabled.⁶⁵ Without exception, no other characters would agree with the doctor. Despite harrowing vigils beside her bed, the men around Gwen show no sign of wanting to end her misery.⁶⁶ Gwen's confinement and the initial threat to her life serve to reveal human interdependence. She sees her canyon (the good things in life) through others and they see it through her. The Duke, the epitome of the stock cowboy hero of the future genre of American Western films, is portrayed as fiercely and romantically self-sufficient, solitary—a Teflon man—free from any restraints. After Gwen's fall, the Duke admits that he depends on Gwen to ground his humanity and that if she should die, he could not continue in that country. Gwen was and continues to be the Duke's redemption. To the narrator's amazement, the Duke admits his need for Gwen. Gwen's value, then, does not lie in her awesome physical ability to "ranch" better than the men. Her value emerges in relationship. It is the Pilot who underscores and explains the responsibility community members have for each other. The sins that the Pilot condemns are those that, as Ivan Illich characterizes, betray relationship. He condemns the idea of self-sufficiency and the blaming of an individual for their misfortune.⁶⁷ In response to the suggestion that "a man ought to look after himself," Pilot replies "Yes!—and his brother a little" (80). The narrator contemplates this new directive for the West: "an uncomfortable doctrine to practice, interfering seriously with personal liberty, . . . There would be no end to one's responsibility" (81). Indeed, the Pilot holds Gwen's community responsible for her temper and inconsolable state after her fall. He indicts them all for fostering her inappropriate behaviour, "and then not only wonder at the results, but blame her, poor child, for all" (161). He is able to help Gwen find peace with herself because, of all her devoted followers, it is only he who attempts to look beyond himself to her specific context and need. The Pilot demonstrates the ethic of relationship, not forcing Gwen into a prefabricated formula of behaviour, but being present to her particular situation.⁶⁸

There are indications that suggest the disabled figure of Gwen is deliberately challenging contemporary attitudes towards disability in two instances. The first is the Pilot's reluctance to introduce Gwen to Lady Charlotte—the transplanted English aristocrat. He fears the class distinction will disturb Gwen, but more significantly, he questions Charlotte's reasons for wanting to see Gwen since "these people love a sensation" (241). Furthermore, the Duke directly challenges the Lady's interest. "Why

should you be interested in her? No one was,' he added sadly, 'till misfortune distinguished her'" (235). The two characters are poised to protect Gwen from being made into a spectacle for those with "idle curiosity" (241). At this time in history it was not unusual for people with anomalous bodies, whether from acquired disabilities or congenital differences, to be displayed as entertainment or as "scientific" curiosities.⁶⁹ This trend continues currently in the use of disability in the media where stories foregrounding disability focus primarily on sensationalism, featuring disability as a narrative of tragedy or inspirational overcoming. Ironically, in this novel, Connor's use of disability in Gwen both reinforces this stereotype and resists it. The inspirational Gwen is not exactly the clichéd disability saint; with her former passion, she devises and orchestrates a scheme to solve the Pilot's church-building dilemma. She delegates Bill as her main agent. His dedication to her will is no less than before her impairment: "[W]hen my pardner, . . . calls for trumps, I'm blanked it I don't throw my highest, if it costs a leg'" (206).

During his fundraising mission, Bill portrays Gwen as the pathetic saintly cripple, selflessly (and melodramatically) sacrificing her beloved equine companion to raise funds for the community church that she, bedridden, would not be able to attend. Bill's portrait of Gwen is deliberately configured to evoke pity and compel the hearers to donate money for her cause. The image of Gwen's laughter at Bill's success with moving the immovable "little Scotchman" (184) who was holding up the church-building project starkly and humorously contrasts with the "charity poster" Gwen: "'Oh, dear! Oh, dear!' she kept crying, shrieking with laughter" (200). Bill's fundraising strategy prefigures the future phenomenon of charity telethons that capitalize on people's impulses to feel good about themselves by being "charitable." Helping the less fortunate creates a plethora of emotional and psychological benefits for the giver; these benefits increase as the misfortune of the receiver increases, resulting in the fundraiser's need to highlight the "tragic" while eliding what does not elicit pity (Longmore, "Conspicuous" 151). Clearly, Bill's skillful drawing of Gwen provides the ranchers with a service for which they happily pay:

The men were greatly pleased with Bill and even more pleased with themselves. Bill's picture of the 'leettle gel' and her pathetically tragic lot

had gone right to their hearts and, with men of that stamp, it was one of their few luxuries to yield to their generous impulses. The most of them had few opportunities of lavishing love and sympathy upon worthy objects and, when the opportunity came, all that was best in them clamored for expression. (217)

However, Gwen's role in the community is more than one of inspiring pity. Her feisty nature continues to influence others, but now, ensconced in her inner being (symbolized by her room), her intelligence joins her passion in the focused goal to help another. The imperative for the formative nation of Canada, according to this narrative, is for people to acknowledge their need of each other and their responsibility for each other. Connor's narrative fosters a spirit of interdependence, as opposed to the fierce independence of popular American ideology (Tranquilla 75).

Gwen illustrates the danger and ease of internalizing notions of disability as inferiority. She fears that she can be of "no use to anyone" (175), and consequently she will be rejected: "I know they will get tired of me" (176). Gwen's intense dissatisfaction with her new position stems from a paradigm that evaluates worth through utility. Thus her transformation from seeing herself as "hateful" to being "bright as the morning" (235) follows her understanding of a different standard of value, that of being rather than doing. The Pilot helps her know that she is loved by God and demonstrably needed by those around her, affirming her being as she is. Finding her authentic self through the introspection afforded by her immobility is suggested metaphorically by her position within her room, looking out through the window—her metaphoric eyes. However, her self-knowledge and contentment depend on the affirmation of others. Gwen's impairment would end in tragedy and despair if others permitted it. If they no longer saw Gwen as their "pardner" but saw her as tragedy, she would despair. Significantly, the doctor's prescription for Gwen's companions—"her spirits must be kept up" (148)—is more profound than first appears. When affirmed as worthwhile and important to others, Gwen's character illustrates that physical conditions can be accommodated. Gwen's perspective can be seen as emerging from the liminal space rendered by her disability. The lady Charlotte finds that "wonderful things are to be seen through Gwen's window" (253). Through her relationship with Gwen, Charlotte learns to come to terms with a

mystifying dilemma that has clouded her own being. Although she had confided in the Pilot, it is through knowing Gwen that she succeeds in grappling with her problem that, although not identified, involved a troubling relationship with family.

Connor thus uses disability in Gwen to illuminate his social vision, which is presented by the preacher who appears for a time and literally passes away. The ranchers and Gwen accepted the Pilot because he accepted them: “No man [before him] had ever shown concern for them” (290). They expected his interest was professional, but when they learned it was “genuine” they became his followers. Again, the novel foregrounds the overwhelming need for authentic relationship and an ethic of otherness where those involved strive to recognize each other’s uniqueness of being. Gwen’s scene with Bill at the Pilot’s funeral resounds with the novel’s theme of relationship. He carries her close to their friend’s body. Her steady gaze at Bill, despite their acute sorrow, recalls the Pilot’s manner. Admitting their fear, they agree that they will be able to carry on without the Pilot only by helping each other. One can imagine the credits of an old black and white film with harp and heavenly choirs rising in crescendo as the words of the preface are repeated: “The measure of a man’s power to help his brother is the measure of the love in the heart of him and of the faith he has that at last the good will win.” “The good” is embodied in Gwen’s disabled body and in the value others attribute to her. Gwen’s “disabling” parallels the “civilizing” of the Western wilderness, a civilizing considered to be necessary and progressive. Gwen’s disability in Ralph Connor’s *Sky Pilot* offers an exemplary portrayal of the relationship that must undergird the mythos of society Canadian nation builders can strive towards.

In contrast, ten years later in the novel *The Foreigner*, Connor’s concept of society shifts from an imperative of relationship to one of paternalism and enforcement of a dominant norm. Although the narrative follows the formulaic pattern of all Connor novels in which a romanticized hero represents the ultimate victory of civilization over savagery, a notable shift in emphasis occurs from the *Sky Pilot*’s morality of interdependence to a morality that can be discerned directly by physical appearance. The shift warrants attention within the historical context regarding disability and difference. As immigration to Canada increased, populations swelled with newcomers from diverse parts of the world. Urban centres consequently began to exhibit the social problems that

the colonials had fled in the “Old World,” and the Anglo-Saxon establishment embraced an eugenic ideology that overtly strove to “improve” society (and in Canada, the developing utopian nation) by regulating human “breeding.” In *Sky Pilot*, published in 1899, the moral difference disability makes rests in material pragmatism, not unlike that embodied in McCulloch’s *Stepsure*. One learns to accommodate restricted mobility and hence the disabled figures hold acquired wisdom, but only with the aid of religion and other “good” people. The “different” character retains the disability difference as s/he plays the exemplary role. In *The Foreigner* (1909), there are no heroes with permanent mobility restrictions. There is a mass of humanity, however, labeled “foreign” that is distinctly marked as Other, classically outlining the prescribed norm. This “undigested foreign mass” (255) is constructed as morally disabled and requiring rehabilitation into British cultural norms in order to become “truly” Canadian. However, only those whose bodies conform to the aesthetic norms of the power establishment can hope to transcend their barbaric inheritance, which in itself predisposes them primarily for hard manual labour.

Just as the social model of disability perceives society as disabling people with atypical bodies by constructing them as deviant, so too Connor’s narrative disables the “foreigners” by constructing them as inferior species. In discussing the dilemma of disability bias, Celia Haig-Brown and Carl E. James agree on the imperative that we must see ourselves, individually and collectively, constructing people as different before affecting social justice (316). Connor’s *The Foreigner* demonstrates a mainstream defensive reflex to what appears to be a disruption of order. As Michelle Rosaldo observes, “whatever violates a society’s sense of order will be seen as threatening, nasty, disorderly or wrong” (qtd in Herndl 83). Read from a Disability Studies perspective, Connor’s work demonstrates an evolution of a national construction of difference that involves a complex tangle of reactions to multiple social factors including imperialist impulses, power relations, aesthetic bias, and economic concerns.

The social model of disability recognizes that given bodies are marked by society as undesirable, and social environments, both physical and attitudinal, are constructed to support a prescribed model of able-bodiedness that excludes all whose bodies do not conform. Consequently a need arises for a system of industries that thrive on the

“management” of disenfranchised “defectives.” Mainstream society is dependent on this construction of abnormality to maintain the concept of the norm and the power of those who control it. The medical model configures this abnormality as pathology, thus delegating the leading role in management to the medical arena. Thus difference is received as disease demanding cure. The response, then, to the problem of difference is to strive to normalize the anomaly—“re”habilitation—returning to how one “should” live. Prosthetics reproduce a semblance of the requisite norm, while retaining the stigma of defect and abnormality. Attempts to “normalize” unconventional bodies negate the possibility of their intrinsic validity and fortify a normal mandate that serves to further mark the prosthetized body as abnormal (Stiker 150). Hence, Connor’s project in *The Foreigner* is to normalize human cultural difference into a model of citizenship that he imagines to be ideal. The “making of a nation” that Canada is undergoing, for Connor, involves a concerted effort on the part of the “civilizing” agents of society to erase national backgrounds in order that they merge, as Connor’s “Preface” suggests, into one united “Entity of Canadian national life”: “The blood strains of great races will mingle in the blood of a race greater than the greatest of them all” (5).⁷⁰ This fusion is to occur within an idealized version of a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant norm, not identified as ethnic, since it occupies a privileged position of power, in the same way that the non-disabled and white position assumes neutrality. The preachers, police officers, doctors, and self-appointed social workers such as Connor’s Mrs French combine heroic efforts of tolerance, patience, and beneficent force to teach the newcomers decency. Jack French exercises the same admirable qualities handling the “plunging broncos” as he needs to deal with the “wrathful and murderous Galician” (219) who savagely attacks him after French accidentally runs the man’s cart off the road. French amiably overpowers the irate foreigner and creates a teaching moment to instruct him in the “manly art” of fist fighting (216). The parallel between taming broncos and people assumes more of a sinister note in this later narrative, because of a power differential between the foreigner and non-foreigner that brings the analogy closer to a literal comparison.

Connor shapes cultural difference from the British norm as morally defective, and it is marked on the body primarily through dress, hygiene and substandard intelligence. Whereas in the *Sky Pilot*, the ranchers expecting to be pitied by the preacher

were surprised to find respect and understanding, in *The Foreigner* the readers are asked to pity the immigrants rather than be horrified. When the formulaic “good woman” of the narrative, Mrs French, exhorts her brother-in-law to “pity” the “poor ignorant creatures,” he implies that this strains ordinary generosity and spotlights her saintliness for “she’d find good points in the very devil himself!” (195). In *Sky Pilot*, the Westerners are drawn as sympathetic figures, despite their “wildness,” whereas in *The Foreigner*, the repulsive and sinister Other foregrounds the moral superiority of the non-foreigner: “The little white-faced Mrs French . . . the symbol of all that was high and holy in character” (205) is financially secure because “the Lord has given [her] many friends, and He never has allowed [her] to want” (197). Because the “good woman” is rewarded for her virtue, the poverty of the immigrants also seems providential. Indeed, wealth increases with assimilation.

In contrast to the wise English woman is the Galician, Paulina Koval. She embodies the repugnant ethnic traits that, once on Canadian soil, must be purged.⁷¹ Repeatedly described as cognitively deficient and animalistic, she appears less than human and hence, “insensib[le] to moral distinctions.” Fat, tanned, filthy, slovenly, she allows herself to be exploited sexually and financially by the men in her life (25). Juxtaposed with the Galician figure, even the comic stock figure of an Irishwoman seems a beacon of decency and good sense. Despite Connor’s articulated desire to see a new Canadian race emerging from the myriad of cultures settling Canada, he does not create a new “us.” Instead he reduces non-British residents into an indistinguishable mass of otherness, creating a stark binary between us (presumed non-ethnic) and them.⁷² “It was the East meeting the West, the Slav facing the Anglo-Saxon. Between their points of view stretched generations of moral development. It was not a question of absolute moral character so much as a question of moral standards” (24-25). Thus, the narrative manifests the increasingly popular focus on the question of character determined by heredity or social environment (nature/nurture). The foreigners are characterized as less intelligent than the Anglo-Saxon hosts; however, exceptions to the rule are recognized in physical beauty and the swiftness of a foreigner’s adoption of English norms. The biological father of the two children in Paulina’s charge speaks English eloquently, dresses impeccably, and has “an appearance of higher intelligence than the average

Galician” (103). His wife is a Russian aristocrat and their children, therefore, show promise.

Even the Irishwoman recognizes that the girl, Irma, in Paulina’s charge is not her biological offspring. “Tin years, an’ she has more sinse in the hair outside av her head than that woman has in the brains inside a hers. It’s aisy seen she’s no mother of hers—ye can niver get canary burrds from owls’ eggs” (23). Yet, Irma’s transformation occurs when she discards her ethnic dress for “Canadian” clothes. Miraculously, Irma becomes a model of morality. The flirting she engaged in when in “Galician garb” is no longer enjoyable once dressed as a Canadian. As Connor’s narrator explains, “For such subtle influence does dress exercise over the mind that something of the spirit of the garb seems to pass into the spirit of the wearer. Self-respect is often born in the tailor shop or in the costumer’s parlour” (166).

Similarly Paulina’s step-son, “a fine handsome little fellow,” is recognized as “different” from his dull-witted mother. The narrative details the coming-of-age of this character, Kalman Kalmar. He demonstrates the possibility of transcending ethnic barbarism to become the good Canadian. Kalman becomes “a Canadian among Canadians” (373) by adopting the look, speech, habits, and faith of “the” Anglo-Saxon, and finally marrying into the power class. Nevertheless, as a “Galician” he is prosthetized, and his hereditary (ethnic) moral impairment remains a hidden threat, evidenced by the surfacing of violent rage when he is provoked, horrifying the girl he fancies. Despite this drawback, the romance develops when Kalman, despite having broken his foot, heroically rescues the lovely daughter of the president of the mining company that he manages. As she departs for Scotland, Kalman bids her farewell “sitting on his bronco, for he hated to go lame before them all” (327). His disability, significantly, is prosthetized by sitting on the horse. Kalman is left behind but is soon able to catch up. Thus, although Kalman’s ethnicity is a handicap manifested by his broken limb, it can be overcome with rehabilitation. Just as his horse closes the distance between him and the “normal” characters, the steady work of the civilizers may train the inferior breeds to overcome their defects. His lameness is no longer mentioned. Kalman’s final success as a Canadian is not due to his own credit but to his Scottish love interest, who overcomes her aversion to foreigners and shakes the hand he feels is too dirty to extend to her. His dirty

hand evokes his crippling heritage that dare not mingle with the noble Scottish blood. Signaling the new order of the “wonderful country,” the girl accepts Kalman’s hand because he manifests the power of Canada to “transform men” (378).

In *The Foreigner*, developmental disability, immorality, ethnicity, poverty and violence are conflated in the ethnic Other marked by ethnicized clothing and filth. Assimilation into a WASP norm is mandatory before becoming “transformed” like Kalman into a “Canadian foreigner” (384), affirming the norm by striving to reproduce it, yet maintaining a power differential between us and them through the notion of an inherent dichotomy.

Connor’s inscription of physical anomaly in the two novels reveals a shift in the concern with difference in the project of nation building. Whereas *Sky Pilot* suggests inclusive community relations with members benefiting mutually from an ethos of collective responsibility, *The Foreigner* creates a readily discernible “Other” that demands attention from the norm. The progression in *Sky Pilot* is that class, occupation, gender, ability, difference becomes “we,” striving towards a common goal of community interdependence. Ten years later, in *The Foreigner* difference becomes threatening and requires remedy. This shift echoes a medical view of disability, configuring difference as a defect to be eliminated or hidden from view. The reader is presumed to participate in a “we” that unites in contrasting with the inferior other. Connor’s sustained popularity in 1909 suggests a growing intolerance of diversity in the Canadian mainstream that carried and still carries oppressive ramifications for any groups considered to be different. Far from representing the desired merging of multiplicity into the hybridity of excellence imagined in the preface, *The Foreigner* demonstrates the process of creating deviance from difference in what political theorist Iris Marion Young describes as “the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society” (41). Young’s analysis of social oppression probes the enculturated and unconscious bias that operates within socio-political and cultural institutions, confirming Douglas Biklen’s argument that social policy relating to disability is formulated within an unacknowledged biased social context that must be examined through a different lens in order to be understood: “Because social scientists and social policy developers work within a social context, and because that context becomes so much a part of their perspective, it is difficult to achieve a sufficient

level of reflection or self-criticism” (530). Therefore, Biklen advises using literature as a means to access the attitudinal milieu surrounding disability policy. In *The Foreigner*, the young male Galician must be removed from his home and ethnic community to be trained into normalcy. His transformation into a facsimile of sameness is his achievement and success. This paradigm echoes the policies that removed Aboriginal children and children with disabilities from their families into state institutions purportedly for their own and society’s “improvement.” Although the condescending tone of the doctors, preachers, and police officers exists between the covers of fiction, *The Foreigner* chillingly foreshadows the construction of difference delineated in Alberta’s contributions to eugenic discourse, found in the arguments of an article printed in Vancouver’s daily newspaper in 1932.⁷³

This article, written by Connor’s contemporary, the renowned reformer and feminist of early twentieth century Canada, Emily Murphy, demonstrates the phenomenon of Othering, seen in Connor’s fiction, at work in legislated disability policy. Her vehement promotion of eugenics as the scientific and, therefore, intelligent, solution to social ills provides a non-fiction example of Connor’s fictional process of identity building, where categories of privilege are constructed on foundations of devalued otherness. Emily Murphy, like Connor, consciously engaged in Canadian nation-building. She championed the right of women to be full citizens in the public as well as private arenas. However, in the way that in Connor’s narrative personal worth correlates with proximity to the expectations of a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant cultural norm, Emily Murphy’s article demonstrates that her vision for gender equality was limited to women like herself in economic and educational status. By constructing disability as profligate deviance inherently situated in the lower classes and immigrant populations, Murphy draws the line, as it were, between those deserving political power and those whose inferiority warranted disenfranchisement. By illuminating a threatening “other” marked by a level of intellectual capacity, Murphy erases the question of gender as a marker of inferiority. As a social reformer with a personal investment in the devaluation of disability as abnormality, Murphy provides an historical example of the social and power investments made in the process of configuring deviance illustrated in *The Foreigner*.

After Alberta ratified The Sexual Sterilization Act in 1928, Murphy successfully advocated for a similar law for British Columbia. By the time Canadian eugenic laws

were repealed in the 1970s, thousands of Canadians had been subjected to non-therapeutic sterilization procedures without their consent and often without their knowledge. A disproportionate number of Native and Eastern European women were affected, women who shared backgrounds with the fictional images of Connor's Galician Paulina and Metis Ponka (McLaren 160).

The images that Murphy paints of a menacing onslaught of undesirable aliens threatening to pollute the "future manhood of the Dominion of Canada" evokes Connor's portrayals of "ignorant" immigrants, pathetically herding together in filth and squalor. Both texts contrive Otherness not only as an ominous problem demanding address, but also as the defining boundary that gives shape to the acceptable norm. A solidarity is forged among those who are able to pass as successful citizens by identifying a disabling difference in supposedly expendable others. As Kenneth Burke observes, we need the enemy to define ourselves (268).⁷⁴ The binary pairing of us/them artificially polarizes readers' identifications. Thus, readers of both Connor and Murphy must align with the "normal" in order to avoid association with the inferior Others. Furthermore, just as Connor conflates the images of ethnicity with developmental disability and animalism, Murphy identifies those within the country who are "insane and feebleminded" as "outsiders" and "the human wreckage which has been dumped from foreign lands." Then, if "our thinking is directed, not by the force of the argument at hand, but by the interest in the image in our mind" (Beardsley 194), conceivably the images of "difference" that Connor provided in *The Foreigner* may have preconditioned readers to accept the flagrantly dehumanizing notions of people with disabilities in Emily Murphy's discourse and in similar attitudes of her day.⁷⁵ Re-reading Canadian literary texts that have informed our culture in order to interrogate images and metaphors of disability provides a new venue for inspecting collective and personal thoughts and behaviour towards the people these images and metaphors represent.

Recognizing Murphy's investment in the construction of difference alerts us to the ongoing process in social relations that persists in obstructing institutional equality and justice. Essentially, difference challenges the status quo, threatening the complacency of those who benefit from conventional systems. Deconstructing cultural processes of disabling is mandatory, therefore, in the effort to create a Canadian nation where human

variation can enrich rather than oppress its members. The images of difference inscribed by Connor in *The Foreigner* on the national imaginary can be seen as enabling Murphy's political project that itself participates in the same model of nation-building as Connor's: perpetuating dominant inequities through suppressing ordinary human diversity.

⁶⁰ Coleman also discusses Connor because his “works and career so readily illustrate the phenomenon of the popular author who had enormous influence not just upon public opinion but also upon public policy” (38). Coleman analyses Connor’s image of muscular Christianity as a recurring trope that functions as a form of national pedagogy. The image of a powerful sculpted body whose vibrant energy is guided and controlled by practical Christian morality becomes the Canadian prototype: “what ‘Canadian’ looks like so [citizens] can repetitively act it out themselves” (40). While Coleman uncovers the role of the muscular Christian in the establishment of a dominant Canadian White British civility, I suggest that this same image also functions to enforce a corporeal normativity that generates anxiety about perceived anomaly and qualifications for citizenship. Would a “pure-bred” British Canadian with the requisite religious affiliation constitute model citizenship if s/he were disfigured? Is the person who limps a “bad Canadian”? Or must those who cannot strive to conform to the strong, muscular, enterprising image of “Canada” be forced to internalize a sense of inadequacy as citizens?

⁶¹ Although I recognize non-inclusive language as a reinforcement of androcentrism, I will not distract readers with further interpolations of “sic” at every such occurrence.

⁶² Connor seems to favour narrative expediency over credibility in that it occurs to no one that Gwen’s pining for the outdoors might be alleviated by simply carrying her, “small child” that she is, out the door.

⁶³ The intersection of constructions of disability, femininity, and race found in Gwen has contributed to the initial exclusion of women with disabilities from feminist concerns.

The image of Gwen as “the” disabled woman—passive, confined, dependent, and

sexually desirable—portrays the antithesis of the goals of an early feminist movement.

See Fine and Asch.

⁶⁴ The narrative reads like an extended episode of the 1960's television series

Bonanza—the Canadian version. The men in Connor's Canadian West reflect the stock figure of the muscular Christian discussed by Carleton (128-167).

⁶⁵ Currently disability rights activists engage in an uphill battle against this uninterrogated popular presumption that devalues the experience of disability and endangers the lives of people with disabilities by making them most vulnerable to the pernicious benevolence of euthanasia, assisted suicide, mercy killing, and DNR orders. See *CBC Ideas*: "Life."

⁶⁶ The argument of shooting injured horses in farm culture as a necessary and compassionate practice has surfaced frequently in the past decade in defence of Robert Latimer's murder of his daughter Tracy, who had cerebral palsy.

⁶⁷ The medical model's personalization of disability interprets the social exclusion of people with disability as misfortune rather than injustice.

⁶⁸ See Introduction, 26.

⁶⁹ See note 56.

⁷⁰ Coleman notes that the movie based on *The Foreigner* is called *God's Crucible* (1922), which Connor suggests the Northwest will be for the nation (132).

⁷¹ As Susan Gingell has pointed out to me: "Connor's prefatory rhetoric about 'the blood strains of *great* races' (emphasis added) is not borne out in his representation of British-Canadians' ethnicized Others." Connor's fictional characters reflect the taxonomic categorizing of non-British immigrants. Nordic nations were considered to be most

desirable and Slavs were among the nations deemed inferior to those of British heritage (Woodsworth 92).

⁷² Immigrants from Eastern Europe are fused into “Slavs” or “Galicians,” but their hereditary inferiority is similar to that in Connor’s depiction of Aboriginal figures.

⁷³ See Appendix for the text of Emily Murphy, “Sterilization of the Insane,” *The Vancouver Sun* Sept. 1932.

<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/famous5/excerpts/pages/sterilization1.html> March 5, 2004.

⁷⁴ The cultural theorist John Fiske agrees. He emphasizes the “sense of oppositionality” (24) crucial to any culture’s self-definition. Thus, if people with disabilities are stigmatized as Other they are not perceived as “good” or “real” citizens and become vulnerable to a system that treats them as inferior without acknowledging it. The systemic double-standard for disability is naturalized, taken for granted, rather than recognized as discriminatory.

⁷⁵ I do not intend to suggest that Connor’s text was the only vehicle for conditioning readers to accept Murphy’s eugenical construction of Otherness. A broad study of cultural productions of disability in this historical era would yield interesting insights into attitudes towards difference and normalcy.

Chapter Three

Beguiling Beauty: Inscribing Normalcy in the *Emily* Trilogy

“he does not have to think be cause he knows/...because he knows, he cannot understand.” (e.e. cummings)

Like the work of Ralph Connor, Lucy Maud Montgomery’s fiction has played a major role in forming the national imaginary. Her vision of Prince Edward Island and its rural communities has sustained enduring popularity not only through time but also across cultures and languages around the world. Montgomery’s world, iconic of Canada, continues to be reproduced in contemporary media. Therefore, an examination of her portrayal of disability provides insight into the meaning of difference in Canadian identity. I focus on the *Emily* trilogy because of the many characters that are marked with anomaly.

In the *Emily* trilogy, *Emily of New Moon* (ENM), *Emily Climbs* (EC), and *Emily’s Quest* (EQ), physical disability, inscribed on the characters of Dean Priest, Mrs Kent, and Mr Morrison, functions as a sign of personal defect, alerting readers to the dangers surrounding the heroine Emily Starr’s ultimate self-actualization. Yet Montgomery also uses developmental disability, portrayed in the heroine’s Uncle Jimmy, as a metaphor for the oppression endured by creative artists in the Canada of her day. The deployment of disability in these novels reproduces the conventional literary paradigm of enforcing normalcy theorized in Disability Studies literary scholarship. Interrogating the images of disability in Montgomery’s work problematizes the idyllic evaluations of her fictional world that have so profoundly informed Canadian cultural identity.

Montgomery’s deployment of disability in the *Emily* series is consonant with the eugenic attitude towards disability conveyed by the woman’s suffrage movement of her era. Militant feminist activists in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada such

as Marie Stopes, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Emily Murphy opposed the construction of women as inherently disabled, and therefore incapable of functioning in the public sphere, by pointing to a segment of the population as genetically defective and legitimately warranting disenfranchisement.⁷⁶ Similarly, by portraying Emily as belying her family's perception of her as consumptive, Montgomery confronts and refutes standard estimations of women as constitutionally deficient. When Emily's perceived "odd" traits are juxtaposed with those of the characters inscribed with anomaly, Emily's "differences" become not only acceptable, but desirable. Montgomery surrounds Emily with male figures whose impairments serve to illuminate Emily's contrasting strength, capability, and self-reliance. Douglas Baynton describes a comparable rhetorical technique used by suffragists to counter their classification with "minors, paupers, lunatics, traitors, [and] idiots": "A popular theme in both British and American suffrage posters was to depict a thoughtful-looking woman, perhaps wearing the gown of a college graduate, surrounded by slope-browed, wild-eyed, or 'degenerate' men identified implicitly or explicitly as 'idiots' and 'lunatics'" (E. C. Stanton in Baynton 44). This poster theme resonates in the scene where the bookish Emily is pursued by a wild and sinister Mr Morrison (43-9). Baynton argues that "[d]isability figured not just in arguments *for* the inequality of women and minorities but also in arguments *against* those inequalities. Suffragists rarely challenged the notion that disability justified political inequality and instead disputed the claim that women characteristically suffered from these disabilities" (43). Montgomery parallels this stance by configuring Jimmy as a metaphor for the degradation of Canadian artists.⁷⁷

Emily's distinction from the marked figures clarifies her "fitness" as a productive citizen and woman. Although Emily's relationship with Uncle Jimmy is positive, his metaphoric role as a developmentally disabled artist also serves to buttress Emily's relative normalcy and, therefore, legitimacy as a writer. Montgomery delineates Jimmy's disabling by his community; yet, she validates the stereotypes his character connotes by Emily's acceptance that there is "something missing" in Jimmy. Her realization as a successful artist in part stems from her understanding Jimmy's instruction that she is different from him. Emily's writing distances art from its association with mental aberration, which Montgomery sardonically portrays in Jimmy. The conflation of poet

and intellectual disability in Jimmy manifests disability's expedience as what Longmore terms the "new mudsill, the bottom of the social ladder below whom 'we' must never allow ourselves to fall" ("Conspicuous" 154). Montgomery's portrayal of Jimmy as labelled intellectually disabled due to a brain injury, maligned and infantilized by his community for being a poet, and idealistically manifesting wisdom and contentment perpetuates stereotypes of disability while revealing the devaluation of artists through being treated as "idiots." Foregrounding Montgomery's deployment of disability in the *Emily* series presents a source of Canadian perspectives towards difference that have been so efficiently integrated into our ideological understanding of ourselves as to preclude critical examination.

Adrienne Clarkson, reflecting on the import of Montgomery's novels to the meaning of being Canadian, concludes that Montgomery "will continue to make everyone feel that, even though they were once alone and rejected, they now *belong*" (xii). And, it is "the unique sense of belonging that makes a Canadian" (xii). Her own experience as a young girl and new immigrant to Canada illustrates the power of fiction in creating national identity through deploying representational images that become ensconced in the collective imagination, imprinted indelibly onto the idea of "Canada" even in the global arena. Clarkson vividly relates Montgomery's themes of the orphaned child finding home and self, in what appears to be a hostile foreign environment, to her own negotiation of identity as a refugee from Hong Kong in Canada. For Clarkson, Montgomery's characters "*are Canada*" (x) and so the ultimately successful struggles in the narratives to incorporate the "different" child into a tribal environment symbolically describe the Canadian potential of "balancing all aspects of a human life and its obligations to others, especially family" (xi). The fictional lives of the "rural, rooted, and white" Prince Edward Islanders offered Clarkson an intimate understanding of the Canadian mainstream because "fiction, like all art, tells the truth from the inside" (x). And this received truth becomes a shared cultural reality.

What Clarkson does not consider is that Montgomery's fictional world continues to exclude some differences while embracing others. The Canada that the novels portray is not as inclusive as Clarkson imagines and, consequently, the belonging that Clarkson believes is imparted to "everyone" does not easily encompass readers whose bodies are

marked in ways similar to those of the rejected characters in Montgomery's fiction. When examining Montgomery's disabled figures, the inside "truth" that fiction exposes suggests that the eugenic impulses discussed in the previous chapter are active in Montgomery's stories.

Clarkson is not alone in acknowledging Montgomery's critical role in the shaping of Canadian culture and identity. The posthumous publication of her personal journals has revived analysis of her work whose enduring popularity has ensconced it in Canadian consciousness. As Margaret Atwood attests (referring to *Anne of Green Gables*), "Readers of my generation, and of several generations before and since, do not think of Anne as 'written.' It has simply always been there" (223). Interest in Montgomery has generated an Institute for Montgomery Studies where thriving cross-disciplinary work has yielded contributions to Canadian studies, life-writing, and feminism.⁷⁸ Indeed, Gammel and Epperly, the editors of a collection of works investigating Montgomery's "Canadianness," maintain that Montgomery informs the Canadian imaginary on a political and national, as well as cultural, level, "strategically inscrib[ing] the signifiers of Canadian distinctness." They argue that the ubiquity of Montgomery's fiction in multiple media forms and languages "powerfully infiltrates the [social/cultural/political] institutions from below . . . on a grass-roots level" (7). Hence, Montgomery's positioning of disability also becomes imprinted onto the collective unconscious as part of the shared reality of Canadianness.

The Canada that Montgomery narrates, in her *Anne* and *Emily* series, is rooted in Victorian standards of value sustained by insular families living in conservative rural communities. A disruptive, unorthodox, young heroine arrives on the scene, injecting life and beauty where it had been depleted while learning to appreciate the established environment. A revived traditional harmony is reconfirmed. This is the pattern through which Montgomery resolves the struggles between unique individual and reified clan identity, proffering a hope of belonging for some who, like Adrienne Clarkson, feel or fear dis/misplacement. However, this potential incorporation into the mainstream is not open to everyone. While the fictional heroines dramatize the entry of an outsider into the social centre, the characters whose Otherness is inscribed on their body as disability remain on the periphery. Not only is the "difference" of Montgomery's heroines

incorporated into the mainstream, but their normalization results in their becoming exemplary models of the norm. Those who bear signs of corporeal aberrancy serve to demonstrate that the perceived irregularities of the heroine in fact are not “difference” when juxtaposed with the markers of disability. The presumably “real” difference of disability remains undesirable.

As I have argued in the previous chapter, the narrative dichotomizing of differences, with some specifically labelled as disability, mitigates the affront of other forms of anomaly, facilitating their acceptance into the privileged side of the constructed binary (normal/abnormal and their collocations). Disability then provides a metaphor for marginality without being considered as a category requiring politicized investigation.

Montgomery’s narrative blueprint envisions a Canada that accommodates the newness of “outsiders” into its life, thereby synchronically adjusting and transforming the receiving environment. It would represent positively the notion of liminal subjects informing and reforming society. However, a closer examination of figures Montgomery paints as abnormal, disfigured, or disabled in some way suggests a Canada that is selectively inclusive. In the *Emily* trilogy, the rejection of bodies with visible marks of difference is desirable, while the alienation of the “different” mind is indicted. This latter difference is confined, controlled, and “tolerated” in varying degrees. Notably, the figure considered to have a defective mind, Uncle Jimmy, is capable of profitable labour and his physical appearance conforms to able-bodied norms. Montgomery’s deployment of anomalous bodies suggests a Canada unwilling to incorporate human bodily diversity in its ever-shifting indeterminate nature; however, the use of the developmentally disabled figure reinforces a utilitarian standard of value where individuals might challenge the rigid frame of normalcy if they in fact conform to bourgeois imperatives of economic self-sufficiency and physical ability.⁷⁹ The figure labelled “simple” is not described as being different, only as having a distinctive perspective on things. In this way Montgomery does advocate for the incorporation of “difference,” but more in the way of difference of opinion than in the form of any categorical human diversity.

In Montgomery’s writing, tensions between family clans and associated class dominate, but the tales are generally untroubled by a non-British presence. Nevertheless, despite a general elision of even an Aboriginal Canadian reality, Gammel and Epperly

argue that Montgomery “constructs the nation through difference,” pointing to her articulation of the mixture of Irish, English, and Scottish presence in her imaginary communities, as well as her unconventional treatment of gendered identities (7). Much work has examined Montgomery’s feminized male characters and controlling women. In these discussions, the male figures in the *Emily* trilogy are repeatedly featured. Although they support the heroine, the adult men in this narrative are themselves failures in some way. Kate Lawson characterizes the male figures in the trilogy as “weakened, deformed or eccentric.” She views Jimmy Murray as the “ultimate failed male” who represents male genius that is “tragically lost” (3). Jimmy’s marginalized status is not interrogated because of his disability label, demonstrating the naturalized presumptions surrounding disability that have precluded its critical analysis.

Similarly, critical views of the character of Dean Priest concur in the presumption that his physical difference is a “deformity” that also represents male weakness. Lorna Drew explains his treatment of the heroine, Emily, as a compensation for his “already physically eroded masculinity” (25). Drew reads Dean’s anomalous body, with its limp and slightly raised shoulder, stereotypically, associating these physical traits with damaged masculinity. These conventional readings of disability as social devaluation degrade the gendered reception of people with disabilities in lived experience. The writing and reading of physical anomaly as failure illustrates the endurance of sedimented prejudice against what are recognised as disabled bodies. The critical reader of the twenty-first century would problematize, for example, the racialized portrayal of a villain in Western fiction. A similar acknowledgement is necessary for the facile correlation of disability with defect and fear. Both in the writing and reception of disability in Montgomery, interrelated systems of oppression are overlooked. Montgomery’s promotion of female agency and power comes at the expense of physical anomaly that is drawn, in eugenic fashion, as the difference that crosses the boundary of acceptability.

Because of their ostensibly grotesque features of body and personality, Drew identifies Dean and the secondary character, Mr Morrison, as classic gothic elements in the *Emily* narrative. However, the menace evoked by these portrayals of difference is activated only when readers share the presumptions of normalcy encoded in a socially constructed world. Montgomery’s construction and deployment of disability demands

unpacking in order to consider the repercussions of these images on the Canadian identity that she so deliberately desired to inform. On examination, the characters with unconventional bodies in the *Emily* trilogy suggest that Montgomery's Canada must beware of corporeal difference. Physical anomaly in these texts transmogrifies into defect of personality that threatens creativity and, therefore, social progress.

Feminist readings of the *Emily* trilogy acknowledge that within the conventional parameters of this sentimental romance run subversive threads that resist the cultural scripts that the narrative ostensibly reinforces. Within the limited space of Victorian values, expectations, and obligations for women, the figure of Emily represents female autonomy and self-realization. Irene Gammel argues that, in the *Emily* novels, Montgomery inscribes a radical sexuality in Emily, despite the marriage plot. Emily's delayed marriage, dedication to writing, and her erotic pleasure in nature promote women's emancipation from patriarchal norms. "The message is radical, while the packaging appears reassuringly conventional" (40). However, seen through a disability lens, the *Emily* trilogy configures an ableist norm that garners its form by delineating anomaly as a moral menace. Current feminist readings have not situated Montgomery's "packaging" within the eugenic philosophy of her contemporary activists for women's rights.

Gender, class, and cultural difference (of British background) can be accepted, providing that the characters are productive. Emily is eventually accepted into her family as a writer when the interpretation of her occupation shifts from a "waste of time and paper" to a lucrative source of income. Difference is accepted or at least tolerated when it conforms to a model of economic expedience. Otherwise, difference threatens the health of the society that Emily's life story ultimately confirms. In the *Emily* novels, rather than incorporating difference into "the larger organism" as in Adrienne Clarkson's experience (xi), the narrative draws difference in opposition to an acceptable normalcy and therefore resolves it through control and erasure.

