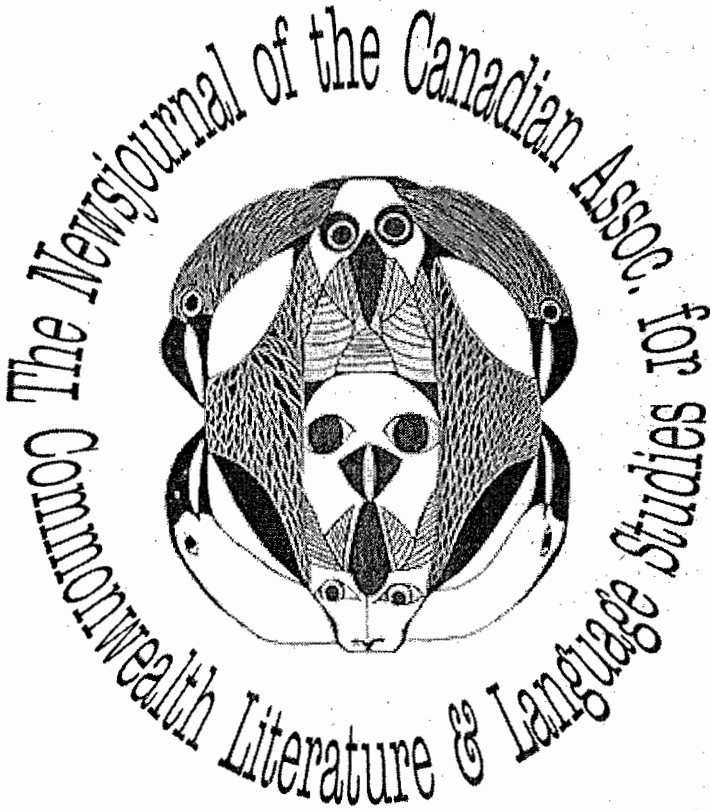


# CHIMO



Number 43

Fall 2001

  
**CHIMO** (Chee'mo) greetings [ Inuit ]

# CHIMO

The Newsjournal of the Canadian Association for  
Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies



Number 43

Fall 2001



# CHIMO



Editors: Wendy Robbins & Robin Sutherland  
Layout & Copy-Editor: Matte Gallant-Robinson

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

**After September 11th . . . .**

Whatever optimism was conceived at the dawn of this new millennium—I think many of us felt a powerful sense of planetary renewal as all the digits rolled over to 01/01/01—it was aborted in the ninth month, on 09/11/01. I was driving to UNB for my first day of classes for the fall term when I heard the news breaking about the first plane crashing into the World Trade Centre. We all now know the aftermath: the nearly 4,000 dead—people from some 80 countries, including 25 Canadians—and more dying every day in Afghanistan, one of the most destitute countries on earth, as the US-led coalition of 38 countries, including Canada, engages in a “war against terrorism.” As bills were rushed through the US Congress and our Parliament granting the state more power to apprehend and detain anyone suspected of terrorist connections, many of us fear a new McCarthyism and the increasing demonizing of dissent. Concerns are rising for the safety and security of some of the international students on our campuses, and for campus activists, pace Sunera Thobani, who was savaged in the Canadian media for describing US foreign policy as “soaked in blood.”

How do any of us carry on with our daily lives against this shocking backdrop of death, destruction, famine, war, financial collapse, the curtailing of democratic freedoms, and the new menace of anthrax in the mail or other forms of biological terrorism? How do our students go on studying? How do we go on teaching? How do we not?

No doubt each one of you reading this is grappling with the tragedy and the war in your own way. I helped to organize a teach-in at UNB which we called “NYC, Washington, Our World: Perspectives on a Tragedy.” New questions are being asked as the US is finally forced to face its ethnocentrism, its neo-imperialism, its “masters of the universe” sense of itself. What, for example, does “the West” actually look like to the rest of the world? What about American or NATO foreign policy? In what conditions does religious fundamentalism take hold? Why did the Taliban prohibit women's education and suspend human rights, and why did so few care until September 11th? Why does there seem to be so little possibility of recourse for crimes against humanity through an international criminal court? How can moderates resist the Bush binary: you're either with us or you're with the terrorists? There are more questions than answers.

The multidisciplinary, multicultural understanding that we strive for in CACLALS through our international study of literature and culture—our analyses of intersections of imperialism, racism, sexism, power, identity, “self,” and “Other”—are needed more than ever. The Humanities seem newly relevant, as you



will read in Peter Adams' statement in the House of Commons, which is included in this *Chimo*.

### **At Canberra . . .**

Let me now give you some brief updates about CACLALS business. I have included a detailed discussion of the international ACLALS conference, held in Canberra in July, in the Conference Reports section of *Chimo*. Let me add that CACLALS was solidly represented; we received many compliments for being a well-run organization; and we are a serious contender as a possible host of the international executive, not immediately, but for 2004-07. On your behalf, I indicated that CACLALS was willing to take its turn, now or in the future, in the best interests of the international group as a whole; however, I also offered my wholehearted support for the proposal which was on the table from India, made by Meenakshi Mukherjee, which was ultimately successful. For the immediate term 2001-04, the ACLALS Executive is moving to India, which has not hosted the international conference since 1977. The next ACLALS conference thus will be scheduled for Hyderabad in 2004, in either January or June.

Another item of business that is highly noteworthy is the recent vote to endorse the creation of a branch of ACLALS in the US. Such a group was set up a year ago in Rhode Island, but ratification of USACLALS (a non-Commonwealth region) requires a change to the constitution of ACLALS and a vote, which has just recently been completed, with the majority of those CACLALS and ACLALS members' votes signalling their approval of the change and the new branch. For the first time, CACLALS members, virtually all of whom are now subscribed to CACLALS-L, were invited to vote by casting an email ballot. We thank you for your co-operation in this experiment with online democracy, and we look forward at the next AGM to a fuller discussion of the merits (and limits) of conducting business this way and creating, as needed, e-amendments to our constitution.