In the first book of the trilogy, *Emily of New Moon*, the eight-year-old protagonist, Emily Byrd Starr, is introduced as a precocious romantic spirit, loving words as well as the natural world her father allows her to explore freely. She is consequently considered to be, like her famous predecessor, Anne of Green Gables, "different." With her "queer"

temperament and thinking she must navigate among a cast of characters who embody a variety of ways of being. Emily must negotiate a space between extremes of control and submissiveness, kindness and malice, but she learns that goodness is not always easily ascertained on the surface. The rigid Aunt Elizabeth is not without tenderness, albeit deeply submerged, and her schoolmate, the lovable and pretty Rhoda Stuart, is deceitful and manipulative, while the foul-mouthed Ilse proves to be an enduring friend. Emily is immersed in a world where appearances often conflict with personal realities. What is said by her mother's family, the Murrays, about her father, Douglas Starr, is untrue, just as their estimation of Emily as an ill-mannered consumptive is false. Similarly, Emily's initial encounter with the successful New York career woman, Janet Royal, manifests the unreliability of factual experience, when both women respond negatively to each other because they misinterpret the presence of a destructive dog (290-96). Even the presumed indisputability of "God" is complicated by a young Emily's recognition of radical variety in the divine being worshipped by people around her: "The trouble is," she writes in her diary, "Aunt Elizabeth and I have different Gods, that is all. Everybody has a different God, I think" (*EC* 13). Emily's grappling with the clash between circulated presumptions in her community and lived reality parallels her struggle to develop a writing voice by probing boundaries between and within fact and fiction. Montgomery complicates the question of fact and fiction still further by imbricating Emily's fictional life-writing and her (Montgomery's) own journal-keeping. Judith Miller details the shared passages of the fictional Emily's journal and the non-fictional diaries of L.M. Montgomery. Miller demonstrates that the *Emily* trilogy, in Gammel's words, "Montgomery's most unsettling and provocative fiction" (40), is a rendition of Montgomery's own "development as a writer and a woman" (304). Faye Hammill points out that the *Emily* trilogy also narrates the development of "the *Canadian* woman writer and the Canadian literary scene" (113), emphasizing yet again Montgomery's influence on the evolving nature of Canada.⁸⁰

The *Emily* books begin with the death of Emily's father and friend, Douglas Starr, and Emily's discovery of her deceased mother's history. Juliet was one of the "proud" Murrays, owners of New Moon Farm since their arrival to Prince Edward Island in 1790. Juliet is disowned by her family for scandalously eloping with a "poor young journalist" (14), forfeiting her inherited identity by choosing to follow her passion rather than the

rules of convention. Severed from her roots, she dies of consumption, her husband soon following suit. Obligation, not kindness, compels the estranged relatives to assume responsibility for Emily. The task of keeping the unwanted relation falls to the original Murray household of New Moon. Through Emily, the prodigal daughter must be reinstated; however, the unenthusiastic hosts expect Emily too to die of consumption, her hereditary defect. Unlike her parents, Emily will not acquiesce to a personal fulfilment that entails social “failure.” Emily is determined that her chosen career path will bring her an enviable status as well as economic security. Her ambition is to be “a famous *authoress*” (*ENM* 38). The ambitious nascent artist then must mature in a hostile environment. Emily’s predicament portrays Montgomery’s struggle for credibility as a Canadian writer. At New Moon the newly orphaned Emily is injected into a fossilized milieu where the eldest sister, Elizabeth, obsessively maintains family tradition, while the younger sister, Laura, and their cousin Jimmy Murray bend to Elizabeth’s oppressive will or conceal any action that would displease her. Emily’s father had described the two unmarried sisters in Darwinist terms as “old stock” that “is pretty well run out” (14). Indeed, the New Moon household is drawn as an anachronism, a household which no amount of self-righteous pride could preserve.

Emily’s presence initially contaminates the sterility of New Moon where her indignation at being misunderstood and unjustly treated can only be articulated in a steady stream of letters she writes to her dead father. Her creative gift is ridiculed and discouraged by most, except for Cousin Jimmy, whose dedication enables her writing by providing a steady supply of bootlegged paper. The novels chronicle Emily’s growth, as an artist and a person. After a steady stream of complications and romances, Emily marries the perfect man: Teddy Kent, schoolmate, artist, high achiever, good-looker. His lack of a Murray-like pedigree is overcome by his individual achievement. Hence, Emily, thought to have inherited failure from her consumptive father, shows herself a true Murray, but not of the antiquated variety. Her successful manoeuvring through life with her valued Murray/Starr inheritance creates a promising “new-stock” Murray. Emily’s disquieting rebelliousness has shifted the boundaries that had threatened to restrict her. Having found a space within the stretched social matrix, Emily’s marriage at the end of the story assimilates her radical being into convention. No longer vowing to be “wedded

to her work” (6), the young Canadian artist will continue the Murray lineage. Canada’s future is carried by the “chosen,” while graciously incorporating the meritorious into their world. The challenging “difference” initially posed by Emily assumes a familiarity that becomes praiseworthy. In contrast, an unassimilatable difference is foregrounded as marked and threatening. Contrary to Gammel’s analysis of the Emily tale as a wolf in the sheep’s clothing of convention, a disability perspective reveals what might have been a wolf to be, in fact, a sheep. What may appear as a radical message for female sexuality is riding on a conventional, oppressive treatment of disability as defect.

Grappling with the integral human difference that disability represents is crucial to an equitable and just society. Otherwise, a hegemonic norm merely stretches its parameters in order to encompass each new difference after it becomes sufficiently familiar to appear more similar than foreign. If equality entails sameness, then human difference is minimized through the necessary identification of and juxtaposition to a form of otherness that is shaped as unfamiliar and undesirable. As Rosemarie Garland Thomson documents in *Extraordinary Bodies*, the display of anomaly as entertainment in American circus freak shows served to consolidate the normalcy of a financially and culturally insecure population. Thus, Montgomery, like Emily Murphy in the same era, resists the subjugation of women by creating an ostensibly irreducible difference, that of disability, in characters that renders gender differences as insubstantial and therefore able to be assimilated into the norm.

In the *Emily* narrative, the romantic plot of Emily and Teddy is driven by figures with marked bodies. Teddy’s mother, Mrs Kent, is a sinister character of gothic proportions. A single mother and recluse, she is pathologically jealous and self-obsessed. She seems menacingly to haunt the children who come to visit Teddy, on doctor’s orders, to facilitate his convalescence after a serious illness. Therefore, while Teddy is introduced as having physically escaped debilitation, and his fitness established, the spectre of other versions of personal damage arise, embodied in his mother. Her desperate “hunger” to be the sole focus of Teddy’s life and affection drives her to violence: she drowns his pets and destroys his artwork. This emotionally and psychologically warped character, a “sick soul” (*EC* 212), not only stands in the way of her son’s self-fulfilment as an artist, but also nearly succeeds in destroying his marriage

to Emily. Teddy's artistic talent is threatened with submergence by his family environment in the way that cousin Jimmy's future as a respected poet is ruined by his sister's disapproval, a ruin symbolized by his fall into the well. Emily, the object of Teddy's affection and thus the target of Mrs Kent's malice, admits that there are only two people in the world she truly fears: Mrs Kent and Mad Mr Morrison. Both characters, notably, have disfigured bodies. Mrs Kent's original beauty is marred by a "red scar across her pale face" (*EQ* 191). Not only is the scar disfiguring, but it also causes her twisted behaviour: "I never used to be like that—not until I was burned" (197). She is burned, and she burns the written document of Teddy's love for Emily. Tormented by her disfigurement, she is driven to torment others. Her sinister designs provide a large portion of the narrative tension, sabotaging the heroine's destined path to fulfilment. Mrs Kent's death signals freedom for the new generation to fulfil their destiny. The marred face, damaged goods now, threatens the healthy progress of the nation and so is expunged, allaying the fears it engendered.

The inscription of difference on a body to signal inner defect is a classic literary trope that has played an enduring role in the stigmatization of real people whose bodies appear similarly marked.⁸¹ For the reader, as well as for the other characters, Mrs Kent's "disfigured" face is a red flag, raising alarm. Montgomery evokes a fear of difference by configuring a facial scar as destroying beauty and creating monstrosity. Beauty is Emily's life force and Mrs Kent, in turn, is a threat to Emily. Mrs Kent's voracious mothering portrays the distortions of the conventional female role in its extreme. Anxiety is produced by this character in order to be erased, effecting a catharsis and re-establishing harmony. If Adrienne Clarkson had a facial scar, would she have felt so welcomed to Canadian citizenship? Significantly, although the Kents are not destitute, Mrs Kent lives from her late husband's insurance, not generating any income of her own. Emily, in contrast to Mrs Kent, crystallizes a desirable norm of womanhood: attractive, beguiling, loving, but intelligent enough to pursue a career of her own while valuing and supporting the talent and ambitions of those she loves. Mrs Kent's neediness provides a foil for Emily's emotional independence. The younger woman is capable of incorporating even unrequited love into her life, while always maintaining her dignity.

Cecily Devereux explains Montgomery's contribution to "imperial efforts to regulate reproduction through the didactic reinforcement, at an early age, of normative gender roles." Emily's shaping, both as writer and woman, includes the repeated rejection of physical anomaly, affirming what Devereux contends was the feminist project of promoting the Anglo-Saxon mother "working for social purity as the last hope for imperial regeneration" (8). Devereux's analysis thus situates Emily as part of the cultural mechanism promoting eugenic ideology.⁸²

Montgomery clearly designates physical anomaly as a menace to the well-being of the social order she envisions for Canada in her *Emily* narrative. The second of the two characters the otherwise undaunted heroine fears is Mad Mr Morrison, another gothic creature whose monstrous image melodramatically drives Emily into the arms of Teddy. Mad Mr Morrison manifests the omnipresent threat of defect Emily must vigilantly repudiate. Like Mrs Kent, Mr Morrison is a stock trope of peril, adding the "spice" or interest factor that Emily looks to have in her life and work (*EQ* 23). In light of these bodies of marked difference, Teddy's uniqueness, like Emily's, becomes reassuringly normal. These images of difference blatantly exhibit the construction of normalcy through difference. Reified spectres of failed humanity, they alleviate any unease raised by irregularities in the behaviour of the protagonists. Emily's ambitious and determined pursuit of a writing career is scandalous to the Murray sense of propriety; however, significantly, the mental instability of both feared characters arises from a frustrated pursuit, an unsatiated need. Emily observes that "*She* [Mrs Kent] wants something terribly—I don't know what it is but it's something she can never get, and the hunger for it goads her night and day" (*EC* 41). Both have had their passion thwarted and suffer from a desire that is relentlessly denied, warping them into signs of abnormality. Hence, self-actualization justifies some divergence from expected norms, such as Juliet's elopement and Emily's unconventional habits. The pursuit of both young women's heart's desire is commendable in light of the consequences of repression portrayed in Mad Morrison.

Morrison loses his sanity when his newly wedded wife dies. He doggedly continues his futile search for her. Emily portrays him as inhuman "like an old, old monkey" and horrific: "the thing I hate most about him is his right hand—it is a deep

blood-red all over—birth-marked” (48). Despite his pitiable state, he is, like an animal, capable of unpredictable violence. When Emily is locked into the church with him during a storm, her nightmarish fear of being touched by his repulsive hand, portrayed as if it had no context or body, is almost realized. The difference signalled by the birthmark is monstrous and hostile. The figure of Morrison represents “*the* very dreadful, inhuman laughter of *the* unsound in mind” (EC 48, emphasis added). The abnormal body is something other than human: “He was crouched five steps above her, with his gray head thrust forward. She saw the frenzied gleam of his eyes—the fang-like yellow teeth exposed in a horrible smile” (49). Emily recoils from this spectre into the arms of Teddy. Teddy recognizes in Morrison an interesting object to paint, echoing Montgomery’s own use for this image of the old man with “the ageless quest in his hollow, sunken eyes” (51).⁸³ The notion of physical difference as a social threat is reinforced even by the figure responsible for the scene of terror caused when he mistakenly locked Emily in the church (with a madman) because he is “a little blind and more than a little deaf” (43). At the close of this scene, the threat of abnormality is further facilitated by the appearance of Mrs Kent, destroying the romantic moment for the young couple with her “hollow, hungry eyes” and “scarred face clear in the moonlight,” both features echoing Morrison’s image (55) and the message of physical difference as ubiquitous danger and insatiable need.

Montgomery exploits the disability trope as a sign of twisted humanity most thoroughly in the character of Dean Priest. The thirty-six-year-old former schoolmate of Emily’s father rescues a twelve-year-old Emily from where she literally hung out on a limb trying to reach a flower, a scene metaphorically reinforcing the danger inherent in Emily’s pursuit of art. Emily’s rescue from this limb is literal only. Figuratively Emily’s liberation from the edge of the cliff by Dean Priest is jumping from the frying pan into the fire. Dean’s character of disability manifests what Leonard Kriegel argues is a literary convention, typified by Shakespeare’s Richard the Third, that links disability with evil that is to be both pitied and feared (32).

Of all the dangers and obstacles to Emily’s self-realization, Dean is the most insidious and destructive. Despite being her father’s peer, he is sexually attracted to Emily and decides that she is worth waiting for. His intent is control and possession:

“your life belongs to me henceforth. Since I saved it, it’s mine” (*ENM* 271). Dean’s exchange with the twelve-year-old appears to be light-hearted banter; he agrees to teach her the “love talk” she cannot manage for her novel writing. Although readers understand the sexual innuendo, Emily’s innocence creates a disturbing ripple for readers, which gathers force until it explodes into the dramatic irony that reveals Dean in his malicious deceitfulness towards the naïve heroine. The selfishness of his deliberate obstruction of Emily’s writing career exceeds even the actions of Mrs Kent. Dean recognizes Teddy’s mother’s destructive possessiveness: “the kid has talent—he’ll do something some day if his morbid mother doesn’t ruin his life. But let him keep his pencil and brush off my property” (*EQ* 30). Dean is jealous of Teddy and oblivious to the direct parallel between Mrs Kent’s repressive measures and his own towards Emily. Dean’s conscious manipulation of Emily’s self-esteem as a writer and his presumptive ownership of her lend Dean’s possessiveness a diabolical quality: premeditated destruction of the life one ostensibly loves rather than the desperate, somewhat stupid damage exacted by Mrs Kent. Both characters none the less trumpet the stereotype of people with disabilities as narcissistic and demanding.⁸⁴ Montgomery further calls attention to this perception of disability with allusions to the repressive household run by the “petulant tyranny of the five years of invalidism” (*ENM* 58) of the Murray patriarch, Emily’s grandfather.

Montgomery uses disability in Dean Priest to symbolize the demise of this oppressive authoritarian patriarchy. Like the mad aristocratic class of Edgar Allen Poe, Dean represents the dying breed of a tradition of male wealth and familial dominance. Embodying a corrupt power in an ostensibly corrupted body is itself a literary tradition that has effectively contributed to the social degradation of people with disabilities. To Emily, Dean is deceptively attractive. He is one of the Priest clan—wealthy, well educated, proud. His “green Priest eyes” are described as beautiful. His voice is “musical and caressing” (*ENM* 264). Emily’s innocent interest in Dean, despite his alienation by others, suggests a warning to readers to heed the outward signal of defect, not to be fooled as she has been.

Like Mrs Kent, Dean does not need to work for his income. He is too wealthy to require wages, but his solitude and alienation from even his family suggest incapability. He is extremely intelligent but his wit is spent laughing “*at*” instead of “*with*” others.

Whether he is cynical and bitter because of his physical shape or because others have defined him by it is unclear. Everyone, except Emily's father when he and Dean were classmates, has called Dean "Jarback" and not "bothered with him" (267). He is described as "lame and hunchbacked" and therefore unable to participate in sports.⁸⁵ He has bitterly internalized others' view of himself, believing Emily would rather he not be "crooked" (*EC* 27). However, readers recognize that Dean's crookedness is deeper than his material shape. Emily assures Dean that his disability "doesn't make a bit of difference—and never will" (27). Although Emily professes to disregard his atypical body, she in fact regards it (him) with pity: "I watched him from my window, limping down the lane. He seemed very lonely, and all at once I felt terribly sorry for him." Emily's pity for Dean emphasizes her superiority, as well as her folly, for not fearing him as others do.⁸⁶ She believes that but for her, Dean's life "must be very empty" (217). Thus, Emily's relationship with Dean is an unconscious obligation that highlights her benevolent character, mitigating possible associations of Emily's ambition with self-indulgent narcissism. The repressed knowledge that Dean is a burden to her surfaces in a dream which the waking Emily dismisses. In her dream, she cannot reach her star before it sets because Dean walks beside her: "I felt I must go slowly because he was lame and could not go fast—and all the time the star sank lower and lower" (322). Montgomery carefully positions disability as an obstacle to the well-intentioned, confirming the most damning discriminatory stereotypes of people with disabilities as a drain on society and a burden to family and friends.

Only after Emily's body is broken, symbolically following the loss of her faith in her own talent, does Emily seem to descend to Dean's level and decides to accept him as a life partner. Marrying her father's peer, even acknowledging his romantic interest, had been out of the question for Emily while she saw herself as capable and productive. By falsely criticizing her work as child's play, Dean betrays her trust and destroys her dream of being a novelist. Dean's calculated diminution of Emily cripples her spirit and subsequently breaks her body as well. Emily falls down the stairs and barely escapes death: "for days Emily hovered between life and death, then between the scarcely less terrible alternative of death and amputation" (*EQ* 55). Aunt Elizabeth forbids amputation, despite endangering Emily's chance of survival. Clearly she believes death is preferable

to disability.⁸⁷ Emily's slow convalescence involves facing the prospect of being what she terms a "pitiable cripple" (55), belying Emily's assertion that Dean's disability did not affect her estimation of him. Indeed, the Emily who chooses to marry Dean has lost the joy and wonder in her life. She no longer experiences "the flash" that inspired her art.⁸⁸ Hence, being like Dean, being with disability, indicates an unhappy life.

Dean thus represents the biblical serpent in the garden of Eden, luring Emily into her fall from grace. He is glad to have her hurt so that she can be dependent on him; she can "belong to him." The twelve-year-old Emily is enchanted by Dean treating her as an adult (290), but when she does mature, Dean demeans her in order to maintain his control over her. Emily's self-realization is a threat to him, and he must consequently subvert her development as a person. Dean is willing to sacrifice Emily's Edenic world, where her flash brings her Divine communion and her art affords her a share in creation, so that he can be the centre of her existence. Emily emerges from the fall with a non-disabled body, but her damaged spirit links her to Dean's, not because she has come to understand his value, but because he is needy and "life had used [him] so cruelly" (*EQ* 32). A broken Emily feels that she must settle for "a crippled broken-winged happiness" (70). Hence, the disabled figure of Dean functions as a metaphor for patriarchy, a traditional priestly caste, which justifies the sacrificial repression of women in order to satisfy its own needs and desires. Montgomery's inscription of patriarchy in the disabled figure of Dean implies that, like the salacious Great Aunt Nancy (*ENM* 242), Dean will die single, and thus the Priest lineage will end, no longer passing on an inherent right to subjugate its women.

Dean's warped body alerts readers to his warped character. The stock salesman figure, Old Kelly, sincerely warns Emily of the Priest husbands' notorious cruelty and abuse of their wives. The association of Dean with the demonic is continued with Kelly's disclosure of stories of Dean involved with a Black Mass (*EC* 68) and "claw[ing] the spectacles off av the minister" (33) when he was baptized. Emily is quite certain she is stronger than all the potential dangers that await her in her union with Dean. She believes that she knows Dean, but the reader knows she is mistaken. Initially, Emily finds Dean's aura of mystery attractive, but later admits his difference is more fearsome than appealing: "Had she not always felt—did she not still feel—that he always seemed to be

laughing at the world from some mysterious standpoint of inner knowledge—a knowledge she did not share—could not share—did not, to come right down to the bare bones of it, want to share?” (*EQ* 68). Montgomery deploys in Dean the construct of impenetrable difference associated with disability that contributes to dehumanizing attitudes towards people with disabilities. Dean is anything but ordinary. His thorough otherness is what both intrigues and repulses Emily. Dean’s twisted body provides the narrative with the complicated evil that serves to delineate the norm. Significantly, even the two aunts who were so eager to have her married oppose Emily’s marriage to Dean, fearing a rumour of a hereditary taint of insanity in the family, corroborating further the danger of procreation with abnormality (60). While readers anxiously watch Emily stand on the brink of self-dissolution in her resolve to marry Dean, Emily is awakened from her folly by a psychic experience linking her to Teddy, whose successful artistic ambition and willingness to do women’s chores at home mark him as a new man replacing the “lame” model of masculinity seen in Dean. Dean’s character provides the element of risk in Emily’s development, the “spice of evil” that Emily’s mentor, Mr Carpenter, tells her that everyone needs. He contends that “It’s the pinch of salt that brings out the flavour” (23), and indeed, Emily affirms that Dean’s friendship was “the very salt of life” (12). However, the teacher also insists that the requisite spice must not prevail. Dean’s “edginess” functions, both within and outside the narrative, as a standard disability trope intended both to impel and repel, ultimately warning readers to beware of a fascination with anomaly.

Emily emerges as the exemplary heroine. In rejecting Dean, she is rejecting the limitations of a traditional patriarchal subjection to a husband, while choosing a feminine role as wife to a man who acknowledges and supports her career ambition. Removing Dean from her life entails the loss of the “spice” their friendship generated, but given Dean’s thwarted life and his intent to thwart Emily’s, spice is a small price to pay for autonomy. Having imperilled the progress of the social order and having been proven impotent, the disabled antagonist, Dean Priest, “limped out of sight” (98), leaving the young, talented and fit lovers to live in the house he had bought and prepared for his life with Emily. Alice Munro observes that the character of Dean Priest is so disturbing “that the author, after a while, hardly seems to know what to do with him” (qtd in Gammel 47).

Once again, the simple disappearance of the disabled figure follows a standard pattern identified by Disability Studies scholars. The disabled figure threatens to disable the social order; anxiety regarding personal and collective integrity is stirred and then alleviated when order is restored by eliminating the disabled disturbance. On the other hand, anxieties of personal integrity connected to disability are raised and perpetuated. Readers with scars or unconventional bodies are expected to associate with the heroine and her lover and breathe a sigh of relief when the marked characters fail to wreak the full extent of their potential damage. What strictures are placed on readers who recognize themselves as the signals of monstrosity and harbingers of evil? Who is sacrificed to Montgomery's vision of strong, independent women? To paraphrase Robert McRuer, "Who haunts the margins of the [reading] we do?" (152).

While Dean Priest represents an antiquated male dynasty of power in the Priest clan, cousin Jimmy Murray holds a correlative position in the Murray family. He, too, is understood in the critical literature as one of the heroine's "failed" male supporters, a marginalized male character who enables the heroine's success, but whom she inevitably supersedes (Lawson). While Dean's atypical body signals an inherited patriarchal corruption of power, Cousin Jimmy's mental impairment suggests a complete abdication of male power. He represents Dean's antithesis. Emily emerges from the mentorship of these characters as the desirable balance, linking ambitious self-realization with concern for the collective, while complying with feminine imperatives of personal beauty and comportment. As a woman, Emily manifests strength of character and as an accomplished author, strength of status. She maintains the Murray dignity and pride while updating its parameters of acceptability.

In contrast, Elizabeth Murray continues the patriarchal authoritarianism bequeathed by Arthur Murray, whose tyrannical rule instills fear in his daughters even beyond the grave. Elizabeth crumples when the young Emily unwittingly exhibits the "Murray look" in a fit of anger and indignation (*ENM* 107). Like her father, Elizabeth demands submission from Laura and Jimmy and presumes to mold Emily according to this family imperative. The child Emily survives this brutally repressive environment of New Moon because of Laura's and Jimmy's practiced subterfuge; they are content to counter Elizabeth behind her back. This deception disturbs Emily's sensibility. However,

through Jimmy's tutelage, Emily comes to grapple with the complications and disjunctures inherent in people's actions and intentions. Jimmy's unwavering wisdom and kindness towards Emily not only protects her from what, to a current reader, might appear as Elizabeth's abusive attitude, but also guides her to understand the value in the Murray tradition that Elizabeth so fanatically upholds. As Kate Lawson points out, "Inheritance necessitates not the *rejection* but the *incorporation* of 'Murray'-ness into her personality" (28), and it is Jimmy who teaches her how to negotiate this inheritance without compromising her integrity.⁸⁹ Dean, on the other hand, intends to remove Emily from the constraints of both their families in order to subject her to his own domination: "just you and I alone with the firelight" (*EQ* 83).

It is of note that Montgomery configures Jimmy as developmentally disabled, a childhood fall having "addled his head," leaving him not "quite all there" (*ENM* 22). Emily's questioning "What part of him isn't there?" (22) could well be asked by the reader. Emily discovers immediately that "[w]hatever part was missing, it wasn't his heart" (34). Jimmy is intelligent, capable, and wise, but he is not like other men and therefore categorized as "less than" others. Jimmy efficiently runs the Murray farm; he has a sarcastic, witty sense of humour; he mediates conflicts fairly and rationally and he supports Emily, not only with loyalty, but with remarkable wisdom and sensitivity. He composes poetry and remembers it without writing it down. Nevertheless, he is labelled "an idiot" (79). The label itself, rather than Jimmy's behaviour, justifies his treatment by others. Elizabeth grants him a voice in the family conclave, despite the objection of others, because she feels guilt for his condition. On the other hand, she manages his bank account and spending, even though Jimmy manages the farm. The reader must accept Jimmy as somehow mentally deficient not because of any evidence of deficiency in his actions or reasoning but because we are told he is "simple." As Emily reflects: "He is very clever in spots. And in other spots, where his brain was hurt when Aunt Elizabeth pushed him into our New Moon well, he isn't *anything*. There's just *blankness* there" (*EC* 11). Jimmy is described as having "queer spells" that everyone but Emily fears. These spells, it seems, generate fear because they deviate from the required norm. Thus, Jimmy, like Dean and the other figures of difference, is set apart from the ordinary into a realm of mystery that necessarily exudes an aura of danger.

The threat of Jimmy's disability is controlled in that his brain injury renders him "childlike" and therefore dependent on Elizabeth. This characteristic of Montgomery's Jimmy illustrates the necessity of author and reader sharing cultural assumptions around disability in order for a character to be viable. Judith Miller, for example, writes that Jimmy "is like an adult child in the household of *New Moon*" ("Montgomery's" 165) even though Jimmy's responsibilities are adult: driving the carriage, managing fires, running the farm, minding Emily. He seems to be the only person who knows how to influence and reason with Elizabeth. Nevertheless, Montgomery clearly intends Emily's description of Jimmy as mentally impaired to evoke the requisite stereotype of people with intellectual impairments as infantile and unfathomable: "The trouble is, you can never put [Jimmy's] clever spots together—there are always those gaps between" (*EC* 11).⁹⁰

Jimmy's mysterious "gaps" symbolize something about him that is unknowable by those comfortable in the "norm." The unknowability of his difference seems to alarm his community who therefore categorize him dismissively as an idiot.⁹¹ In effect, because Jimmy does not conform to his community's expectations of standardized identities, he is disenfranchised. The community classifies him as incapable of full membership instead of accommodating his unconventional participation. Thus, Jimmy's association with assumptions surrounding developmental disability (idiocy) even though he effectively operates the family farm and is remarkably sensible, locates the source of his disabling in his society. Jimmy refuses to conform to the family dogma and is consequently marked as deviant. He is an artist, a poet; this makes him unacceptably unlike the others in his milieu. They (the Elizabeths) devalue that to which they cannot relate and confine him to the periphery. As a result, Jimmy lives liberated from the limitations of normalcy that oppress the Murrays, but at the price of physical and fiscal freedom and social status. His playful sense of wonder at life is not corroded by his perspicuous observation of the faults and foibles of others and their estimation of him. When instructing Emily on the need for prudence around convention Jimmy convinces her that "we can't hang [consequences] . . . They're more likely to hang us . . . Oh, I'm only simple Jimmy Murray, but I can see we have to watch our step" (*EC* 243).

Jimmy's status as intellectually disabled signals the crippling effect of convention, embodied in Elizabeth, on creativity. Elizabeth pushed him into the well when they were children, ostensibly causing damage to his brain. Like Dean, she is the instigator of the fall of the poetic spirit. Unlike Emily, however, Jimmy falls into water. His survival can be interpreted as a rebirth, a baptism of sorts—a transcendence of the destructive force of convention. Jimmy emerges without fear of being himself. In a classic example of Foucauldian resistance to repression, Jimmy submits to Elizabeth's control without sacrificing his spirit.

Montgomery's use of developmental disability in Jimmy perpetuates disability prejudice by stereotypically exploiting his disability as a pejorative metaphor for being a poet, highlighting the cultural dismissal of poetry by situating it in the ultimate devalued position in society: developmental disability. However, an alternative reading can interpret Jimmy as artist, illuminating the creative role of disability that is unjustly discredited in society. Jimmy's marginalized status offers him the liminal status that various Disability Studies scholars argue renders an untapped perspective affording a potent source of knowledge about society. The figure of Jimmy suggests that rather than representing failure, developmental disability can function as artistic skill in society, defamiliarizing a naturalized construction of normalcy and bringing it under critical scrutiny. Although Laura and Jimmy both live under Elizabeth's repressive rule, Laura appears to have lost her spirit. She is weak and submissive; she acts behind Elizabeth's back more from fear of her sister than from respect for her ideas. Thoroughly oppressed by her family heritage, she considers it a blessing that Emily has lived beyond it (*ENM* 44), whereas Jimmy recognizes that Emily is a true Murray. He teaches her to find value and richness in the Murray tradition instead of suffering under it. Jimmy's creative genius has survived because he has embraced his confinement and worked within its limitations—perhaps the greatest indication of his genius. He keeps “a thousand poems” (44) in his head, thus circumventing his family's desecration of his art and Elizabeth's obsession with wasting paper. He makes the most of his peripheral space by assuming the liberty to be starkly honest about others and their actions. His responses to his family are sharp and often acerbically witty or sarcastic. When Jimmy defends Emily, Aunt Ruth calls him “an ass.” “‘Well, we're cousins,’ agreed Cousin Jimmy pleasantly” (*EC* 237).

As “the idiot,” he flaunts family demands fearlessly, yet within appropriate contexts and in timely ways, so that he cannot be silenced as some of his family members would wish: “Ruth wished Elizabeth wouldn’t let Jimmy in on family conclaves. It was absurd to suppose that a grown-up child like Jimmy had any right there” (236). However, it is Jimmy who teaches Emily that “nobody can be free who has a thousand ancestors,” inciting Mr Carpenter’s amazement at Jimmy’s label of idiocy: “And yet people call that man simple” (92).

Emily accepts Jimmy’s diagnosis, but she also accepts his wisdom. Jimmy understands that people fear him because he himself is not afraid of being different: “nothing ever worries me. . . most people worry so much, they think you’re not right if you don’t worry” (*ENM* 67). Relegated to idiocy, he acknowledges, but does not internalize, his community’s devaluation of difference. He is not tyrannized by the norm as others are. The norm has pushed him into the well—the confines of the disability label—but he has retained his dignity.⁹² Although he nurtures Emily’s creative imagination, he steers her away from his own counter-conventional path, into the mainstream. Jimmy convinces Emily to stay with her intolerably conservative Aunt Ruth, who believes Emily too is “mentally unsound” for writing “and would make a bad end in some asylum” (*EC* 107). Jimmy directs Emily to success, encouraging her to maintain her ambition, reminding her, “You haven’t been pushed down a well” (149). He ensures that she not be relegated to “the well” as he had been. Jimmy points out the key to carving a place in the Murray family tradition and, by extension, in the Canadian mainstream: “Money makes the Murray mare go” (255). Jimmy’s most damning act was to disregard this fact by giving his earnings to a penniless “tramp.” Clearly this person needed the money more than Jimmy who had “a good home and a steady job and clothes enough to do me for years.” His generosity “was the foolishest thing I ever did—and the nicest. But Elizabeth never got over it. She’s managed my money ever since” (*ENM* 68). Jimmy knows what he is doing and accepts the consequences of acting and speaking according to his conscience. He is master in his own realm and would not exchange places with the folk who criticize him (142). But his instruction of Emily carries a poignant contrast between Emily’s potential and his own. He perceives his social alienation as evidence of a prejudice against poetry: “Folks say I’ve never been quite

right since [the fall]—but they only say that because I’m a poet, and Blair Water folks don’t understand them” (67). Hammill compares Jimmy’s reception in Blair Water to the hostile reception of Montgomery’s work and to the rejection experienced by many other of Montgomery’s Canadian colleagues. Archibald Lampman observed that writers were considered to be “a sort of monstrosity” and “the word ‘poet’ was simply and completely synonymous with the word ‘fool’” (qtd in Hammill 90). Emily senses that, without the well incident, “this queer little man beside her might have stood in the presence of kings.” According to Montgomery, the Canadian artist is considered, like Jimmy, “a failure and a mental weakling”; but if people looked without prejudice they would see “a prince in his own realm” (142). Similarly, if we were to acknowledge people with developmental disabilities without the attendant socially imposed stigma—if it were possible—there is no telling what we might see in the individuals we encounter.

Although Jimmy’s character is benign and intended to evoke popular notions of one labelled “simple” or mentally disabled, the motivation behind the construction of his label echoes the fear associated with the physically marked characters. Deviations from the norm are automatically devalued rather than considered as potentially enriching. Montgomery indicts the reception of art in Canada through figuring Jimmy as the poet, his art silenced, his skill unacknowledged, his being disenfranchised. Recognizing the phenomenon of disability as ordinary human variation that participates in the ordinary human condition requires a continuing process of self, and social reflexivity that undermines static codes of institutionalized living. Because “disability” is completely situated in multiple fluid contexts, its embrace entails ongoing reassessment of relationships in context, endangering complacency and rigid hierarchies of social categorizations. This fluidity generates fear in those who approximate a standard notion of normalcy closely enough to believe in and value sameness as moral necessity. Deviations from this sameness demand delineation and dismissal in order to buttress the illusion of norm as natural. The mandate of normalcy therefore generates a great deal of anxiety that provokes a Foucauldian vigilance and self-discipline deployed to maintain the mainstream norm (*History* 194). Jimmy’s character at once reinforces and subverts the norm by the simultaneity of his positioning as “simple Jimmy” and his astute observations of and functioning within that positioning.

Montgomery's configuration of the poet relegated to "idiot" speaks to society's unwillingness to listen to and appreciate what appears as otherness. While the *Emily* trilogy illuminates the discriminatory and repressive nature of established convention, the tripartite narrative ultimately promotes the notion of a naturalized norm that must be accommodated, rather than of the need for accommodation of difference. Emily's nurturing and enrichment garnered from her sincere relationship with Jimmy suggest the deprivation that results from rejecting unconventional individuals as subjects worthy of authentic relationship. Yet, at the same time, Emily's success at achieving economic independence through her career path while fulfilling the female role in a conventional marriage plot leaves the disabled figures who supported her firmly on the sidelines, reinforcing the centrality of the hegemonic norm. Consequently, Montgomery's Canada that exists so ubiquitously in the national imaginary contributes to the normalization of ableism.

Laura Robinson's explanation of Montgomery's construction of national identity helps to illustrate the process by which people with disabilities are placed outside the vision of the ideological Canadian. Robinson examines Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* and *A Tangled Web* but her observations apply to the *Emily* trilogy as well. Echoing the conclusions of Gammel and Epperly cited earlier, Robinson concludes that Montgomery "lobbies for an identity that recognizes the positive power of difference" (29). However, while Montgomery's vision of national identity includes certain kinds of difference, at the same time it excludes those whose variance is not considered to be aesthetically or economically profitable. Canadian identity does not embrace the readers whose bodies conform more closely to the characters drawn as physically disabled—visibly marked as different from the heroine and her lover. Drawing on post-colonial theory, Robinson discusses narrative as the site where quotidian details are forged into national culture and national subjects are *interpellated*, obligated to identify with ideological subject positions in order to take part in a sense of nationality and a collective unity (20). Etienne Balibar points out how some perceived differences are incorporated into a dominant norm and rendered acceptable: "Ideological form must become an *a priori* condition of communication between individuals (the 'citizens') and between social groups, not by suppressing all differences, but by relativizing them and

subordinating them to itself in such a way that it is the symbolic difference between “ourselves” and foreigners” which wins out and is lived as irreducible” (qtd in Robinson 21).

In short, Montgomery deploys disability in the Emily trilogy as the “irreducible” difference that renders Emily’s particularities acceptable. Disability performs the difference that delineates the “them” that creates an “us” who, through narrative reiteration, come to constitute Canadian citizens. Montgomery’s Canada, therefore, recognizes some difference, but unlike Adrienne Clarkson’s optimistic reading of Montgomery’s work as exemplifying a state where everyone who cares to participate will belong, an examination focussed on the disabled characters of her narratives suggests that some difference is too different to belong.

⁷⁶ See Mitchell and Snyder, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (12-15); Baynton; and Kerr and Shakespeare.

⁷⁷ In effect, Montgomery is saying that Canadian attitudes make artists into idiots; to embrace one's art in this milieu entails accepting one's own role as idiot. Montgomery does not problematize the construction of the stereotype of intellectual disability as much as she problematizes the poet's wrongful reception in Canadian society, as if feeble-minded.

⁷⁸ For an excellent sampling of Montgomery scholarship, see Gammel and Epperly.

⁷⁹ This resistance to corporeal variation observed through a focus on disability suggests why racialized bodies can never be accepted the way ethnicized ones can be if outward but superficial signs of ethnicity like clothing and hair style are stripped away. Recall Kalman and his sister's integration in *The Foreigner*.

⁸⁰ Hammill discusses the widespread influence of Montgomery on future female Canadian authors. Since our national literature is renowned for its remarkably high proportion of female authors, it would be interesting to investigate the use of disability specifically in the work of the artists who are indebted to Montgomery.

⁸¹ For an account of the role of facial anomaly in Western culture, see both Grealy and Aspinall.

⁸² Emily's relationship with Uncle Jimmy is positive, but ultimately functions to delineate her normalcy. He instructs her to be not like him, in order to be successful. He provides Emily with the tools to enable her writing (paper) that he himself does not use. Emily's legitimation lies partly in her contrast with the delegitimized Uncle Jimmy, whose role as artist is devalued and impotent.

⁸³ This image spotlights what Mitchell and Snyder in their introduction to *The Body and Physical Difference* call “the double bind” of disability representation: its metaphoric expediency in art and its dehumanization and erasure from politicized concerns in lived experience.

⁸⁴ Tobin Siebers’s “Tender Organs, Narcissism, and Identity Politics” provides an analysis of the allegation of narcissism against people with disabilities as a central justification for discriminatory treatment: an example of blaming the victim for being victimized.

⁸⁵ That physical anomaly precludes participation in sports is a popular myth that reigns to this day in physical-education classes. Many games can accommodate many body types if the players are willing.

⁸⁶ Sherene Razack argues that pity precludes respect and reinforces oppressive systems of power (132).

⁸⁷ This perspective is not uncommon today. A contemporary disability rights group in the United States, called Not Dead Yet, for many years now has been opposing the pervasive and terrifying presumption that one is “better dead than disabled.”

<http://www.notdeadyet.org/>.

⁸⁸ Emily’s “flash” is a moment of perceiving ineffable beauty, glimpses of paradise that bring her overwhelming satisfaction. Since Emily’s creative flash might be construed as “abnormal,” its disappearance in Emily’s “invalid” phase and its return with her emotional and physical reestablishment, affirms its acceptance in the realm of normalcy that Emily symbolizes at the end of the narrative.

⁸⁹ Jimmy facilitates Emily's negotiation of what Ignatieff argues in *The Rights Revolution* is a fundamentally Canadian imperative of traversing the tension between individual and group rights (1).

⁹⁰ Although Jimmy's ability might suggest that Montgomery is critical of his construction as intellectually impaired, Emily's acceptance of his impairment as well as the lack of realism in his character precludes politicized considerations of his disability status.

Jimmy's character may be positive, but it does not challenge stereotypes.

⁹¹ On her first day of school Emily learns that difference generates not only fear but also antagonism. Her classmates verbally assault her simply "[b]ecause you ain't a bit like us" (*ENM* 81).

⁹² The well as a metaphor for the confines of convention is also found in the subplot of Ilse's mother, whose disappearance in an open well spawned her community's construction of her as a fallen woman. Her reputation was restored with the recovery of her body. Although the well functions metaphorically in different ways for the two characters, falling into the well signifies a death for Jimmy's original potential as a public figure.

Chapter Four

Rich Morality, Economic Depravity: *Such is My Beloved*

The so-called lesser grades of mental defect are perhaps really those of paramount importance, for these are accountable for a very large share of the criminality and immorality and delinquency and pauperism which cost us so dearly, and it is these lesser defects which are most likely to be passed on from generation to generation. The problem then is many-sided, and bears so intimately upon national efficiency and national progress that we cannot afford to disregard it. (W. H. Hattie, 1920)⁹³

A Disability Studies reading of *Such is My Beloved* brings into focus the novel's exposition of the eugenic ethos of its time. The narrative illustrates the social process of disabling as a function of power dynamics between economic classes. The wealthy middle-class, represented by the Robisons, arbitrates the norms of social behaviour by its financial support of institutions such as the Catholic Church. Failure to conform to middle-class ideologies is judged to be evidence of personal incapacity rather than of social inequality. Callaghan explores the investments of a middle-class "norm" in maintaining its perceived antithesis (people with disabilities) as defective and inferior, through the protagonist, Father Dowling, who begins on the privileged side of the normal binary but ultimately finds himself at the opposite pole, incarcerated in an insane asylum. By delineating the population occupying the lower economic classes as congenitally inferior, the professional classes sustain their advantage on the basis of biological inheritance. Dowling's effort to approach the two prostitutes as individuals deserving respect threatens the establishment. His lack of conformity is interpreted as abnormal behaviour that requires discipline and control, necessitating his removal from the mainstream (a classic case of Foucauldian discipline and punish). Similarly, the network of professionals affronted by Dowling's care for the "feeble-minded" prostitutes combines to sweep the young women from the city streets. However, the narrative

erasure of the characters who threaten the status quo does not provide the classic cathartic effect of delineating difference in order to erase it, thereby reaffirming the norm. Instead, the narrative reveals that the enforcement of normalcy involves a persistent practice of hypocrisy that, once acknowledged, cannot be justified as moral. Father Dowling's honesty in the face of his Church's participation in social injustice results in a cognitive dissonance that is constructed as madness. His institutionalization, purportedly for his own good and in keeping with eugenic practice, symbolically penalizes resistance to the constraints of hegemonic normalcy.

In her journal, L.M. Montgomery decries modernist realism and its canonical adulation in Canadian literature, targeting Morley Callaghan's work as an offending case in point. She compares Callaghan's fiction to a photograph of a pigsty or latrine: "Callaghan sees nothing but the latrine and insists blatantly that you see nothing else also" (*Selected 3*: 387). Ironically, the latrine image might be appropriately applied, at least metaphorically, to Callaghan's most acclaimed novel, *Such Is My Beloved*. One of the most remarkable features of this novel is his depiction of Toronto society devolving into a system of waste elimination, where undesirables, including detractors of the established social system such as the protagonist, are dispensed with, exiled beyond the boundaries of acceptability. However, one would be hard-pressed to agree with Montgomery's estimation of Callaghan's artistic vision. The "dirt" Callaghan exposes reveals a humanity in relationship that spills beyond the sterile laboratories of medical knowledge or cultural categorizing. In an interview with Robert Weaver, Callaghan describes his task as "somehow or other to catch the tempo, the stream, the way people live, think, and feel in their time, quite aside from any intellectual attitude to the matter" (Aaron 24). George Woodcock affirms Callaghan's success in this endeavour, observing that Callaghan presents a generally unbiased "realistic picture of the social landscape" (Aaron 24).

Such is My Beloved, published in 1934, is a somber tale, written in and about somber times. In his introduction to the New Canadian Library edition, Malcolm Ross situates this novel as a hallmark Thirties narrative: "The date is stamped on every page" (v). Nevertheless, Ross argues that Callaghan's interweaving of the social issues of the time with metaphysical religious symbology of the Catholic tradition renders the novel

timeless and accessible to current readers. Ross suggests that *Such is My Beloved* can be best categorized as a biblical parable, one that reveals paradoxical realities: “a rising series of opposites in tension, opposites which illuminate each other, which may even interpenetrate each other, but which cannot (within time) obliterate each other.” This sustained tension is what Ross imagines baffled Callaghan’s contemporaries because the Thirties was a time when people believed in enemy annihilation rather than “co-existence.” The “enemy” alluded to is Communism. However, Ross fails to acknowledge the prevailing Canadian socio-political climate exposed in *Such Is My Beloved*, that far more glaringly and locally encapsulates what Ross highlights as the Thirties ethos of power: “total destruction of the enemy” (viii). In the Canadian urban centres of Callaghan’s experience, the more imminent enemy is embodied in people labelled as “defective” who, left unchecked, threaten to corrupt the fabric of society. The novel provides a counter-discourse to the domestic eugenic project that first constructed a spectre of internal national menace and then campaigned for its eradication.⁹⁴ At the same time, as Ross observes, Callaghan creates tension by raising questions that challenge the integrity of this counter-discourse. Gary Boire describes Callaghan’s skill in inscribing an “elusive ambiguity” that compels the reader to take part in the meaning-making of the narrative, forcing the individual reader to choose between conflicting values and to take responsibility for the choice (208). Perhaps, then, what would have puzzled Callaghan’s contemporaries was not so much the co-existence of opposites as his problematization of the pervasive, trendy social ideology of eugenics through a bold indictment of the very institution that opposed this trend, the Catholic Church. Callaghan’s depiction of his protagonist, a Catholic priest, ultimately driven mad by the betrayal of the Church he represents also speaks to a current postmodern consciousness of entrapment within ideologies that simultaneously sustain and oppress us.

The choices that confronted Callaghan’s readers in the Thirties reached beyond a personal “religious” struggle undertaken by a fictional Catholic priest to burning current political issues that profoundly affected not only individual lives but also the nature of Canadian identity. The historical context of *Such Is My Beloved* not only renders striking political resonance to what appears to be a simple tale of hypocrisy in institutionalized

religion but its social commentary is electrified by featuring the Catholic Church's contradictory response to social poverty.

Such Is My Beloved appears at the apex of eugenic popularity in Canada, shortly after the institution of the Eugenics Society of Canada in Toronto, Ontario. Albeit never named, Toronto is by implication, the "Protestant city" (37) of the story (James 39, n 3). Callaghan's Toronto is the place where many of "Ontario's most respectable citizens" formed the "Toronto League for Race Betterment" (McLaren 7). Callaghan's narrative challenges the hegemonic social establishment whose economic success, it believed, legitimized its assumed positions as arbiter of human worth. In 1930s Canada, the Eugenics Society of Canada exemplified a determined movement of articulate and high-profile professionals who relentlessly promoted a self-serving myth of their own (middle-class) superiority by embracing the hereditarian claims of British and American eugenic theory. Eugenics essentially proclaimed an end to the social debate of whether one's biological inheritance or one's environment determined human character (nature/nurture), in favour of the former. Eugenics espoused a Spenserian Social Darwinism that divided society into two strata: the fit and unfit. The latter category was accused of genetic inferiority.

Proponents of eugenics publicized the notion that inherited defect precluded success, rendering social support efforts and philanthropy useless to the unfortunate and burdensome to the "normal." Eugenicists argued that social programmes wasted resources by artificially maintaining a substandard class that would otherwise, in the natural course of existence, expire, while the worthy would prosper. Perhaps most significantly, they believed that low intelligence spawned amorality that resulted in generational criminality. Despite its lack of grounding in sound scientific research, eugenics was celebrated as the "scientific" and therefore indisputable solution to the pervasive social problems that characterized the Great Depression. Poverty, illness, prostitution, and violence could be eradicated, according to eugenic theory, by prohibiting the procreation of the unfit and promoting the breeding of only the best specimens of human beings. Renowned social reformers and nation builders linked White Anglo-Saxon Protestant missionary zeal with goals of "race improvement," calling for state intervention in human reproduction. "Lower" or working classes, such as those

alluded to as comprising the majority of parishioners in *Such Is My Beloved*, were deemed “feeble-minded,” a degenerate species unfit to propagate, while the economically wealthy were being programmed to fear the increasing birth rates of the lower classes as a national threat, an enemy infiltration that would bring the country to ruin.

Angus McLaren describes the facility with which Canadian reformers linked their Christian missions with their eugenic goals, citing the 1933 Masters thesis of Tommy Douglas as one of many examples of the imposing obstacles bias poses to perspective, or indeed, to rational thought. Although Douglas rejected eugenics after witnessing its implementation in Nazi Germany in 1936, two years earlier, when *Such Is My Beloved* reached bookstores, Douglas, a Baptist minister, was engaged in vitriolic eugenic discourse that dehumanized the population in Euro-Canada most ravaged by the collapse of the economy. McLaren reveals that “the central thrust of [Douglas’s] argument was that, to protect itself, society had to recognize that mental and physical misfits warranted no better treatment than that once reserved for lepers and criminals” (8). It is of note that contemporary readers of *Such Is My Beloved* would have been exposed ubiquitously to exponents of eugenics in classrooms, churches, and media. In 1932, the popular Ontario service clubs, Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis, passed a resolution in support of a sterilization law (117). Social ills were attributed to flawed individuals rather than to flaws in social structures. Social failure, therefore, was embodied in physical or intellectual disability—in defectives, genetically disposed miscreants. People with a disability therefore became the scapegoats for those concerned with public welfare, and any individuals considered undesirable by the established middle class were subject to being branded as people with disabilities.⁹⁵ The prostitutes, in Callaghan’s narrative, are therefore categorized as people with disabilities, “feeble-minded” individuals whose degenerate circumstances are biologically determined. Those configured as subnormal were placed under the purview of medical expertise and approached like a virus that must be contained and eradicated. Identification and sterilization of society’s “disappointments” were to eliminate social failure by addressing its root cause.

It is helpful to situate *Such Is My Beloved* within the penetrating force of the Thirties’ eugenic ideology because, ultimately, in the early Thirties, the only consistent opposition raised against the legislation of sterilization policies emerged from the

Catholic Church, particularly in Quebec. McLaren suggests that the Catholic Church's opposition to eugenics in English Canada was not as effective as it might have been because of the Church's stance against birth control and divorce, as well as sterilization. Nevertheless, despite a host of converging events brought on by the Second World War, the failure to establish a national eugenics programme was largely attributed to the Catholic resistance whose members' votes politicians courted. Significantly, sterilization laws were passed in British Columbia and Alberta, where "Catholicism was weakest" (125-26). However, Callaghan's Catholic Church in *Such Is My Beloved* reflects the minority status of the Catholic Church in 1930s Toronto, where the hierarchy is, in Margaret Avison's words, "pressed into propriety by the prejudiced Protestant majority around them" (207).

Such is My Beloved begins with the young priest, Father Dowling, "just a year out of seminary," "eager" (3), idealistic, and popular, trudging along the street completely absorbed with the idea of preaching "another powerful discourse on the building of a society on Christian principles" (4), when he is propositioned by two prostitutes. Instantly, on the second page of the narrative, theory slips into the cold slush of reality. Before his encounter with Midge and Ronnie, Dowling knows his sermons criticizing bourgeois values garner complaints from wealthy parishioners, but these protests have been as shallow as the message he preaches. Despite his sermons, Dowling's status as a priest and his charismatic personality elicit invitations to dinner and bridge. He appreciates having wealthy parishioners, even if they hypocritically insist on advertising their charitable donations (39). Father Dowling's encounter with the prostitutes begins a journey of theoretical application, as it were, by which he, implementing the Christian imperative of love for the "Other," enters into relationship with the young women who live on the periphery of society. From a postmodern perspective, this path also enacts Derrida's ethic of responsibility in relationship: Dowling reaches out and strives to appreciate the others as they are, even though he cannot fully understand who or what they are. Dowling's attempt to practise what he preaches essentially places him in the same socially constructed category as Ronnie and Midge—feeble-minded. Just as they are banished from their city by the authorities of church and state, so too Father Dowling joins the disenfranchised in an asylum, his commitment to the Other sealing his fate with

them. *Such Is My Beloved* narrates the disabling process of maintaining normalcy, demonstrating the hypocrisy of social institutions that purport charity while adhering to an ethic of economic materialism and class bias.

As Dowling comes to grapple with his role as a priest in the young women's lives, the reader must also draw conclusions about the tensions portrayed in the novel: social service model or human relationship? Christian compassion or social success? Father Dowling responds according to the Church's theological teaching, while the Catholic hierarchy acts according to social expedience. The sin of the Bishop and the wealthy members of the parish exhibits what Illich refers to as the institutional betrayal of relationship (*passim*). The Catholic Church is indicted in the novel for following society's rather than Christian teaching. Since the Anglo-Canadian power establishment in the Thirties openly professed Christian Protestant values, Callaghan's portrayal of the Bishop's "anaesthetized" conscience (Burbidge 109) reaches beyond the Catholic institution to the justifications for discriminatory treatment of marginalized citizens employed by society generally. In the novel's exploration of the traditional dualism between the physical and the sacred (either in the world or not of the world), both Dowling and the Bishop ironically manifest a confluence of the binary; however, their respective incorporations of the tension are incompatible. The Bishop justifies his power because he is "supposed to be an administrator rather than a contemplative" (98), exemplifying the Church as a social institution, serving the sacred through efficient management. This image of the Church resonates with the Thirties' notions of eugenics as apposite with Christian charity. In contrast, Dowling, seeking to live his faith, is convinced that divine love is expressed through human embodiment. Dowling's desire to perceive all human life as eminently lovable defies social reasoning. This Christian imperative makes sense to Dowling even as it defines him as a lunatic by his contemporary society's standards. His conviction sustains him in the asylum where he continues to write a commentary on "The Song of Songs."⁹⁶ Dowling represents the multifaceted, unlimited possibility of loving relationship, directly challenging the "social service model" that simplistically reduces people to subnormality and rejects the most vulnerable as subhuman. In a crushing moment of epiphany, Dowling viscerally

experiences the injustice of the establishment's judgement of morality, recognizing the insubstantiality of the moral complacency in which he played a part.

The voices of society's "sins" encompass him as if they were whispers in a dark confessional. These stories of misery are overwhelmed by the argument of Mrs Robison, the model woman of the parish. Her position, that "all prostitutes are feeble-minded" (94), implies that they need, not help, but erasure. Her words replay in Dowling's mind, climactically pronouncing the narrative crisis:

"The social service point of view, the unfit produce the feeble-minded, let's sterilize the feeble-minded, Mary Magdalen was feeble-minded and Mary of Egypt, too, and Joan of Arc heard voices; it becomes simply a problem of breeding, once you can sterilize the unfit it's easy to breed the whores out of existence, and the mentally fit are always moral, and immorality is simple feeble-mindedness. Mrs Robison, Father Anglin, prominent women of the parish . . ." The darkness within him and the deadness became so deep he could hardly move. (95)

Because the Bishop chooses to align himself with the comfort of the moneyed status quo, he must discredit and remove Father Dowling from his position of spiritual authority. The former status requires the unequivocal delineation between the desirable successful citizens and the intolerable unfit population. The Bishop thus sacrifices in one sweep not only his junior priest, but also the majority of his Catholic congregation, who are mainly poor immigrants: "people in the neighbourhood were in the habit of jeering and saying that all Catholics were poor, unsuccessful in business and socially unimportant" (38). The corporate lawyer, Mr Robison, and his family raised the profile of the Catholic cathedral, initially making Dowling proud "that no finer, more aristocratic, more devout people were coming out of church doors anywhere in the city" (38). Robison too carefully cultivated his Catholic image: "as a prominent citizen he had always felt it was his duty to cherish the good name of his religion, especially in this very Protestant community" (96). In order to preserve his own reputation, Robison terminates Dowling's ministry, justifying his betrayal by condemning the young priest as "tainted with dangerous thinking. His sermons against what he calls the bourgeois world" (97).

Callaghan challenges his predominantly Christian social milieu by foregrounding the Catholic Church's hypocrisy when associating itself with mainstream society. Furthermore, the absence of Christian morality in society is underlined by Dowling's recognition of Catholic "intuitions" in his only friend, Charlie, who is a communist atheist. The moral outlook tested in the narrative is hence more social than "religious." The novel probes the hierarchy of class and power that claims authority to decide standards of social inclusion. In attempting to situate Ronnie and Midge in the social order, Dowling defamiliarizes their role from one of depravity to one of spiritual sacrifice whereby the respectability of others is maintained through the young women's sin. His naïve struggles to find a role for the girls in the utilitarian social environment render rationalizations that encourage readers to make moral judgements of their own. Dowling's inability to assimilate his individual experience of the girls as human beings and parishioners with their stigmatized status illuminates the social construction of disability, revealing the dependency of the "normal" on the "subnormal." The outcasts of society are outcast in order to protect the legitimacy of the more powerful. "Subnormalcy" is impersonally produced: "we get so accustomed to despising those girls that we never see them at all" (127). The construction of disability as Otherness is presented as a social failure of relationship, denying the humanity of those labelled as Other. In a conversation with Charlie, Dowling points out the absurdity of eugenic reasoning: "All you would have to do would be to sterilize the feeble-minded, and in a couple of generations everything would be rosy for the strong-minded ones, who would all be highly moral" (127). The problem, Dowling notes, is that the respectable are blatantly not necessarily moral. Prostitution exists not only because of the economic need of the women but also because of the immorality of those men who attenuate the prostitutes' humanity by paying for the women's services.

By denying the women's value as fellow human beings and parish members, the Church abandons its pretence to be a sign of the sacred. James traces Callaghan's use of the Cathedral in the narrative, describing its shifting symbolism for Dowling, from a redeeming presence of the sacred integrated with the world, to a symbol of spiritual impoverishment (41). For Dowling, the Cathedral initially inspired the profound joy of inclusion because it signified a human connection where "he was at home in the midst of

his own people” (58). After the prostitutes are rejected by the most exemplary members of the community, Dowling feels “disgust” at the sight of the spire “as if the church no longer belonged to him” (94). He is alienated from his home—from what was the well-spring of social community. For Dowling, who clings to his faith that all people constitute the Beloved of God, the institution that dismisses the needs of Ronnie and Midge cannot be his. The merging of the Cathedral with its surrounding environment marks the Cathedral’s unremarkable complicity with the unjust social order.

Father Dowling, however, as an ordained priest of the Catholic Church presents a discourse of love that cannot conform to a morality of economic expedience.⁹⁷ He maintains his love for the prostitutes and for “all the living who need [God’s] pity and justice” (143), and consequently is confined to an insane asylum, beyond the margins of the city, removed from respectable society as Ronnie and Midge had been. Dowling’s “madness” is his nonconformity, which constitutes a threat to the conformers by suggesting other options. Robison realizes that Dowling will “make fools of us all” (97-98) if he is not silenced. Thus, Dowling is imprisoned with others who have been labelled as feeble-minded. He describes a woman who screams out her story, “her wild voice . . . ringing over the lawns” (142), but no one seems to hear or even notice her. Significantly, Callaghan portrays this mad woman as coming from another country, reminding readers of his contemporary society’s correlation of feeble-mindedness with immigrants. Is she, like Dowling, incarcerated because more powerful others do not want to hear her? Dowling also notes the “rich brown fertile soil” on the hospital grounds, ironic in the place where people are segregated and sterilized, their creativity, their meaningful participation in humanity, denied.

The novel closes with Dowling accepting his incarceration in the asylum, intent on continuing his commentary on “The Song of Songs”—the celebration of physical love as a site of divinity. As a young priest with great potential for advancement in the hierarchy of the Church and coming from an economically impoverished background, Dowling spotlights the dilemma of the Thirties’ simplistic hereditarian discourse. Dowling’s background of poverty determines his “subnormality,” but his ordination qualifies him for the “fit” camp of society. The critical factor in realizing the discourse of eugenics is compliance. Dowling chooses his fate by associating with the social pariahs.

His demise demonstrates the process by which society constitutes feeble-mindedness. His offence is conscientious practice of Christian teaching. In this light, Dowling's acceptance of his "madness" can be read as a resistance to the relative madness of the norm. Dowling sees that obedience to a social norm is required; he cannot agree with the Bishop's assessment that his love "had degenerated" (133). Since God's love makes no distinctions among the classes or conditions of souls, Dowling is certain that he, too, is not to discriminate among the worthiness of parishioners. The Bishop, acting as the arbiter of the young priest's behaviour, concludes that "Father Dowling made a fool of himself" (135), cynically acknowledging that for the relationship he has had with Midge and Ronnie to have spiritually affected the girls, Dowling "would have to have been a saint" (135). It is easier for the Bishop to declare his priest insane than saintly.

The novel's critique of eugenic ideology is itself vexed by Dowling's observation of the Italian family he visits after the birth of their twelfth child. The mother, Mrs Canzano, is ill and exhausted; they are poor, on city relief; both wife and husband are in despair. Representing the Church that forbids birth control, Dowling senses his complicity in their misery and is at a loss for a meaningful response to their experience of a God who is "not good" (123). Dowling intuits that his pious, rehearsed responses to a baby in a family are not only inadequate but also inappropriate; he realizes that he does not understand. He notices that the other eight Canzano children do not all look "right wise" (124). Dowling is troubled by two of the daughters who have "a fixed silliness in their eyes" (123), and he imagines that any of these children may have a future on the streets far worse even than that of Ronnie and Midge: "What chance did they have for spiritual development when they were born with weak minds?" (124). To a current reader, this ostensibly rhetorical question posed in the mind of the naïve priest would be comical if Dowling did not succeed in conveying deep sincerity. In this scenario, Callaghan has portrayed a ready profile of the type of family that eugenic theory vilified as a threat to society: genetic degenerates from another country (Italian immigrants), exponentially consuming Canadian resources by being on relief and reproducing without control. The stereotype presumed "defective" offspring who, especially if female, would become sexual profligates.⁹⁸

This image of the Canzanos reproduces the prevalent British-Canadian estimation of immigrant wretchedness. The recirculation of biased images, even to refute them, may unintentionally work to perpetuate their existence in the collective imagination. Dowling sees the Canzano children's poverty, ethnicity, and eyes and concludes, according to social conditioning, that their minds are "weak." However, he admits bewilderment; he realizes that he does not understand. The meaning of misery in the world that overwhelms Dowling is left to the reader to ponder. Should readers align themselves with this embarrassingly naïve cleric, wondering if the biological heritage of the little Italian girls condemns them to a life of immorality, or do readers attend to the context of unemployment and Catholic faith? Readers are left to grapple with the web of images presented.

As Dowling puzzles over the "purpose" behind lives such as the Canzanos', he feels drawn to Ronnie and Midge and "all the wretched people he had ever known" (124). Ironically, from his subject position as Roman Catholic priest, Dowling has increasing difficulty sustaining the presumed boundary between "us" and "them" in the eugenic discourse of the time. The Cathedral parish is not a part of "successful" society but belongs to the economically depressed area of the city: "The parish was no longer a rich one . . . [P]oor foreigners kept coming in and turning the homes into rooming houses. These Europeans were usually Catholics, so the congregation at the Cathedral kept getting larger and poorer" (37). The Cathedral is described in the contemporary discourse as consisting of a feeble-minded population that breeds without constraint and deepens their poverty. Similarly, Dowling's observation of "a cripple, a Frenchman . . . being helped into his wheelchair" (79) reminds the reader, cognizant of the Thirties' eugenic debates, that French Canada, predominantly Catholic, resisted eugenic policies that disparaged Quebec's economic poverty and high birth rates (McLaren 150-52). The image also signifies enduring community support and encourages Dowling to expect help for Ronnie and Midge from the Robisons. Dowling has become sensitized to the variety of people in the community, the human diversity that enables a sacred connection. His relationship with the prostitutes has uncovered a new experience of invigorating love he can only understand as divine—embodied, incarnational, but selfless and enriching. This revelation transforms his perception of the congregation from an institutional,

depersonalized view to one of relationship with individuals, each worthy of being loved “for themselves” (131). Dowling's convictions contravene those of the Bishop and the Robisons, dividing the institutional and the theological paradigms of Catholicity. Readers are compelled to decide how people should be approached: as a labelled, homogenized mass, or as individuals offering relationship. Dowling demonstrates the incommensurable results of entering into relationship with Otherness. Disability Studies explores the potential deepening of human knowledge that occurs when suppressed human experience finds expression. Dowling’s encounter with the Other leads to an experience of God.

When rebuked by the Bishop for his relationship with the prostitutes, the young priest recognizes that the constructed stigma around the unwanted is unchristian. Through his love for the prostitutes, Dowling perceives human inter-connection: “All around us there are all kinds of people prostituting their souls and their principles for money. I know people in this city who prostitute our faith for the sake of expediency. I watch it going on all around and wonder how corrupt our faith can become before it dies. So if I can’t have charity for those girls, certainly I can have no love for many others in higher places” (132). Thus, in response to the burgeoning eugenic ideology of its day, Callaghan’s novel declares that we in fact *are* the Other. Them is us! Eugenic ideology cannot complement Christian charity. The authority of law and church will not tolerate Dowling’s non-conformism and banishes him to an asylum, thus illustrating a process by which middle-class self-interest can construct a class of feeble-minded or, in current discourse, developmental disability.

Callaghan’s narrative of a Catholic priest’s relationship with two prostitutes during the depression is critical to understanding dominant social attitudes towards developmental disability that persist to this day. By juxtaposing authentic relationship with institutional propriety, Callaghan foregrounds the folly of both the Catholic establishment and middle-class society in the early Thirties that tolerated eugenic discourse and allowed its implementation. Read in the context of the Thirties eugenics craze in Canadian history, *Such is My Beloved* becomes a text of resistance to a dangerous abuse of power in the professional classes as well as in the religious institutions which served them. Abuses of power persist with the stigmas associated with disability in current social institutions where practices of involuntary sterilization and

invasive procedures continue with little popular interest or political accountability.⁹⁹ The eugenic “science” that legitimated the advantages enjoyed by the privileged class and blamed the underprivileged for their lot soon fell into disrepute. Eugenic claims had no scientific authority but they were deeply embedded in a fear of Otherness and a desire to preserve advantage. The story of Father Dowling suggests that any “social service” programs must be questioned and de-naturalized in order to begin to recognize the interlocking systems of power that might be invested in the service.¹⁰⁰

⁹³ Dr. William Harop Hattie held positions of considerable influence throughout his career. He was the medical superintendent in Nova Scotia from 1908 to 1913, and Provincial Health Officer from 1914 to 1922. He resigned this post to work as Professor of Hygiene and Mental Diseases and Secretary of the Faculty of Medicine and Assistant Dean at Dalhousie University. He was an active member of local, national and international medical associations, as well as an editor of the *Journal of the Canadian Medical Association*. Hattie, originally McHattie, was born in Pictou, Nova Scotia, where Thomas McCulloch lived and wrote *The Stepsure Letters*. The epigraph is taken from the essay, “The Physician’s Part in Preventing Mental Disorder” (1920).

See Hattie’s obituary in *The Canadian Medical Association Journal*.

For more information also see: <http://www.library.dal.ca/archives/MS13/MS-13-12>. and http://leftlite.blogspot.com/2005_06_01_archive.html

⁹⁴ I draw primarily from McLaren for material on Canadian eugenics in this work. For further reading see Kevles; Kerr and Shakespeare; Mitchell and Snyder, *Cultural Locations*; Black; Noll and Trent; Paul; and Zenderland.

⁹⁵ McLaren quotes the Toronto medical health officer, Dr Charles Hastings, asserting the need for medical policing of private homes because “psychologists assure us that mental, moral and physical degeneration go hand in hand” (36).

⁹⁶ John Burbidge argues that the novel is in essence Dowling’s commentary on the “Song of Songs” and that this expression of divine mystery is a “significant expression of religion in Canada” (113).

⁹⁷ In 2004, Archbishop Desmond Tutu's writing on the gospel's role in promoting a healthy post-apartheid society described the place of Jesus with the "fringes of society." In contrast, he imagines the reaction if he were to follow Christ's mandate: "Can you imagine if they saw me there walking into a brothel to visit. . . Who would say, 'We're quite sure the archbishop is there for a pastoral reason'?" (10).

⁹⁸ In *Canada and Its Provinces* (1914-17), the authors categorize immigrants according to their presumed ability to conform to a white Anglo-Saxon ideal. They characterize Italians as "devoid of shame" and place them low on the list of desirable immigrants (MacLaren 47).

The Canzano's poverty and need for relief targets them as genetically inferior, according to some eugenic claims. In 1936, the Association of Ontario mayors endorsed the lobby for mandatory sterilization. "The mayor of Fort Erie called for the sterilization of *all* fathers on relief, even those not clinically categorized as mentally defective" (MacLaren 122).

⁹⁹ See the most recent controversy raised by the disability rights community regarding the surgical procedures used to arrest the maturation of a child with disabilities in order to ease the work involved for her care-givers, reflected in Liao, Savulescu, and Sheehan.

¹⁰⁰ Recent advances in genetics, for example, have normalized a need for pre-natal testing that would lead to abortions if any abnormalities were detected. Medical ethics boards often do not include a person with a disability.

Chapter Five:

Defective Fronts: *As For Me and My House*

*Whence all this passion towards conformity anyway? – Diversity is the word ...
Must I strive towards colourlessness? ... Life is to be lived, not controlled, and
humanity is one by continuing to play in the face of certain defeat.* (Ralph Ellison)

While Callaghan's *Such is My Beloved* can be seen as the quintessential Thirties novel, Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*, published in 1941, has become the classic Canadian literary portrait of the Depression. Without specifying time and place in the novel, Ross's work has come to characterize the Dirty Thirties ethos of his native Saskatchewan, providing literary posterity and the Canadian imagination with a collective, deeply personalized, prairie experience of the multi-layered devastation of the time. Despite its regional positioning, *As for Me and My House* succeeds in capturing a complication of existential being that resonates beyond the particular, resulting in what John Moss calls "a haunting orchestration of so many of the themes and images and behavioural patterns that are prevalent in our fiction as to seem uncannily prescient of the Canadian experience" (Stouck 7). Consequently, Ross's novel has not only informed the work of Canadian authors writing in its wake, it also has generated unflagging critical interest. This interest springs primarily from ambiguities surrounding the narrative voice.

The novel is presented in the form of a personal journal, written by the fictional Mrs Bentley, the wife of a small town prairie preacher, Philip Bentley. The introspective diary recounts the couple's failing marriage of twelve years, during one year's struggle at their new, albeit their fourth, parish assignment. The subjective narration of Mrs Bentley and its vexing of narrative meaning provide an enduring fascination for literary criticism. The reliability of her interpretation of her husband's character and their joint experience in the town of Horizon have provoked readings of the gaps and silences in the text, producing arguments for contradictory images of the major characters.¹⁰¹ As Robertson

Davies observed in his review of the newly published text, Ross's narrative style obliges the reader to "draw his [sic] own inferences" (17). Both Ross and Callaghan elicit active valuations from their audience, and while both set their tales in the Depression, Ross's text, written seven years after Callaghan's, emerges from a different socio-political climate. With the start of the Second World War and the subsequent decline of eugenic fervour in Canada, the role of the lower classes had been shifting from hereditary failures to military martyrs. However, Ross draws on the expedience of disability as a literary "shorthand method of securing emotional responses from audiences" (Mitchell and Snyder, *The Body* 17) at the expense of perpetuating oppressive and dangerous notions of disability as marking an impairment of humanity. Hence, the presentation and erasure of the disabled figure in *As for Me and My House* participates in what can be seen as a literary eugenic tendency.

It is of note that even though *As For Me and My House* is the most critically analyzed text in the history of English Canadian literature, I have not encountered any work that acknowledges or examines the character of Peter Lawson, the "boy who limps" (37).¹⁰² This elision manifests the critical neglect of disability that contributes to "literature's complicity in the historical devaluation of people with disabilities" (Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative* 17). Furthermore, this critical oversight produces the paradox "of disability's definitive invisibility in the cultural imaginary" (16).

Typically, in response to my queries, readers cannot recall encountering an image of disability in *As For Me and My House and My House*. Much like background description, the inscription of disability in a minor character that is given no agency and is only described and observed activates the requisite metaphoric impact of a stereotypical image of disability. No complicating personality traits attenuate the desired effect. Peter's death fulfils the negative schema typically at play in unanalysed responses to disability. Like Callaghan's portrayal of the physically impaired "Frenchman" (79) being assisted on the church steps, the image of a young "limping" child evokes in the reader a mandatory visceral response of pity that intensifies the significance of the main event without demanding any question of the viability of the disabled image itself (Fiedler "Pity"). As Paul Longmore contends, ubiquitous images of disability are screened "out of our consciousness even as we absorb them" (Mitchell and Snyder, *The*

Body 17). Within Ross's indeterminate style that ostensibly leaves so much for readers to interpret, the sketch of the child with a disability provokes a predictable response from a presumably able-bodied audience, providing an effective, yet unnoticed, means to project meaning and manipulate readers' understanding.¹⁰³ Certainly, in 1941, Ross and his contemporaries had been steeped in dominant discourses of disability as familial blight. On examination, not only does Ross engage in the opportunistic exploitation of disability as a literary trope signalling misery, but his image of the disabled boy with its requisite stereotypical connotations functions as the narrative's central metaphor. A focus on Peter illuminates a significant parallel between the Lawsons, Peter's family, and the Bentleys that supports readings of Mrs Bentley as a shallow, domineering individual, intent on controlling and punishing a husband who has failed her expectations. Readers' propensity to forget the disabled character in *As For Me* may well be due to cultural habit rather than to textual insignificance.

The theme of failure that permeates the narrative is symbolized by the image of the young limping Peter whose talent, and future promise sicken, die, and are buried in the barren prairie of the Thirties, with no promise of resurrection. The figure of Peter embodies the hopelessness of the Depression. Despite the waning of eugenic fervour in Canada with the start of the Second World War, within the narrative, Peter's disability reiterates the eugenic policy of identifying individual weakness, isolating it from the mainstream, and erasing it (for the sake of race improvement). However, although Ross depicts Peter as a stock metaphor, readers who no longer acquiesce to the reification of disability as signalling the negative will recognize Ross's cynicism towards the eugenic promise. Even though Ross invests in the powerful stigma attached to corporeal impairment that participates in the social devaluation of people with disabilities, he does not champion the non-disabled norm. After the bodies marked with anomaly are removed through death, the outlook at the end of the narrative is stiflingly oppressive. The surviving actors resonate with the futility and despair evoked by the disabled image. Just as Peter's death could be justified because his future was bleak, so too the new family, classically symbolizing hope at the narrative's end, suggests instead a continuation of the dismal existence its members had shaped for themselves.¹⁰⁴ The persistent association of the Bentleys with the Lawsons consolidates the Bentleys' abnormality rather than

comfortably re-establishing the requisite norm. Hence, even though normalcy is not championed at the end of the novel, disability functions as “the master trope of human disqualification” (Mitchell and Snyder, *Cultural* 125), signifying the degradation of normalcy in the Bentleys. Ultimately, Ross’s conventional use of disability in *As For Me and My House* illustrates the endurance of the stigma of disability, which proliferated via eugenic advocacy, even when the narrative overtly problematizes the hereditary claims that had dominated public discourse throughout the Thirties.

In *As For Me and My House*, layers of failure are relentlessly buffeted by the inexorable wind that remains ubiquitous from the first entry of Mrs Bentley’s diary to the last. The narrative completes a (vicious) circle, taking us from the spring of the Bentleys’ arrival at the town of Horizon to their departure the following spring: “It’s blowing tonight, and there’s dust again, and the room sways slowly in a yellow smoky haze. The bare, rain-stained walls remind me of our first Sunday here, just a little over a year ago, and in a sentimental mood I keep thinking what an eventful year it’s been, what a wide wheel it’s run” (164). At the vortex of this circle stands the portrait of the Lawson family of Partridge Hill: Joe Lawson, his unnamed wife, and “crippled son Peter” (83): personifications of the country and its “crippled” potential. Peter’s disability exemplifies the erosion and depletion of potential for a good life during the Depression.

Partridge Hill, Philip Bentley’s country appointment, eleven miles south of town, is as archetypal a country parish as Horizon’s Main Street is typical of the prairie town. The country parish’s distance from town situates it as peripheral; access to it is limited, just as the disabled body is considered outside the norm and access to accommodation is restricted. Yet Ross’s contrasting depictions of country and town folk obfuscate the characters’ demographic delineation of value.¹⁰⁵ The country is the place from where those in the “town” have escaped, ostensibly moving towards a superior life. Nevertheless, while the wind with its plethora of metaphoric possibilities drives the characters variously to distraction, Lawson, *the* farmer, “was the only one who seemed indifferent to the wind” (37). The Lawsons alone stand as unambiguously decent: genuine, without the “false fronts” the others construct. When Paul, the country-born town teacher, comes to church wearing a new outfit and sees Lawson with “just a freshly ironed work shirt on, and blue overalls nearly white with washing” (54), he is mortified at

his own shallowness. Joe Lawson signifies an unspoken moral standard that is felt but feared. Hence, unlike Paul, who feels guilty near Lawson, Mrs Bentley flagrantly determines to distance herself, by extravagant spending, from the milieu that Lawson represents. Philip has just spent precious funds on new overalls for Steve, their unofficially adopted son, but after observing Lawson and Paul, the narrator decides that for their family “the overalls won’t do” (54) and Steve must have a suit.¹⁰⁶ When the Bentleys are juxtaposed with the Lawsons, Philip’s sketches of Main Street false fronts that Mrs Bentley finds so distressing, appear as a symbol of her own obsession with erecting elaborate false fronts for herself and Philip.

The narrator, in an example of her “unreliability” as interpreter of facts for readers, describes her husband’s sketch of Partridge Hill as expressing not his own perception but Paul’s. Her writing suggests that she is seeing Philip’s vision as aligned with Paul’s, but the obsessive nature of her comparison suggests that she gives Paul’s vision priority, as if Philip’s were derivative. “You see it the way Paul sees it . . . it’s *Humanity in microcosm*. Faith, ideals, reason—all the things that really are humanity—like Paul you feel them there, their stand against the implacable blunderings of Nature—and suddenly like Paul you begin to think poetry, and strive to utter eloquence” (80). The narrator fails to see Philip’s sensibility in his sketch of Partridge Hill. The Lawson family, the embodiment of the human nobility conveyed in the portrait of Partridge Hill, illuminates the Bentleys’ isolation from each other and the self-delusion that Mrs Bentley projects onto her husband.

The paralleling of the Bentleys with the Lawsons appears after the first Partridge Hill service and for the remainder of the narrative in almost every journal entry that refers to Partridge Hill. The narrator correlates the two men by repeatedly reiterating Joe’s likeness to Philip in nearly identical phrasing: “Joe Lawson looks like Philip (20); “Lawson, the man who reminds me of Philip” (37); “Lawson, the man who looks like Philip” (54); “Joe Lawson, who looks like Philip” (83). While drawing the comparison between the two men, Mrs Bentley fails to see herself in Mrs Lawson, whom she describes as “a yelping little terrier round a plodding Clyde”(20). Nevertheless, the image suits Mrs Bentley, whose reflections ineluctably converge on her husband to the extent that her desire for a son is merely a strategic means to sustaining her marriage.

The meaning of Philip's name "lover of horses" (162) connects him to the image of the Clyde that Mrs Bentley evokes to characterize Lawson. Horse imagery also persistently links Philip both to Lawson and to Peter's injury. The figure of Peter, "a thin, delicate-looking boy about twelve . . . limp[ing] a little still from a runaway two years ago" (20), mobilizes a vertiginous interplay of literal and metaphoric associations within the narrative that together effect the pervasive hopelessness that forms the essence of the novel.