A serious administrative concern is the loss of Commonwealth Foundation support to ACLALS this year. We do not have the details as of yet, but the sum to be transferred to CACLALS and the other regional associations by the outgoing Executive will be very much reduced compared to other years, when we received 1,000 pounds Sterling. The impact of this loss is compounded by the fact that CACLALS and the other branches had increased expenses this year as a result of our travelling to the triennial conference "down under." Fundraising is being discussed currently by the CACLALS Executive, and your input and ideas are most welcome. As many of you are aware, CACLALS applied twice to SSHRC's Aid to Occasional Scholarly Conferences Program for funds with which to hold a Commonwealth-in-Canada conference in Fredericton, but neither time were we successful, and "Digital Imperialism" was not held (despite what you may have read

in ACLALS' newsletter!). The CACLALS Executive decided to focus our efforts on the Web site and CACLALS-L, and newer and less costly strategies for keeping the membership connected.

On a lighter note, let me add that, yes, the announcement by the UN that Canada has slipped from first to third place in the world ranking of quality of life—behind both Norway and Australia—was duly noted by our friends (and rivals?) in Canberra!

### **Plans for Toronto . . .**

Plans are advancing well for the next CACLALS conference, to be held 24-26 May 2002, at the University of Toronto, part of the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities (COSSH). The paper proposals are being vetted by the Executive and a tentative program will be circulated on CACLALS-L and posted to the Web site (<http://www.unb.ca/CACLALS>) early in the new year. The process will be more competitive than before, as there will be no concurrent sessions, as was requested by members attending the 2001 conference. The importance of our highly acclaimed annual Aboriginal Round Table has been noted by the HSSFC Executive, on which as I serve as Vice President, Women's Issues Network. The HSSFC, in fact, is discussing ways and means of better addressing Aboriginal and other equity and diversity issues. It is very likely that the Toronto conference will be officially opened by an Aboriginal ceremony of welcome, and that attention will be paid to issues such as "Indigenizing" the curriculum as we focus on interrogating "Boundaries"—the main conference theme.

As I close, let me thank a few special people on your behalf: Robin Sutherland, our intrepid Executive Officer, who is indispensable to the daily operations of our association and who commutes from St. John to Fredericton to work with the team here; Matte Gallant-Robinson, a UNB graduate student who is working as a research assistant and copy-editor of *Chimo* this year; and CACLALS Executive member Ranjini Mendis, who agreed to represent CACLALS at the annual meeting of the HSSFC in Ottawa in November (I cannot do so, being a member of the HSSFC Executive now). I would also like to thank you all for the privilege of representing you at the international conference and serving as President for this three-year term, which will be ending next summer. Elections will be held at the Toronto conference for a new CACLALS Executive. I would invite any person or group interested in issues of "la relève" to please get in touch with us to discuss what the transfer and the work of running the organization entails. An official Call for Nominations is included in this number of *Chimo*.

Peace, and a happier New Year.

Wendy Robbins



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 137    ■    NUMBER 109    ■    1st SESSION    ■    37th PARLIAMENT

## OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

### HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada and the researchers it supports play a special role in our nation.

Today we speak of the global village, a concept created by Marshall McLuhan, a great Canadian. When discussing links between demography and society we commonly refer to the boom, bust and echo generations, concepts created by David Foot of the University of Toronto.

The work of these Canadians and of more than 18,000 Canadian researchers who work in the humanities and social sciences is a precious national treasure.

Their research advances our understanding of the histories, attitudes and values shaping human behaviour. It allows individuals, communities and organizations to better understand the major social and cultural transformations affecting them. It enables us to know ourselves.

The tragic events in the U.S. illustrated the essential contribution of the humanities and social sciences. We cannot go a day without the media quoting expert researchers in the fields of culture, religion, international relations or psychology. Let us support the humanities and social sciences.

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### **CACLALS – Executive Call for Nominations**

In accordance with the Constitution, we call for nominations to all Executive positions in CACLALS, except those of graduate students. Nominations should include the written consent of the nominee and the supporting signatures of two paid-up members. The Constitution requires the names to be submitted “2 months before the AGM.” Since the AGM is scheduled for May, the Executive Officer should receive all nominations by 24 March 2002. The Executive Committee consists of a President and Executive Officer, both of whom should be from the same region, and Regional Representatives, distributed in the following manner:

BC and the Territories: 1  
Ontario: 1  
Quebec: 1  
Atlantic Provinces: 1  
Community Colleges: 1

The region in which the Headquarters of the Association is situated will be considered represented by the chief officers.

Please send nominations to: Robin Sutherland, Executive Officer, Department of English, UNB, PO Box 4400, Fredericton, NB E3B 5A3. Email: [caclals@unb.ca](mailto:caclals@unb.ca)

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### **Notice of Elections**

An election will be held at the AGM during the next CACLALS conference, scheduled for the University of Toronto, 24-26 May 2002. All nominations must be received no later than 24 March 2002.

\*\*\*

**Notice of Motion: Constitutional Changes**

That the CACLALS Constitution be amended in the following ways:

(Note: Changes are indicated with \*\*. The major items are creation of the position of President Elect and recognition of email for official business. The ten signatures will be circulated at the AGM. The Executive supports these changes. )

**7. Executive Committee**

The Executive Committee of the Association will consist of the President, the Executive Officer, the Past President **\*\*(for two years)**, the President Elect (for one year)**\*\***, four Regional Representatives, and two Student Representatives.

**8. Executive Committee: Terms of Reference**

The Executive Committee shall observe the following terms of reference:

f. The Executive Committee shall be convened at least once each year by the President, who will give notice of the meeting to its members by **\*\*email,\*\*** mail or telephone.