A focus on Peter highlights the interconnections created by the recurrence of references to twelve-year-olds. Lawson watches his twelve-year-old with pride and hope "exactly like Philip [would] if he had a boy" (20). The Bentleys' son would have been twelve, but he was stillborn and, as Helen Buss writes, "is the only memory of creativity they both share" (197). Hence, the notion of a twelve-year-old boy reverberates through the narrative, evoking a plethora of potential significations. The recurrence of associations to a "twelve-year-old" refers variously to Phillip, Steven, the stillborn child, the Bentley marriage, the Lawson marriage, Judith's boy, and Peter. The Lawsons' paralleling with the Bentleys, however, grounds the motif of twelve years in the figure of Peter Lawson, who acquires a disability and, at the age of twelve, dies.¹⁰⁷

Mrs Bentley explains to the parish women that she and her husband have wanted a boy for twelve years: "As parents, you see, it makes us really twelve years old ourselves" (61). Thus, the twelve-year-old Bentleys can both be seen metaphorically in the twelve-year-old Peter. Like both of the Bentleys, Peter has potential as an artist. Like Mrs Bentley, Peter demonstrates talent as a pianist, but his creative capability is disabled by his circumstances. Poverty will necessitate the loss of the piano. An absence of specialized medical care results in the loss of Peter. His potential is destroyed, and with it, the family's hope in the future. Lawson despairingly suggests that Peter had nothing to live for: "Staring across the hot burned fields . . . Maybe he's not missing such a lot" (109).

Peter's death resonates in the hopelessness of the Bentleys' futile aspirations. The narrator recalls that she "had ambitions" as a pianist but now instead is "a failure too, a small-town preacher's wife instead of what I so faithfully set out to be" (16). Mrs Bentley's initial hopes for her future have died and been replaced with futile plans that

rely on a nonexistent son and a nonexistent relationship. The narrator depicts Philip as intrinsically unfulfilled, a frustrated artist as well, his desires for the future impaired and destroyed by unfriendly or inaccessible environments. Her attempt to revitalize Philip by taking in the twelve-year-old Steve ends in futility; Steve is taken away by the Church, the Catholic one, echoing Philip's use of the Church to escape his own roots. Mrs Bentley does not regret Steve's departure and Steve himself seems unmoved. Although both the Lawson and Bentley families experience troubles and an uncertain future, the differences emphasize the indistinct boundaries between individual natures and their environments. Does the Bentleys' dysfunctional relationship stem from their circumstances or their inherent personalities? The couples' divergent responses to their plight highlight Mrs Bentley's determination to correct things herself because of the contrast with the Lawsons, who represent the "sober-work-roughened congregation" whose fervent religious faith reflects "the grim futility of their own lives" (19). The narrator's faith is not in God or Church but in "the thousand dollars" she saves to start a business and in Philip's ability to be better than he is. Her disillusionment with her marriage has provoked her to project her own lack of faith and distaste for the role of pious minister's wife onto her husband. The false front of their ministry is possibly Mrs Bentley's construction, not built or buttressed by Philip. It may be she who is "shrivelled up inside with the guilt of [her] hypocrisy" (139).

The Bentley/Lawson parallel adds another perspective from which to assess the Bentley relationship. The latter pair symbolizes "the country," where Paul interprets religious faith as an instinctive reaction to human meaninglessness in the face of an indifferent universe. Philip, categorized by his wife as a hypocrite, a preacher without faith, was originally a country dweller himself. His comparison to Joe Lawson hints at an elemental humanity that the narrator fails to see. Through the Lawsons, we catch glimpses of Philip that seem to protrude beyond the enclosure of the narrator's text. Mrs Bentley sees traces of Philip in Joe's physical characteristics. He is "long and lean" with the same mannerisms and "the same look of stillness in his eyes" (20). However, whereas in Lawson, "sky and weather" have had this effect, in Phillip the look results from his resignation to being "a failure." Just as Lawson is "such a farmer," the quintessential farmer and thus authentic, Philip is "a failure now, a preacher instead of a painter" (16).

Joe's and Philip's likeness might suggest that Philip's turn to the Church was not purely instrumental; he too may have sought refuge from meaninglessness. In reference to the Lawsons, "Paul said thoughtfully that that was the worst penalty inflicted by education, the way it separates you from the people who are really closest to you, among whom you would otherwise belong" (20). Mrs Bentley assumes he refers to himself, "a ranch boy with a little schooling," and therefore unable to fit in anywhere. However, the emphasis on the similarity between Lawson and Philip implies that Paul could be referring to Philip as well as to the narrator (rather than or in addition to himself). The Bentleys are isolated from each other, from others, and, despite Mrs Bentley's relentless analysis of their relationship, from themselves as well. They do not "fit in." Despite deploring the hypocrisy of the false-fronts, Mrs Bentley keeps theirs in prime condition: "all its letters freshened up this afternoon, *As For Me and My House—The House of Bentley—We Will Serve the Lord*" (61).

The lack of authenticity in Mrs Bentley is illuminated when her painful association with food is contrasted with the Lawsons' hearty eating. The Lawsons' basic humanity and fruitful relationship are reflected in their eager generosity in sharing the food they produce and enjoy. They send food with the Bentleys after showing them "twin calves (Phillip and Joe?) born just yesterday." Significantly, Joe's appetite is healthy; he can "pitch in . . . and eat" without being urged (20). In contrast, meals at the Bentleys are persistently strained and unappetizing, often left untouched. Mrs Bentley invites others to the table only to avoid facing Philip.

In keeping with her practiced deception, Mrs Bentley plans to create the illusion of family by taking Judith's child and eliminating Judith from their lives. The futility of the narrator's hope for a happy ending is evident when the Bentleys' "gain" is juxtaposed with the Lawsons' loss of their child whose body bears the mark of tragedy. Peter's death signifies the death of hope for his parents: "We aren't even going to get our seed this year" (109). The drought has wrought thorough destruction for the Lawsons, but the Bentleys' misery is formed by a relational drought. After the funeral the Lawsons prepare a chicken for the Bentleys, passing their nurturing life to the minister and his wife. With the Lawson boy's death, the Bentleys seem to inherit the family role. The parallel provokes readers to contrast the couples and question the source of their differences.

Leaving Partridge Hill, the narrator glances back to see the bereaved parents watching “as if afraid to go in” (109), echoing the narrator’s fear of facing her husband at the dinner table. The pain of the families is juxtaposed and narratively interchanged, not communally shared. At Peter’s funeral, Mrs Bentley’s concern is again, superficial. She worries that Philip’s preaching lacks conviction, yet her description of him suggests he is overwhelmed with emotion, contrary to the cold aloof man she portrays.

Finally, we encounter Lawson’s image in Philip’s painting. The work expresses defeat, focussing specifically on “big, disillusioned, steadfast hands” (139). Without Peter, Lawson’s hands, his life work, have no purpose. Philip’s sketch that articulates such “insight and pity” (139) seems to be self-expressive. Perhaps it is his own hands Mrs Bentley reads as “so faithful to the earth and seasons that betray them” (139). Philip’s resignation may be to his inability to respond adequately to the misery of the time rather than to his inability to paint. Her response to the extent of devastation she observes is purely material. Ironically, she vows to stop complaining about “clothes and furniture” (139) and to re-dedicate herself to her “thousand dollar” scheme to get herself and Philip out of the Church and into the book-selling business.

The Lawson-Bentley parallel casts doubt on Mrs Bentley’s eugenic assertion that “a man’s tragedy is himself, not the events that overtake him” (94). The narrative questions the nature of self: the differences between self-constructs and the material from which these structures of identity can be constructed. Subsequently, the challenge extends to the nature/nurture dilemma. Is Philip simply Joe Lawson in a different context, or is he intrinsically different? Underlying the recurring comparisons of the two couples is the pathetic image of Peter’s disability and death, imprinting failure and futility and reinforcing negative connotations associated with people who have labels of disability.

Since disability figured centrally and negatively in the socio-cultural debate on the roots of human nature for the first three decades of the twentieth century, the metaphoric resonance of the image of the disabled figure, embedded in this Canadian Great Depression novel, efficiently pervades the scenes of multi-variegated failure. Exploring the function of this easily elided disabled figure illustrates one process by which an enculturated bias towards disability as tragedy is unconsciously received and perpetuated within our cultural productions. Peter’s death is conveyed as a logical

progression of circumstances. At the age of ten he falls from a horse, perhaps connoting a defect in masculinity marked by his musical talent. In contrast the twelve-year-old Slavic Steve is “ominously good-looking” and aggressively virile: “I do go riding—and I don’t fall off” (41). Steve’s strength attracts Philip. Philip’s desire to see himself in this twelve-year-old rider of horses is futile. Philip’s affinity lies with the artistic, delicate Peter, whose limp signals a disadvantage that Philip and his wife perform in their relationship. Philip, perceived in connection to Peter, also appears “disabled,” incapacitated, and without control over his own life.¹⁰⁸ Philip’s hopes, like the Lawsons’ hopes in Peter, have died. Mrs Bentley, however, in refusing to identify with the Lawsons’ experience, exerts her power, relentlessly striving to control Philip and shape him into what she hopes to have in life. Mrs Bentley’s control, none the less, continues to be another false front.

Anne Compton argues that, through Mrs Bentley, *As For Me* investigates the human struggle of “yearning that our lives count” (73). Ross’s use of disability evokes the anxiety of insignificance. Peter’s life is uselessly aborted. He dies before he has had much opportunity to live. His death signifies life’s tenuousness.¹⁰⁹ The narrator’s strategic persistence in dissociating herself from the Lawsons in order to solidify her significance reflects the cultural dependency on positioning disability as the wrong side of a binary pairing. In keeping with the stereotype of disability necessarily entailing weakness, Peter, with only a slight limp, becomes ill, bedridden, requires unattainable “city specialists” and finally dies. Without the limp, a protracted and fatal illness would need to be explained. Had Steve, for example, similarly been mysteriously bedridden, notions of neglect or abuse might arise or the event would mar the narrative’s tenability. Peter’s “crippled,” curtailed life signals and embodies the miasmatic disappointments of the narrative. However, viewed in the author’s historical context of these recent eugenic debates favouring hereditary causes for failure, Ross’s narrative includes provocative elements. The Lawson family is strong, enduring, and loving while the Bentleys’ ostensible “success” is hardly enviable. The narrator characterizes Philip as sick: “The constant sense of deceit and hypocrisy has been a virus, destroying his will and sapping his energy” (67). Yet when Philip wants to respond honestly to defend Steve before the parish women, Mrs Bentley intervenes, maintaining the façade she purports to deplore in Philip (73). The conflation of a diseased morality and a diseased body does not

correspond with either Peter or Philip or Mrs Bentley, for that matter. Her behaviour, if morally suspect, is not indicated on her body. Nevertheless, the metaphoric tie with the disabled Peter evokes the link between defective bodies and defective lives.

Ross obfuscates the lines of the nature/nurture dilemma. Although the characters whose difference is marked on their bodies are eliminated, in keeping with conventional uses of disability in literature, these characters, or in Peter's case, his family, are not responsible for their difference or the circumstances that lead to their deaths. In one instance, Ross directly refers to the waning eugenic polemic of his time through the doctor's wife, Mrs Bird. She assures Mrs Bentley that the town talk that deprecates Steve because of his background is groundless: "The doctor insists it's environment, not heredity, . . . worse sins can come home to roost than those of your peasant ancestors" (60). The town's medical authority states that country ancestry is not inferior or degenerate. However, neither Peter and Judith, tied with the country, survive and, economically, at least, the Lawson parents are ruined. Mrs Bird confesses that "[i]ntellectually, you see, the doctor and I are alone here. Provincial atmosphere—it suffocates" (21). The narrative suggests that although small-mindedness may breed more small-mindedness, the limitation is engendered by context, not genetics. Thus, while Ross avails himself of disability's hyperbolic symbolic weight, thereby reinscribing eugenic fallacies, he fails to complete the expected metanarrative by affirming the normalcy of the non-disabled survivors. The dismal gloom that lingers after the novel's close suggests that although Ross exploits a conventional disability trope, the result does not affirm hegemonic normalcy. Eliminating figures with marked differences and limitations does not destroy human suffering. Ultimately, *As for Me and My House* indicates that normalcy is merely a false front. Perhaps Ross's own life experience of confinement both within his job as a bank clerk and within his queer sexuality impelled the novel's pervasive dreariness.

Like Peter Lawson and Mrs Bentley, Ross had artistic potential as a pianist that could not be realized. In the climate of his day he also could not easily express his homosexuality.¹¹⁰ Ross's difference and his musical aspirations were stifled. His use of disability suggests that he believed the Canadian environment for artists was disabling and consequently their future was bleak. While Ross's conclusion echoes Montgomery's

in her portrayal of Cousin Jimmy, the climate of futility that Ross depicts conveys a far more sinister outlook for Canadian culture.

Ross's use of disability in *As For Me and My House* presents what Mitchell and Snyder identify as the double bind of disability representation: Peter's limp complies with literary convention around the representation of disability, intensifying complex metaphoric meanings in the novel without acknowledging the human reality of disability, the political reality of a disabling society, and the politicized ramifications of the literary expedience of the disability metaphor. In other words, by deploying disability as an efficient metaphoric device, Ross reinforces and perpetuates negative stigma surrounding disability, stigma that translates into and justifies oppressive public policy. Readers who have a physical impairment are forced to identify either with the pathetic figure who mercifully dies after worrying the worthy parents, or with the figure of otherness, Judith, who also, accommodatingly, dies. On the other hand, they are expected to identify with the able-bodied actors, denying association with the character who is drawn to resemble them. Despite the vexing of the nature/nurture dichotomy, Ross sustains the eugenic paradigm of disability.

¹⁰¹ See Stouck's *Sinclair*, for an overview of critical response to Ross's novel until 1991.

¹⁰² D.M.R. Bentley argues that Ross has constructed Mrs Bentley as manifesting mental illness, *Dementia Paranoides*, as conceived by Freud. The inclusion of mental illness within the category of disability is currently disputed; however, on a popular level, in Ross's time as well as today, any perceived anomaly of mind or body is conflated under either label. The controversy lies within the differences between the cultural receptions (stigma) of illness and disability. See Wendell's *The Rejected Body*, 19-22, for a reflection on arguments against the correlation of illness and disability with the conclusion that the categories are too indistinct in themselves to justify categorical separation.

¹⁰³ Ironically, the degree of disability does not generally play a part in disability's metaphoric expediency as "the master trope" (Snyder, Brueggemann, Thomson 4) of disqualification. According to literary convention as well as social stigma, Peter's "slight" limp is a red flag, or a flashing yellow light, signalling *problem*. This problem might range anywhere from a personality defect to global corruption, but the point is that the problem is symbolized by a corporeal anomaly of any degree. The anomaly signals a wrong that needs to be corrected. With this recurrent theme in text, people with disabilities in lived experience bear the consequences of being perceived as a symbol of a "wrong." Of course, the how and why and the complexities of this process of metaphorization are what constitutes a great deal of current Disability Studies. In Thomson's discussion of the "visual rhetorics of disability" she describes cultural images of disability as "a culturally fabricated narrative of the body" and, as such, "a system that produces subjects by differentiating and marking bodies. . . .The category of disability

exists as a way to exclude the kinds of bodily forms, functions, impairments, changes, or ambiguities that call into question our cultural fantasy of the body as a neutral, compliant instrument of some transcendent will. . . . Thus, *disability* functions to preserve and validate such privileged designations as beautiful, healthy, normal, fit, competent, intelligent—all of which provide cultural capital to those who can claim such status” (74-75). Therefore, Peter’s limp, slight as it is, carries the symbolic weight of an error in the human condition that eugenic ideology promoted as subhuman and pernicious to society.

¹⁰⁴ At least one scholar, Barbara Mitchell, argues that the narrative ends positively for the couple.

¹⁰⁵ The delineation of value is demographic in that “country” suggests an inferior life; town, therefore, implies a better existence. Nevertheless, the narrative reveals contradictory realities.

¹⁰⁶ It is interesting that the Lawsons elicit reactions of guilt and resistance. Among the many reasons suggested that people with disabilities are avoided by others is that the non-disabled may feel guilty for their relative good fortune. Also, they do not want to risk self-association with the “defective”; or they fear being perceived as inferior because they are associating with someone who is stigmatized as such.

¹⁰⁷ Scholars such as Robert Murphy, Paul Longmore, and Rosemarie Garland Thomson discuss disability’s subversion of the American Dream. Because disability reveals the bluff of progressivist myths of physical perfectability and immortality, the disabled body is constructed as deviance. “The physically disabled body becomes a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control, and identity” (*Extraordinary* 6). The editors of *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities* call

disability “the ubiquitous unspoken topic in contemporary culture” because it is seen as “the harbinger of mortality” (2). Peter Lawson’s character affirms these standardized notions of disability.

¹⁰⁸ The metaphoric association of disability with other forms of misfortune and unhappiness shackles people with disabilities within a negative stereotype that precludes acknowledgment of experience that does not fit a discourse of tragedy.

¹⁰⁹ Susan Gingell observes that the treatment of disability here might be usefully compared to the representation of certain kinds of female characters in pre-1960s Western literature, who have to be killed off because there is no legitimate place for them in the social order.

¹¹⁰ Recent criticism considers the role of Ross’s sexuality in *As For Me and My House*. See, for example, the work of Andrew Lesk and that of Timothy Cramer.

Chapter Six

Dis/Connections: Ethel Wilson's *Love and Salt Water*

"We do not sit with each other long enough to understand each other." (Minnie Freeman)

The images of disability in Ethel Wilson's *Love and Salt Water* provide a counter-discourse to former fears of national inferiority projected onto anomalous bodies. Wilson's narrative vision of a post-war Canada suggests that perceptions of able-bodied perfection are false fronts that obscure authentic human and, hence, national value. The false fronts that in Ross's narrative hide a "disabled" existence, in Wilson's world hide a reality that cannot be as easily discarded. Wilson's novel begins to chip away at the constructions of normalcy that obscure the complexity of the human condition by subtly raising doubts about the reflex to devalue disabling conditions. The protagonist, Ellen Cuppy, can be read as the new Canada emerging with a hard-won maturity from its role in the Second World War. Ellen's measured reflections on life and humanity represent a Canadian ethos distinct from the superficial attractiveness of American culture. Ellen, as the Canadian heroine, stands in contrast to her ostensibly perfect yet one-dimensional older sister alluded to in one instance as the Statue of Liberty (127). The menace signalled by bodies marked as imperfect in Montgomery's Emily trilogy is vindicated in *Love and Salt Water* by a facially disfigured Ellen, who, like Emily, looks towards a fulfilling marriage at the novel's end. These resonant fictional protagonists in Canadian literature elicit contradictory attitudes towards difference, both promoting and resisting the status quo. As with the disability of Stepsure in *The Stepsure Letters*, the imprint of accident on the heroine's face in this novel suggests that Canada's valuable experience may be manifested in its difference from the dominant structures of Britain or the United States.

Each work discussed in the preceding chapters occupies a significant place in our national literature and participates in the creation of a shared narrative that, in turn, shapes a collective consciousness of Canadian identity. The author discussed in this chapter, Ethel Wilson, is no exception, though she did not come to Canada until she was ten. She was the daughter of a Methodist minister, whose death left the young Ethel an orphan when she was only nine years old.¹¹¹ Although the writers who have contributed so strongly to our national imaginary until the first half of the twentieth century spring from a relatively narrow well of social experience, Wilson champions the notion of an authorial obligation to create from personal knowledge.

Indeed, Ethel Wilson's thoroughly middle-class life propelled her writing. Although she has been criticized for her unapologetic focus on middle-class living, Wilson adamantly argued throughout her career against the artistic reduction of human behaviour to diametric oppositions of black/white, good/bad, rich/poor. Our behaviour, Wilson maintained, is "compounded of a whole range of impulses and motives, and determined by conditions and situations" (Stouck, *Ethel* 165). Consequently, her work foregrounds figures within quotidian settings grappling with ontological ambiguity. Images of disability pervade these mundane contexts.

In fact, disability is central to Wilson's vision of human reality. Her insistent evocation of corporeal deviance serves to illustrate Lennard Davis's perception of the disabled figure as the postmodern universal: a paradoxical universal within indeterminate human mutability (Bending 32). In *Love and Salt Water*, Wilson constructs disability as a human norm that requires address within the process of striving to become fully human. Wilson's use of physical anomaly contradicts the conventional deployment of disability as a negative trope signalling disruption of an otherwise fixed and valuable normalcy. Wilson's inscription of disability defamiliarizes myths of human control over life's circumstances.¹¹² By converging the marginality imposed on disability with the coastal marginality of British Columbia, Wilson proffers a particular perspective on universal affective experience.

Since the imperative of "becoming human," or fulfilling whatever our human potential might be, can be seen as universal to the species, Wilson felt it was important not to dismiss the deep humanity of those who lived in between extremes of poverty and

wealth. In her attempt to capture this particular demographic, she demonstrates skill in expressing intangibles in human experience that resonate across categorical boundaries. Wilson argued that only regional writing is “capable of achieving universality” because it “is rooted in association, affection, and apprehension of place and people” (Stouck, *Ethel* 170). In other words, she believed that good writing requires intimate knowledge of one’s subject and place: the personal then becomes the communal (public, political, national). Consequently, Wilson publicly opposed the popular post-war project of nationalist writing, that is, a conception of Canadian literature as constituted exclusively by Canadians self-consciously defining a generalized Canada for public consumption. As Stouck observes, Wilson’s stance prefigures the twenty-first century attitude towards our national oeuvre: “Her position was simply that if something was written in Canada, then it was automatically Canadian” (*Ethel* 168). Although born in South Africa and spending most of her childhood in England, Wilson became an integral player in the Canadian literary scene. The west coast of British Columbia is the home she knew best and recreated in a way that allows her readers to recognize and sense the effect of its terrain without lengthy expositions on landscape.

For Wilson, a window view of the ocean carrying freighters and tugboats “unfolds and spreads the imagination” (Stouck, *Ethel* 208). Wilson interprets life in British Columbia as rendering a particular perspective from the country’s periphery: a geographic postmodern subject position analyzing the centre from the edges. By rendering her situated experience of territory, Wilson provides insight into what collectively does contribute to a “Canadian” experience. Her portrayal of people on the coast, literally living on the brink of firm terrain, extends a metaphor for what resounds as a deeply human and Canadian phenomenon: “The fact that these Western people live on a periphery tempts them continually to move and return, move and return, very like birds” (98-99). For Wilson, the mobility of those on the coast also characterizes a fluidity of movement that allows individuals either to link with others or to escape from them, literally and figuratively. The geographic brink and its implications symbolize the precariousness of human existence. Wilson responds to this uncertainty in life by extending a moral obligation of community. Connection with the Other prevents one

from slipping into an abyss of meaninglessness. In Wilson's work, disability presents a subversion of the facades that obfuscate fundamental human interconnection.¹¹³

Wilson's powerful evocation of the fleeting moment of existential perspicacity and the human response to geography has informed following generations of authors. Her urbane style has won her acclaim as a "writer's writer" (Mitchell, *Women* 220), and no less a writer than Alice Munro claims Ethel Wilson as her "literary mother" (Stouck, *Ethel* 248). Indeed, her activity in hosting and mentoring many future luminaries of Canadian literature gave her an artistic parental role. In this way, Wilson's creative use of anomalous bodies potentially influences a Canadian perspective even if her work is not as popularly read as L. M. Montgomery's.

In a curious demonstration of how life can imitate art, Wilson's biography echoes L.M. Montgomery's tale of Emily's youth in *Emily of New Moon*. However, although both the fictional Emily and the actual Ethel emerge as Canadian authors, Ethel Wilson translated her life experience not into material for her stories, in the way Montgomery conceives of Emily doing, but rather into an ethical vision of communal interdependence that infuses her stories.

Ethel Wilson, born in 1888, lost her mother before she was able to remember her. Ethel's father did not remarry and became his child's closest and dearest companion. As in the Emily narrative, when her father died (evidently of consumption), Ethel pined for him as she was passed among relatives who, although kind, were strangers to her. She, in time, was transplanted from England to Vancouver, Canada, to be raised by her maternal grandmother, whom she did not know. In his critical biography of Ethel Wilson, David Stouck demonstrates how Wilson's childhood experience is inscribed in the recurring themes of displacement and insecurity in her fiction. While Montgomery's fictional Emily responds to her emotional solitude largely with an independent determination to control her destiny and fulfil her desire to write professionally, Ethel Wilson imagines the most successful response to the precariousness of life as requiring a conscious acknowledgment of every individual's inherent bond with a larger human community.

Wilson's understanding of human community appears in her narratives in the recurring interplay of relationships with disability. Stouck argues that "on a philosophical level, Ethel Wilson would turn her insecurities into a search for a moral order that would

confirm the humanistic values of love and faith and unity; and she would transform her emotional preference for retreat, isolation, and distance into a vision of unity and the theme of moral responsibility” (*Ethel* 14). Wilson’s theme of moral responsibility reveals a consciousness of social attitudes that marginalize disability from visions of humanity and the consequent corruption of community that this exclusion incurs. The “moral order” evident in Wilson’s writing consists in acknowledging a fundamental human connection to others, especially others perceived as unattractive for some reason. Her fiction depicts her experience of ordinary persons (white, middle-class, of English descent) whose humanity develops or withers according to their relationships. Her characters are vivified when they respond to others empathetically, eliciting attention from the readers through spare, deftly inscribed reflections on an encounter with another, even in passing. On the other hand, self-centred characters are flat; again, in the most mundane sense, they refuse their own growth in humanity and become uninteresting “types.”

Using a deceptively simple prose style, clearly indebted to Morley Callaghan and Sinclair Ross, whose novels she admired (Stouck, *Ethel* 241), Wilson develops her predecessors’ sparseness of language that provokes active readerly participation in realizing the meaning she has conceived. In order to make conclusions about the characters she portrays, readers must decide on their own stance towards others, since the sketches she provides are not detailed enough to include unequivocal authorial judgements. Readers must assess their response to the other in order to render an opinion of a character’s response/ability.

Love and Salt Water, published in 1956 when she was 68, is Wilson’s last novel and masterfully exhibits the honing of the vision her fiction presents for Canada. Although W. J. Keith claims this is “the darkest of her novels” (112), it can be interpreted instead as profoundly positive in its address of the inevitable precariousness of lived life and the enduring hope it holds if people believe in one another. The prevalence of images of disability may contribute to Keith’s evaluation of gravity; however, if critical readers are not predisposed to recoil from disability, the novel’s effect changes. *Love and Salt Water* presents the struggle to come to terms with an experienced life, an examined life, rather than the surface notion of “a normal life” we expect and presume is our birthright.

The narrative suggests that a life lived not superficially admits shadows and darkness. These shadows in Wilson's novel do not obscure light; they are integrally bound to what we perceive as light. They are perhaps the same phenomenon as light, but our perception and reception of reality shift, and as our view shifts, the meaning of what we encounter shifts as well: "[P]erhaps our whole existence, one with another, is a trick of light. That may be somewhere near the truth, which is often hard to determine because of the presence of the lights and shadows of look, word, thought which touch, glide, pass or remain" (71). In *Love and Salt Water*, acknowledging the darkness that accompanies living enriches rather than diminishes existence. Denial of this reality dehumanizes the individual privileged enough to maintain the pretence.

The title of the novel reflects Wilson's oft quoted statement "Life is a difficult country, and our home" (Sonthoff 104). In Wilson's narrative, love and salt water are two inextricably bound elements of reality. Love as human relationship—the empathetic caring we consider as distinctively human—is immersed in the natural environment that includes both the salt water of the sea and the salt water of our embodiment. Salt water evokes human tears and the womb—our biological existence as a species subject to the vicissitudes and uncertainties of the natural world. The simultaneous allure and danger of the sea is itself a metaphor for the risk inherent in living life. In *Love and Salt Water*, readers seem to stand *beside* an omniscient narrator, observing a character's thoughts, observing, rather than participating, in their personal correspondence. "Reading" a figure's mind leads to identification, but soon the text reminds readers of their separation, their position as observer of another, thus engaging readers in the novel's ultimate ontological dilemma of relationship. Wilson's style reinforces this exploration of boundaries of self and other. The novel's protagonist discovers that she feels "very much alone on this sea, and yet very much together with all the other people who were also alone" (46).

Again, Wilson demonstrates what Derrida will come to theorize in his reflections on ethical behaviour as the moral response to an otherness that is at once incommensurable and universally shared. At times, narrative scenes are set with observations that read almost like stage directions. The beginning of Chapter 29, for example, includes a detailed, objective description of Ellen Cuppy's appearance (115).

For the previous twenty-eight chapters, we have followed the events in this primary character's life, yet the scene describes her as if we were seeing her for the first time. In this way, we are reminded that as voyeurs of others, we encounter a surface that reveals little else than the details of our observations, while what we see relies on shifting variables symbolized by the motif of the permutations of ocean vessels watched from windows on shore. A shift in angle and "[i]t became a different ship" (5). From the vantage point of her sister's apartment, a tugboat anthropomorphizes, mesmerizing Ellen with its "extreme beauty" (117) although her sister has no interest in its existence. Wilson complicates perception still further by demonstrating that, as with the seagull noted by the narrator but not by the narrative players, familiarization can render things invisible. The interrogation of perception wrought through the multi-variegated metaphor of love and salt water illuminates the inextricability of the themes Urbas names as Wilson's literary project and her vision of life: "love, the complexity of human relationships and the subtlety of truth" (15). This thematic trinity assumes substance in disability.

Love and Salt Water follows the development of a sixteen-year-old Ellen Cuppy into an adult. Her maturation involves a self-recognition that evolves through a process of connection to other people. Ellen learns how to be fully human through others. Humanity in *Love and Salt Water* incorporates binary oppositions rather than juxtaposing them. Shadow or darkness, as mentioned earlier, does not necessarily imply a negation of light but a variation of perception and impression. Within the narrative, disability embodies this recognition of the fullness of the human condition as a network of contrasting elements. Ellen Cuppy's development can be traced through her engagement with the disabled images she encounters. At sixteen she observes a woman in a wheelchair as someone wholly other (25). She is repulsed and resentful of the person's presence within her environment. A total of seven disabled images figure in the narrative; ultimately Ellen is not transformed *by* the anomalous characters, she is transformed *into* one. Ellen's journey takes her from spectator to spectacle, out of the invisibility of a presumed normalcy to the hyper-visibility of anomaly. Disability in Wilson suggests an engagement with living that demands awareness of connection, making it prototypical for all human individuals.

Having sustained facial injuries during a near-fatal accident, Ellen incorporates her disability into her life-experience and begins a marital relationship with a man she knows more deeply because of her injury. Her greatest fear was not the loss of her “undoubted beauty” (193) or the possible loss of her fiancé. What she “could not bear” was the possibility of “compunction” or that George would marry her out of pity or obligation (195). Significantly, Ellen’s injury becomes disabling only as a consequence of other people’s negative responses. While Ellen is prepared to carry on with her life “chastened and only a little sorry” (193) for her changed appearance, the novel makes no suggestion that Ellen’s facial difference does not “matter.” Humanity entails embodiment. Ellen underlines the significance of corporeality when she predicts to George that her facial transformation “would make a difference in so many ways that we can’t even think of” (195). George’s response demonstrates a developed sense of the depth of human connection: “Will you use a little imagination and think whether you’d want to leave me because I got bashed over the face” (196). As George approaches the moment of meeting the new Ellen, Wilson creates a crescendo of contrapuntal images of superficial beauty and blemished, complicated loveliness that culminates in the two characters’ embrace and “the actual beginning of their happy chequered life together” (203). Ellen arranges their meeting at the train station rather than in the ordered sterile atmosphere of the airport, where passengers wait “often with a mechanized watching look which they catch—in part—from their surroundings” (202). The narrator suggests that some imperfection would improve the place: “A little unsuitable plush might help; or rose candle shades laden with dust might humanize” (202). Flawlessness is subhuman, according to Wilson, not the contrary. Ellen’s life promises to be rich, not despite her “disfigurement,” but together with it and even because of it. George, initially repulsed by kissing her scarred cheek, “then kissed her well, out of love and pity and delight” (202). The melange of emotions resonates with any deeply felt human experience.

The marriage closure in *Love and Salt Water* deserves attention. In her correspondence to her editor, John Gray, Wilson admits that the novel’s happy ending is conventional and “so detested by critics today” (Stouck, *Stories* 203). An alternative ending written by Wilson, but rejected by her editors, has the protagonist drown, her body never to be recovered. Ironically, since Ellen has been disfigured, her death would

have reproduced the literary convention of erasure of disability, with its accompanying cultural effects. Thus, the marriage closure in this context contravenes convention. Deborah Kent demonstrates that invariably in canonical English-language literature the marriage plot is reserved for non-disabled characters, or still more insidiously, the marriage is precipitated by or itself precipitates a miracle cure, inferring that disability precludes a happy ending (90-91). Disability perspectives further vex the conventional marriage plot beyond its feminist critique. Disqualifying female disabled characters from the myth of “happily ever after” informs and perpetuates oppressive and dehumanizing views of women with disabilities as asexual, unattractive, and inadequate as partners. The naturalization of this prejudice within literature in turn contributes to the disabled women’s vulnerability to abuse and exploitation while it decreases access to legal protection and defence.¹¹⁴ Hence, Ellen Cuppy’s marriage to a man who proposed their union before her scars marked her as “ugly” (190) defies literary convention. Acknowledging usual attitudes, Ellen Cuppy worries her fiancé might be a martyr for marrying her; George is more distressed that Ellen would imagine herself devalued in his eyes than he is about her physical transformation.

The images of disability threaded throughout the narrative suggest that disability is an irrevocable part of the human condition and as such plays a vital role in our individual and combined humanity. Just as accident and death are unavoidable elements of living, so too, impairment happens, despite attempts to erase it, despite myths of a normalcy of plastic perfection. The pervasive presence of disability throughout the novel suggests that disability’s unanticipated and unwanted, but inevitable, appearance may carry unexpected cargo. Just as pleasure and love may appear when unsought, or in the way a tug boat may surprise with its “extreme beauty” (117), an impairment may have positive ramifications.

Nora, Ellen’s older sister, is introduced as a picture of the ostensible ideal: the norm. Although she has little imagination, not caring to join her mother and sibling’s unceasing reverie of ocean freighter views, she exhibits features generally admired and desired in Canadian mainstream culture. Romantic attractions to “birds and boats” are of little use in a society that values efficiency. That Nora “was practical by early nature” (7) is reflected in her sensible choice of marriage to an older man, a successful lawyer and

politician who is fully devoted to her. Because she had “unflawed good looks,” her lack of passion for others “had a casual or beguiling quality of indifference” (8). In short, Nora adheres to the epitome of the 1950s norm for a North American woman: a slim, ethereal, white, young wife of an established, wealthy, dependable public figure. Nora’s conformity seems effortless and willing, and her privilege appears to be rooted in her fortunately fashionable appearance. The narrator renders a snapshot description of a young Ellen walking with her parents in Stanley Park: “they were better to look at than most people” (11). After admiring their appearance, the speaker concludes: “if Nora had been walking with them in her tall fair beauty, they would have looked finer still” (12).

This image of the Cuppy family in the park unconsciously attracting onlookers portrays the incident that engendered Wilson’s writing of what became *Love and Salt Water*. Wilson was struck with a family she observed in Stanley Park “walking together in health, companionship and unusual physical beauty.” She began to envision “the dreadful private casualties of life [that] might or might not befall them” (Stouck, *Ethel* 224). Thus were born the fictional misadventures of the perfect little family. Stouck marvels how this novel “[i]n the myriad gruesome accidents, maimings, and sudden deaths, ... dramatizes more powerfully and insistently than any of her other books her conviction that chaos lurks beneath the smooth surface of events, that we always live ‘on a brink’” (229). The hidden turbulence that Wilson uncovers does not, however, necessarily render the novel “dark.” Rather, the novel interrogates this classic interpretation of life’s precariousness, suggesting that the typical reception of life’s vicissitudes may not be entirely accurate; our judgements and expectations of worth may be as relative as our perceptions of light and beauty. What Stouck characterizes as “gruesome” phenomena in the narrative extend the possibility of increasing a character’s humanity and thus her or his appreciation and enjoyment of life. The more one lives with intention, the wider one’s range of human encounters. Readers determine a character’s moral worth according to the figure’s response to adversity, often represented by disability. Furthermore, Wilson’s portrayal of disability hinders a typical process of distancing readers from disability’s Otherness by gradually shifting our initially voyeuristic gaze to a familiarization and identification with disability through Ellen Cuppy, mitigating possible reflexes of pity and fear. Wilson also obfuscates the clear

delineation of the social categorization of anomaly by providing a detached viewing of non-disabled characters in a way reserved for a “disabled figure,” whose differences often render corporeal observations that suggest a medical gaze. Thus, the outline of Gilbert, the “idiot“ son devoid of agency, shown only as surface “defect” is echoed in outlines of Nora, whose surface is wholly attractive. Nora’s personality is “flawed,” but her perfect exterior precludes being pathologized or discredited socially. There is no indication of personhood in the sketch of “the little mongol” (141), but the mistake in judging Nora superficially implies that the surface view of Gilbert may also be insubstantial.

Just as Ellen Cuppy stood watching the vessels on the ocean from Nora’s window and soon was herself immersed in the sea, Ellen is plunged into a depth of living after her disabling accident. She is removed from her vantage point of spectator. At sixteen, Ellen had watched a young disabled sailor who was drowned and she, after nearly drowning, becomes the one others stare at or from whom they avert their eyes. The young disabled sailor cannot survive his immersion in reality, as it were, without enough supportive connections. Ellen, on the other hand, while thrown into life experience, has the support she needs to prevent drowning. Significantly, the identification of disabled with non-disabled figures in the story, the immersion and merging of identities in the indiscriminate salt water of the sea, suggests that life can be beautiful if we care to make it so for each other and ourselves. Ultimately, disability, disfigurement, and impairment need not thwart life’s beauty if one’s life also has loving relationships. Wilson was crafting this novel during a time that she describes in her correspondence as the happiest in her life. Career, friendship, prosperity and, most importantly, her relationship with her husband brought her more joy than she imagined possible (*Ethel* 161). Not only had her husband Wallace been critically ill, but Wilson herself also suffered from tremendous arthritic pain and fatigue which resulted in her need to use a wheelchair. While she regretted her limitations, she revelled in the privilege she so consciously was able to enjoy. Evidently, Wilson’s experience of disability as much as her fragmented childhood informs her reality and the worlds she creates. Wilson’s most golden years included harsher realities of embodiment. Her privileged position did not provide erasure of pain; it did allow for access to available accommodations. Her personal life provides the

insight that life might be wonderful when one is loved and affirmed in whatever physical state one is in. Disability and the good life are not mutually exclusive.

When she is sixteen, Ellen Cuppy's reaction to disability is ageist and ableist. For her, the disabled woman she notices is rendered unnecessary as much by her age as by her wheelchair use. In a letter Ellen writes during the cruise she must take with her father, she hopes that young people will come aboard: "Everyone is 80. There is even a woman in a wheel chair. You wonder why such people come. How is Morgan?" (25). Clearly Ellen has not devoted her time to wonder about "such" people's motives; they have no place in her environment. However, Ellen's voyage launches her into maturity. The cargo freighter represents the archetypal space of transformation in tribal rites of passage from childhood to adulthood. Ellen emerges from the ritual transformed, and transforming her former environment as it shifts to accommodate her development: "to Ellen the voyage was a shaking and transforming experience" comparable only to her encounter with George after she is disfigured (61).

In the liminal phase of transition, the initiate is separated from the security of familiar surroundings: "[the passengers] insensibly entered the life of the freighter where all personal responsibility ceases, and the period of private arrangements and decisions slides into the past" (33). The death of Ellen's mother violently removes her from the figurative salt water of her womb-like security and thrusts her onto the literal salt water of the sea, itself an archetypal symbol of life. The cargo freighter that until then had only been watched from shore becomes a self-contained world floating on the fathomless surface of the ocean. Its passengers are confined within its perimeter. Ellen, at sixteen, feels isolated from the adults whose age renders them aliens. The liminal phase of initiation, however, while perhaps individual, is never in isolation, encompassing traditional instruction relayed by elders. Ellen feels at once alone and together with her elders. During a violent storm the sea water invades the sleeping quarters of the travellers and crew, boundaries blur, connecting strangers sharing the vessel's confinement. The illusion of security that might accompany the pampered passengers is undermined by the equalizing penetration of the sea into the ship, immersing people in the natural environment, suggesting that there is no escape from what are natural conditions of our species. Survival depends on collective interaction. Ellen's father joins those who are

able to help those more in need. The element that previously afforded a leisurely cruise now threatens the existence of both crew and cruisers. The only casualty “stripped off the deck like a leaf and flung into the dark” (46) was the youngest sea-boy, who not only serves as a metaphor for human vulnerability but also illustrates the tragic implications of a collective failure to take responsibility for the Other.

Contrary to the repulsion she feels for the woman in the chair, Ellen is drawn to the only other young person on the ship, the disabled sea-boy. Thus throughout the narrative, Wilson explores multiple possibilities of human connection. Ellen was unaware of her similarity to the woman with whom she shared, at the very least, gender and class, with the wealth to afford a passenger space on a freighter whose crew laboured under less favourable conditions.¹¹⁵ Instead, Ellen responds empathetically to the bosun’s 13-year old grandson. He is strikingly pretty, “a Botticelli angel in bathing trunks” (36), timid and evidently developmentally delayed. Ellen’s outrage at his mistreatment by other crew members is affirmed by an elderly fellow passenger. Thus the shared moral affront suffered from witnessing abuse of the boy connects the young girl and old man. Ellen wonders if the sea-boy’s lamentable treatment continues. Readers are left to imagine the answer; in this act of imagining, we position ourselves in relation to the characters. With whom do we identify? The scant sketches distill the choices whether to recognize the boy’s position or the able-bodied sailor’s: disabled or not, vulnerable or powerful, victim or victimizer. Because readers who are accustomed to respond to a non-disabled norm would not want to side with the aggressor, they find themselves in the position of the developmentally disabled target of the bully.

The sea-boy’s disability does not impede Ellen’s identification with him. Readers witness a convergence of the two characters at the ship’s Christmas Eve carol sing: “The bosun’s boy gazed in wonder at the singing sailors and at the Christmas tree and at the passengers . . . This is wonderful, thought Susan’s daughter, I never in all my life saw anything like this” (41). Other distinctions blur: “the roar of the waves and the songs of the seamen filled the mess room” (42). Readers are drawn into identifications with the medley of characters, including the boy with the disability.

According to convention, the troubling, anomalous figure is killed off—mystery solved by drowning. However, in *Love and Salt Water* the resolution sought by erasing

the complicating force of disability is subverted by the connections between characters and the persistent reappearance of disability images throughout the narrative. In the context of the storm when even a weathered sailor has become delirious and every individual is at risk, the sea-boy's loss dramatizes the ramifications of neglect. The boy has been "instructed to stay within and then was forgotten" (46). Unlike Ellen, who was removed from her flooded room and deposited into the safety of her father's chamber, the sea-boy is neglected. The tragedy of the bosun's boy is not that he was disabled, but that others have failed in their responsibility towards him.

Just as the "cloud of the child's death hung over the whole ship" (52), the death resounds through the narrative. Nora, the "vision of perfection," gives birth to three sons, each one evoking the sea-boy. The first son dies; the second son has congenital disabilities, and the third, the "cherub," while appearing to follow the prescription for expected unblemished perfection, is losing his hearing. Nora's children and the sea-boy participate in life through the fundamental human experiences of disability and death. The sea-boy, however, does not belong to the crew that would be his community. We do not see him with his grandfather, the bosun; we see him on the margins of the group: present, wanting to belong, but not embraced by the others on the ship. His death does not shock the reader. His exclusion from his community can be interpreted as a type of death in itself. The connection between Nora's second son, Gilbert, and the sea-boy, however, draws attention not to their disabilities, since the former is "deformed" and the latter is angelic, but rather to their forced isolation and rejection. The sea-boy is vulnerable to abuse. No one prevents the bullying Ellen witnesses, in spite of its regularity, in spite of its offensiveness to those such as Ellen and the elderly passenger. Gilbert, the Peakes' son, is also forced to live in an environment where he is tolerated but not loved, cared for but not engaged in a familial embrace. Both young boys are placed in a situation of risk. Nora refuses to accept a child she perceives as imperfect and instead lavishes her mothering on the third son, Johnny, who seems to fit her maternal aspirations. Nevertheless, his increasing hearing deficit links him to the sea-boy as well. Both are beautiful to look at: Nora's "cherub becomes more cherubic" (66), echoing the sea-boy's label of "Botticelli angel" (36). However, Nora disables Johnny through her

need to control. She denies him any relationship with his sibling, removing both boys from that human experience of family.

The Cuppy sisters' Aunt Maury has three sons who parallel Nora's: "one son was in Egypt, one boy was invalided home, and Billy, her eldest, was lost at sea" (66). The fate of the sons indicate the precariousness of human existence. The children of the older and younger generation of women and the drowned sea-boy merge into one image: someone's child, needing love. Who they are and where they are relies on the response of others. Nora's conditional maternal response reveals the corrosive effect of the cultural imperative of (surface) perfection. Her psyche seems incapable of assimilating the phenomenon of accident, impairment, or anomaly, which the narrative represents as integral to human existence.

In *Love and Salt Water*, the corrective to human vulnerability to accident is not control, but rather conscious responsibility to other. The boy's drowning might have been prevented had someone looked after him. Similarly, Ellen's and Johnny's near-drowning happens by accident, a result of Ellen's wanting to please her nephew. Nevertheless, Ellen's indulgence is condemned as negligence towards Johnny. Blaming Ellen for the accident illustrates the impulse to deny one's own responsibility for others. On the other hand, Ellen's brother-in-law Morgan represents a cognizance of the interconnectedness of human actions. His decision to entertain a potential Cabinet Minister requires Ellen's agreement to babysit Johnny. He recognizes that "the price of casual negligence and danger often comes . . . very high, disproportionately high" (192). Wilson highlights (unacknowledged) human connectedness by providing the seemingly irrelevant information regarding the political demise of a Mr Hartley Pearce, "who was an unknowing contributory cause of all this to-do" (192). Ironically "[i]t was, therefore, not necessary, after all, that Mr and Mrs Morgan Peake should have gone to Victoria and that Ellen should have been scarred on one side of her face for life; but who could tell" (193).

In *Love and Salt Water*, disability, impairment, and difference are ordinary facets of the human condition, usually as unpredictable as accidents of any sort and equally defiant of controlling impulses. While Ellen's disability is presented as an extravagant price for an unintended mishap, her connection with Nora's boys and the bosun's grandson raises the question of blame and price exacted on disability. Gilbert is not

responsible for his condition, yet he is paying the price of banishment from the family nurturing that we (in Canada) consider essential for a child. Importantly, Nora, who cannot tolerate the idea of insufficiencies in her offspring, suffers as well. She manifests the dehumanization self-induced by those who refuse to acknowledge the humanity of others.¹¹⁶ Her inability to incorporate what she views as imperfection into her vision of reality attenuates her humanity. In a direct reversal of conventional disability figures in literature whose disability defines them, Nora's physical beauty becomes her defining attribute. Because she portrays the expected norm and her attractive exterior is an empty shell, her character suggests that the idealized look of a mannequin requires a paucity of imagination, passion and depth of character: "Nora Peake . . . put some steel objects into her fair hair until she looked like a modified goddess of Liberty—meet to be admired but not to be fondled" (127).

Nora seems surprised, even mystified at the possibility of "imperfection" in her life. She is unable to accept the loss of her first son and the anomaly of her second. When her second child is born "deformed and a mongol" (65), Nora's response follows conventional medical advice of the time by erasing him from her family's (manifest) reality.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, with a characteristically odd syntax, the narrator indicts Nora's parental neglect, even as the justifications for her behaviour are recounted: "Since Johnny's birth Nora had not ceased to put away from her the thought of the little mongol who was well cared for, washed, dressed, and fed by Mr and Mrs Waldman" (141). Nora dotes on the "cherubic" Johnny (66). She refuses to sully her portrait of familial perfection through acknowledging the existence of a son she sees as flawed: "Her heart was set on Johnny, her *only* son" (italics mine 142). Her sister's silence about the second birth leads Ellen to believe the child had died, and "as no one referred to him, she rather forgot him" (143). Wilson aptly pens the social practice of consigning non-conforming bodies to the peripheries of social consciousness. Medical wisdom of the time (that persists to date albeit less overtly) recommended relinquishing one's child to expert professional care for the good of the child and the family.¹¹⁸ Families were taught that they were incapable of providing the medical expertise imperative for disability and that the burden of care would damage the family's well-being. The uncomfortable

justifications for Nora's parental neglect proffered by others echo the contemporary rationale for the institutionalization of children with unconventional bodies.

Mr Waldman admonishes his wife's criticisms of Nora, arguing that "[t]he sight of Bertie to a sensitive woman and him never getting any better might be more than she could take" (141). Similarly, Morgan initially feels Nora should be protected from the anxiety the disabled son provokes; and Aunt Maury concludes that "it seems better for her to forget if she can for the time being, seeing it has hit her so awfully hard. She doesn't seem able to face it at all" (65). Thus, Nora is able to reject her son, while appearing "sensitive." The child's anomaly is blamed for assaulting maternal sensibilities. The penalty is denial of family life and identity, denial of parental love and affirmation. Gilbert is not sent to a provincial institution, however. Ostensibly Morgan's wealth allows his unwanted offspring to be "sent to a suitable place in the country to good people" (65). Mrs Waldman, nonetheless, is a "trained nurse" who is "well-paid" to keep her charge; and her own daughter does not want Gilbert living in their home, rendering him an unwanted "boarder" (141) as well. Despite Mrs Waldman's good-hearted competency, Gilbert is her job and a source of income. His social reification is intensified by his depiction as a spectacle for the reader. He is observed: unresponsive, given no thoughts or agency, mechanically accepting food from his father whom he has not recognized. But his lack of acknowledgement of Morgan, rather than indicating Gilbert's "idiocy," depicts Morgan's alienation from his son. Despite weekly visitations from his parent, Gilbert has been disowned and manifests the passivity associated with institutionalization, where people are warehoused under the guise of care. Gilbert's failure to respond is not inherent to his impairments but to the response of others to his condition. Wilson conveys, in a most understated manner, Gilbert's vulnerability to neglect and abuse. Morgan knows that a change in his visiting routine provides an opportunity to "see for himself whether his son Gilbert was still well cared for, and whether Thursday (Mr Peake's usual day) was or was not the occasion for window-dressing" (139). Morgan approaches with a certain dread, betraying his awareness of the risk in Gilbert's environment. Morgan's encounters everything as "well—or as well as it could ever be" (140), implying that the situation is imperfect not because of Gilbert's

disability, although he is described as an automaton, but rather because of his displacement, resulting in a father's awkward journeys to his son's place of exile.

Nora feels justified in rejecting Gilbert to protect Johnny's "normalcy." Ellen epiphanically realizes that Nora "couldn't bear that her son . . . should be touched, at all, ever, by a deprivation, a human limitation of any kind, and that anyone, ever, could perhaps pity him" (146). While this impulse may be construed as maternal protectiveness, here it illuminates Nora's dehumanization of both Johnny and Gilbert. Because Wilson presents this performance of relationship within the familiar paradigm of a loving "average, middle-class" family, readers are left to define whether Ellen's baffled response arises from a lack of similar experience, as Nora intimates, or from the suspicion that her older sister is, in effect, monstrous. Nora's determined denial of life's limitations distorts her character, precludes her growth as a human being, and diminishes her humanity. Nora's experience can be seen as representing a microcosm of the process of exclusion effected by a tyrannical normalcy in society. Ellen, on the other hand, does not subscribe to the ideology of disability as tragedy: "A little boy is going to be a deaf man. It is too bad; but there are worse things" (146).¹¹⁹ Ellen sees deafness as one of Johnny's features that pale in comparison to the assets of his privilege: "he has everything else in the world" (147). Nora's shallowness portrays the restricted vision rendered by the demands of a normalcy that excludes the richness of human diversity and individual uniqueness.

While Nora's deficient response to her sons is embedded in a justifying discourse of sensitivity and parental love, however ironic, Morgan's desire to acknowledge and encompass Gilbert in his life has no affirming discourse. Gilbert's lack of voice, literally and figuratively, is intensified by the silence around his parent's need to be with him. Although a discourse of disability as defect is prevalent, there is no similarly familiar language to express its value.¹²⁰ Just as Gilbert is silent and unresponsive, Morgan is awkward and displaced in the house of his son's exile. Gilbert's residence with a trained nurse medicalizes his existence although there is no indication that he suffers from any illness. His personality is reduced to a medicalized "deformity" in-validating his being. The lack of a language indicating the love for one who does not conform to conventions of "child" or "son" contributes to the effectiveness of disability's social erasure. Johnny's

cherubic quality constitutes his worthiness (of love). Once Nora realizes he is losing his hearing, she refuses to speak it out loud, even to Johnny's own father, Morgan. Language bestows a reality onto her son's encroaching deafness that she can deny by refusing to utter the words. Initially, Ellen reacted similarly to her mother's death: "It's if I tell people, then that makes it true, one person telling another person" (16). Nevertheless, disability, like death, persists despite concerted social efforts to deny it. Morgan's desire to relate to his son deepens the worth of both persons. Morgan's empathy extends beyond himself to other human beings, whether devalued as Gilbert, or enviable (apparently) as Nora. Consequently, Ellen chooses Morgan to accompany her to her pivotal meeting with her betrothed because his moral integrity lends her strength to be herself.

Wilson's use of disability in *Love and Salt Water* exposes the experience behind the absence of a discourse of validation and the devaluing and social silencing of disability. Ellen's development as a moral person is traced through her relationship to disability, beginning with her observation and rejection of disability through a gradual process of identification and empathy until she herself emerges as a mature being, willing to face the complexities of existence. Ellen is transformed into the other; her face "hideously scarred" (Sonthoff 103), she becomes the disabled figure, the mature human being.¹²¹

Ellen's transformation into disability is not, however, a sign of loss, defect, overcoming, or any of the classic tropes images of disability serve. Her disability marks her enriched humanity and, furthermore, it marks not the end of her narrative, but instead signals the promise of a fertile relationship. The promise of "happily ever after" for Ellen enfolds a promise for collective humanity in that loving human relationship involves seeing beyond the surface. When Ellen recognizes her love for George, the narrator observes that "the love spread around and forward and backward, illuminating areas of her life which had nothing whatever to do with the matter; and this is one of the perquisites of love" (151). The entanglement of all human beings allows for Ellen's identification with others. Her loving relationships suggest how uncertain physical details become in a relationship of empathy. In response to her friend's query about George's looks, Ellen describes George's being. Ellen cannot describe George objectively any more than she can her mother. Their characteristics are described in terms of their

meaning to her rather than as isolated pieces of anatomy. The irrelevance of physical characteristics to potentially valuable relationships is further emphasized by Ellen's observation of her friend's response to her husband's loss of a hand: "His hand was blown off in the war, but neither he nor Isa nor the children seemed to look upon this as anything out of the way, or a disability" (152). The novel warns against judging exterior appearances because they may function as do the false fronts in Ross's *As For Me and My House*. Ellen recognizes that "[k]nowing people by sight is not enough" (128). She begins to appreciate her brother-in-law, Morgan, despite years of sharing family, only after she begins to understand his relationship with Gilbert. As a result, Morgan becomes meaningful for her in her own life.

In *Love and Salt Water*, the most admirable characters engage with disabled figures in ordinary and positive ways. The characters with disability do not have primary roles or personalities, until the protagonist becomes "disabled." The others function as examples of visibly anomalous individuals who participate in the ordinary web of humanity, "the circle of life" (133). This conscious engagement with other people marks a character's developed personality. George's love for Ellen brings him out of his self-imposed seclusion, where he can enjoy community again. He embraces her with her scars as he knows she embraces him. In contrast, Ellen's former fiancée, Huw, seeks to withdraw himself and Ellen from others.¹²² He is perceived as attractive and heroic, but he is bad-tempered and arrogant, and values Ellen as a personal accessory: "desirable but very unreasonable" (82). Huw contributes to the novel's theme of human interconnection. His failure to identify with others stunts his personality: "It was plain that Huw was unable to tolerate the fault of tedium in the aged" (79). In contrast, Ellen's maturation as a person involves a profound development in her reception of the elderly. Her adolescent dismissal of the old as unnecessary shifts as she begins to imagine herself in a similar space. "Who are we to be so snooty? . . . Haven't [the Ransomes] even the right to be dull?" (79-80). Unlike Nora, who ignores the incessant babble of the elderly Miss Sneddon, Ellen admits that she "simply can't not listen" (123). Consequently, she is able to slip into the subject position of the "tiresome" others, recognising that she too might one day appear "trivial, boring, not very welcome" (124). However, lest Ellen's empathetic musings render a false assurance of knowing the other, the power of

positioning and perspective is problematized: “If you are an Indian do you begin thinking from a totally different premise? Do you then see the world and people differently and differently conditioned? How can we understand? And how can we legislate?” (138). How then, can one imagine what Gilbert thinks and feels from the place he has been forced to occupy?

Ultimately, the imperative for humanity is to seek interconnectedness. Lest one imagine that material well-being supersedes a need for others, the Dickensian Mr Platt exemplifies the insufficiency of wealth to replace human community. Platt’s concerted avoidance of relationship renders him nothing more than a caricature of a miser.

Wilson’s incorporation of disability into the ongoing quest towards a fullness of humanity concurs with disability’s incorporation into our collective understanding of Canada’s multifaceted diversity. Ultimately, this last novel of Wilson’s inscribes disability as a marker of Canadianness, in that we, as Canadians, must grapple with difference of terrain, culture, language, creeds, and human corporeal variety in ways perhaps unprecedented in history. The incorporation of disability into the body and psyche of the protagonist marks her maturity as a human being; it readies her to face the future equipped with an openness that provides potential for an ongoing appreciation of life experience—whatever that may be. Rather than a mark of defect, Ellen’s disabling exposes the chaos existing beneath quotidian banality. This exposure is a mark of honesty, a sign of victory over the forces of conventional normalcy that work to deny human richness by devaluing the fundamental realities of human existence. Wilson’s work suggests that just as embracing the incommensurability of both love and the sea vitalizes human existence individually and collectively, recognizing disability as the embodiment of the richness of human complexity would generate personalities like those of Morgan and Ellen, rather than the “successful” shells of individuals like Nora and Platt. The desire towards empathy and connection potentially binds the most disparate solitudes we encounter, enhancing the experience of life, lending promise to a unity in Canada’s increasing diversity.

¹¹¹ I was surprised when I realized that each author of the works examined in the dissertation to this point is personally connected to the ministry of a Christian church or, as in the case of Callaghan and Ross, centrally figures the church in their work. Perhaps it should not be surprising that many of Canada's first writers were bred in a somewhat privileged environment that nurtured a sense of social obligation, provided the opportunity for education, a respect for reading (at least the Bible), and carried with it a status that ensured some amount of economic stability and security. An exposure to ministry might have facilitated Ethel Wilson's thoughtful perception of her world, fuelling a creative impulse to communicate her observations. Wilson believed that "a novelist is a born watcher" (Keith 115).

¹¹² Ethel's husband, Wallace Wilson, was once President of the Canadian medical Association and professor of medical ethics at the University of British Columbia.

¹¹³ I refer here to the ideology of a human norm that necessitates a display of self-sufficiency and control over one's being and environment. All human beings are dependent on others; however, some dependencies, such as for physical care, are derogated while others, such as for motorized transportation, are unacknowledged.

¹¹⁴ See Roeher Institute, *Harm's Way* and *Disability and Vulnerability*; Sobsey, Howe, and Rajan. The social exclusion of disabled women from the perceived realm of ordinary sexuality creates systemic prejudices that prevent expectations of accommodations that would facilitate women's access to police assistance or shelters, for example. The attitudes that increase disabled women's vulnerability to abuse involve both external and internal convictions of inferiority because of physical non-conformity to cultural standards of female desirability.

¹¹⁵ See Gelfant for a discussion of class and money in Wilson's novel.

¹¹⁶ Ralph Ellison is among many who observe that oppressors essentially oppress themselves: "the writers who stereotype or ignore the Negro and other minorities in the final analysis stereotype and distort their own humanity" (278).

¹¹⁷ See Radford for a discussion of the convergence of the "highly deterministic notions of class, race, and intelligence" in Langdon Down's research (1867) that introduced the label "Mongolian Idiot" into medical discourse (13-16).

¹¹⁸ Val Adolph describes the Woodlands institution in British Columbia as "for most of its one-hundred and eighteen years [it] . . . was the place where the least wanted people of the time were sent" (viii). Parents were given no other support for their children who "did not fit into a regular class" (77), but were advised that their children would receive the professional expertise they required in the asylum. Also see McCallum for a 2001 administrative review of Woodlands revealing its history of abuse and neglect of the people incarcerated there.

¹¹⁹ Wilson provides a faint hint of a historical conflict with the notion of deafness. Without following any chronological progression, mainstream attitudes towards deafness have fluctuated between brutally repressive to respectful and appreciative. See Harlan Lane, "Constructions of Deafness."

¹²⁰ I do not refer to the popular sentimentalized discourse of disability as inspiration for the non-disabled sector. This role can be as debilitating as the negative stereotypes, creating unrealistic expectations of overcoming an impairment (denying reality) while asserting the distance between the non-disabled individual with presumed potential and the supercrip whose achievement inspires because disability precludes potential.

¹²¹ Note Sonthoff's judgement of Ellen's face as "hideous" (103). Her nephew calls her "ugly," but the scarring does not impede Ellen's functioning and is only aesthetically disabling.

¹²² Huw's desire to separate Ellen from her relational obligations echoes Dean's wish to remove Emily from her family ties in Montgomery's *Emily* Trilogy. Both characters represent the threat/lure of disconnecting the protagonist from the relationships that enrich her as a human being. See above, Chapter 3.

Chapter Seven

Property Seizure—Dis/placing Conditions of Humanity:

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz

The Canadian dream of social decency does not fit with economic expediency (Ignatieff)

In Ethel Wilson's *Love and Salt Water*, disability is the vehicle which transports the protagonist Ellen Cuppy into maturity. Encounters with disability catalyze and deepen her understanding of human life as tenaciously interconnected. In this fictional world, denial of Other exacts the steep price of one's human fulfilment. Contrary to the standard prejudice, disability need not attenuate human value. Rejecting another because of her/his disability diminishes one's own human worth. A disfigured Ellen Cuppy, separated from her parents, embraces her facial scarring and a future shared with another. *Love and Salt Water* offers a vision of Canada that dares to risk the ambiguities of its complex identity as a post-war sovereign nation severed from the authority of the colonial mother-country.

Mordechai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* also deploys disability to illustrate human interconnection; however, Richler's protagonist, Duddy, rejects the incorporation of disability into his reality and consequently cuts himself off from the richness of his human possibility. Richler's narrative suggests that the future of a post-war Canada is indeed bleak if anomalous identities are banished from what has become a struggle for economic wealth. The ruthless entrepreneurism represented by Duddy dehumanizes by excluding the ostensibly unprofitable but ineluctable complexities of being human that include caring for the Other. Both Wilson's and Richler's coming-of-age novels exhibit the imperative of human connection across constructed boundaries of normalcy.

In *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, disability is presented as a facet of Duddy's humanity that needs to be acknowledged, accommodated, and embraced. Duddy's banishment of the realities represented by Virgil and Dingleman seals the end of

his apprenticeship to becoming “a man.” His deliberate exclusion of these two figures marks a rejection of his potential for meaningful human relationship. Read through a disability lens, disability functions in the novel as a means to demonstrate society’s failure, on an individual and communal level, to value and seek human wholeness through empathetic relationship with others. Duddy’s maturation signals and problematizes the expulsion of disability from the social and personal narration of life. In *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, a focus on disability reveals competing and intersecting socio-cultural ideologies based in gender, ability, class, and ethnicity that complicate the notion of normalcy and undermine its privilege.

The figure of Jerry Dingleman demonstrates how the social construction of disability deflects attention from human concerns. Within the narrative, the silence surrounding Dingleman’s disability silences the pernicious effects of his “personal trouble” of relationship. The social ramifications of disability stigma are the fundamental source of his pain and brokenness. Because Dingleman contracts polio, Olive’s father terminates his daughter’s betrothal to him. Dingleman’s highly desired attributes immediately and automatically evaporate once exposed to the powerfully toxic stigma of disability. The physical effects of polio on Dingleman do not, however, impair his ability to achieve gangster status. His appearance corrupts in concert with his emotional despair. Without the love he had with Olive, Dingleman’s moral being disintegrates. He portrays the element of Duddy that is fed by his similar desertion of a mutually fulfilling, loving relationship. Within the novel, disability does not symbolize, as it does according to convention, brokenness or fragmentation. Duddy’s denial of the complexities embodied in disability results in his own fragmentation. The effect of Duddy’s deliberate betrayal of Virgil is delivered in the image of Virgil’s crumpled body beneath a dangling phone, replaying Duddy’s initial school-boy experience of the deadly effects of his need to exert his ego. The target of Duddy’s puerile revenge, Mr MacPherson, finds his invalid wife in a similar frame. She dies after answering Duddy’s prank call while her husband is on a drinking spree, no longer able to justify his own professional and personal failure. Duddy becomes the incarnation of MacPherson’s personal ruin. MacPherson’s accusation of Duddy as his wife’s murderer haunts Duddy throughout his “apprenticeship,” signalling a nascent conscience in Duddy. However, Virgil’s resonant tableau at the end of the novel

delineates the deliberate destruction of Duddy's malnourished potential for empathy. Just as MacPherson's self-delusion is represented in his failed responsibility to his wife, Duddy abnegates any moral imperative toward those around him. Banishing "cripples," he banishes his own capacity to be fully human.

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, published in 1959, warrants attention for having penetrated the Canadian consciousness, both through Richler's distinctive authorial swagger and for the memorable figure of Duddy Kravitz, who as George Woodcock observes, has taken on a life "in our minds as [an] autonomous being" beyond the context in which Richler had created him. Thus, probing the function of the images of disability in this work exposes another source informing collective attitudes towards disability in Canada. The name of Duddy Kravitz, a metonymy for Richler's dismal Montreal Jewish ghetto, is familiar to many Canadians who have never opened the book itself. No doubt the production of the highly successful film version of the novel has contributed to the narrative's entrenchment in Canadian culture. Richler's legacy can be seen in acclaimed contemporary authors such as Guy Vanderhaeghe.¹²³ Therefore, I have chosen *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* as the text for the 1960s although it precedes the decade by a year.

In *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, the character of Duddy Kravitz is "centre stage at all times," surrounded by a constellation of characters known only through their relationship with him (Bevan, "Intro" 7). These surrounding figures comprise the experience Duddy must integrate or reject during his "apprenticeship" in becoming an adult. Duddy encounters his life lessons from various others who seem to form concentric circles rippling out from his desolate central space. Despite irrepressibly straining to belong, to be identified within his nuclear and cultural family, he understands in the end that he is on his own.¹²⁴ The circles that Duddy encounters cast his character into sharp relief as he awkwardly negotiates a range of socio-cultural categories. Regardless of the "guild" or social community he enters as apprentice, Duddy becomes a laughing stock. Because he lacks affirmation from his family and a sense of being wanted by his parents, Duddy cannot respond to the nuanced requirements of membership in sub-cultures of students, artists, cultural heritage, or wealth.¹²⁵ The more that Duddy becomes

a source of ridicule and amusement, the more focused his determination to purchase respectable status through land acquisition.

In the constellation of characters around Duddy, three are marked with overt disability, although arguably most of the characters, as well as Duddy Kravitz himself, are notably “impaired” (emotionally, psychologically, intellectually) on multiple levels. Mrs MacPherson has a chronic illness, and after her death, Mr MacPherson is eventually placed in an asylum; Jerry Dingleman, the Boy Wonder, is a polio survivor and uses canes for walking; and Duddy’s pinball supplier, Virgil Roseboro, has epilepsy and becomes paralyzed after a motor vehicle accident.

The critical literature has most frequently interpreted these images of disability conventionally as stock metaphors of defect, activated in order to highlight the major agent’s moral status. Exploitation of a disabling condition culturally associated with personal misfortune, pity and pain constitutes a heinous villainy; hence, it is expedient for Richler to juxtapose this culturally recognized sign of failure inscribed on the body with Duddy’s “impaired” sense of success. This persistent positioning of disability as the “genuine” deficiency illustrating metaphorically the failure of other individuals or groups or their unjust treatment *as if* impaired is among the most insidiously damaging. Tobin Siebers succinctly articulates the deprivation of identity this persistent metaphorization effects for people with disabilities: “Disability is the other other that helps make otherness imaginable” (51).

Not surprisingly, as in the novels previously discussed in this dissertation, Richler’s portraits of disability, while ostensibly perpetuating crippling stereotypes, have a more complex function within the narrative once the stereotypes are confronted. For disability stereotypes to function effectively as metaphors, readers must participate in the prejudice of the stereotyping. Once the stereotype as a naturalized presumption is dislodged, fresh meanings may emerge. Thus it is helpful to review the published responses to the novel that include interpretations of the characters with disabilities. Acknowledging the readings as learned responses assigned to disability images facilitates a recognition of expanded possibilities of significance for these figures and the novel itself. An unshackling of disability images from the enculturated reactions they evoke subsequently enables perceptions of normalcy as both constructed and complicated.

The critical literature does not radically differ in its appraisal of the two most prominent disabled characters, Virgil and Dingleman. The “personal problem” of Jerry Dingleman that results in his use of canes for walking is interpreted as “clearly indicative of his moral corruption,” and the epilepsy and paraplegia of Virgil are generally read as serving to emphasize the extent of Duddy’s moral decrepitude. However, John Ower diverges slightly from this view by interpreting Virgil not as the stereotype of tragic victim designed to stir pathos, but rather as the stereotype of disability that Leonard Kriegel argues is exemplified in Shakespeare’s Richard III: the conniving manipulator whose inadequacies as a man account for his ethical and moral deficiencies, eliciting in the observer pity as well as hate and revulsion (32). The erasure of this character type within a narrative provides not only cathartic relief, but also the satisfying sense of justice and order restored. Virgil’s destruction by Duddy in this way maintains the normalcy paradigm: anomaly conjured in order to be banished, articulating the hegemonic norm. In *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, however, establishing Duddy as the figure of “normalcy,” the “fit” citizen of Richler’s Canada, manifests Richler’s sardonic wit. According to Ower, Richler portrays a realistic “nastiness” (426) in society that individuals must contend with in order to succeed. Duddy adapts to his environment; Virgil and Yvette, in contrast, represent those who would naturally fall prey to the Duddy-like predators around them. Ower reads both Virgil and Yvette as too weak and foolish to survive. Therefore, Duddy’s victimization of Virgil “may be seen as a judgment of implacable reality upon the unfit” (426).

Ower views Virgil as a type of “human parasite” (427) exploiting his epilepsy to manipulate Duddy. Although Ower is writing in 1976, before the disability movement gained a political presence in Canada, his attitude toward disability is not obsolete.¹²⁶ The notion of disability as a tool of manipulation for personal gain is a prejudice that pervades the institutions of disability service provision in North America. Frequently, services are granted to those who present their condition according to a particular agency’s mandate, forcing people to emphasize particular aspects of their functioning.¹²⁷ However, success in accessing one service may disqualify one from accessing another equally vital to one’s well-being (Wendell 24). Advocating for one’s rights, as Virgil is doing, defies the

stereotype of weak dependency imposed on people with disabilities, resulting in the perception of individuals with disabilities as narcissistic and demanding.

Ower argues that Virgil's character "arouses that instinctive cruelty that is one of nature's ways of eliminating the hopelessly incompetent" (426). Ower's writing indicates that he recognizes Virgil as representing a population familiar to his readers: "*the unfit*," "*the hopelessly incompetent*." This reading of Richler's treatment of weakness naturalizes Social Darwinist principles when he points out that the cruelty that Virgil arouses in Duddy is instinctively human, echoing Fiedler's similar claim that disability evokes a desire to kill ("Pity" 13).¹²⁸ Although Ower describes Richler as impatient with stupidity, his condemnation of Virgil seems to betray more his own personal impatience with weakness than Richler's. Richler admitted that while the novel was to advocate for the human realities of a "loser" such as Duddy Kravitz, he did not intend to valorize Duddy. Virgil and Yvette are "better human beings" (Ferns 81). Because the characters of both Virgil and Yvette are not adequately developed as human beings but instead embody human virtues that Duddy lacks, it is more helpful to read them as symbols of virtues presented to Duddy during his apprenticeship to becoming human, rather than as figures representing real individuals whose "self-willed stupidity" (426) is responsible for compelling their own mistreatment.¹²⁹

If the characters with disability conform to popular stereotypes, they merely correspond to McSweeney's contention that all the characters in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* are too stereotyped, imposing a too simplistic indictment of the American dream (131). John Ferns complements McSweeney's reading by arguing that Duddy Kravitz encapsulates an inner division that preoccupies Canadian literature (79). What Sweeney views as stereotyped, Ferns justifies as archetypal. According to Ferns, Duddy Kravitz is a "North American everyman," "accurately" reflecting "what passes for life on this continent" (79). Although he concedes that Richler is incapable of creating convincing female characters, Ferns sees Yvette as well conceived in that she fulfils the role of conscience in this morality play. In most critical accounts of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, the narrative roles of Yvette and Virgil are merged, whereby both represent the collateral damage of Duddy's drive to success. Notably, Ferns believes Duddy exhibits a modicum of selflessness by giving Virgil a job in that he wishes to

“give his epileptic friend self-respect” (79). Because of Virgil’s epilepsy, Ferns interprets Duddy’s response as charity. However, Duddy is driven by his own need for profit. Therefore, he has no qualms about exploiting Virgil’s (or anyone’s) desperation for work. His inability to find appropriate employment is, according to Virgil, because of societal discrimination against people with epilepsy. By characterizing Duddy’s motives for hiring Virgil as charitable, Ferns reinforces the social prejudice against epilepsy. Because Virgil has a disability, Duddy’s callous exploitation of him is seen as kindness; yet, commentators have not made similar claims regarding Duddy’s comparable treatment of Yvette.¹³⁰

Virgil and the other characters with disabilities illustrate not only Duddy’s ruthlessness but also his underdeveloped sense of human value. He presumes that his lack of physical impairment denotes superiority. As Michael Greenstein observes, the physical contrast of Duddy’s able-bodied propensity to run against the limited ability of Dingleman’s legs and Virgil’s use of a wheelchair illuminates Duddy’s literal and figurative flight from the responsibilities of human relationships (17). Readers are expected to recoil at Duddy’s indecent ridicule of disabilities because the cultural assumption is that the disabled figure is in fact integrally and fundamentally “defective” and warrants pity rather than abuse. Engaging in the latter constitutes cowardice and ill-breeding because doing so points out an obvious shortcoming that cannot be corrected by the victim. The image of Duddy’s insensitivity towards those around him who have disabilities doubly “victimizes” the notion of disability as deserving of pity albeit not receiving it from the protagonist.

There is an irony in Richler’s deployment of disability as a foil revealing Duddy’s character, in that Richler exploits disability in the same derogating fashion that Duddy does, and that indicts Duddy’s character. Kerry McSweeney approaches this dilemma when he problematizes Richler’s attempt at satire in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. Although Richler admits a goal of moral instruction, McSweeney contends that the satire blunders because Richler fails to establish the standard by which his targets are ridiculed. McSweeney cites Virgil’s magazine, printed as one chapter, as an example of Richler lapsing into “tasteless, gratuitous” mockery that only detracts from his “serious” moral concerns (121). In essence, Richler is laughing at disability issues, not to illuminate

foibles that need correction, but from a sense of superiority that elicits mockery of what is perceived as inferior. Richler's "superiority" is then as misguided as Duddy's. Ridiculed by Richler, Virgil's publication can be read as another modality in the panoply of human failure that Richler skewers in the narrative. Yet, when contrasted to the "successful" ventures of other figures, Virgil's attempt to realize a goal in life takes on a different tenor.

While conventional readings of disability in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* continue to reinforce stereotypes and restrict narrative meaning, a Disability Studies perspective provokes critique of the narrative's construction of the normal. Read through a Disability Studies lens, the presence of disability does not simply function in its classic support of normalcy. Normalcy is clearly complicated not only by anomalous bodies but also by distinctions in class, ethnicity, education, and gender. Duddy's response to disability in others is as inappropriate and devoid of empathy as his response to anyone outside of his family. In this way, disability merges with other human variances that Duddy misapprehends. The characters of Virgil and Dingleman assume a greater role in Richler's satirical intent, diverting a focus from surface appearances to personal integrity in relationship to other human beings regardless of tribal associations of family or creed. Ironically, despite radically differing contexts and styles, Richler's moral theme concurs closely with Ethel Wilson's: responsibility of relationship determining the extent of one's humanity. Virgil's appearance vivifies Duddy's internal tension by incarnating his potential for innocence and kindness.

Virgil manifests one of the "potential people" in the adolescent Duddy that will be, as Benjy warns, either nurtured or killed by the personality Duddy assumes as an adult. "A boy can be two, three, four potential people, but a man is only one. He murders the others" (280). Benjy's dying words to Duddy exhort him to "be a gentleman. A Mensh" (280).¹³¹ Benjy might have encouraged the development of Duddy's nascent potential for kindness. However, Benjy's recognition of the "Virgil" in Duddy comes too late. The child-like desire to be loved had already been stifled in Duddy beyond resuscitation. Virgil embodies the elements in the adolescent Duddy that are caring, poignant, compelling. Through Virgil, one can more clearly discern what Yvette finds endearing in Duddy; consequently, Duddy's ultimate transformation into another Boy

Wonder is more tragic. Duddy's destruction of Virgil enacts Duddy's rejection of his nascent potential for an ethical consciousness. Yvette's final decision to stay with Virgil and sever her ties with Duddy illustrates her integrity. She had accepted Duddy's abuse and exploitation as long as she believed that the "Virgil" side of him might blossom; but when Duddy "murders" the goodness Yvette detected, he is no longer attractive for her.

The parallels between Duddy and Virgil are remarkable. They both have entrepreneurial missions that spring from need and inventiveness. Both feel disadvantaged. Both encounter barriers to their business ventures that they are ready to overcome even if their means are not entirely legal. Both are excruciatingly naïve and have pretensions to art (poetry and film) that are not realistic. They have a raw need to be acknowledged and loved. The innocence shared by these characters and their quest for identity are dramatized in their gleeful response to new snow. Bringing his truant brother Lennie back home, Duddy notices the "first snow," grabbing at it and "opening his mouth to swallow some" (190). His incongruously child-like joy at snow elicits even Max's notice: "some kid" (190), he says. In keeping with his childlike persona, Virgil echoes Duddy's enchantment with the new snow: "It's snowing. I love snow ... Look, everything's covered in snow outside ... I want to be the first person to walk in it. The first in the world" (210). Virgil's optimistic assertion of his being in the world is intensified by his safe recovery from a seizure during sleep. The snow motif illustrates the contrasting compulsions of the two figures to "make a mark" in the world that is beckoning (fresh) but also disinterested (cold).