**12. Notice of Election**

Notice of Elections shall be sent out to all current members **\*\*no later than\*\*** three months before the Annual General Meeting of the Association at which the elections are to take place **\*\*and normally in the Fall Issue of Chimo.\*\***

**13. Nominations**

Nominations for all positions on the Executive Committee shall be conducted in the following manner:

b. The Fall Issue of *Chimo* will include a Call for Nominations for a graduate representative. The Spring Issue of *Chimo* will **\*\*normally\*\*** include a slate of nominees: the election for one graduate representative for a 2-year term will [DELETE word "will"] **\*\*may either\*\*** be held amongst graduate student members at the annual AGM **\*\*or, alternatively,** at the discretion of the Executive Committee, this process to nominate and elect a graduate representative may be conducted via email at any suitable time. **\*\*** Their terms will be staggered, to ensure continuity.

e. The proposed slate and the submitted nominations shall be included in a mail **\*\*** or email**\*\*** ballot to be sent out to all members one month before the Annual General Meeting of the Association.

g. If there are more nominations than vacancies, there shall be a mail \*\*or email\*\* ballot.

h. Mailed ballots should be submitted in a plain, sealed envelope. This envelope should be placed inside another envelope, sealed, with the member's signature written across the sealing strip. These ballots shall be verified by the Executive Officer against the current membership rolls. The signed envelopes shall be opened by the Executive Officer at the appropriate point in the agenda of the Annual General Meeting. A member of the Association approved of by the general membership present shall then record the ballots in the plain envelopes. \*\*Email ballots shall be downloaded and similarly verified and recorded by the Executive Officer for presentation at the AGM in conjunction with the process for recording regularly mailed ballots.\*\*

j. Voting at all elections of the Association shall be by secret ballot. \*\*Where this is rendered impossible because of email identification, then the Executive Officer and/or the President shall be entrusted with blacking out identifying marks and with maintaining confidentiality.\*\*

#### **14. General Meeting**

The Annual General Meeting or any other Extraordinary General Meeting of the Association shall take place at the time and location of the annual meeting of the Association, usually at and during the meetings of the \*\*Learned Societies of Canada [DELETE old name and substitute the following] the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities\*\*.

#### **18. Constitutional Changes**

c. The Executive Officer shall circulate these motions to the membership \*\*at least\*\* six weeks before the Annual General Meeting.

d. Ratification of amendment motions shall require a two-thirds vote in favour by members in good standing at the Annual General Meeting.

\*\*\*

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORTS****FINANCIAL REPORT (April 1 - September 30, 2001)****INCOME**

<b>Balance (March 31, 2001):</b>	<b>\$14,304.54</b>
Memberships	1,758.40
ACLALS partial reimbursement for travel	1,306.28
SSHRC travel grant	3,480.00
HSSFC Outreach Grants (Aboriginal Roundtable)	500.00
—CACLALS	
—ACCUTE	
Phone reimbursement	178.32
Account Interest	20.75
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$ 7,243.75</b>
<b>Sub-total:</b>	<b>\$21,548.29</b>

**EXPENDITURES**

Administration		
—(paper, phone, photocopying, postage)		229.24
<i>Chimo 42</i>		
—Production	500.98	
—Postage	<u>213.84</u>	714.82
Executive travel/expenses:		3,848.23
—Canberra		
HSSFC membership		1,209.00

COSSH 2000:		100.00
—Travel	6, 511.95	
—Programmes	140.45	
—Other	<u>85.97</u>	6, 738.37
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES:</b>		<b>\$12,739.66</b>
<b>BALANCE (September 30, 2001):</b>		<b>\$ 8, 808.63</b>

The figures provided in the above statement agree with the recorded transactions with the Bank of Montreal in every respect.

ROBIN SUTHERLAND, Executive Officer  
University of New Brunswick

\*\*\*

### A Personal Account of the HSSFC Annual General Meeting

by Ranjini Mendis

*The Report of the Working Group on the Future of the Humanities (03/2001)*, sounding a note of comfort and joy, provided the focus for the General Assembly of October 23-25, 2001. It was critically viewed by some participants as being overly optimistic, but others heralded the prospect of thousands of jobs opening up due to retirements in the next decade. In her opening address, President Patricia Clements referred to the *Maclean's* survey of Canadian universities and colleges, noting that little Johnny will not have a professor in his classroom if nothing is done at this time to meet the growing need for qualified academics. She spoke of the demographic shift and the necessity to nurture new graduate students through travel funds for conferences and mentoring and helping them to publish quickly. She observed, as well, that public mistrust of intellectuals seems to have lessened somewhat after the media interviews of academics following September 11th. The Breakfast on the Hill talks are another way to get the message across that academic associations are viable and significant, and need funding for continued service to the public.

The meetings began with a presentation on Ethics Consultation by Tim Flaherty, Director of Ethics Division, Health Canada. An overview of the governance of



research involving human subjects paved the way for information about protection of research subjects, the promotion of socially beneficial research, and the maintaining and building of public trust. Mr. Flaherty outlined the current status of research ethics as being decentralized and unevenly implemented and exhibiting conflicts of interest and expertise. As well, he pointed out that research lacked consistency, transparency, accountability, and ongoing monitoring. The options he proposed to resolve these problems are:

- a new national policy for education and critical reflection;
- accreditation and certification;
- new legislation to create a national authority;
- an ethics review for all federally funded research.

The session ended somewhat dismally when Mr. Flaherty told the assembly that interviews with politicians do not constitute “research.” The comment prompted questions regarding what *does* constitute research. Mr. Flaherty replied by cautioning “[us] guys” again, that we must be very careful of defining “research,” and left the session rather flushed, but graciously extending an offer to come to any of our future “dog fights.”

The flutter caused by this exchange of perspective continued in the next session, on the SSHRC report. This session offered practical suggestions (the use of teaching portfolios for promotion and tenure purposes; training graduate students in public speaking and teaching methods) as well as a critical reading of the SSHRC report which urged the Humanities to “Be Happy.” One panellist questioned the consultation process and the fact that the disaffection or disarray in the disciplines was not reflected in the report. This elicited an indignant defence from two participants followed by a timely reminder from Dr. Louise Forsythe that critical analysis should not be interpreted as complaining, but rather that critical reading must indeed be valued.