Virgil's uninvited entrance into the private space of Duddy's apartment need not imply, as Ower argues, that Virgil is a leech, but rather that Virgil, as a figurative Duddy, might succeed in humanizing the developing character of Duddy: the potential person resides semi-permanently with Duddy until he is banished to the basement room. Significantly, Virgil's epilepsy is not used as a trope of defect to spotlight Duddy's impaired sensibilities. Epilepsy in Virgil is paralleled with Jewishness in Duddy, revealing the complexity of Duddy's search for identity in concert with other Jews and gentiles. Neither Jewishness nor epilepsy needs to be an impediment in one's life. The novel demonstrates that the meaning of both attributes derives from a sometimes

contradictory interface of personal experience and socio-cultural attitudes. Duddy's apprenticeship involves locating himself within an affirming historical narrative.

Richler's linking of Virgil's epilepsy and Duddy's Jewishness draws attention to both as conditions a mainstream society has treated as a diseases to be extirpated, denied, or assimilated, or as identities that limit one psychologically and socially on multiple levels. Virgil's comparison of the persecution of epileptics and Jews is historically accurate. People with epilepsy were among those marked for death in Nazi extermination camps.¹³² In Canada, although the 1952 Immigration Act liberalized former immigration regulations that barred people with disabilities from the country, people with epilepsy were still considered "undesirable." Between 1954 and 1957, minister's permits waived the regulations to admit "epileptics whose condition could be controlled by drugs, tubercular cases, and people who had a previous history of mental illness, provided these cases posed no danger to the community and were adequately sponsored" (Knowles 130). Nevertheless, these admissions were granted at the "uncontrolled" discretion of the minister and his officials (130) and did not constitute amendments to the Act. Hence, Virgil's legitimate residence in Canada, were he seeking legal status, would still be contingent on the preconceived attitude of an immigration official towards epilepsy. Virgil's desire to catalyze awareness of the realities of epilepsy in order to dispel discrimination reflects a serious social issue both at the time the novel was written and currently as well.

Both Duddy and Virgil seek counter-narratives with which to defy their personal and collective devaluation. Virgil constructs his vision through his magazine; Duddy shapes himself as the superhero of the Boy Wonder legend. Duddy's struggle with his heritage is complicated by mentors who deliver an array of unsatisfactory stereotypes of Jewish identity: limitation (Max), fear (Benjy), denial (Lennie), pride (Simcha), prejudice (Cohen), to name a few. Virgil illustrates the process of struggle with identity construction involving a navigation through oppressive prejudice and internalized insecurity as well as a negotiation with history and a personal need to belong. Virgil's life goals clarify for readers Duddy's quest to become a "somebody" within the matrix of his family by creating a Jewish theme park. Virgil's magazine for epileptics around the world compares with Duddy's messianic mission to build "a real *shul*" (311) on the land

formerly guarded from semitic ownership. Virgil's idealism in striving to liberate people with epilepsy from oppression, albeit comical, distinctly articulates the poignancy and pathos of Duddy's parallel but misguided quest. Virgil manifests the idealism that is also a driving force in Duddy but is distorted and obscured in his lunge towards a valued identity—being a somebody. Virgil envisions himself as belonging to a constituency that is proud of its identity and deserving of civil rights and social respect. Virgil's dreams of leadership are for the common good of his community; Duddy's vision involves a notion of common good purely as a vehicle to win approval for himself. Duddy's self-worth relies on establishing his Jewish community's admiration, only because he believes his success as a BTO (big time operator) would ensure his family's appreciation. Beneath the outrageously crass and callous exterior, Duddy just wants his parents to love him. Deprived of the security (ideally) rooted in a family's unconditional love, Duddy garners attention through delinquent behaviour, deluding himself into believing that his antics compel admiration. Duddy desires relationship, but is mystified by its exigencies. His forays into having friends elicit repulsion, ridicule and exploitation. Virgil represents that facet of Duddy that desires friendship. By betraying Virgil, Duddy betrays himself. He deliberately destroys his capacity for loyalty.

Virgil arrives on Duddy's doorstep like a stray puppy begging for shelter. Like Duddy, Virgil is described as "skinny" (205), and his use of clichés rivals Duddy's. Also, like Duddy, Virgil does not attempt to hide his association with "a persecuted minority" (208) although the evident need of both figures for affirmation and belonging betrays an internalized ambivalence towards their subject positions. However, unlike Duddy's subsequent derogation of non-Jews, Virgil does not emulate Duddy's enactment of the role of oppressed as oppressor. Perhaps, rather than gratuitous mockery of a disadvantaged figure, Richler's portrait of Virgil presents the moral standard McSweeney failed to detect in the novel. Functioning figuratively and embodying one facet of Duddy's personality, Virgil is not three-dimensional; nevertheless, his position on epilepsy, while naïvely formulated, reflects realistic issues.

Virgil correctly correlates racism against "the Jews and the Negroes" with discrimination against people with epilepsy. The goals of his magazine anticipate the need for conscientization currently addressed by global Disability Rights activists. The

dilemma of garnering a critical mass of epileptics reflects the difficulties frequently encountered in the organization of people with disabilities as a politicized minority.¹³³ The issues of stigma attached to epilepsy, the economic status of epileptics, the cross section of social identities and the possibility of “passing” as “normal” all hinder the solidarity required for effective social activism. Virgil’s writing reflects very real and serious issues confronted by the global disability movement. The subtitle of “The Crusader” prefigures the refrain that buttresses a current disability rights activism: “nothing about us, without us” (Charlton). The lives of people with disabilities have been subjected to a medicalized control that has deprived individuals of life choices and opportunities taken for granted by people without disabilities. Virgil’s social approach to the issue of epilepsy—dating, civil rights, “heritage moments” dispelling myths, humour is, from a disability perspective, funny in tone only, not in essence. Journals and newsletters do provide a method of networking for people who are otherwise isolated from the affirmation of others living in similar circumstances.¹³⁴ The euphemistic label of “health handicappers” that Virgil uses for epileptics manifests a swipe at the steady shift in politically informed labels for disabilities. Virgil’s attempt at creating a respectable moniker for a devalued condition reflects a phenomenon still in process. The social stigma surrounding disability results in the labels assigned to denote disability becoming pejoratives in common parlance (Mitchell and Snyder, *Cultural* 19). Thus, “retard,” “spaz,” and “moron,” have moved from a medical lexicon to a popular, derogatory use. The ever-shifting movement in disability terms reflects the difficulty in erasing entrenched prejudices. To those as yet unaffected by disability, attempts at new terms appear affected and silly. However, as long as words for individuals with unconventional bodies are accepted as pejoratives, the search for justice for all human beings cannot be achieved. New terms reflect a desire for better attitudes and must evolve until they no longer demean people for their unconventional bodies.

Richler’s choice of name for Virgil is playfully humorous: the author of “The Crusader” named after the epic writer. However, the name is suggestive not only as sarcasm, but also in that the Roman Virgil was an imitator of Homer. Virgil’s writing mimicks popular magazines. On the other hand, the Roman Virgil chronicled the birth of the Great Roman Empire. Duddy’s Virgil is also writing the beginning of a human rights

movement that involves an international population. The Canadian author Andre Alexis describes the Aeneid as “a book of history, politics and philosophy as well as being the story of the founding of Rome. That is, Virgil is as concerned with political, historical and even theological questions as he is with storytelling.” Alexis argues that Virgil is more “vital, influential and inspiring” than simply an “inferior Roman copy of Greek masterpieces” (D5). In this light, the Virgil of *Duddy Kravitz* is a catalyst for social change instead of a parodist of a mainstream style of publication.

Virgil’s publication constructs a narrative out of his innocent desire to find worth in an oppressed identity category. He revises history in order to validate his present. Virgil associates famous historical figures with epilepsy in the way Duddy fashions his imaginary brother Bradley as a heroic adventurer who writes faithfully to Duddy. Even Duddy’s classmates recognize that Bradley “[is] a fictional character” (16), but Duddy needs Bradley as a means of self-validation. “The Crusader” is a spoof of popular magazines or tabloids, replicating a standard format, tone and content, but rather than providing an inside scoop on Hollywood stars, Virgil’s magazine shines the spotlight on epilepsy or on a “coming out” for people with epilepsy. Is Richler ridiculing epilepsy? It seems that he is more certainly ridiculing cultural responses to human issues, in the way that he ridicules but does not condemn the ritual practice of Bar-mitzvah. Virgil delivers requisite instalments “from his readers” with painfully naïve sincerity as well as with some deliberate wit. His “U. S. Marine Captain” detractor writes: “Next thing you’ll want to elect an epileptic Pope so people can say we have dual loyalties too” (272). This hilarious reference to the reality of historical attitudes that believed epileptic seizures manifested satanic possession suggests that Virgil writes with his proverbial tongue in cheek. When Virgil is read as a nascent potential being in Duddy, “The Crusader” becomes an alternative to Duddy’s narrative of the Boy Wonder. Virgil employs the skills he has to implement a dream of advocating for global justice. His vision of being a hero is to be a Sister Kenny for people with epilepsy.¹³⁵ His goal is to help others. Duddy’s role model is implanted in his head from childhood by his father. “Duddy wanted to be a somebody. Another Boy Wonder maybe. Not a loser, certainly” (63). Virgil’s publishing venture represents the promise in Duddy’s innocence that is warped by his father’s stupidity in constructing a mythos of the heroic virtues of a criminal. Duddy dedicates

himself to achieving the status of his father's idol in order to warrant a corresponding respect. Duddy's subsequent actions can be understood to be as sincere and, ironically, as innocent in intent as Virgil's. The responsibility for Duddy's repulsive behaviour shifts to the parental narrative that shaped Duddy's perception of reality. His other mentors fail to provide the affirmation he craves in order to nurture the idealism of Virgil. Duddy's innocence is channelled into believing that his goal to "find himself," to be "somebody," entails material possessions.

Virgil's comparison of the plight of Jews with that of epileptics ironically draws attention to Duddy's lack of support in his community. Virgil contrasts the support Duddy should enjoy from his cultural community with the isolation a person with a disability would experience in the face of discrimination. "You know, Mr Kravitz, you're a Jew and wherever you go other Jews will help you" (208). But Duddy's experience has been to the contrary. Not only have his fellow Jews not helped him, his family members have neglected him. His brother Lennie and his uncle Benjy are ashamed of Duddy. Virgil's challenge: "You think there's shame attached to being an epileptic?" (208) recalls the shame Duddy's mentors have manifested about their Jewish identity. Virgil is secure in embracing his reality as an epileptic: "I can't help it. That's the way I was born" (207). Although Duddy embraces his heritage, the community of his birthright rejects him. As he engages in a futile search for his mother's love, Duddy is persistently deprived of the connection he craves, rendering him incapable of relationship beyond self-interest.

Virgil, on the other hand, seeks affirmation from both Duddy and Yvette. His desire to improve the world is without discriminatory boundaries. Virgil manifests an acknowledgement of Others that includes relationship and respect. His goal is to end political and social oppression for other people with epilepsy, but he is able to contextualize his goal within other world movements. Virgil's "squishy puppy dog" (Ower 426) politeness towards others contrasts with Duddy's inability to apply his similarly "puppy dog" dedication to people beyond his family. Duddy's family can be seen as an extension of his own being; winning their attention involves self-interest, rather than empathy. Duddy's justification of his betrayal of his only friends, Virgil and Yvette, on the basis of ethnicity and religion, reveals his incapacity to understand

responsibility for human relationship. Duddy's sacrifice of Virgil signifies his final execution of his own integrity and conscience. Following Mr Cohen's advice, he becomes immune to the repercussions his actions inflict on those around him.

Jerry Dingleman, The Boy Wonder of St. Urbain Street, is, for Duddy, the pinnacle of success, the legendary idol whose exploits nourish Duddy's childhood. Just as Dingleman recognizes Duddy's land lust as "somebody else's [Simcha's] platitude," Duddy's perception of Dingleman as a superhero is also Max's platitude.¹³⁶ The Boy Wonder encapsulates the darkness of Richler's satire. The young Duddy's dedication and drive are sadly apprenticed to a "legend" who is not even noteworthy as a criminal beyond the Montreal Jewish Ghetto. Duddy's apprenticeship ends after he resorts to the most despicable means to acquire his desired land, thereby usurping Dingleman's role as the Boy Wonder; the apprentice becomes the master. As noted above, Dingleman's disability conventionally signals his moral corruption. J. A. Wainwright calls him a "spiritual as well as a physical cripple" (62). Interestingly, Ower perceives Dingleman's disability as leaving him "a twisted cripple both physically and sexually," despite the assertion in the text that "he was still capable" (133). Stereotypes of disability frequently involve the presumption of abnormal sexuality, either asexuality or hyper-sexuality.¹³⁷ For the St. Urbain Street community, Dingleman's post-polio sexuality is an "intriguing" topic of discussion, inextricably involved with his "personal troubles" (132-3).

Ower associates Dingleman's impotence with the emotional castration of the males of Duddy's family who are incapable of extending "adult love" (426). According to Ower, the disabled characters in the narrative exemplify the novel's pervasive theme of moral failure: "Through Dingleman's twisted physique and the multiple ironies of Duddy's career, mere survival and success without the higher ethical and cultural values leave a man as 'crippled' as those who are too weak to preserve themselves" (427). Ower reads disability in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* with the standard prejudice that unquestioningly correlates physical anomaly with defective humanity. A.R. Bevan asserts that Dingleman's "physical appearance, changed greatly for the worse by his 'personal troubles' (polio), is to the reader clearly indicative of his moral corruption," but Duddy is slow to recognize his idol as a "two-bit dope smuggling cripple" ("Introduction" 7). Ironically, the "cripple" epithet functions equally for the unsocialized Duddy as it does

for the literary critics. “Cripple” is used facilely as a pejorative and a descriptive term. However, Richler’s description of Dingleman contradicts the assumptions of physical limitations. Dingleman’s disability, while rendering his legs “twisted and useless” (131) does not limit his mobility: “He could not only walk further but he walked faster [than most men]” (141).

At the age of 28, Dingleman contracts polio. This event marks his transformation from a law-abiding, God-fearing man into a racketeer. Before polio, Dingleman is remarkably attractive and is engaged to a beautiful woman. Their love is idyllic, its goodness spilling beyond the couple to others who encounter them: “They looked so right together that complete strangers would take one look and smile, they felt so good inside” (132). This image echoes Ethel Wilson’s portrayal of the Cuppy family’s effect on those who saw them walking together in Stanley Park. Both refer to the interconnection of human beings by illustrating the communal ramifications of the contentment of individuals. After polio, Dingleman undergoes “immense physical changes” (132). The man whose good looks “could have wiped the floor with Clark Gable” (132) becomes diabolically ugly, compelling people to avert their gaze. His body is described as monstrously disproportioned. “But the most noticeable and unexplained change was in the flesh of his face. After his illness it turned red and wet and shiny” (133). The menace in Dingleman’s satanic face is exacerbated by his “smile that somehow retained an aura of innocence” (133). The remnant of innocence detected in Dingleman evokes Duddy’s gradual decimation and ultimate annihilation of altruistic potential. Dingleman evidently corresponds to Benjy’s theory of development whereby the adult murders the multiple people that coexist in the boy. Ostensibly, the attractive attributes of Dingleman were destroyed by the polio that caused physical deformities, criminal behaviour, sexual excess, a substantial acquisition of insurance money, and most significantly, his rejection by his betrothed. The loss of Olive, the woman he loved, constitutes his “personal trouble” more than the polio.

According to Max, Olive’s father terminated her engagement as soon as Dingleman became ill. Dingleman’s mobility, travel, and wealth attest to the fact that his physical limitations, wrought by polio, are not disabling. Rather, his loss of love has disabled him, incapacitating his relating to others with compassion. Both he and Olive are

broken psychologically, emotionally, and physically by their separation. She becomes a drug addict, stalking him for a fix, while he becomes the feared, ugly Boy Wonder. Only encounters with his former love destabilize Dingleman and expose his vulnerability. After seeing Olive unexpectedly at a New York party, Dingleman needs to escape. The encounter causes Dingleman pain and confusion, aspects he does not otherwise manifest. Alone with him in the night immediately after the incident with Olive, Duddy witnesses Dingleman's response: "Something had happened to him. His neck had contracted. The massive head had rolled uselessly to one side and the piercing eyes were shut" (142). Dingleman, contrary to character, exhibits fear in sending Duddy to scout out the hotel lobby for Olive. Although Duddy is oblivious to it, Dingleman needs Duddy with him because he is afraid of another confrontation with Olive. He allows Duddy to sleep only after he has reluctantly dealt with her phone call.¹³⁸ Dingleman's reliance on Duddy's presence during his vulnerable moments underlines his unfulfilled need for someone he can trust. Both Dingleman and Duddy have been neglected by their fathers and seem particularly needy for, yet inept in, caring relationships. Richler implicates all the father figures in the distortion of their children's personalities. Dingleman's father served a ten-year prison term; Duddy's father is a pimp; Olive's father prevented her marriage to Dingleman. All three offspring are incapable of a loving relationship. The portrayals of disability function as indicators of a human need for connection that is denied by selfishness and greed. Dingleman's transmogrification comes two years after his illness and two years without Olive: "At thirty he was no longer a handsome man" (132). His commitment to the Jewish community responds to the mandate to "take care of your own," ironically manifesting the perversion of this imperative and consequently advocating, in the context of the novel's moral imperatives, responsibility to a broader understanding of "your own" as a human community. Duddy's encompassing Virgil and Yvette would enrich Duddy's personhood and might improve his insular community as well.¹³⁹

The disabled figures in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* illustrate Duddy's personal downfall as a fundamental betrayal of human relationship. Duddy cannot recognize the Other in himself. When he expels "cripples" from his land, Duddy deprives himself of his own possibilities to develop as a person. He rejects the opportunities

Dingleman and Virgil presented to understand human interdependence. Just as his family neglects the individual beneath the “little Jewish *pusherke*” (261), Duddy fails to perceive others beyond their expedience for him. He misses his opportunity to understand and thus not replicate Dingleman’s “personal trouble,” just as he disdains Virgil’s invitation to activism that is not merely self-serving. Duddy’s reception of others as commodities crystallizes the source of Duddy’s failed humanity and, when reading Duddy as a North American Everyman, signals the moral injunction of Richler’s satire. The function of the terms *cripple* and *epileptic* in the novel is to highlight the barrenness of labels in revealing individual realities. Like Boy Wonder and *shiksa*, labels carry narratives that erringly suggest knowledge of another that is arbitrarily imposed. Richler’s use of disability illuminates his moral concerns as not being limited to the corrosive power of materialism, but also including the ineluctable imperative for interdependence of people regardless of social taxonomies. Human development demands a sense of belonging, a community with which to ground an identity, and inclusion in loving relationships in order for one to develop into an empathetic individual: “a *mensh*” rather than “a brute” (280).

¹²³ Vanderhaege's *The Englishman's Boy* similarly provides an interesting study of figures of disability.

¹²⁴ When accused of killing MacPherson's wife, Duddy looks to his classmates for support: "We're all in this together, you understand?" (40). However, neither they nor his family are "in" with Duddy. Duddy's recognition is painfully ironic since he admits his solitude to Yvette, who is selflessly loyal to Duddy despite his mistreatment and rejection of her.

¹²⁵ Examples of Duddy's deprivation of familial warmth pervade the novel. Duddy is well aware of the differential between the attention rendered to his older brother, Lennie, and him. For instance, Duddy's father, Max, does not respond to any of Duddy's letters even though "Duddy remembered that when Lennie had worked as a camp councillor one summer his father had written every week" (105). Max either ignores or belittles Duddy despite Duddy's irrepressible attempts to please his father: "Do I always have to be in the wrong?" (27). His uncle Benjy does not hide the fact that he is ashamed of Duddy (61). At university, Lennie denies Duddy's existence (165) and Duddy's desire to hear about his mother's love for him is persistently frustrated (129, 174, 189, 257).

¹²⁶ Tobin Siebers argues that the medical model's "relentless" individualizing of disability impedes the effective politicization of disability issues because the disabled person is perceived as in need of what is "special" and consequently narcissistic (48). Therefore, the notion of disability accommodation is shaped as "special rights and not civil rights" (48). In the way that some white middle-class sectors have protested against programmes of equitable hiring practices for women and visible minorities as discriminatory (see for example the election material used by Jim Pankiw in the 2004 federal elections in

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan), services for people with disabilities are often viewed with suspicion by the non-disabled mainstream. Disabled parking areas are often resented and misused by those who do not have permits to use them. Accommodations are perceived as a privilege rather than as a right. Because claimants for services must place their needs in competition with others, individuals and families with disabilities are often forced to reduce their identity to the most negative aspects of their disability and assert their inability to cope without assistance.

¹²⁷ Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick analyse the phenomenon of disability norm production that requires adherence to a fixed set of symptoms that construct the illusion of a stable identity. “Members are constrained to ‘perform’ their illness or disability in ways that fit in with the norms adopted by the self-help group” (109) or organization. In my own experience as a parent, I have been forced to construct my daughter’s disability according to providers’ mandates.

¹²⁸ Ower’s reading of disability is not as extreme or dated as it may seem. A disproportionately higher percentage of people with disabilities continue to be victims of aggression and violence compared to their non-disabled cohorts. See Sherry “Don’t Ask.”

¹²⁹ Ower’s sentiments are evident in the stereotypes believed to contribute to abuse of people with disabilities. For example, the stereotypes include the view that individuals “are stupid and can be taken advantage of” and they are “lesser beings . . . who do not deserve decent treatment” (Harm’s Way 16).

¹³⁰ See Reaume for accounts of unpaid work by inmates of institutions similarly framed as benevolence instead of the exploitation it would constitute if the workers were without disabilities.

¹³¹ *Mensh* means a good human being in Yiddish.

¹³² Among the growing body of research uncovering the plight of people labelled with disability in Nazi Germany, I recommend *Forgotten Crimes*.

¹³³ See Simi Linton 17-22.

¹³⁴ In my experience, the connection to a like-minded community with similar experiences provided by newsletters regarding disability issues has made the critical difference between stability and despair. I have been the editor of *The Family Fodder*, a newsletter for families in Ontario who have a member with a disability and more recently, *The Prairie Hand*, the Saskatchewan Rett Syndrome Association newsletter.

¹³⁵ Elizabeth Kenny, 1880-1952, is famous for pioneering techniques of muscle “re-education” that became the foundation of physical therapy. She is known as “Sister” because she worked as an army nurse in Australia for thirty-one years. She developed a treatment method for polio that was opposed by the medical establishment. The Sister Kenny Rehabilitation Institute was established in 1942 and still operates today.

See Kenny, and Gould for Sister Kenny’s biography,

<http://www.ott.zynet.co.uk/polio/lincolnshire/library/drhenry/srkenny.html>

¹³⁶ Pollock draws a parallel between Dingleman and Simcha, whom he finds “disturbingly similar” (135).

¹³⁷ See Shakespeare “Disabled Sexuality.”

¹³⁸ Another amalgamation of characters into the evolving personality of Duddy occurs when readers recognize Dingleman’s need for Duddy who, in turn, needs to incorporate his empathetic potential embodied by Virgil. Virgil dreams of emulating Sister Kenny

whose life was dedicated to improving the lives of victims of polio. Thus, by nurturing his “Virgil” side, Duddy might improve his “Boy Wonder” side.

¹³⁹ Yvette’s willingness to transfer “French-Canadian” owned land to Jewish ownership suggests that enculturated prejudices are not ubiquitous. The eldest family member, Simcha, does not appear to object to Yvette’s non-Jewishness. Duddy clings to an empty tribalism for the assured identity he believes it effects.

Chapter Eight

Breaking the Mould: Seeing Difference Differently in *Crackpot*

Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack, a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in. (Leonard Cohen)

After *Crackpot* was published in 1974, Russell Brown wrote that Wiseman's novels signalled a "far reaching transformation of the Canadian imagination" (158). The transformation that Brown refers to can be seen as arising from the radical embrace of difference that Wiseman conveys in *Crackpot*. Although the scholarship on Wiseman's work focuses primarily on her exploration of immigrant life in North Winnipeg's Jewish ghetto, *Crackpot* confronts the dilemma of ethnic differences in Canada by exposing the issue of human physical diversity and the social disabling of those perceived to diverge too far from the boundaries of sameness. This dissertation ends with *Crackpot* as a text indicating the beginnings of a profound expansion of the collective national consciousness. Because literary fictions create the shared narratives that inform and transform national identities, *Crackpot* participates in the ongoing project of nation building undertaken by the earliest Canadian authors. However, the resistance to dominant normalcy seen in Wiseman's novel joins an increasingly overt movement in the nineteen-seventies that grapples with the politicized issues of socio-cultural diversity. Unconventional bodies in *Crackpot*, devalued for their difference, embody the story's central theme of requisite brokenness in wholeness. The elemental humanness portrayed by the main disabled characters illustrates Lennard Davis's concept of the disabled figure as the postmodern universal.

Crackpot's postmodern confrontation with the unresolvable paradox intrinsic to the human condition, the novel's transgressive overlap of fiction and fact, and its subversion of convention and taboo, prefigure a burgeoning of literary experimentation in

Canadian writing that probes the boundaries of normalcy.¹⁴⁰ In *Crackpot*, the pejorated image of disability is deconstructed by revealing the disabling action of social prejudice on anomalous bodies. Furthermore, disability is reconstructed as inherently Sacred—not distancing people with disabilities from the ordinary in the way that *special* or *supercrip* images might. The Sacred element in *Crackpot* derives from the disabled characters' embrace of their humanity, much in the way that Stepsure was blessed in accommodating to his circumstances and not striving to impress his neighbours. The Sacred situates and validates the disabled family within their faith tradition without relying on capitalist standards of worth measured by income production and the status brought by financial wealth.

The significations catalyzed by the central image of the cracked pot converge on the disabled figures. In *Crackpot*, disability evokes the shattered vessels of the novel's foundational creation myth taken from Hebrew mystical tradition. "Brokenness" indicates archetypal humanness, rather than inherent deficiency. In *Crackpot* disabled figures struggle against a multi-directional derogation of their unconventional bodies that dramatically restricts possibilities and choices in their life. *Crackpot* suggests that the dignity of the characters with disabilities is a Divine endowment; their persistent devaluation is wrought by socio-cultural prejudice. Hence, the repression of difference is conveyed as a violation of social justice as well as a violation of a Divine order.

As seen in Wilson's and Richler's stories, dehumanizing attitudes erode the humanity of those who fail to recognize human interdependence. Thus, a society that devalues difference diminishes its own worth. Wiseman's *Crackpot* expands the Canadian imagination by dramatizing the need to include unassimilable differences into the Canadian "norm," not as a temporary distraction (before assimilation) but as a necessary element of Canada's identity. By drawing attention to the social devaluation of impairment as defect and resymbolizing what is perceived as brokenness into possibility, *Crackpot* adds momentum to a developing sense of inclusive pluralism in Canadian culture and society.

The Lurianic creation account underlying *Crackpot*'s narrative and symbolic structure explains life's genesis as the consequence of brokenness.¹⁴¹ The excerpt of the sixteenth century Kabbalistic myth presented in the novel's epigraph describes a

continuing movement of Divine energy.¹⁴² First, the Divine essence gathers into containers. However, since the Divine cannot be contained, the vessels shatter, spreading Divine light (goodness) throughout the universe. As the fragments of Sacred light begin to gather together again, the cycle is renewed. This pattern of synchronic chaos and order permeates the narrative on multiple levels, ultimately suggesting that the fullness of life emerges from imperfection. The characters with “rejected bodies” (Wendell) attest to life as replete with inseparable joy and pain. Their bodies, blind, misshapen or oversized, are not the only source of their pain or disablement. Similarly, their bodies are also vehicles of pleasure. Wiseman’s portrayal of these characters contradicts the tendency to reduce a person to her/his disability, both in text and lived experience. Therefore, just as the humour and polyphony in *Crackpot* acknowledging the paradox of pain melded to joy is interpreted as a “coming of age of Canadian Jewish history” (Greenstein 179), it can also be read as a reclamation of place in the community for Canadians with disabilities. The “experiential *communitas*” (Greenstein 189) created by the protagonist in *Crackpot* welcomes an egalitarian, pluralistic human community that not only incorporates cultural differences but also includes marked differences in individual bodies, customarily referred to as deformed, abnormal, or grotesque.

Scholars have attributed the current of abnormality or the grotesque in Wiseman’s characters to her Jewishness with its stance of marginality in an anti-Semitic dominant culture. This reading complies with the degrading use of disability by oppressed minorities as a foil to illuminate their own oppression. However, while Wiseman’s cultural heritage informs her creativity, her interest in disability as a marginalized identity extends beyond its expediency as a metaphor for oppression. Wiseman is concerned with marginality as a relational phenomenon imposed by the powerful onto those they desire to control, thereby bolstering their own illusions of superiority. She does not appear to consider being Jewish as an inherent “difference” but rather as a symbol of constructed difference.

Her Jewish experience offers her a view of the social process of “Othering” from both the inside, through her immigrant parents’ lives, and from the outside, as an educated middle-class Canadian author. Just as Wilson determined to affirm the human realities of an ordinary middle class, Wiseman strives to articulate the lives of people

relegated to the edges of the mainstream. Her description of racism as “a geography of identity which annexes for the group or race, the most desirable inner space, the most elevated moral nature, simply by naming it so” (xxi) equally applies to ableism. In an interview with Gabriella Morisco, Wiseman expresses an interest in the fundamental contradictions of human existence that every individual must negotiate in ordinary life; what the interviewer labels as “grotesque,” Wiseman employs as a possibility for affirming a broader understanding of being human. For Wiseman, the abnormal defamiliarizes the normal. Exposing the ostensibly marginal Other as personal promotes identification, revealing the elemental paradox of unity in diversity. As an artist, Wiseman feels compelled to explore figures exiled to society’s margins in an effort to pursue humanity’s fullness: “The air between us joins us; it doesn’t separate us. It’s part of a continuum” (146). Wiseman’s desire to problematize cultural conceptions of difference emerges as a deeply personal philosophy as well as an artistic interest.

A Disability Studies approach to *Crackpot* attends to Wiseman’s interest in the social dynamics of power that compel constructions of difference to buttress dominant norms. At the same time, as demonstrated in the previous chapters of this dissertation, a Disability Studies perspective problematizes critical analyses which read images of disability stereotypically. Marco LoVerso’s “Language of Private and Public: A Study of Wiseman’s *Crackpot*” provides an example of an unexamined ableist response to disability in his reading of *Crackpot*.

LoVerso argues that Wiseman is concerned with a “process of verbal-moral development” and that the character of Hoda illustrates the immorality that results from a failure to conform to dominant discursive norms. According to LoVerso, Hoda’s marginal status is a legacy of ignorance inherited from parents who “are limited by their personal preoccupations” and are “verbally (and morally) insensitive” (82). In accepting the stereotypical association of blindness with ignorance, LoVerso completely fails to appreciate Wiseman’s satirical exposure of social prejudice based on corporeal configurations. Similarly missing the satirical rendering of the educational system’s practices of assimilation into Anglo-Saxon norms, LoVerso focuses on the teacher’s inadequate attempts to “teach Hoda public knowledge and language” (87). Essentially, LoVerso equates morality with majority discourse and seems to equate Hoda’s sexual

activity with “evil,” while suggesting that Hoda’s fairy-tale dreams further evidence the depravity learned from the self-obsessed adults around her. He interprets the novel’s resolution as a move, for Hoda, beyond her egocentrism, conforming to dominant norms to “become more a part of the group by acknowledging its verbal system” (94).

Because a Disability Studies perspective rejects the use of disability as a stock metaphor for deficit, the disability modality would provide a medium for LoVerso to question the portrayal of blindness in *Crackpot* and recognise Wiseman’s play with stereotypical equations of lack of sight and lack of understanding. Furthermore, a disability lens would preclude LoVerso’s acceptance of majority norms as the arbiters of morality. LoVerso misses Wiseman’s rich humour and irony by reading her use of language as if it were transparent.

Disability Studies is particularly concerned with discursive constructions of individual and collective identities and how these realities interact with dominant interpretations of embodiment. The central characters in *Crackpot* have unconventional bodies that carry stigmas that profoundly inform, if not determine, the characters’ life trajectories. Wiseman articulates the tension created between the deterministic propulsion of stigmatized identities arising from marked bodies and the impulses and possibilities arising from the experience of those particularly configured bodies. The protagonist, Hoda, is obese, while her father, Danile, is blind and her mother, Rahel, has a “hunchback.”¹⁴³ Their non-conforming bodies shatter expectations that fictional characters with disabilities will represent either failure or a heroic and inspiring overcoming of adversity. Disability in *Crackpot* functions as a counter-discourse to the status quo. In *Crackpot*, the community punishes its members who are different with exclusion and exploitation. Therefore, the story that unfolds around the family is one of resistance to oppression. The family’s survival is a triumph of human resourcefulness and endurance; however, the triumph avoids functioning as a standard trope of inspiration because Wiseman portrays the social construction of bodies without diminishing the phenomenological realities of living in a body with excess flesh, no eyesight, or uneven shoulders. Rather than using the physical markers of disability as metaphors for the oppression of immigrant Jews, Wiseman precludes the conventional literary mileage awarded stigmatized bodies by illustrating the instability of disablement; the reception of

the anomalous body shifts according to the contexts in which the figures appear. Furthermore, Wiseman represents the ordinariness of what is labelled disability in society by remarking on physical elements in the most unremarkable of characters peppered throughout the plot.

The physical anomalies of secondary characters also lend them particular substance, a felt reality: Uncle Nate's "warty hands" (71), the "anarchic twitchings" (228) of Mrs Limprig's body, and the hen-pecked Mr Pankess's "funny shuffle and stiff arm" (116) are among the many images of disability that offer multiple interpretations of corporeal being. Wiseman's attention to fleshliness, incorporating multi-dimensional cracks and irregularities into her characters, conveys to readers an intense awareness of, if not wonder at, humanity's limitless variety. Her characterizations position figures of disability as active agents who belie the assumptions imposed on them by their non-disabled community. The narrative suggests that the knowledge of the experience engendered by diverse forms of embodiment is critical to the collective understanding of humanity. *Crackpot* illuminates the need to acknowledge the multiplicity of human experience grounded in our naturally-occurring bodies and discursively shaped through relationships that take place in shifting contexts. By affirming the material reality of bodies, the novel rejects the myth of a universalized body, suggesting that what is universal is the singularity of individual corporeal being.¹⁴⁴ In *Crackpot*, this uniqueness carries sacred potential.

Wiseman's application of the Kabbalistic mystical paradox of making and breaking (as a creative process) to human existence dislodges disability from its associations with irreparable damage. As the theme of symbiotic fragmentation and wholeness reverberates throughout the narrative's multi-variegated layers of meaning, it consistently relates to the disabled main characters. Hoda and her parents are viewed as "cripples" and "duds" (11), and live in desperate poverty; yet they are the generative site for fresh meanings and new insights. The persistent process of making and breaking extends beyond the page to engage readers' participation. The omniscient narrative position transports readers from the external, perhaps most familiar, view of the main characters' bodies to their subjective response to this imposed portrayal, and back again. In this way Wiseman subverts what might be presumed to be an objective perspective on

an individual with a physical anomaly.¹⁴⁵ The standardized conceptions (presumed public knowledge) of “hunchback” or “blindness” or “obesity” enter into tension with the radically contrasting thoughts of the individual characters. Expectations are raised and then broken, creating a shift in subsequent presumptions that in turn most frequently give way to complication, drawing readers into an imperative moral self-examination and self-evaluation.

Because narrative typically draws readers to identify with its main characters, readers can be expected to imagine the physically extraordinary in ways that are typically devalued in Canadian society. However, the omniscient narrator also provides mainstream responses to images of the main characters that would be familiar to many readers. For example, as the story begins, readers encounter a scene of a “frail” mother (Rahel) scrubbing other people’s homes to eke out a meagre subsistence for her family; her small child is with her of necessity. The narration assumes a fairy-tale quality (selfless young mother scrubbing floors for rich ugly people) that is broken by a humorous account of Hoda, a fat voracious baby, being fed like a zoo animal by Rahel’s employers, for their amusement. The image of the baby is funny, but the readers’ laughter is uneasy because the object of humour is a vulnerable target of exploitation. The employers’ mocking of the baby’s size while putting food in her mouth becomes a metonym for their construction of her larger identity. After the readers’ laughter has drawn them into complicity with the exploiters, readers are compelled to align with Hoda and Rahel, whom mainstream attitudes regard as inferior but who are the protagonists of the story. Wiseman orchestrates readers’ oscillation from centre to margin while complicating the locations themselves. The Kabbalistic creation motif in this way infuses the reading, as well as the language and images, of the novel. By highlighting, throughout the novel, the instability of words, knowledge, appearances, and meaning, Wiseman subverts familiar binaries and transgresses presumed boundaries of human value and behaviour, thus breaking into what often are habitual perceptions of reality, deconstructing certainty and reconstructing concepts from alternate perspectives.

By dissolving familiar norms, Wiseman creates space for imagining fresh possibilities. Hence, the “beautiful ones” in the Jewish community are caricatures of middle-class pretentiousness; the teachers employed by the education system are the

same. Politicians use the police force to attack citizens in the novel's presentation of the historic Winnipeg Strike of 1919; yet the North-enders of Winnipeg who share the economic poverty of Hoda's situation, both Gentile and Jew, are no more romanticized for their marginal status than those who have privilege. The reader cannot easily rest with stereotypical assumptions of character based on literary or popular conventions. If relating to the protagonist, as readers customarily do, they must question the position of the obese Jewish prostitute who accepts her son as a client. In *Crackpot*, there are no straightforward or comfortable locations of centre or periphery. Thus, disability loses its force as a signifier of deviance and deficit in opposition to normalcy as a sign of desirable homogeneity and wholeness. Social categorizations, as well as social understanding, are not immutable, but are subject to an ineluctable process of dissolution and reconstruction.

The narrative matrix of breaking and making established in the epigraph holds the key to the redemptive meaning of the human brokenness that permeates the story. In his discussion of the source of the epigraph, Kertzer explains the Lurianic myth as "a parable about form" referring to "human form and human articulation" (18). He describes the human shape as simultaneously a deformation and manifestation of God, who would otherwise be unknowable. Drawing on Lukacs, Kertzer contends that *Crackpot* confirms the Kabbalistic message that imperfection is not an "unfortunate defect" but an elemental, necessary vehicle of meaning. From a disability perspective, then, when all human bodies participate in imperfection, there can be no prior state of perfection from which bodies are degraded or no one paradigmatic wholeness to which bodies of individuals must conform to justify participation in the human race. All humanity participates in a shattered divinity that requires cooperative effort to be discerned. In this way, Danile with his blindness can be a vehicle for meaning as much as an imagined Danile with eyesight may be. The point is that one perspective is not less relevant or valuable; both are necessary to approach knowledge of humanity. Either way, the revelation of the divine is only a fragment; it is not God in entirety, but it is a piece of God, and it is the human condition to know Godness (goodness) imperfectly through human encounters. The epigraph explains the paradox of Divine Light in the world as a result of brokenness, not in spite of it. God is accessed through an embodied humanity that Wiseman suggests must be embraced in all its variety rather than measured and judged according to a

hierarchical standard of (divine) bodily perfection. Fragmentation is the human condition and consequently all embodiment contains a critical fragment of meaning. Wiseman sustains this foundational subversive motif throughout the novel by persistently shattering the illusory nature of categorical borders separating individuals from each other.

The epigraph involves the narrative in a tradition dedicated to transcending appearances. As the earthy story of Hoda is elevated into cosmic significance, the creation narrative is simultaneously demystified because it is personalized, given substance in the novel's portrayal of embodied reality. In the same way, Hoda's fictional experience demythologizes and breathes life into historical events such as the Royal visit to Winnipeg and the Winnipeg Strike.¹⁴⁶ Wiseman's interplay of creation mythology, fictional lives, historical events, and Winnipeg's places further blurs presumed boundaries, separating what is received as fact from what is imaginatively composed, which parallels the undermining of stereotypes of disability and their concurrent dichotomizing of the normal and the abnormal.

The blurring of boundaries challenges established structures of knowledge as well. Hoda's struggle with the meaning of knowing and not knowing reflects a critical social issue illuminated by disability. While the particular knowledge of living with anomalous bodies is repressed and silenced, medicalized fields claim expert knowledge regarding the treatment of people with disabilities, resulting in social structures that veiled systematized abuse and social degradation under the banner of professional beneficence. What Hoda knows shapes her identity, yet her knowledge changes continually throughout the novel, changing at the same time her relationship with the others in her world. The novel demonstrates reality as fluid and knowledge as relational, each new knowledge shattering and recreating former perceptions. Readers observe the contrast between internal and external interpretations of experience and the transmutations that "knowing" anomaly undergoes. Thus, the "cracked" figures in *Crackpot* serve to deconstruct oppositions of self and other that essentialize categories of identity as "fixed, permanent, internally homogenous" (Shildrick and Price 95) rather than as discursively produced in contexts. In this way, disability functions as a profoundly transgressive social element exposing the uncertainty of knowledge and truth.¹⁴⁷

Hoda is born into a web of ongoing discourses that interpret her body and its place in society. The characters' response to the tensions these discourses create informs their self-image. Foucauldian technologies of self, whereby individuals police their own actions to conform to dominant norms, are portrayed primarily in Rahel's reminiscences of her youth and are poignantly illustrated in Hoda's attempts to be accepted in the classroom. But the disabling discourses of others are clearly belied in the relationships of the family, where bodies are valued for being as they are, enabling them as sites of resistance.¹⁴⁸ Obesity in Western culture often stereotypically represents excess consumption, laziness, slovenliness, lack of self-control, and either hyper-sexuality or asexuality. These character elements mirror those commonly associated with physical disability and elicit typical responses of derogation and ridicule.

Hoda is bewildered and wounded by the derision of her and her parents' bodies that she encounters from her schoolmates. At school her body becomes a "carcass" (121), her father a "burden," and her mother a "cripple" (120). However, Hoda's inherited counter-discourse, which perceives beauty and wonder in the physical attributes that the school-children mock, enables defiance rather than despair. Secure in the knowledge of her family's noble role in the world, Hoda is able to reject the negative judgement of the students as uninformed: "What did they know about it?" (120). In Ethel Wilson's *Love and Salt Water*, the heroine's embrace of her disability portrays a defiant move in Canadian literature towards acknowledging disability as valid human experience, as inseparable from both the light and shadow of existence. In *Crackpot*, Hoda magnifies this defiance of a mandatory homogeneity of bodies. Her excessive size embodies a transgression of socially prescribed limits and expectations. It demands notice, but also it claims agency despite relentless repression. Whereas Wilson's Ellen Cuppy hesitated in her advance, with Wiseman's Hoda there is apparently no time left for hesitation. *Crackpot* represents a Canada that disables difference, but "difference" is not passive. It does and will resist and survive simply because humanity is intrinsically diverse. *Crackpot* suggests a renegotiation of a collective hermeneutic and epistemology that admits the mutability of knowing and therefore the responsibility to remain open to the voice of an Other.

The limitations imposed on Hoda require a great deal of resourcefulness of her in order to exert agency. Hoda capitalizes on her exploitation by the women who hire her by choosing to accept the advances of their husbands. Hoda chooses to conform to the stereotypes that she sees as desirable, dancing tirelessly at weddings while taking customers on the side: “Hoda had heard somewhere that fat people are light footed when it comes to dancing” (175). Although readers may not applaud Hoda’s choices, there is no doubt that her options are severely restricted by social attitudes towards her. Thus, while social scripts of disability are indicted in *Crackpot*, so too are scripts of normalcy. Typical adolescent girls’ dreams of romance become burlesque when located in Hoda’s massive body, accentuating the absurdity of this gendered marriage script. As a girl, even Hoda knows that “happily ever after” requires a particular type of body: “Of course, when the really good time came she would be thin and beautiful like everyone else, and have plenty to eat anyway” (113).

Wiseman’s multi-perspectival presentation of the disabled protagonists foregrounds the constructed nature of all identity. The label of “grotesque” affixed to the main figures by other characters as well as by literary critics loses its potency when the nuclear family relationships convey a sense of loving ordinariness. The rich uncle, Nate, is appalled when, after Rahel’s death, Hoda and Danile vehemently refuse to be separated and institutionalized according to his plan: “Grotesque, he raged internally, fighting the impulse to do violence to all this blubber, grotesque offspring of that cunning little hunchback whose eyes still defied him from the grave in these grey living eyes” (99). Nate is portrayed as a caricature that might also be characterized as grotesque; however, his wealth preserves him from that label in his community. *Crackpot* suggests that the notion of the grotesque as applied to individuals reveals more about relationships of power than about an objective reality.

On the other hand, from the perspective of disability, Hoda might conform to the notion of a “grotesque” work of art in that sixteenth-century grotesques represented amalgams of real and fantastic figures. Hoda’s adult identity, while still in process, results from a life of formation and transformation as she internalizes and resists the realities circulating around her. As an adult, she embodies a reconciliation of the realities and fantasies that her body and its reception in her community have elicited. In learning

so much of others from the way she is treated, her selfhood is, ironically, positively constituted in opposition to those who objectify and deny her being. However, Wiseman does not merely reverse the binary of ability/disability or knowledge/ignorance by privileging Hoda's formerly pejorated vulnerability. Wiseman shows Hoda to be positioned as both marginal and central to the life of her community, thus conveying the paradoxical positioning of disability within culture: "It was by this time (middle-age) her fate to have been part, even if only fragmentarily, of the past of such a great segment of the community that she was something of a vested memory" to be cast in stories "in which she distinguished herself by being somehow still unrepentantly out of pitch with the rest of humanity" (400). In the way that disability is central to cultural productions in its ubiquitous metaphoric use but absent as a politicized concern in the public consciousness, Hoda's familiar presence in her community remains marginalized. She is, to her fellow town's-folk, the equivalent of a literary trope, enhancing their stories without representing a story of her own. Her body is intimately known by the males of all ages, and mocked by most women, but few recognize her as a person. For Hoda, this liminality generates the insight articulated by Tanya Tichkovsky in *Disability, Self, and Society*: "Critical awareness, and the possibility of deconstructing and reconstructing the significance of embodied existence, is what the marginality of disability offers to us all" (238). Ubiquitous and ubiquitously exploited, yet seldom acknowledged and valued, the marginal/central paradox of Hoda and her family describes a neither/nor or either/or site of liminality that generates wisdom. This wisdom includes openness and empathy towards others. Recognizing that "nobody really wanted to know her" and yet everyone readily mocked her, Hoda nonetheless refuses to compromise her dignity by similarly betraying those around her: "she didn't have to live off their weaknesses" (409). Wiseman's multi-dimensional representation of Hoda, Danile, and Rahel produces insight by interrogating their "disability" as a process of enmeshed social relations that demands critical reflection. Titchkosky quotes Ricoeur to explain the awareness that may spring from positions of alterity: "It is only in a conflict of rival hermeneutics that we perceive something of the being to be interpreted . . . [Meaning] is given nowhere but in this dialectic of interpretations. . ." (249). Titchkosky suggests that the very nature of marginality embodies the message of "alternative ways of being-in-the-world,"

presenting “the possibility that things could be otherwise” (237). *Crackpot*’s protagonists demonstrate this potential.

Wiseman’s use of unconventional bodies illuminates the reality of rival social discourses informing internal dialectic as well as the human identities these forces inform. The character of Rahel illustrates how prejudice is easily internalized, immobilizing subjectivity by denying the individual a sense of affirmation and belonging. Through Rahel’s thoughts readers experience the dissonance between the knowledge of self that derives from her daily life experience in relationship with loved ones and that imposed by social narratives of disability that serve those with the power to construct normalcy in their image. While Danile embraces their particular embodiment, Rahel tries to accommodate herself to conventions of the norm. She had distanced herself from her body, praying her anomaly, though minimal, would disappear: “That skew of her body wasn’t really hers; she wasn’t really that way” (14). Danile, on the other hand, celebrates their disabilities as the cause of their union and consequent joy in each other. Danile’s “crying [her twisted body] forth as a source of pride” (15) confuses Rahel. She knows that her irritation at Danile’s glorification or dismissal of her “deformity” is irrational; “[Danile] wasn’t interested in the anatomical fact” (15). While Rahel expresses a medicalized view of a body as an objective “anatomical fact,” Danile’s view underlines the discursive shaping of disability. For Danile, Rahel’s “hump” existed, or not, according to narrative efficacy. Since Rahel was not her hump, this part of her would not always be relevant. However much Rahel internalized the negative valuations of her community, she acknowledged that, “in a way, if you followed his way of thinking, exclusive of all the other ways which the world knew and accepted, he was right” (15). The character of Rahel reveals the turmoil inflicted by social categorizations of “difference” that have become naturalized to the point that their negativity is difficult to resist even when contradicted by personal experience.

By parodically rendering the wealthy non-disabled the “beautiful ones” and eliciting identification with the pragmatic, resourceful but self-giving Rahel, Wiseman highlights the injustice of disability discrimination. Amusement at the behaviour of society towards the family marked with deviance provokes discomfort in the readers who might, however reluctantly, recognize themselves in the space of the beautiful while

desiring association with the characters alienated for being as they are. Rahel's relationship with her husband actualizes her self-identity, enabling her to assert meaning that vitalizes rather than oppresses. Her consequent active embrace of her abject position as a means to provide for her family subverts the impulse to pity her as a victim. However, her bitter awareness of her family's victimization grounds her in a recognizable human reality that prevents her from appearing superhuman. Hoda finds that when her mother participates in Danile's recounting of their family history, "the stories hurt more" (31). Sobbing with the memory of their first child, Rahel sarcastically whispers: "No wonder she did not have the strength to go on breathing, . . .with the weight of the disapproval of all those beautiful people lying down on her. No wonder she couldn't breathe" (31). Wiseman evades the victim trope by imbuing Rahel with agency. As with Danile, the meaning of her sincere relationship with her loved ones supercedes the crippling effects of prejudice. Rahel reinterprets the slave-like conditions of her employment by choosing to embrace her baby's presence with her as a "privilege." If power is envisaged as "the ability to control events and meanings" (Brummett 70), then Rahel assumes the "power" not to control events but, like Danile, to control meaning. She herself chooses to re-metaphorize her raised shoulder as a place to "balance the world on" (33), drawing strength and confidence from this self-generated reading of the text that is her body.

In *Crackpot*, bodies are the ground where cultural battles for meaning take place. Refused both fair wages for labour and welfare from family or state, Danile, Rahel and Hoda demonstrate a Foucauldian resistance to regulatory power by asserting their own meaning in the face of the daunting stigmas inflicted by their society. The hovel they make their home is considered haunted by the neighbourhood children, who fear "the hunchbacked witch and her husband the scary blind man" (34). For the small family, however, "the very decrepit condition of the house was a positive virtue" (35). The tree destroying the veranda with its root system becomes a source of pride for Hoda, and for Danile a symbol of the awesome force of nature: "A porch is a very fine thing, but can it gainsay a tree?" (35). The tree roots can be understood as a symbol of the strong family roots that underpin the built structures of society and culture. These roots are Danile's grounding of his family's meaning in a divine plan of cosmic proportions. The structural

damage created by the tree's development depreciates the property value and renders the house unliveable or undesirable. Yet, the inhabitants of both the ostensibly impaired bodies and the impaired house experience vibrancy and value in the very elements generally perceived as broken. Before it collapses altogether, the veranda's flat surface becomes "a wooden wave" which Danile delights in, claiming he can feel it undulating beneath his feet. The entry to the house and its symbolic connotations of the psyche of those inside may be difficult to navigate, but once inside, the family's space, lined with Danile's woven art, becomes one of his baskets—a magical space containing "the entire universe" (56) of possibilities. Hence, the symbolic veranda implies that perhaps the effort required to understand the unconventional beings depicted in the novel may yield untold possibilities for new knowledge, new awareness, new socio-cultural perspectives of particular embodiment.

Yet, through Rahel's untimely death, the novel warns against ignoring embodiment. It is not disability that kills Rahel, but disease. Cancer destroys Rahel because she not only ignores her body's pain but deludes herself with self-constructed fictions that deny the insistence of her pain. Danile collaborates in the fiction of Rahel's invincibility. However, even through the pretence carried out deliberately in language, Danile's body actively knows what his words cannot formulate. While holding Rahel: "For one sickening moment he understood completely, in his flesh, what he could not bear to know" (57). Danile's experience suggests that human knowledge is not derived merely from the senses and that "disabled" experiences may broaden personal and collective understanding of embodiment.¹⁴⁹ Thus, *Crackpot* demonstrates the social construction of disability, while maintaining the crucial reality of bodily needs, knowledge, and particularities. The primary critique of social constructionist theory warns that by locating disability in the exclusionary practices of a disabling dominant culture, the particularities of corporeal experience may be eclipsed.¹⁵⁰ It is in the context of this vexed hermeneutical issue that Wiseman navigates by her focus on relationship as the key to identity, relationship as signifying not simply interaction but a meaningful recognition of embodied being among individuals, relationship as a mutually affirming revelation of interdependence.

The juxtaposition of Rahel's impulse to deny her body's particularity with Danile's embrace of it emphasizes the critical role of storytelling in the process of identity formation. However, subjective narratives are not simplistic endorsements of vertiginous relativism whereby our realities are only determined by our stories. (This is how I see it, therefore it is true.) Instead, subjective stories seem to approach degrees of authenticity or truth through a constant process of grounding in corporeal experience, in self-reflexivity, and in relations with others. Just as Danile's narratives affirm the shape of Rahel's body, both characters construct stories to deny the pain developing in Rahel's body despite its demand for affirmation. Wiseman weaves a body's knowledge into the web of ways people "know," in addition to her use of bodies as sites of prejudice, power, and resistance. Ignoring what the body "says" is fatal for Rahel, while Hoda, in her ignorance of biology and lack of understanding of the body's language, as it were, gives birth without knowing it, without even knowing she is pregnant. What she suspects is death is disturbed by "the very noisiness of her own panting." "Perhaps it wasn't death but the long awaited transformation then, and fat Hoda had dropped away from inside all at once, a ton and a half of guts, that had left only her true beautiful self, transfigured by this upheaval from within. . . . The lump was alive" (208-09). Wiseman's birth scene assaults the senses, rendering another version of the epigraph—in flesh. Hoda erupts; her body literally breaks away from within, producing new life. Hoda not only delivers a son, she also gives birth to knowledge and thus to a new self.

Crackpot as *Bildungsroman* traces Hoda's process of becoming, unfolding a life narrative answering the question posed at the start of the first chapter: "For what did Hoda know?" (9). Hoda's ignorance generates much of the humour in the novel. Her theory of human conception, misreading of teachers' intentions, and friendly profanities that horrify the church women who visit Danile exemplify a lack of knowing that is presumably counterbalanced by readers' superior knowledge, knowledge which allows them to laugh at Hoda's naiveté. However, as Hoda discovers the hard realities of her life in relationship with others, the ubiquitous disabling processes of society throughout the trajectory of a life come into relief, always foregrounding options of response to the barriers erected. *Crackpot* highlights the relational constitution of disability by representing a variety of disabled figures receiving society's discriminatory valuations in

different ways. At the same time, knowing and not knowing become complex concepts, ultimately raising questions of not only who is doing the knowing but also how and why they know, which knowing counts, and who stands to profit from this knowledge.

Hoda does know who she is. Her enviable self-assurance proceeding from the gift of her father's stories sustains her and endows her with an unshakeable integrity despite shattering circumstances. From childhood Hoda is nurtured on Danile's painstakingly detailed accounts of her history and birth. "Daddy told her who she was and where she came from and what had happened. Real things." These creation stories implant in Hoda an assurance of her place in the world. Danile's stories endow their family with meaning and joy. In Danile's creation narrative, Hoda's "arrival and survival [were] a signal victory for the forces of virtue" (33). Thus, Wiseman asserts the critical power of narrative to shape being and to create meaning in human existence. The novel demonstrates the need for personal meaning to be affirmed by others as well. Danile's version of their family dramatically differs from the accounts circulated in their community. From the outside, Hoda's family story is one of abject degradation and humiliating cruelty. As discussed earlier, *Crackpot* manifests the social nature of disability through the juxtaposition of, tension between, and melding of, knowledge derived from the personal narratives of Hoda's family and those composed about them by others. The novel suggests that the stories from society's margins must not only be told, but must be heard as well, in order to expand understanding of self and other.¹⁵¹

Wiseman sardonically portrays Canadian systemic attitudes towards "difference" in the early years of the twentieth century through the disparaging behaviour of the school teacher, a stock spinster figure who, as a vehicle for dissemination of national knowledge, asserts the meta-narrative of British superiority among her mainly immigrant students: "There was that subtle something in her teacher's expression . . . which showed, more clearly than words, that some immigrant children imposed a considerable strain on western hospitality" (43). The teacher is threatened by these "dangerous, unknowable creatures" (128) who clearly embody her fears of her own repressed sexuality. For the comically named but cruel Miss Boltholmsup, bodies are menacing; Hoda's speech "repelled and yet seemed to draw her like an obscene demand of the flesh" (135).¹⁵² The teacher's positive reputation within the school system lies in her facility in performing

the institutional response to perceived difference: control.¹⁵³ Therefore, when Hoda, in a desperate effort to belong, attempts to disclose her real self by sharing her sacred creation story, her voice is silenced by the teacher's order to sing "The Maple Leaf Forever." Hoda encapsulates the depersonalizing erasure bigotry effects when she puzzles over the notion that "Some people didn't like you. No matter what you did they wouldn't like you. You couldn't be what they would like you to be because they didn't like you to be at all" (46). The teacher's authority forbids Hoda's expression of her meaning and place in the world, effectively enforcing conformity or expulsion. Baffled and betrayed, Hoda senses but cannot fathom what has transpired: "First teacher had not even let her finish and then she had simply reduced everything that she had tried to say to nothing, somehow, without questioning her or even directly criticizing" (142). The educator judges Hoda's reality as worthless, untrue, and replaceable with the desired discourse: "She had just, simply, thrown it all away, dismissed it as though it meant nothing, had even tried to hint that it had never been, or if it had that it had been something unclean and uncivilized and best forgotten by those who wanted to sing 'The Maple Leaf Forever'" (142).

Titchkosky describes a similar situation in her experience with disability: "Within an educational environment, learning-disabled people learn that learning is difficult and sometimes impossible. But it is easy for us (learning-disabled people) to learn that no one wants to learn anything about us. It is easy to learn what does not count as knowledge and what does not even count as learning" (*Disability* 224). Hoda in fiction, like Titchkosky in real life, reflects the dilemma of not conforming to standardized expectations. Silencing Hoda deprived her of "the most basic of human necessities, namely, to have an experience of the world that others confirm" (Titchkosky, *Disability* 224).

Hoda's role as a prostitute encapsulates the social tendency to reify and capitalize on the bodies of citizens with disabilities. Segregated placements for school, recreation, or work for people with disabilities fuel profitable industries that employ a host of "specialists" purportedly serving the needs of people with disabilities. These "specialized" areas often drastically reduce options in disabled people's lives. Hoda claims control and agency over her life, despite her lack of options. However, her "choice" to build a home-based business to support herself and her father is made because she is rejected from other options for conventional employment. Prostitution is

her business response to a viable market, not a sought-after career. Hoda's limited job choice can be compared to the careers of many people with unusual bodies who "chose" to work in the circus because performing their anomaly was their only option for a viable income.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, Hoda's community will only accommodate her body as a commodity. Her uncle Nate's refusal to allow her to work as a cleaning woman at the orphanage suggests that the hypocrisy of the powerful enforces the prostitution (humiliation) of those they purport to assist.

Crackpot illustrates the immense effort required for those categorized as disabled to sustain a semblance of dignity and worth in the face of dehumanizing socio-cultural attitudes. Hoda's locking of eyes with Miss Boltholmsup recalls both the post-colonial notion of "looking white people in the eye" (Razack) and the concept in the disability rights movement of "staring back" at those who stare (Fries). Although in the classroom Hoda's gaze is not deliberately subversive, she does "out stare" the teacher (colonizer) who fears what Hoda portrays: the "ordeal" (137) of Jews in her class, in the school, in the city. For Miss Boltholmsup, Hoda represents the menace of unregulated difference: "and nobody doing anything about it though suddenly a person could find herself surrounded by fat presences with loud voices and demanding eyes" (137). The child Hoda does not yet know that her position of difference entails a menacing power to those who cling to the supremacy of normalcy. In time Hoda learns to maintain some sense of power through asserting her gaze: "She developed . . . a way of out-facing whoever faced her" (298). Hoda redirects the critical gaze back on itself, in this way modelling the project of Disability Studies, which scrutinizes the "pathological impositions and moral investments in disability . . . [of] cultural ideologies of able bodiedness (Mitchell and Snyder, *Body* 21). The audacity and tenacity of Hoda's stance are analogous to the effort required to make visible enculturated bias against unconventional bodies.

Hoda's unconventional size signals a claim to presence. Together with her irrepressibly outgoing character and bellowing voice, it announces that the "rejected bodies" of her parents can and will produce offspring. She is a life not to be ignored but to be reckoned with. Her story announces that no amount of repression or rejection can erase the reality of non-conforming bodies. Hoda's "super abundance of physical presence" (134) compels the fascination/repulsion response a person's visible disability

typically evokes in public. “[S]he was one of those bodies you felt was impinging on all your senses” (134). The disabled body, like the female body (Grosz 14), often implies too much physicality that demands attention and provokes discomfort; hence culture targets anomaly and labels it as Other, removing it from the matrix of “normal” concerns and sequestering it safely into the realm of pathology or the exotic. In response, *Crackpot* reveals the very ordinariness of the “abnormal” and the banality of its suppression.

Wiseman also resists the literary habit, seen in Montgomery’s *Emily* trilogy, of locating “sick” souls in disabled bodies. Hoda’s subjectivity both embraces and defies popular notions of female obesity. Wiseman complicates programmed understanding of socially determined body types by inscribing the young Hoda with the outward markers of a transgressive unruliness— sundry escaping body fluids, lack of cleanliness, smell, flesh bursting from clothing and from furniture—as well as with attractiveness. Furthermore, the inner workings of Hoda, although “weighty,” fail to satisfy any forecasts of binary simplicity. The evidently repulsive figure is a vessel for neither repulsive thoughts nor saintliness.¹⁵⁵ Hoda’s size can be seen as marking the incommensurable and uncontainable complexity of any individual’s existence. Simply, (recalling Wilson’s *Love and Salt Water*) identity is larger than one’s appearance. The negative role her body has played in her life trajectory results from the social response to it, not from her direct experience of herself as large. However, Hoda’s story manifests the interplay of social relationships, subjectivities and environments that continually interact to shape identity, specifically, disabled identity. While her body provokes stigma and derogation, it paradoxically elicits desire: Hoda is never short of work, but she also receives genuine proposals of marriage, even after she has long given up belief in a marriage script for herself. Her initial response to Lazar’s interest is distrust and self-preserving dismissal of the idea of matrimony: “‘I need to get married like I need a hole in the head’ as if to imply, ‘I never wanted to’” (405). The imposition of society’s disapproval is constantly negotiated by Hoda, who mediates her response by her history and her current experience. Hoda’s understanding of herself and the world evolves as she ages, altering as well her history, the meaning of her relationships, and the reality of those around her.

As an adult, Hoda abruptly understands the abuse that she, as a hungry child, suffered from the butcher: “He could have given me the scraps. You don’t do that to children” (278). She realizes that the adults around her failed in the moral imperative to respond to her need with compassion rather than with self-gratifying exploitation. Until that epiphany Hoda accepted her abuse as a necessary trade for food.

Crackpot proposes that a refusal to acknowledge personal responsibility for moral action leads to the injustices of ableist societies and the atrocities of war. Hoda’s contravention of taboos illustrates a Derridian ethical paradigm that necessitates self-reflexive personal involvement. Price and Shildrick describe how Derrida’s ethics avoid fixed codes that may negate the individuals’ contextualized relational existence: “It is in the uncertainty and risk of response to the unknowable other that real responsibility lies” (73). In “one of the most shattering scenes in contemporary fiction” (Laurence 436), responsibility leads to a mother knowingly committing incest with her son. She does this selflessly, to protect his self-esteem, even though, because he is unaware of the transgression, she is betraying him as well. By agreeing to take her son David as a client, Hoda surrenders her cherished dreams of “coming out” as a mother and passing on her legacy of stories. Hoda cannot rely on any preordained rules in this situation, except to do one’s best to avoid hurting another. Hoda accepts Derrida’s “risk” and makes the shattering decision to sacrifice herself for her son. Thus, in *Hoda*, Wiseman explores embodied moral action whereby the most compassionate motive involves the most reprehensible act, vexing the mind/body dichotomy. Hoda’s body cannot separate from the gravity of her decision: flesh, psyche, emotions, soul—must participate in her conscious action: “Always she had wanted to do what was right. At first she had thought that what felt good was what must be right. Well, how was she to know? And how was she to know now that what felt, just awful, what aroused in her a revulsion of loathing at the very thought, was wrong?” Hoda admits that “in all her flesh” she knows to accept her son as a client is “wrong for her” (352). Hoda, then, as his mother, subordinates her well-being to his. David, or Pipick, is lost to Hoda from that moment.¹⁵⁶ He becomes an irretrievable piece broken away from Hoda’s life.

Hoda literally portrays an openness to the Other when she unexpectedly occupies the subject position of Mrs Limprig, the wife of the orphanage’s director. Hoda’s

compassion erodes corporeal boundaries. Mrs Limprig is a stranger to Hoda, although they both share the stigma attached to an unconventional body and a parental love for Pipick. Hoda's "sudden spasms of comprehension ... knowing what it felt like to be in [a total stranger's] body" (274) are the consequence of having learned to hear the stories of others. Again, Wiseman suggests human knowledge and capability beyond the norm. Because Mrs Limprig appears to have a condition such as cerebral palsy and is perceived to be a burden to her husband, her suicide may reinforce the view that one is better off "dead than disabled." However, when the plight of Mrs Limprig is considered in contrast to the central "disabled" figures, for whom suicide can never become a conceivable option because of the accountability they have to each other, Mrs Limprig's misery would appear to stem from a deficiency in meaningful, affirming relationships. As Rahel and Danile show, an irregular body would not in itself compel suicide. Mrs Limprig's despair appears to have been mitigated only by caring for Pipick. She is driven to suicide when she is deprived of her care-giving role. Rather than representing care-giving as a burden, *Crackpot* (like Wilson's, Richler's, and McCulloch's works) suggests that caring for others and being cared for imbues life with purpose even though neither is easy nor straightforward; acknowledging human interdependence is essential to being fully human. Hoda's interconnection with those around her exposes the myth of autonomous personhood, "making visible our fundamental human identities as givers and receivers of care" (W. J. T. Mitchell 397). Once autonomy is challenged, the ephemeral nature of normalcy is exposed.

Wiseman condemns the tyranny of normalcy through Hoda's understanding of the absurdity of grading bodily variation: "So often they were such little things, such minor cracks and chips and variations in the human design on which her clients concentrated as much unhappiness as did the real possessors of the grossest deformities" (409). Hoda marvels at the self-regulatory imperative for corporeal sameness. Bodies vary dramatically, yet the practical reality of one's body is not as significant as the fact that the body does not conform to the imagined norm. Comfortable in her skin, Hoda recognizes the oppressive angst in those who are not: "In the minutest flaw men divined perfection withheld, and saw themselves cast down" (409). Hoda acquires a wisdom through her struggle to maintain herself as she is with self-dignity without crumbling under the

pressure to internalize the public devaluation of her. Hoda, through her stigmatized flesh, subverts literally and figuratively the oppositional space assigned to her in the binary value system where privileged norms are constituted and supported by a requisite negated value. She refuses to reify her clients or herself. Hoda's narrative illuminates the permeability of bodies and the process through which identities are mutually configured in material interactions (Price and Shildrick 63).

Crackpot's subversion of familiar binaries is not a simplistic reversal whereby the same power system is perpetuated by privileging formerly subordinated subjects. Neither is Hoda's story an overcoming of disability. Rather, Hoda's embodied being assumes responsibility within the context of the competing narratives in which she circulates. Hoda reveals a human creative possibility to live life's synchronic ranges of pain and joy through deliberate openness and vulnerability to Others. Her life is sustained, like those of her parents, by continually refusing the containment of self so carefully regulated by mainstream norms. Hoda's embodiment conveys a sense of authenticity in its literal and figurative "leakiness" (Shildrick). Hoda's body does sweat, cry, and otherwise leak. Alternately, her body leaks in a Bakhtinian sense of participating in a shared corporeal humanity; her existence is intimately linked to all humans and to human events, in the country and in the world.¹⁵⁷

In contrast, the implied majority in the novel that exclude and derogate Hoda's family are also victims of normalcy's tyranny. They limit their understanding by closing themselves to difference. External perfection and the economic success it often accompanies are lampooned in the character of the miserly Uncle Nate. A caricature of the successful Jewish entrepreneur, Nate exemplifies the shallowness of drives towards material beauty and wealth. Nate "fixes" his physical flaws, adjusting to what Danile satirically depicts as the superficial emphasis of the Western mainstream: "The new world is almost like Heaven. They want you to be perfect before you get there, at least on the outside. In heaven of course they are more interested in what you are inside" (16). Through the character of Nate, conventional notions of perfection emerge as comically contingent on wealth, power, and delusion. In *Crackpot*, neither inner nor outer perfection can conform to a static formula or description, physical or intellectual; it lies perhaps in the moments of illumination when an individual feels genuinely loved and

loving simply for being her or himself. Nate's attention to surface evolves into a parable where the rich man learns too late that loving relationship is more valuable than wealth. Nate's obsession with money and appearances results in his lonely death in a nursing home; his only visitors, Hoda and Danile, are the two who accept him as he is (373).

Crackpot exposes the myth of diversity as a foundational precept of Canadian nation building. The novel suggests that collective entities do not necessarily easily practice their ideals nor do they easily recognize their failure to do so. Both individually and collectively, the Winnipeg government, the Aboriginal poor, the Marxist comrades, and the ghettoized Jewish community fail to see human beings in the physical shapes they devalue. Hoda's story of grappling with marginalization ends with a reactivation of a mythic ethos that reinforces the notion of constant process, not towards an end, but towards renewed efforts to realize an inclusive society. New knowledge activates a new process of understanding and being, represented by "stirring" the "brimming pot together" (427), not allowing homogenization or stagnation of knowledge. This vision of Canadian community does not involve a melting pot but rather one that is about to erupt like the vessel of Divine Radiance with which the novel begins, leaving fragments of goodness to try to reconnect, always incompletely, always still becoming. Hoda's story of embodied Otherness is a fragment of the continuous story of a nation wholly comprised of Otherness, searching for itself. Hoda's connection to the conflicting ideologies of war and military involvement, her brush with an RCMP officer attacking a defenceless protester, her regular trips to the Public Health Office as well as her involvement in recognizable places and events in Winnipeg culminate in her dream version of the city's motto: "Condoms, Prurience and Incestry" (426) replacing the "Commerce Prudence Industry" that historically marked the entrance of the Winnipeg City Hall. The satirical motto neatly echoes the deconstruction of institutions effected through the perspective of Hoda, central, marginal, disabled, and betrayed by these civil virtues.

Institutional bias against disability is inflected by other socio-cultural categorizations. Hoda's, Danile's, and Rahel's gender, age, ethnicity, and class inform the ways their disability is constructed and received. Although Danile's family was "respectable," he is perceived as "less than a man" (23) because of his blindness. In Russia, he is forced away from his dying mother by fellow villagers who use him and

Rahel in a public degrading ritual enacted in a desperate attempt to ward off the plague and the threat of a pogrom. Danile and Rahel are forced to serve as the most hopeless members of the community who, according to this rite, must be married in a cemetery, bringing life in a place of death. This tradition is itself a communal “drama” that uses people identified as disabled in a ritualized role. Although this ritual use reifies and degrades people with disabilities, it is important to note that the community also has a complementary role to fulfil. In a communal consciousness, individuals participate in communal responsibility that may require personal sacrifice for the collective good which ultimately benefits each member of the group as well. As Danile emphasizes, this ritual (albeit horrific) brought him together with Rahel. The story takes on a meaning of beauty: “God blinded me for reasons of his own, and the loss is nothing to the gain. For if I had not been blind and your mother had not been a little crooked many wonderful things would not have happened” (14). Danile’s narrative inherently provides a satirical representation of the dependence of the concept of normal or average on a bell curve. Both he and Rahel were from “respectable” families and therefore not immediately considered on the fringes of society; however, because, as Danile tells it, “There was a shortage of idiots in our community that year” (24), Rahel and Danile’s “differences” become abject deformities. In such a system of evaluation of worth, anyone is in danger of being disqualified from the “normal” centre. As Davis argues in “Constructing Normalcy,” the nineteenth-century evolution of statistical science and national interests fit well with eugenic goals of standardizing populations into a desired norm and eliminating deviations. However, Davis points out that the project of “norming the non-normal” is problematic (36). If normal is that which is not “different,” a difficulty arises when difference is eliminated; a curve will always have end points, no matter how much they are trimmed. If the centre of the curve is the desired location where difference cannot reside, then the privileged centre imagines itself as the “same.” This sameness depends on its contrast to a peripheral Otherness that allows the variety of types of bodies and behaviours (on the inside) to merge. We are not them. Danile is well aware of the cultural assignations bestowed on his and Rahel’s corporeal particularities, yet he nevertheless adheres to the reality of his subjective experience: he has been united with a woman whom he deeply loves by fulfilling his responsibility to his fellow villagers.

However, it is the community that fails in its commitment to the tradition. Instead of honouring the couple's sacrificial participation by providing for their livelihood, as the tradition obliges, the community denies communal interdependence and betrays the shared story. By denying the place and value of people with disabilities within their society, the village establishment exposes its own hypocrisy and self-delusional superiority. Danile, nevertheless, not only remembers his and Rahel's stellar performance that rescued their community but also celebrates the bodily attributes that enabled their heroic service.

Wiseman's portrait of the Jewish community's construction and stigmatization of disability provides a microcosm of the process of objectification of non-conforming bodies that she draws in the larger Canadian milieu, thus mitigating a propensity to attribute bigotry to collectives while absolving individual culpability.¹⁵⁸ The establishment of the couple's unjust treatment and alienation in a territory foreign to North America provide an initial comfortable distance from which to judge their plight as rendered by backward barbaric practice. By re-situating the disabled figures and their unjust treatment into a recognizable Canadian scene, while maintaining a pervasive comical undertone throughout the narrative, Wiseman intensifies the sobering exposure of familiar social attitudes toward disability. Furthermore, Danile's subjective perspective informing his family's ethos, when juxtaposed to societal attitudes, illuminates inherently prejudicial relationships to perceived differences of class, ethnicity, ability, and race in Canadian society.

Danile exemplifies the value of "being" in relationship as opposed to the "doing" that is so privileged in industrialized societies. He is so good natured that on the surface his character seems to correspond to the literary tropes of disabled saintliness that objectify disability as much as metaphorizations that demonize the disabled figure. Wiseman, however, complicates this assumption by painting Danile with heavy strokes of ambiguity, while highlighting the social rendering of him as deficient. In Danile's community, many believe his goodness is "unnatural," stemming from "feeble-minded[ness]" that renders him "incapable of truly understanding the gravity of his own plight" (20). Danile's contentment does not conform to society's normalized association of impairment with suffering. Rather than listening to his experience as a person who is

blind, those around him further delegitimize his voice by presuming he is incapable of rational thought. This reaction to Danile exhibits a common prejudicial phenomenon of disability “spread” whereby non-disabled people presume one impaired function implies all functions are damaged. For example, people often speak very loudly and slowly to individuals using wheelchairs. The assumption is that if people are unable to walk, they are unable to hear or understand. Because Danile is blind, he too is considered to be cognitively impaired. Rahel is baffled by Danile’s lack of bitterness and by the recognition “that her husband was not, as she had often imagined, a stranger to humiliation. She wondered greatly at the species of pride, or the species of ignorance, that had endured without naming, had submitted without surrendering, to the kind of indignity which had embittered so much of her own life” (61). Danile is all too well aware of injustice, yet he unwaveringly chooses to find the light in the darkest situations; while exercising an extraordinary ability to recognize redemption, he also struggles to make sense of evil. He confers this unresolved and ongoing epic struggle onto Hoda.

Danile’s fellow villagers resent and devalue him for being economically dependent. Because he does not generate income, as a ward of the town, Danile forfeits a right to a voice, to human dignity. In keeping with the popular eugenic disposition of the inter-war period, the community disparages Danile and Rahel for conceiving a child, for even conceiving of the notion of procreating. Hoda’s subsequent survival propels Rahel’s wealthy uncle to send them to the “new world,” “rid[ding] himself of a chronic burden” (11). Danile’s uncle, the Canadian counterpart to the old country’s stock representation of coarse greed, bemoans the arrival of “skeletons in the family closet,” “cripples,” and “duds” (11). These images are not unfamiliar to the reader enculturated with a respect for independence, economic self-sufficiency or wealth, especially for the father of a family. Wiseman, however, undermines these values through the representation of the interdependence of the three family members.

Ironically, while Danile is considered to be a burden on his wife because he is blind and unemployed, he is in fact “supporting” his family. Danile provides his family with stability through his perspective on reality. His presence sustains a depth of love and contentment that generates the small family’s strength to endure poverty and injustice. The practical and resourceful Rahel intuitively discerns Danile’s essential part in their survival, yet

there is no language, no discourse, to express this felt reality: Watching Danile and little Hoda, Rahel is “strangely touched. Her impulse, always, was to protect these two, but at times she had the not entirely comfortable feeling that they could, in some ways, take care of themselves far better than she knew” (33). Hoda and Danile direct the power of narrative in a way that Rahel cannot understand.

Despite the power of stories to create realities, the disabled character Danile suggests that an embodied human being participates in a concrete “aliveness” that not only needs social affirmation but deserves it simply and uncontestedly for sharing the communal air. His human dignity and integrity are solidly grounded in a knowledge of belonging, even though he is marginalized by those with whom he identifies. While he is being dragged to the place of his forced marriage, Danile experiences a fleeting but epiphanic moment of knowing, of meaning, that surpasses the quotidian social habits of inclusion and exclusion: “I couldn’t grasp the wholeness of it for long, but for one moment I knew, I acquiesced, and I was known” (27). This moment of cosmic acknowledgement secures Danile so that consequently he is not ever “truly afraid” (27), not at least with the existential fear of meaninglessness. He does not depend on social valuations to know that he too has a place in the world (a right to life). Underneath the surface of Danile’s economic dependence is a character who exerts elemental agency and nourishes his family with what is, at least in the long term, as essential to life as food.

Danile’s story of their family is their lifeblood, yet it is distorted and rejected by those around them. Nevertheless, Danile clings to it, claims it, endlessly repeats it even when no one will listen, thereby clinging stubbornly to his integrity and hence his generosity towards others. Similarly, his whispered repetitions resist the relentless imposition of devaluing stories by those who refuse to acknowledge Danile’s family’s reality. Danile’s repetition of the narrative to assert its reality parallels the technique of any cultural discourses that are reiterated to the extent that they seem natural. Therefore disability may seem like an extraordinary individual tragedy simply because it has been represented as such for generations. As seen in Danile, countering this medicalized meta-narrative with one’s own affirming story requires concerted effort and determination. Danile knows what people think of him: “Funny how people thought that blindness took away more than just the sight of your eyes” (125).

Wiseman conveys the prodigious power of claiming one's personal story most directly when, at separate times in their lives, Danile's and Hoda's grief brings them to the brink of dissolution. After Rahel's death, the desolation of meaninglessness threatens to destroy Danile: "He could feel the death of all meaning . . . in that long scream of terror and pain and indifference into which wife, mother, and now self as well seemed about to dissolve" (104). Danile rises above this abyss of despair by "urgently" "pouring out" to Hoda the stories shared with Rahel. The stories solidify the worth of Rahel's life and the legacy of wisdom she conferred on her beloved husband and daughter. Danile draws strength from Rahel's memory to "move toward the time when he and Hoda would be able to reconstruct from the shambles of that visit [Nate's plan to separately institutionalize them] the great myth of their heroic resistance to Uncle" (105). Danile claims the right to embrace his own version of identity, not the demeaning view of society.