The report poses the following question to the scholarly community: “What would you as colleagues of Humanities and Fine Arts say to the Federation and community of public intellectuals?” Despite the acknowledgement of “the profound malaise within the humanities research community” (Report pp. 7, 10, 11), the focus was on “look[ing] beyond fashionably sceptical aperçus” (p.11) to various publications, as well as the Prime Minister's address (“The Canadian Way in the 21st Century”) and plans for an international conference (“The Canadian Graduate Enterprise in the New Millennium”). However, one member expressed his deep disappointment at the SSHRC report *Alternative Wor[l]ds: the Humanities in 2010*, noting that it does not include issues of diversity, nay, even of alternate cultural climates. Even the solitary entry in the bibliography to *Learning to Divide the World: Education After*

*the Empire* by John Willinsky failed to comfort this individual who then declared, "But it's a footnote! That's exactly my point."

Next on the agenda were two workshops: "Scholarly Associations: Looking at the Future," and "Preparing for the New Generation of Scholars." The former, chaired by Dr. Noreen Golfman, comprised a panel of three speakers: Dr. Donald Fisher (Canadian Society for the Study of Education), Dr. Michel Desjardins (Biblical Studies), and Dr. Mary Vipond (Canadian Historical Studies). Here, too, there was the admission that Associations have been instructed by the SSHRC report to focus positively on Change and The Future, and the suggestions of the panel were on ways to improve presentations at conferences, bringing the "lost generation of scholars" (Wendy Robbins' words) into the fold (referring to the thousands of part-time faculty as well as those who have left academia due to lack of jobs), and mentoring younger scholars.

Dr. Donald Fisher of the CSSE spoke of the effectiveness of their umbrella association for other small associations in Education, and mentioned several useful activities within his association, such as a job fair at the Congress and a writing workshop, both of which have been very successful for new scholars and graduate students. The Outreach Meetings, he said, have legitimated their field of study and have guaranteed its growth.

Dr. Michel Desjardins of Biblical Studies spoke of the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, another umbrella group. His Association seemed very inventive in establishing an endowment fund and dabbling in the stockmarket (Any tables being overturned in the Tabernacle?). He spoke as well of the efficacy of having a Publications Officer to help manuscripts through the ASPP process, using a Web site to convey news of scholars and job postings, and video conferencing. Dr. Mary Vipond of the CHA mentioned subsidies for graduate students and the publication entitled *Becoming a Historian* (adopted by the American Historical Association). Further, she pointed out the usefulness of a Dissertation Register in Canada or on Canadian topics, available on their Web site. Strong moral suasion is essential to keep past presidents and executive members active within associations, she advised. Dr. Noreen Golfman wrapped up this session with a comment on ACCUTE and the allied associations, noting the success of the professional concerns sessions, and commending SSHRC for providing support for younger scholars to present at the Congress.

In the discussion that followed, the Canadian Association for the Study of Women reported on a two-day international institute being less threatening than the Congress, with a low fee of \$60, peer reviewed papers, a xeroxed copy of abstracts that could be used as a publication, and the effectiveness of graduate mentors.

Jacqueline Wright urged all members to write to Dr. Marc Renaud for more funding for conferences.

Dr. Wendy Robbins (who is Vice-President, Women's Issues, in the Federation) spoke of the 28,000 or so part-time professors, about half of whom are women, who should be factored into the hiring projections and also be encouraged to participate in the Congress. As well, she suggested that we incorporate burgeoning online associations into the scholarly community.

There was the recognition that the strategic plan should incorporate teaching as a major component and that we need to bring the quality and excellence of teaching into prominence. Of concern as well is the possibility of online teaching undercutting the passion in the classroom. Of particular significance is the need for time release for duties of associations. Meanwhile, the workshop "Preparing for the New Generation of Scholars" had stressed recruiting, retention, and recognition. It emphasized the need for money and effective infrastructure, interdisciplinarity, and the necessity to clarify and demystify processes.

The reports from the Electoral Colleges summed up the following issues: the demographic shift creating a new face in the Federation, the need to retain the experience of those who most times disappear entirely from the academic scene at retirement, to be cautious of focussing solely on the "young scholars" to the exclusion of other groups who also should be considered for jobs, and ways to combat the malaise especially through money, money, money. The recommendations to the Federation are: to share services, organize umbrella groups, give more travel grants to graduate students, fund-raise, get time release, consider duties in associations and Federation for promotion and tenure, and be more inclusive in language as well as in references to culture and age.

A break in this tightly packed program came with a reception and the awarding of Book Prizes and the 60th Anniversary address by Ted Chamberlin entitled "If this is your land, where are your stories," which was poetic, well-directed to the audience, and reflectively personal in its philosophical contemplation of our profession and the academic pursuit of truths. Our congratulations go to Dr. Diana Brydon who is the new Director of the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program.

This was a rewarding weekend that generated ideas on how to keep our association alive and well. And so I returned to Vancouver sitting in the plane beside a plainclothes police officer who was reading a Bunny Wright mystery, unshaven and looking bored, but ever watchful for any unusual move of the passengers.

## CONFERENCE REPORTS

**“The Humanities Computing Curriculum / The Computing Curriculum in the Arts and Humanities”**

by Wendy Robbins

I am tempted to begin this report with the grand proclamation, “I have seen the future, and the future is us!” This conference on curriculum issues in the new interdisciplinary field of Humanities Computing, organized by English professor Ray Siemens and held November 9-10, 2001, at Malaspina University College in Nanaimo, BC, was billed as the first of its kind. It set out to “document the currents of thought surrounding curriculum issues in Humanities Computing today, as well as the initiatives—extant and in-development—that they have spawned.”

The gathering attracted a high proportion of English professors amongst its participants; some English Departments (e.g. Georgia Tech) have been transformed into Departments of Literature, Communication, and Cultural Studies, in fact. The University of Alberta has emerged as an important leader in research and in teaching, with the enrollment this fall of the first seven graduate students in its new MA degree program in Humanities Computing. Several speakers, including keynote speaker Susan Hockey, had connections to the U of A, and specifically to Patricia Clements, the first Humanities professor to be awarded a major research grant by the Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI) for “The Orlando Project,” which some CACLALS members and others saw demonstrated in Edmonton during the 2000 Congress.

Most of the presentations, enlivened by PowerPoint graphics, concerned the specific computing skills, techniques, and online tools that are emerging as the core elements of the Humanities Computing (HC) curriculum, sometimes also accredited as Media Studies. Several presenters used the metaphor of a marriage between computing science and humanities disciplines. The marriage, however, appears to me to be very far from an egalitarian one. Humanities, constructed as woman, seems to me to be like Ginger Rogers dancing with Fred Astaire—required to follow his every move, doing everything backwards and in high heels. What was missing, almost totally, was any cultural critique or any attempt at a gender- or race-based analysis. Not only did men seriously outnumber women amongst the conferees, but almost all references to online works in progress, authors, philosophers of education, epistemological theorists, or cultural critics were to white European males only. It was both surprising and distressing to realize how these bold new Canadian (and other) academic pioneers are in imminent danger, not of finally

breaking the hold of outmoded traditions in the Humanities, but indeed of inscribing them writ large in the Cybersphere.

Despite the early presence of women in the artificial intelligence and computing revolution—I would include Mary Shelley for *Frankenstein*, as well as Byron's daughter Ada Lovelace and American Grace Hopper for their pioneering work as the world's first computer programmers—Computing Science is a field dominated overwhelmingly by men on our campuses today. But the majority of students enrolled in the Humanities in Canada today, both as graduates and undergraduates, are women. How do we develop a new curriculum that respects the vast and impressive array of feminist scholarship in our disciplines, that takes into account the research on “women's ways of knowing” and women's “why's” of using the new communications technologies, and that is genuinely innovative, inclusive, and future-oriented, rather than being merely a dull repetition of the old messages in a new medium?

The HC conference experience, though friendly, informative, and set amidst the gentle autumn beauty of Vancouver Island's misty mountains and pellucid ocean waters, left me wondering anew whether we are not in danger of selling our souls for a mess of potage in the new dispensation, which is trying hard to package us all together in “full spectrum science” as we make our applications to that “big daddy” of all research funds, Industry Canada.

Visiting the Web site <http://ww2.arts.ubc.ca/fhis/winder/cochcosh/> of the Consortium for Computers in the Humanities, a Canada-wide association of representatives from Canadian colleges and universities that began in 1986, I see that their objective is “to foster communications about, and sharing of, information technology developed by Canadian institutions for the betterment of post-secondary education across Canada.” It is a worthy objective, to be sure, but it cannot be achieved without attention being paid to the diversity issues that many of us in postcolonial and women's studies have been working long and hard to understand and apply.

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**“Resistance and Reconciliation: Writing in the Commonwealth”**

by Wendy Robbins

The 12th triennial ACLALS conference, attended by about 300 participants, including some 20 from Canada, took place in Canberra, Australia, 9-14 July 2001. CACLALS members made numerous thoughtful presentations, starting with Stephen Slemon's opening plenary address “The Return of the Native,” which examined the relation (“not a healthy one”) between postcolonialism and globalization. As President of CACLALS, I was invited to chair this opening session, which featured Vijay Mishra as respondent, who concurred that it is time to re-emphasize postcolonial commitment and a politics of literary advocacy. Other plenary speakers included Shirley Geok-lin Lim (Hong Kong), whose talk about identity in Singapore fiction and the rise of regionalism explored the paradigm of de-centred space through the imagery of the rhizome (which, like the net, begins with the multiple, not the one); and Harish Trivedi (Delhi), whose remarks, witty and incisive, directed attention to issues of indigeneity, hybridity, and, just for a change, “lowbridity” in Indian literature. Of interest to those of us in Canlit who are familiar with the cosmopolitan (Smith) / native (Sutherland) debates of the 1940s is the resurfacing of these terms, albeit with expanded meanings, in current international dialogues.

Amongst the creative writers reading and speaking, the most outstanding was J. M. Coetzee of South Africa, whose Booker-Prize-winning novel *Disgrace* was subsequently studied in several excellent critical papers, including one by Helen Tiffin, which focussed on the intertext, *The Lives of Animals*, as well as on speciesism as a prototype for racism. Coetzee (“J.M.” to the inner circle) offered us a parable about the Humanities and the wrong direction our disciplines took about 500 years ago when Hellenism (“mechanical” reason) was allowed to displace the Judeo-Christian tradition (feeling, suffering, compassion). At least I think that is what it meant. J.M. read with a voice that sounded much like that of *The English Patient*, soft, almost inaudible at times, laboured, faint.

Coetzee's respondent was Black South African writer and academic Mbulelo Mzamane, who provided a very great contrast—was it an illustration of how the Humanities can get back on track?—with his deeply moving call to action on restoring African indigenous languages to their rightful place in their societies, which he framed as a human rights issue with reference to the January 2000 Asmara Declaration. He urged us to remember those for whom things have not changed for the better in the “new dispensation” in Africa, especially those suffering with AIDS and without access to the basic conditions necessary for health. His call for attention to be paid—urgently and profoundly—to those people alienated, marginalized, and

dispossessed by, or in disagreement with, the current global economic and political order is underscored a thousand-fold in the aftermath of September 11th and the soul-searching about "American" or "Western" values, practices, and policies in the US, Canada, and the rest of the world, which is now taking place.

The tide is turning in our discipline away from its recent obsession with theory and back to its prior commitment to social and political engagement, critique, and change. "Resisting Western Academic Writing" was the title of a presentation by Judith Rochecouste (Edith Cowan University), which questioned why the "objective" style of academic writing so often factors out personal experience of such realities as war, poverty, deprivation, and racism. Another paper, "Legitimising the Personal Voice: Storytelling and Reconciliation in the Global Arena," by Kay Schaffer (University of Adelaide), focussed on the rise in popularity of the memoir, or public life story, and its legitimation through national fora like the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission hearings on the "Stolen Generation" in Australia, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. There were several presentations by and about Aboriginal Australians, and I found them particularly compelling, including one by Adam Shoemaker, newly appointed Dean of Arts at the Australian National University, who spoke about the controversy over Mudrooroo's "authenticity" as a Black Australian.