Ultimately, although Danile is wise and able to erode boundaries among culture, language, religion, and gender, in the Christian ladies' blind club he is regarded as a crackpot (88). Danile's basket-weaving metaphorically intensifies his critical but unappreciated role in the human community. Echoing the cosmic significance established in the epigraph, Danile imagines his baskets as "bottomless" (56). As a metonym for Danile's stories they are able to accommodate the extremes of life's joys and pains. Nevertheless, although the baskets (stories) are strong, they are rejected by the community at large. Hoda's lining their dwelling with his work further emphasizes that Danile's stories supply a nest of warmth, security, and beauty. Danile prefers to give away his work (story) as gifts. He is an artist, not a capitalist.

The image of Hoda's home as a warm woven nest belies the stigma of disability as a memento mori. Hoda's "disabled" family members are the locus of creativity and joy. Unlike the rich Uncle Nate who is unable to decipher "what was central to his existence" (265), Danile's family members never lose sight of serving each other as central to their being. Hoda's attraction to funerals as she ages counters the idea that her family's physical anomalies symbolize death. By frequenting funerals, Hoda mourns the dissolution of her dreams and revels in being alive. Her discovery of the "feeling of her own aliveness" (397) repeats the task her parents were forced to fulfil in the ritual they

enacted before Hoda's birth, bringing life to a place of death. Hoda's choice to be connected to the dead in order to feel her life more acutely reverses the threat of mortality projected onto disability in North American culture.

Danile's characterization illustrates how social meanings imposed on unconventional bodies may have little, if any, connection with individual biological realities. His community presumes that he is "blind" to events around him. He admits, on the contrary, that "sometimes I have thought that the cruellest thing about being blind is that you cannot close your eyes to what you see" (416). Because Danile is blind, he is considered to be a burden, despite his ability to travel around town independently, his dislike of being led, his skilled weaving, and his insight. Danile's vibrant description of the plague suggests his lack of eyesight does not impede knowing the events around him. His body exhibits "arrangements of sensitivities" (Swan, "Disabilities" 292) that are underappreciated because of culture's privileging of the visual. Blindness can be understood as a talent or gift that discloses realities hidden "by the dominance of the visual" (292). Danile's adherence to his own convictions suggests that he, like Hoda, is staring back, "his eyes both vulnerable and impermeable" (413), at the forces that render him incapable of seeing. Rahel sees that Danile's disability is ultimately his fear rather than his blindness (54). By redirecting the scrutiny from marginalized bodies to those that conform to dominant norms, Wiseman is, in a way, "staring back" at conventional deployments of disability in literature.

The conventional mileage extracted from disability representations in literature is interrupted by Wiseman's representation of all individuals as variously "cracked" and "whole." This is not to argue that everyone is disabled, thus erasing the particular subjectivity of the experience of disability; rather, in *Crackpot*, Wiseman presents disability as an ordinary event in the human condition that generates a necessary, critical worldview. Hence, the mainstream harms itself by marginalizing this facet of human experience while it oppresses those who do not conform to mainstream prescriptions.

Consequently, Hoda struggles poignantly throughout the narrative to discover her own meaning of self and world. Ultimately, by claiming her body as it is, Hoda represents an exploration of humanness grounded in corporeality—not as deterministic essentialism but as a continual process of self-reflexivity that searches for authenticity

through relationship. Knowledge takes shape from listening to and hearing others' self-generated narratives while recounting one's own. This process, ostensibly self-evident, is at the same time complex because it entails a responsibility (agency) for moral decision-making that results in every individual participating in the creation of meaning in societies. Meanings arising through active relationships with embodied Others necessarily cannot remain static because of the infinite variety of perspectives from an embodied stance. Rather than producing chaos, this valued acceptance of different perceptions engenders a recognition of human diversity itself as a perfection towards which to strive. The fragment of humanity that any individual represents is a necessary condition of a wholeness that has, as the epigraph suggests, always more than it can contain and therefore must, paradoxically, continually remake itself in order to maintain integrity.

In Hoda, Wiseman illustrates the social and cultural perversions that relegate those deemed to be different, primarily because of social norms, to spaces of pity or derision. Hoda emerges, curiously, despite her strife, as an enviable personage: secure in herself, generous, and successful at what she does. Hoda can be seen as a representative citizen, assuming responsibility for her actions and accepting others. The story of *Crackpot* proffers a vision of Canada engaging in a continuous identity-forming process that accommodates ever-new knowledge from voices who participate, not because they conform to requisite norms, but because they constitute yet another valuable "piece" of humankind. Hoda ultimately understands that perfection, as flawlessness, is a chimera. Wholeness is approached within interminable fragmentation through recognizing human interdependence and the value of the narratives of particular embodiment.

¹⁴⁰ For a study of the postmodern elements of *Crackpot* see Michael Greenstein.

¹⁴¹ Excellent work has been done demonstrating the influence of the Kabbalistic mystical tradition in *Crackpot*. For example, Kenneth Sherman, Francis Zichy, and Jon Kertzer each describe and deploy the Lurianic creation myth as the vehicle for navigating the intricate maze of meanings in the narrative.

¹⁴² *He stored the Divine Light in a Vessel, but the Vessel, unable to contain the Holy Radiance, burst, and its shards, permeated with sparks of the Divine, scattered through the Universe.*

¹⁴³ Obesity is most frequently associated with disability in a medicalized sense. If an individual's size impedes function, their obesity is considered a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the United States. However, social attitudes towards body weight marginalize people who are obese in ways similar to people with disabilities. See "Is Obesity a Disability?"

http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9043-1/

Also see Gilman's *Fat Boys* for a cultural history of the meaning of male obesity.

¹⁴⁴ As Elizabeth Grosz observes: "Indeed, there is no body as such: there are only *bodies*" (19).

¹⁴⁵ Lennard Davis argues that "normals" usually presume to know the issue of disability by observing the "obvious" and adding "a liberal dose of sympathy and pity." "No one would dare to make such a leap into Heideggerian philosophy for example." He

recognizes this imagined understanding as another form of discrimination against people with disabilities (*Disability Studies* 2).

¹⁴⁶ In the sense that Robert Kroetsch aphoristically asserts that “fiction makes us real” (63), encountering historical events through the fictional Hoda’s consciousness not only lends an experiential familiarity to the historical event but at the same time increases Hoda’s (and thus her family’s) credibility. Hence, the unconventional representation of Hoda’s family might be more effectively incorporated into the national psyche because of the historical links.

¹⁴⁷ *Crackpot* narratively demonstrates the thesis of Shildrick and Price in “Breaking the Boundaries of the Broken Body”: “Our topic is disability; and we want simultaneously to hold in mind the experience of disability as an experience of a supposedly ‘broken’ body, and disability as precisely one of those transgressive categories that demands that we rethink not simply the boundaries of the body, but equally those between sameness and difference, and indeed self and other” (93).

“Crackpot” and “broken body” are synonymous with disability and the socially imposed constructions of its meaning.

¹⁴⁸ Foucault contends that “there is no power without potential refusal or revolt” (*History* 84).

¹⁴⁹ The increasing exploration of embodiment by Disability Studies scholars is restructuring ideas of physical capacity. For example see the work of Michalko, Titchkosky, and Wendell.

¹⁵⁰ The British practice of dichotomizing impairments and the disabling practices of society (impairment/disability) risks essentializing a bodily trait as fixed and uninterpreted.

¹⁵¹ Titchkosky argues for the necessity of articulated disability experience for social well-being: “Between our knowledge of *different types* of knowing arises the flash of self-understanding as it is constituted between one’s self and others” (*Disability* 225).

¹⁵² Thanks to Dr. Gingell for pointing out that the name “Boltholmsup” gives a Scandinavian form to the English phrase “bottoms up,” which in context replaces a phrase related to drinking with one that signifies *derrieres* in the air.

¹⁵³ Nelson describes contemporary classrooms as “organized more around control than conversation, more around the authority of teachers than autonomy of students and more around competition than collaboration” (394).

¹⁵⁴ Fictional explorations of the options available to people labelled *freaks* because of their unconventional bodies include Swann’s *The Biggest Modern Woman in the World*, and Dunn’s *Geek Love*. Also see note 33.

¹⁵⁵ Hoda might be characterized as “saintly” in her ability to retain a generous attitude towards others who have wronged her. However, her goodness can be interpreted as exemplary rather than superhuman in that it is portrayed in a complicated context of morality.

¹⁵⁶ David is nicknamed Pipick for his protruding navel that resulted from Hoda’s inexpert tying of the umbilical cord. He too anguishes over his “abnormality” which marks him, for the reader, as a member of the stigmatized family. The extra flesh from his mother,

however, becomes a mark of the unknowable (in one's self), for both he and Hoda are forever separated from each other's life narratives.

¹⁵⁷ In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin discusses how the bawdy openness of bodies in Rabelais's world signify a perception of indiscrete boundaries between beings—a shared humanity.

¹⁵⁸ See Razack for an analysis of ways individuals participate in oppressive structures by not recognizing the benefits they enjoy from ideologies they do not theoretically support.

Conclusion

Rehabilitated Reading: Recognizing Resistance

Nevertheless, so long as the Other remains excluded from the [national] contract, the realization of a “Canadian identity” will always be thwarted. (Blodgett)

In a discussion about the purpose of revisiting Canadians’ narrative inheritance, Margaret Atwood argues that history is integral to our consciousness of the present: “The past belongs to those who claim it, and are willing to explore it, and to infuse it with meaning for those alive today. The past belongs to us, because we are the ones who need it” (*In Search* 39). In this light, I have begun to reread our literary inheritance with a critical eye to search for the meanings that disability images impart to current understandings of who we are as Canadians.

At the beginning of this dissertation project I wondered if the representations of disability in Canadian literature could provide some insight into the national reactions to the murder of Tracy Latimer by her father, Robert. Our highest court—as emblematic of Canada as the beaver—upheld Latimer’s conviction of second degree murder when it was appealed, while popular opinion, supported by the media, continue to portray Robert Latimer as a folk-hero, wronged for compassionately ending his child’s suffering. The “Canadian” response to the Latimer case indicates a contradictory attitude towards disability that I find troubling. The incongruity of the positions articulated by the official voices of justice and by the public is corroborated by an analysis of Canadian attitudes towards disability, published in 2006. Michael Prince encapsulates his findings in the title of his paper: “Pride and Prejudice: the Ambivalence of Canadian Attitudes toward Disability and Inclusion.” Prince’s analysis confirms the link between public attitudes and the systemic treatment of people with disabilities (20). He asserts that society as a whole suffers from the suppression of accurate knowledge surrounding both disability and disability experience. Prince concludes that: “[a]s a social issue and policy area, the

prevailing distribution of sentiment in Canada of disability is one of ambivalence, with an odd mixture of positive and negative attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, experiences and behaviours” (25).

I suggest that our canonical literature has participated in this national ambivalence, particularly because its promulgation of attitudes to the difference represented as disability has been largely uninterrogated, resulting in readings that perpetuate enculturated views of anomaly, even if, perhaps, the narrative contains alternative possibilities.

The absence of analysis of disability images in Canadian literature parallels the absence of a written history of the treatment of people with disabilities since Canada’s inception as a colony. Both gaps are being addressed by Disability Studies scholarship. However, while the replication of past abuses can be, to some extent, curtailed in the present through legislation and human rights charters, it is important to recognise that naturalized biases of the past coexist with more enlightened laws and policies today. Thus, bringing a Disability Studies modality to critical analysis in literature and in all liberal arts fields actively combats social oppression by defamiliarizing habitualized and, therefore, unacknowledged bias. My examination of canonical Canadian novels using the lens of Disability Studies theory is by no means exhaustive. My intention is to demonstrate arable ground, as it were, and to model a new and socially productive method for reading literature. Although my project is limited to fiction, similar analyses of disability imagery are needed in works of Canadian poetry, drama, and memoir.¹⁵⁹ As with feminist readings of gendered characters in historical literature, once conventional readings are destabilized, the breadth of possible interpretations expands exponentially.

The marginalization experienced by disabled people in society, which is unwittingly reinforced by a conventional critical reception of portrayals of disability, reflects Iris Marion Young’s description of social oppression. Young observes that people are not only oppressed through despotic coercion; oppression results insidiously from prejudice exercised in unconscious quotidian practice. The source of systemic injustice encountered by some groups is

embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, . . . [O]ppression refers to the vast and deep injustices that some groups suffer as a

consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms—in short the normal processes of everyday life. (41)

Therefore, when approaching literature with the knowledge that images of disability take part in the social devaluation of people perceived to be different by the mainstream, we as readers engage in a process that contributes to the dismantling of prejudice in a general sense because we must confront a construction of bias that suffuses our socio-cultural contexts and consequently demands profound self-reflexivity. The force of ableism, as with racism, sexism, and other forms of institutionalized bigotry, is weakened when we begin to recognise its ideological sway on our own perception of reality, instead of merely identifying its influence beyond us in “other” social contexts. When images of anomaly are no longer expected to be received by readers as the negative space delineating a requisite norm, entrenched and corrosive dichotomies of the ab/normal begin to erode. Destabilizing the powerful binary of ability and disability unleashes potential for producing a cultural shift towards acknowledging human difference as diversity, valued for motivating the necessary and ongoing processes of peaceful, equitable, interdependent coexistence. In this way, Disability Studies readings of texts can contribute to progressive social change.

Anita Silvers suggests that recognizing the process of entrapping human possibilities into a reductive dualism would also liberate human creativity. She argues that normalcy and disability are not mutually exclusive: “The privilege of being normal is that one has a claim on having one’s commonness respected. The equivalent, and compatible, privilege of being disabled is acknowledgement of a claim to having one’s difference respected” (238). This ethos of respect, according to Silvers, would allow Disability Studies to revitalize meanings of disability that would reconstruct ideologies of beauty and worth. Silvers’s notion correlates with “transgressive reappropriations” (Mitchell and Snyder) that seek to re-conceive disability as a powerful source of resistance to systems of control. Rereading the meanings of disability in history (as feminism has with femininity) could catalyze

unimagined changes in cultural perceptions of normalcy. However, because the very term *disability* is still weighted with multiple layers of narratives and connotations from past generations and from various cultures, a collective “unlearning” of naturalized bias demands determination and vigilance. The transformation of the significance of disability, in its symbiotic tie with normalcy, still necessitates an active deconstruction of socio-cultural practices that reduce the human worth of people with disabilities.

For culturally effective reappropriations of the meaning of disability to occur, stereotypes still need to be named and deactivated; unrealistic portrayals need to be identified; realistic images need confirmation; and historical functions of disability need contextualizing and analysing. With the conscientization of disability as a fraught politicized identity and untapped human experience that would result, we cannot tell how disability perspectives might be altering collective human understanding. While this project brings into focus a literary legacy that contributes to a Canadian attitude towards difference—difference as Otherness—this legacy also informs the contemporary climate surrounding anomaly that now openly strives to conceive of difference not as aberrancy but as an inherently Canadian pluralism and diversity.

How might the images of difference, that I have shown to be haunting the margins of our national fictional canon, have affected our collective imagination?

The texts for this project were chosen for their national profiles, rather than for their portrayals of anomaly. Nevertheless, in these works, the disabled figure is often narratively erased or sketched simply to be forgotten, dismissed from consciousness—allaying the requisite pity and fear conventionally sought by disability tropes—through the very insignificance of the image in the novel. The authors of the critical studies addressed in this work have generally responded according to convention, reading disabled characters as stereotypes. Any of the works of fiction or drama from the field examination reading list at the University of Saskatchewan at the time I wrote the examinations would have provided material for a standard reception of disability: Philip F. Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh*, Howard O’Hagan’s *Tay John*, Ernest Buckler’s *The Mountain and the Valley*, Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*, to name only a few. Therefore, we can now ask whether the conventional

interpretations of these texts have collectively contributed to a cultural desensitization towards the removal of people with disabilities from the mainstream.

If we are accustomed to recognizing disability as suffering or negativity that is narratively resolved by its disappearance or irrelevance by the end of the tale, then will Tracy Latimer's removal from her father's narrative of suffering seem disturbing? His actions, which erase her suffering, adhere to the pattern readers have been programmed to expect when in narrative encounters with disability. Prince's analysis of the Statistics Canada survey on attitudes to disability strengthens this hypothesis. He finds that Canadians without disabilities have little real knowledge of disability issues and experience (18). However, popular knowledge of disability, shaped by stereotyped images in literature and media, in turn influences the inclusion of people with disabilities in society: "What people believe about individuals with disabilities underlies the treatment of those individuals in all aspects of their lives. The cost of negative beliefs or inaccurate information is high, both for people with disabilities and for society as a whole" (20). Given the absence of disability from what is considered ordinary experience, non-disabled Canadians have not been taught to challenge the viability of the distorted portrayals they persistently encounter, or rather, Canadians have been taught *not* to question the naturalized authority of normalcy.

But the Supreme Court of Canada, emerging from the same Canadian community that would erase the dis-ease provoked by difference, has upheld Tracy's right to life and her father's act as criminal. The voice of the law and the dominant voices of the public appear to be diametrically opposed, illustrating what Prince observes as the pride and prejudice of popular attitudes towards disability: respondents to the survey were proud to live in a country where they presumed the government supported people with disabilities. At the same time they were uncomfortable with the notion of personally relating to someone with a disability (10). Prince observes that the Canadians surveyed conveyed a medicalized view of disability that does not concur with the vision of the disability rights movement. He concludes that a greater awareness of disability issues is an imperative step towards practising the ideology of Canadian equality of rights that we, as Canadians, value. Reading Canadian literature from a Disability Studies perspective would work

toward creating the necessary awareness for the promotion of more equitable civil rights in Canada.

The synchronic “pride and prejudice” identified by Prince generates a tension that participates in the distinctly Canadian questioning of identity that typifies Canadians. As Linda Hutcheon argues, the foundational diversity that engendered the nation positions Canada as constitutionally postmodern. Consequently, Canadians engage in an ongoing process of questioning and adjusting national precepts—legitimizing voices from the margins and, ideally, decentring power establishments. This deconstructive action of diversity is what Derrida would call democracy (“Psyche” 60). The mainstream resistance to disability realities, as illustrated in the Latimer case, demonstrates the destabilizing action of difference in society. The popular support of Latimer responds to the fear of disability exemplified in the eugenic phase of Canadian history, while the Supreme Court responds to the impulse desiring equal rights for people of any “differences.” In order for Canada to maintain its dynamism and integrity as a democracy in process, willing to try to adjust continually to a shifting recognition of the components that comprise its identity, then Canada must confront and respect rather than assimilate and erase disability.¹⁶⁰ The indeterminate nature of disability, the fluidity of the diversity it signifies, renders its ongoing challenge critical to a Canadian ethos.

If, as Noah Richler observes, novels are “a mirror to ourselves and to our politics” (xiv), then the very ubiquity of representations of disability in Canadian novels implies that disability is a human constant, appearing in our fictional narratives because disability is intrinsic to human experience. Despite the conventional critical readings of these images, a Disability Studies reading of the novels in this study suggests broader possibilities. Disability also functions to crystallize a theme of humanity’s reliance on relationship that emerges in Canadian literature. Canadian authors have also portrayed disability to question and even counter normalizing structures.

Thomas McCulloch’s Mephibosheth Stepsure provides a counter-discourse to the commercialized ethos of his day. At the start of the nineteenth century, when people could be incarcerated in workhouses for physical, economic, or social transgressions of any variety, McCulloch’s illustration of a social model of disability warrants attention. Although Stepsure is discriminated against by those around him, he is not a weak victim;

he is an example of how social liminality might provide necessary human insight into the mainstream. Aside from promoting diligence in work, McCulloch's tale advocates for the compassionate recognition of self and others. Stepsure's wisdom and wealth arise from his experience of disability, which has occasioned his most valuable human relationships. Notably, Stepsure's disability is portrayed with a realism seldom found in later texts.

While Gwen, in Ralph Connor's *Sky Pilot*, provides readers with the stereotype of brave suffering that endures in telethons to this day, her pairing with the Pilot signifies more than a foil to intensify his heroism. Her role also foregrounds the imperative of relationship in the fulfilment of one's humanity. The characters who care to relate to Gwen discover more about themselves and, consequently, respond more openly to community. Connor's *Foreigner*, on the other hand, intertwines disability with ethnicized difference to form images of subhumanity that the novel suggests must be assimilated or controlled.

Lucy Maude Montgomery's *Emily* trilogy echoes Connor's later use of disability to embody a sinister Other that threatens the status quo; but, whereas Connor paints the spectre of developmental "deviance" as a danger imposed by immigration, a danger demanding concerted efforts of assimilation and rehabilitation, Montgomery efficiently expedites the threat to normalcy within her narrative. She marks dangerous characters with physical anomalies and then, literally, writes them off.

On the other hand, Montgomery deploys the stigma of intellectual disability to emphasize the injustice of artistic repression in Canada. Although the views of the conservative community in Montgomery's Canada to a large extent "disable" Cousin Jimmy, his characterization reasserts a stereotype of "idiocy" as childlike and mysterious. Montgomery demonstrates the social construction of the artist as idiot without perceiving the latter as a contestable identity.

In *Such Is My Beloved*, Morley Callaghan treats the notion of the social construction of disability as social menace with sharp realism, thus defying the eugenic discourse of his day. The novel's mainstream establishment betrays its responsibility to human relationship, dehumanizing those who wield the privilege of normalcy, even as this power system penalizes those it judges to be deviant. In

Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*, the narrative reverberates with betrayal of relationships: personal, communal, and environmental. Here, too, while the physically disabled figure plays out the role of a reified trope of negativity, an alternative view reveals the impaired figure as a locus of relationship: the social and environmental relationships fail "Peter who limps," but his family unit signifies what the narrator chooses to shun, further illuminating her own failure at human connection. Ethel Wilson's *Love and Salt Water*, Mordechai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, and Adele Wiseman's *Crackpot* continue to probe the essential reality of human interconnectedness.

Wilson's novel illustrates Jean Vanier's assertion that "[human transformation] has to do with truly meeting another ... The fundamental quality of human beings is to be in relationship ... Here [in relationship], individuals begin to discover what compassion really is and can come to rejoice in people and their differences" (3). Wilson deploys disability throughout the narrative as a reminder of human complexity and depth. In *Love and Salt Water*, the standard marriage plot is itself radically transformed when the bride with facial scars, whom others judge as ugly, is poised to begin an exciting future. Wilson's heroine, Ellen Cuppy, provides a counter narrative to Montgomery's character of Mrs Kent, who is emotionally warped by her facial disfigurement and whose death liberates future promise for Emily.

A Disability Studies deconstruction of disability images is precarious. The reiteration of portrayals of disability risks reinforcing the sedimented prejudice the idea of disability tends automatically to evoke. The danger of this vicious cycle is acute in discussions of Richler's *Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. The Boy Wonder's warped physicality responds easily to stock metaphors of human monstrosity. Virgil's epilepsy similarly perpetuates the demeaning stereotype of weakness, intellectual impairment, and victimization plaguing real people with epilepsy. For this reason, readers must first acknowledge and problematize the stereotype and then seek to find alternative possibilities for interpretations. Then, rejecting the conventional derogating significations, readers may recognize the depiction of Virgil as presenting a valuable and viable trajectory for Duddy's nascent ethical impulses. In *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, a betrayal and rejection of

responsibility to Other, rather than the disability that marks dependence, is the source of human suffering. Dependency in the characters accentuates the theme of human interdependence that runs through the narrative.

The marked and marginalized figures of Wiseman's *Crackpot*, the last novel examined in this study, defy their abject roles through the power generated by their relationships to each other and through the power generated by claiming their own creational narrative. *Crackpot* pronounces, for Canada, both the right of being within one's difference and the profound power of affirmation that issues from relationship. *Crackpot* illustrates the discursive construction of reality through the reiteration of story. The story of the marginalized family is in ceaseless combat with the dissonant force of contradictory narratives that dominate and threaten to silence the family voice. *Crackpot*'s discourse of resistance to the norms of wealth and power marks a shift in Canadian fictional portrayals of difference. The last two decades of the twentieth century saw a burgeoning of Canadian fiction that confronts issues of difference with increasing directness and pleasure.¹⁶¹

One example of this trend is Timothy Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, published in 1984. In this parodic creation narrative, Findley mobilizes a war between the tyranny of normalcy and the rejected forces of difference. Although the disabled Lottie is murdered, her death spells out the barbarism of society's conventional erasure of disability. Findley overtly depicts the social rejection of difference as a cruel, self-gratifying abuse of established power. The "differences" of gender, sexuality, ability, strength, and intellect are not metaphorized as disability; rather, they are embodied as allies against the victimizing effects of despotic repression that must openly destroy the difference that hinders its self-serving goals. Findley's narrative symbolizes a textual outing of difference as an overt, legitimate threat to the normal—that is, an indictment of the abuse wielded by the Euro-centric, non-disabled, heterosexual male privilege that constitutes itself as normal by suppressing other subjectivities.

A number of novels published in the 1990s continue to demonstrate an evolution in attitudes towards difference. Barbara Gowdy's *Mister Sandman* and Anne-Marie Macdonald's *Fall on Your Knees* provide examples of a playful subversion of disability stereotypes, deliberately outlining these familiar discriminatory presumptions only to

dismantle them. In *Mister Sandman*, Joan, a figure suggesting something akin to autism, becomes the individual whose unique being, once embraced, enables others. The members of one family manifest an array of stigmatized “differences,” which are ultimately reconceived as desirable and deeply fulfilling. *Fall on Your Knees* also defies normalcy paradigms by drawing disabled characters as active agents. Stereotypes explode when the disabled Lily unequivocally rejects the notion of “cure,” as when the infantilized, brain-injured Hector manages to save his wife from tragedy and fathers their child. This new narrative trend deploys disability stereotypes in order to deconstruct them, rather than exploiting stereotypes to reaffirm a constructed norm. At the same time, novels such as Guy Vanderhaeghe’s *The Englishman’s Boy* reproduce and recirculate tropes of disability as wounded heroism and foils for the protagonist’s goodness. Nevertheless, the voices emanating from a disability rights movement and a Disability Studies theoretical stance resonate in current Canadian fiction, illustrating the vibrant changes occurring in our culture if we, as readers, are poised to listen. Academic interpretations of disability that transgress enculturated receptions of human anomaly constitute an essential element in the movement towards justice for people with disabilities and, indeed, for any people regarded as too different from current norms.

The coexistence of past and present ideologies of disability beg mention of Margaret Atwood’s popular overview of Canadian literature, *Survival*. Published in 1972, it also stands at the brink of the period that grapples more openly with the complexities of difference as a Canadian reality.

Atwood stipulates that, in her view, Canadian texts are “written by Canada.” Hence, the patterns she finds in these texts outline the nation and reflect “a national habit of mind” (12-13); that is, our literature reveals us to ourselves. Atwood diagnoses the Canadian mind with a psychosis of victimhood. Her book, in effect, describes the victim pathology and offers suggestions for therapy. *Survival* is salient to the conclusion of my study because it illuminates the complete lack of consciousness with which negative disability metaphors have been (and still are) exploited by authors for whom discourse and language are strategic. Atwood uses disability as the vehicle to describe the failed artist in Canadian society. Pointing to examples such as Ross’s Phillip Bentley, as “crippling himself artistically” (34), she affirms that the Canadian artist is likewise

“crippled,” “maimed,” “mutilated,” “paralyzed,” by an unappreciative audience. Canadian artists’ experience is “like talking to themselves in a room full of deaf people” (192). Since the artist is a mirror for readers, Atwood suggests that Canadian culture and society are equally crippled by Canadians’ vision of themselves as victims, and she extends the analogy further by comparing the paralyzed artists to corpses. Having evoked disability to denote failure and death, Atwood ultimately blames the artists for their failure in the way a medicalized view of disability locates failure in the individual. She points to artists who have successfully overcome what she has portrayed as their disability, as inspirations for the rest.

Atwood is merely reflecting the norms of the time in which she was writing. She also uses male pronouns as universal. What is of note is that while non-inclusive language is no longer widely acceptable in professional spheres, the pernicious metaphorization of disability has continued, especially in criticism that neglects a Disability Studies view. While the derogation of “politically correct” language in popular media attests to the fact that impositions of language cannot force improvements in attitudes towards difference, language is not neutral, and the imprisonment of a population of people within negative associations must stop if Canadian culture is to enact its stated commitment to rich diversity. As Sherene Razack observes, disability is a socially negotiated identity. A failure to recognize our own complicity in discrimination against bodies equals discrimination against the national body (134).

Instead of (or in addition to) Atwood’s theme of survival as significant to our national literature’s project of identity formation, I proffer a theme of human interdependence. This recurring theme upholds what Michael Ignatieff identifies in *The Rights Revolution* as a uniquely Canadian stance towards difference. Ignatieff argues that our concept of rights is based on a recognition that “human differences are what define us” (35). Furthermore, our humanity is deepened through valuing differences. The Canadian challenge is to continually negotiate our right to be equal with our right to be different.

This negotiation results in a core Canadian value that maintains a collective sense of interdependence whereby the violation of any one person’s rights violates everyone’s rights. The concept of our rights legislation entails our belief in the moral worth of the

Other and her/his right to be different. Our national existence, then, depends on the fostering of human relationship whereby we grow to recognize and respect the Other's Otherness. The effort to recognize the societal and personal import of authentic relationship emerges as a consistent theme in Canadian literature, highlighted through characters marked with disability. The act of reading itself brings us into relationship with writer, text, and culture. As Noah Richler asserts: "all novels are inherently political, and reading them is a political act" (45). With a Disability Studies consciousness, the narratives that shape our national consciousness expand to encompass all of us into the human category, equal but not the same.

When we read any national body of literature through the critical lens of Disability Studies, we discover the ways in which national communities read the bodies of their citizens. We open the potential to uncover formerly unconscious bias that participates in global mechanisms of oppression. Only when bias against bodies is acknowledged can it be addressed. In this way, the attitude shifts enabled by Disability Studies' interpretations of novels illustrate Richler's assertion that reading is "a political act." Reading textualized bodies differently facilitates reading national identity differently. Lifting disability's metaphoric weight as a marker of national degeneration may liberate all citizens from the profound anxiety of exclusion. A critical view of disability representation might propel a conceptual shift from independence to interdependence as a collective ideal. Although these imaginings may seem romantic or even ludicrous, the construction of Otherness that shapes disability and has for generations degraded people labelled with disabilities underlies the fear of nationally identified enemies and the tendency towards war. Understanding how nations anywhere in the world socially and culturally negotiate corporeal diversity, at the very least, will help us to more fully understand our humanity.

¹⁵⁹ While a Disability Studies lens focuses on any constructions of normalcy through difference, overt portrayals of disability are as ubiquitous in other literary genres as they are in fiction and offer rich subjects for a Disability Studies critical inquiry. In poetry, Earle Birney's "David" provides a well-known portrait of disability that needs unpacking. David Freeman's critique of the systemic restriction of disabled people's lives in his play, *Creeps*, presents complex views of cultural relationships with perceived anomaly. An interesting current phenomenon for study is the fusion of theory and life-writing in scholarly writing by people with disabilities. Canadian scholars such as Susan Wendell (philosophy) and Tanya Titchkosky (sociology) blend their personal stories into Disability Studies theorizing of culture following on similar foundational personal studies of disability exemplified by Robert Murphy and Nancy Mairs.

¹⁶⁰ I am not advocating against medical or therapeutic interventions for individuals whose disabling conditions require such measures; nor am I seeking to diminish the physical and emotional hardships many conditions present. The right to have one's "disability" respected entails valuing an individual's existence even when medicine is unable to "fix" the perceived problem. This right would ensure that those not able to conform to ableist standards of normalcy would not be subjected to systemic substandard treatment.

¹⁶¹ Noah Richler observes that "eventually, as the novel's moral universe expands, it becomes a tool in the hands of those it once failed to recognize" (55-56).

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Appendix

“The Sterilization of the Insane”

By Emily Murphy

Vancouver Sun, September, 1932.

http://www.abheritage.ca/famous5/achievements/reading/sterilization_insane.html

The only portion of the British Empire which has officially adopted permissive eugenical sterilization of the insane and feeble-minded is the Province of Alberta. . . . You are quite right: Alberta prefers to lead the followers rather than to follow the leaders.

To forestall any would-be wits, permit me to say that 70% of Alberta's insane are not natives of this, the newest province in Confederation, but come from countries outside of Canada.

Since the act came into force three years ago, 150 insane persons have been sterilized and returned to their homes—that is about 8.5% of the patients.

Human Wreckage

If, however, we consider this matter from the national viewpoint it will be seen that Alberta's accomplishment is only a beginning, there being over 25,000 persons in Canadian insane asylums, or more than in all our general hospitals put together. Nearly one-fourth of these mental patients are incarcerated in the province of Quebec where birth control is under the ban of theologians.

In its attempt at salving the human wreckage which has been dumped from foreign lands, the Sexual Sterilization Act of Alberta appoints a board of four persons, the successor of which, from time to time, shall be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, but two of the board shall be medical practitioners nominated by the Senate of the University of Alberta and the Council of the College of Physicians respectively, and two shall be persons appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

When it is proposed to discharge any inmate of a mental hospital, the Medical Superintendent, or other officer thereof, may cause such inmate to be examined by or in the presence of a board of examiners. This board in Alberta consists of three men and one woman, all of whose names are therein set forth. or [sic]

If, upon such examination, the board is unanimously of the opinion that the patient might be safely discharged, if the danger of procreation with its attendant risk of the multiplication of the evil by transmission of the disability to progeny, were eliminated, the board may direct in writing such surgical operation for sexual sterilization of the inmate as may be specified in the written direction and shall appoint some competent surgeon to perform the operation.

Safer Than Childbirth

It will be seen by this that if the patients are to remain in the asylum, they are not sterilized. Indeed, in this event, there is no occasion for the operation.

The operation itself is without serious pain or substantial danger to life. In the case of males, it is very simple, only requiring a local anaesthetic, and taking about five minutes—just about the same time as it takes to execute unhappy degenerates who are not answerable to law because of their imperfect orientation.

The operation for sterilization is more serious with women in that it requires an incision and an anaesthetic. About a week is required for recovery. No ill results, [sic?] so far have occurred in Alberta. Indeed, the operation is much less risky than childbirth in that four mothers out of every thousand die annually from this cause.

In California over fifty thousand persons have undergone this operation for eugenic reason[s?] and only four deaths have resulted. The operation does not interfere in anywise with the sexual functions other than to prevent procreation. Paroled persons who have been sterilized may be happily married.

While not obligatory, it is the custom of hospital officials to consult the patient's relatives.

The answer?

It is needless to say that no man or woman whose relative is only mildly insane would leave any remedial treatment untried in order to obtain the patient's release from the

everlasting seclusion behind asylum walls. If they did, the responsibility then devolves upon the Government as trustees of the people. It is to them we must look for protection, not only for the individual, but for the future manhood of the Dominion of Canada.

The Alternative

It is true we still have people who say "Pooh! Pooh!" and other frightening words—people who argue that sterilization is an invasion of the personal rights of the individual—but this is chiefly an eclipse-eyed perception arising from the exigencies of either religious or political partisanship.

In reply to these arguments of oppositionists, we quote from the report in British Columbia of the Royal Commission on Mental Hygiene: "We question very seriously if the alternative proposed by opponents of sterilization—that is, complete institutional segregation during the whole of the reproductive period of life—is not a much greater invasion of personal rights, particularly in cases where the individual might live out a nearly normal life in the community after the possibility of procreation had been removed."

In Alberta, it is also the aim of the Government that the feeble-minded may be returned to their homes in order to spend their lives as happily and as naturally as possible. To this end, officers of the Department of Health exercise particular care in seeing that the environmental circumstances of these homes are favorable for the released patient.

The object of sterilization is three-fold. It aims at public security by preventing sexual crimes against women and children by feeble-minded but full-lived males; that patients of both sexes may cease to be charges upon the vastly burdened rate-payers, and for the mental and physical betterment of our racial life.

All patients from mental hospitals are released in a parole of six months. That is to say if they relapse during this period they may be again officially taken in charge by the Government. After his period has elapsed, a trial *de novo* is required. The great majority of patients are returned, some of them as often as five or six times. During these periods of parole, unless sterilized, the patients procreate rapidly. Authorities tell us that the insane and feeble-minded are giving birth to a progeny at somewhere from two to six times faster than normal people.

Parental Tragedy

One of the painful experiences of the magisterial life is to take from an insane and violent woman the little baby to which she has given birth during her parole; knowing that someday the child, in turn, is likely to be a patient, owing to the fact that its future was mortgaged before it was born.

Awhile ago, in one of our institutions for the care of the aged, it was found that sixteen of the women were feeble-minded and that these had produced 116 mentally deficient children.

Enquiring into this same matter of descent, it was found in Alberta that out of 3200 persons who had been treated for insanity, nearly 4000 children had been born. It is estimated that one out of every five of these children—that is to say 800 of them—will come ultimately as patients to a mental hospital.... It is quite true that there are tragedies that go on and on. This is one of them.

Perhaps, after all, there is not so much credit in being a mother as being fitted to be one. On the average, among ordinary people, only one child out of four thousand becomes eminent. On the other hand, among famous families -that is to say among human thoroughbreds—one child in eight reaches distinction, proving the absolute correctness of the statement, "To him that hath shall be given."

This means that when a child is born, we may predict its future with considerable confidence after we have studied its ancestry. Everyone has ancestry except Topsy of ""Uncle Tom's Cabin," who "jes'growed."

Some Examples

Examples of this doctrine of "Like father, like son," may be found in the careers of the two Pitts, both Prime Ministers of England; of the two Cannings; of Joseph and Austin Chamberlain; of Lord Alfred Tennyson and his son Hallam; of Lord Randolph Churchill and Winston Churchill, of the Stephensons, father and son, and of the two Alexandre Dumas. Even physical characteristics like "the Hapsburg lip," have also passed along for generations among the Emperors of the Hapsburgs.

In this Dominion, we may point to families like the Merediths, Lemieux, Oslers and

many others whose names must always add lustre to the stately annals of Canadian history.

While we have been talking of famous parents, it is equally true that stupid fathers with poor brain fibre produce stupid sons. In this connection, someone has tersely remarked that while the child of a crippled father cannot inherit his wooden leg, it is almost certain to inherit his wooden head.

At the Ponoka, Oliver and Red Deer Hospitals in Alberta, this is amply confirmed, the physicians claiming that 90 per cent of all insanity in these institutions may be traced to heredity. This is indubitably what Rufus Choate had in mind when he said the trouble with the feeble-minded is there are so many of us.

They also tell us that the characteristics of one parent may modify the characteristics of the other, which explains why children in the same family vary greatly in ability and conduct—a statement, however, which has already been succinctly set forth in a song concerning a citizen called Spratt who greatly disliked a diet of fat, and whose wife simply couldn't consider the lean.

Biblical Authority

The science of genetics shows to us that where both the husband and wife are feeble-minded, all the children are feeble-minded. Nature or heredity is the determining factor in the children's lives. None of us live or die [sic?] to ourselves. What we are and what we do influence our children, and their children, whether we will or not. The Hindu proverb is accurate when it says: "What is written on the forehead will be there, and nothing more."

There can be found folk—many of them—who contend that the methods of eugenic sterilization contradict the Bible. On the contrary, the Bible asserts that men do not gather grapes from thorns nor figs from thistles. It also says that the tree that brings not forth good fruit should be cut down and cast into the fire.

It is true that in the sterilization of the unfit we do not destroy the tree: we do not cast it into the fire, we only prevent it bearing fruit. Incidentally, it may possibly serve as a shade tree or as a windbreak.

Besides, most of us are coming to believe that it is vastly better to bring the Kingdom of God upon earth rather than to defer it for heavenly regions. Indeed, the one is actually supplementary to the other.