Unlike at ACLALS' conferences of twenty years ago, there are now numerous dynamic sessions exploring women's texts and gender issues. Sessions were devoted to such topics as "Writing/Women," "Indian Women," "Gender and Representation," and "Sexualities." "Resistance" was frequently defined, not merely as a reaction to imperialism, but, as Edward Said argued in *Culture and Imperialism*, as an alternative way of conceiving human history, breaking down old barriers and binaries.

A book fair, with writers (e.g. Yasmine Gooneratne, Subramani) and critics (e.g. Bill Ashcroft) launching and reading from their work, was a special component of the week's activities. I picked up Bill Ashcroft's new critical book on postcolonial transformation, which will be reviewed in the next issue of *Chimo* by Shao-Pin Luo, who was amongst the CACLALS delegation at its launch. A main issue of the AGM was discussion of amending the constitution to permit a vote on the official recognition of USACLALS (a regional association without the usual prerequisite—a Commonwealth country in the unit).

The conference paid tribute to members and writers who have passed away, including R.K. Narayan, Anna Rutherford (her journal *Kunapipi* will survive), and Mordecai Richler. CACLALS member extraordinaire Stavros Stavrou did us all proud with, not only an academic paper, but, at the concluding party, a wildly

successful performance of belly dancing. Trips to Canberra's beautiful museums and art galleries rounded out the program. The Aussie ACLALS team set a very high standard for intellectual acumen, artistic savoir-faire, administrative intelligence, and sheer good fun, and, on behalf of us all, I would like to thank the principal organizers: Bruce Bennett, Satendra Nandan, Jacqueline Lo, and Jennifer Webb. The torch now passes to Meenakshi Mukherjee and Harish Trivedi of IACLALS. Congratulations and best wishes! Here's to 2004 in Hyderabad.

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Scholars at work: Stephen Slemon (Alberta), Harish Trivedi (Delhi), Satendra Nandan (ANU, Canberra), Wendy Robbins (UNB).



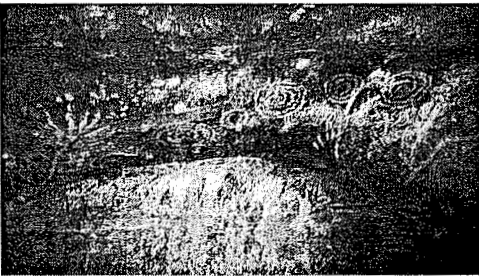
Scenes From Australia



Some Canadians abroad: Shao-Pin Luo (Dalhousie), Wendy Robbins (UNB), John Eustace (Acadia), Jamie Scott (York).



Aboriginal hollow log coffins, viewed by Shao-Pin Luo.



Aboriginal rock art: Uluru, waterhole symbols.

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**“Philosophy and Aboriginal Rights: Critical Dialogues”**

by Wendy Robbins

This moving and important conference, held in June 2001 in Winnipeg, organized by the Canadian Philosophical Association, included more Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal participants. Law, history, and Native studies were represented, but the main emphasis was on political and moral philosophy, especially the concepts of “rights,” “nation,” and “autonomy.” There was an emphasis on ceremony, story, and song as integral to Native philosophy, as well as a focus on “relationship” and “connected” learning, and recognition that a “dialogic,” not “monologic,” process is needed to transform the discipline and the academy.

Philosophy is about values, meaningful things; it is a spiritual journey of immeasurable scope. A new way of “doing” the discipline was discussed. It does not need to be about antagonism, critique. It could be more like a conversation. Could it not be about love? Could it not connect the brain and the heart? Could it not be done in accessible language and published elsewhere than in specialized scholarly journals? Philosophy needs new ideas, not the assimilation of Native philosophers into the discipline.

The terms “truth and reconciliation” were invoked, for without truth there can be no reconciliation. Until the wounding stops, there can be no healing. The word “perspective” was used but also challenged. There is a need for non-Native people to see what history and reality look like from the point of view of Indigenous peoples. From this perspective, universities are “newcomer institutions,” and one Cree member of the audience came to the open microphone and, more as a lament than a criticism, asked: “How much of your PhDs, your Master’s degrees, your Bachelor’s degrees, your life, understands this?” (he gestured to the blanket, cedar boughs, burning sage, and pipe of the sacred opening ceremony). This *is* Native philosophy; it is more than simply a “perspective” on philosophy, many pointed out.

One of the Elders present, Leroy Littlebear, noted how in his language, Blackfoot, there is no distinction between animate and inanimate things. Philosophy is not an abstraction for Native peoples as it often is in Western or specifically English thought. The importance of preserving and using Indigenous languages was highlighted. It was also said that all of us speak “in a grammar of history.” At least two presenters spoke in an Indigenous language. Aboriginal identities are evolving, and attention needs to be directed to Métis culture and to the realities of Natives living in urban centres. Questions were raised about Canada’s multiculturalism policy and whether it has sensitized people to issues of diversity and inclusivity or,

conversely, has obscured Aboriginal issues, which are very different from those of new immigrants.

The university, all too often, functions like a mechanism which maintains colonialism. One participant spoke poignantly of finding a balance between the desire to complete a degree and to “remain faithful to my identity as an Aboriginal person.” Another, after a heart-rending story about her experience at a residential school, stated that Aboriginal people are “asked to shed our skin at the door, and if we don't do it, it is stripped off for us.” Education is one major component of social change, but education comes at too high a cost if it entails assimilation.

Native studies is often marginalized, and Native students, staff, and faculty often feel isolated; the curriculum is not inclusive or relevant to Aboriginal people, we were told. One of the things I noticed was the compatibility of what these Native philosophers and many feminist academics are saying: both raise issues such as token hirings, marginalization, isolation; both point to differences in worldviews (linear vs. circular) and ways of knowing (analysis into component parts vs. relational or connected thinking); both stress the need to shift paradigms in the disciplines, to engage in interdisciplinary work, and to be persistent; and both are concerned with backlash. Some shared my point of view; some pointed out the disappointment that Native studies faculty and students have sometimes felt with women's studies, which is often not inclusive enough.

So, what roles can universities and scholarly associations, including CACLALS, play? In addition to our annual Aboriginal Round Table and the NativeLit-L online discussion, what can we do to promote understanding, end racism, Indigenize the curriculum, and find other “ways forward”? Specific suggestions, which might form part of a “healing plan” (a term used by one of the Elders, Kathy Mallett, based on her work in the justice system in Manitoba) included the following.

With respect to the federal government and the issue of Aboriginal rights:

1. The federal government needs to shift the paradigm by which policy is developed.
2. Academics, political philosophers in particular, need to find strategies to get the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* “off the shelf” so that its recommendations can be implemented.

With respect to universities:

3. “Start talking with us, not to us or for us.” Native voices need to be heard, and

non-Indigenous people everywhere in our society and in our institutions need to listen. We must not speak for, and not in any patronizing way “allow” Indigenous people to speak for themselves, but rather we must genuinely listen and learn. (Are marks ever awarded in seminars for students who are good listeners?).

4. More Native faculty need to be hired; a token one is not enough (“There are so few of us”).
5. “Attention must be paid to all parts of our lives.”
6. Universities could set up an Elder-in-Residence, or College Elder program (as exists in a consortium of Northern Manitoba campuses).
7. At least one Aboriginal student liaison officer could be hired (as at the University of Winnipeg).
8. Raise awareness about Indigenizing the curriculum.
9. Produce a kind of “report card” like the 2001 *Ivory Towers: Feminist Audits*, this time with data on Indigenous students, faculty, staff.
10. We need to find ways to achieve consensus, but also ways to be respectful yet disagree.

A unique and powerful highlight of the conference was a sweatlodge ceremony and potluck feast. Preparations involved chopping wood, heating stones to red-hot, tearing cedar into small pieces to mark the path, and learning about the purposes and procedures. The “sweat” itself, held in a circular canvas structure under the stars on a summer night, was an extraordinary experience of great beauty, openness, emotion, trust, harmony, and purification on many levels. The conference thus manifested one of its central tenets: the benefit of experiential learning and the importance of ritual, even in—perhaps especially in—academic circles.

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**BOOK REVIEWS**

Book Review Editor: Susie O'Brien

***How Should I Read These? Native Women Writers in Canada***

by Helen Hoy

University of Toronto Press, 2001

264 pages, \$24.95

Review by Judith Leggatt,  
Lakehead University

Halfway through her detailed, useful, and intellectually challenging investigation of Native women's writing in Canada and the difficulties facing non-Native critics investigating that writing, Helen Hoy claims, "if I were to write my autobiography, snow shoveling would not, I imagine, figure in it at all" (117). I would argue that, in *How Should I Read These? Native Women Writers in Canada*, Hoy has written her autobiography, and she does dedicate at least one paragraph to the ways in which snow shoveling figures in her readings of both her own identity and those of her neighbours. It might seem as strange to characterize a book of literary criticism as autobiography as it does to read snow shoveling as a marker of identity. Perhaps autobiography—the writing of the life of the self—is not the right word. Autography—the writing of the self—might come closer. Throughout her careful negotiation of her position as critic and her investigation of the politics of her own reading strategies, Helen Hoy situates her readings of Native women's writing within the larger contexts of her pedagogical practices and experiences, her personal life, and her own shifting subject position.

Over the course of the ten years of critical thinking that *How Should I Read These?* documents, this position shifts both literally—from Lethbridge in Alberta, to St. Paul in Minnesota, to Guelph and Toronto in Ontario, with visits to other locations in North America and to Ireland and France—and figuratively: in the text, she identifies herself variously (and in no particular order) as non-Native, as white, as Irish, as Canadian, as academic, as teacher, as mother to Elizabeth and Benjamin, as partner to Cherokee-Greek writer Thomas King, as lesbian, as tourist, as woman, as eldest of ten children. Each of these overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, positions informs and is informed by Hoy's reading strategies. In writing about the texts of women from a different cultural subject-position, Hoy recreates her self in prose; in problematizing the process of cross-cultural reading, she demonstrates the instability of her own multiple selves; in questioning her own subjectivity, she opens up new possibilities for reading.

The dual focus of Hoy's book—outward to the texts and inward to the critic—is

epitomized in the disjunction between the title—*How Should I Read These?*—and the subtitle, *Native Women Writers in Canada*. The question of the former foregrounds the academic “I” and depersonalizes the literature and authors who are being studied so that they are a generic “these,” only identified in the much smaller print of the subtitle. I must admit to feeling a small degree of discomfort when I first saw this title. While it points to a strategy that acknowledges the impossibility of removing the academic investigator from her subject of investigation, it also seems to place too much importance on that academic “I,” so that the subject takes a back seat. “How should I read these?” becomes a question more about the academic reader than Native literature. Similarly, another way of reading the question, “How *should* I read these?” implies an obligation to read in a particular way. All the academic has to do is find out the answer, to put on the correct interpretive glasses, and these texts—which the question implies are somehow obscure and therefore cannot be read in the “normal” way—becomes clear.

Upon opening the book, I found that my discomfort with the title was not misplaced. I was responding to a deliberate strategy on Hoy’s part. She takes the title from a line in Eden Robinson’s short story “Queen of the North.” In Robinson’s tale, a non-Native man buys bannock from the Haisla narrator at a powwow. He asks her “How should I eat these?” (208), which Hoy changes to the question of her title. Hoy describes this tourist as “hungry for sexual and cultural stimulation” (3), and her alignment of her self with this controlling and consuming man indicates her discomfiture with her own status as critic, and with her possible desire “to make a basic foodstuff [or story] esoteric” (4). The repeated question of how to read is a leitmotif in the text, and emphasizes the problems facing the unwary reader. While she looks at a photograph of Beverly Hungry Wolf in *The Ways of My Grandmothers*, Hoy’s question shifts from “How am I to read this figure?” (125) to “How *can* I read this figure?” to “How can I *not* read this figure?” to “And why am I reading *this* photograph . . . ?” (126). The text of the photograph remains the same fixed image, but the questions become more and more firmly focussed on the eye/I that views the image.

Hoy is aware that both her careful negotiation of her own position and her self-referential style of criticism are, at times, in danger of becoming a narcissistic examination of the self of the critic in the mirror provided by the culturally other text. The difficulty anyone who engages in such open and honest criticism faces is in achieving balance. In *White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue: Criticism as Autobiography*, Nicole Ward Jouve tempers her call for bringing the self more self-consciously into criticism: “Not that each writer should splash his or her ego all over the page, like so many liquidized Gremlins. If all criticism became autobiography, it would not only become boring, it would defeat its purpose. Criticism is about the other” (5). Hoy’s text is ostensibly about a specific “othered”

position (or multitude of positions): those of Native women writing in Canada. However, she refuses a simplistic binary construction of self/other within her investigation, positing the Native women writers as central to their own cultures, and her self as cultural other or outsider—at least in this context. She privileges neither the self of the critic, nor the self that writes (or is written in) the indigenous texts, but instead posits a conversation between them, arguing that although “a narrative of my reception might seem to risk displacing the Native text and the Native author, readings (however detached or unattributed) are always just that, readings, meetings between text and reader” (19). Her personal anecdotes are usually specifically relevant to the text she is studying; for example, her possible misreading of a friend’s childrearing priorities as “particularly Native” (168) makes her question her desire to read Eden Robinson’s *Traplines* in terms of Native issues. Even when the connections seem a little more tenuous, Hoy’s own stories always help to illuminate the theories behind her reading practices.

Hoy opens up multiple readings, rather than imposing a single “correct” reading on any one text. She discusses classroom interaction in such a way that student voices—some named, some not—have their say along with the professor. She includes counter-texts to her own text in the form of frequently unglossed quotations, which operate sometimes with, and sometimes against, her own argument. The multiple readings come not only from other people, but also from her own plural selves. In her most blatant example of interpretive play, she gives three different, and contradictory, readings of *The Book of Jessica* by Maria Campbell and Linda Griffiths, seeing it as textual appropriation (50-54), as postcolonial deposition (54-60) and as textual resistance (60-63), believing and privileging each interpretation equally. Similarly, she ends her chapter on Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash* with a reference to the as-yet-to-be-written next sentence (47). Throughout the text, Hoy double-checks herself, questioning the way her subject positions and her ideologies inform her readings.

In this review I have read Hoy’s text as autobiography, providing my own take on the question: “How should I read this?” I could just as easily have focussed on her arguments about the texts, which are theoretically complex and critically astute. Just as Hoy’s readings of Native texts say as much about her subjectivity as they do about her subject, so my focus in this review has as much to do with my own subject position as with the book. Like Hoy, I am a white female feminist English professor at an Ontario university; like her, I study and teach Native literatures in a variety of contexts. These similarities between us might have led me to focus on her techniques of reading and teaching, and her position further ahead of me on the academic career path might have led me to mine her subject for my own possible positionings. Of course, there are also obvious and major differences between us. I have no children. My cultural background is Scottish and English rather than Irish

(anyone thinking this is a minor difference should read some history of the British Isles). No member of my immediate family is Native. These differences show that non-Native academic subjectivities are as diverse as those of "Native Women Writers in Canada." Hoy's text will be useful to a variety of these academics and other readers. Those who specifically study the literature of Native women will appreciate her contribution to the thinking about the texts; those who are interested in how the reader affects the reading, and how reading can become a site of cross-cultural communication, will find her personal insights and stories illuminating.

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#### ***Black Berry, Sweet Juice***

by Laurence Hill

Toronto: Harper Flamingo, 2001

#### ***White Teeth***

by Zadie Smith

London: Penguin, 2000

Review by Laura Moss,  
University of Manitoba

In her criticism of Homi Bhabha, Gloria Anzaldúa, and the "now almost formulaic association of cultural hybridity with the disruption of the nation-state" (13), Shalini Puri writes that "what those otherwise unlikely discursive partners—liberal multiculturalism, corporate capitalism, and sections of the academic Left—share is the displacement of the issue of equality, a displacement of the politics of hybridity by the poetics of hybridity" (13). Two recent works that refuse such a displacement are Zadie Smith's début de siècle novel *White Teeth* and Lawrence Hill's *Black Berry, Sweet Juice: On Being Black and White in Canada*. Both texts foreground the inextricability of the power and the problems to come out of mixed race identities even as they present them in sometimes lyrical, sometimes critical fashions. With the recent proliferation of interest in issues arising from mixed race identities in both Canada and England (from Kenneth Radu's novel *Flesh and Blood* to the UBC collaborative project on hybridity, mixed race, and métissage in



Canada, and from the popularity of *White Teeth* to the “Reinventing Britain” Conference organized by Bhabha and Stuart Hall in England), it is not surprising that both books have met with favourable reviews and positive readings about the timely nature of their production.

However, while Smith’s novel has been received as an almost utopian response to the ever-evolving state of what one critic has called “multi-Britain,” Hill’s book has been seen as a hard-hitting factual description of mixed-race identities in Canada today. I think both readings are over-simplifications. Smith tempers her utopian multiracial and multicultural representations with moments of violence and racism, while Hill seems at points to be overly optimistic about the community building that comes out of declaring oneself part of the black community.

After describing the multiracial cast of characters in *White Teeth*, a reviewer in *The Economist* writes, “this all goes to demonstrate, of course, the colonial origins of modern multi-Britain. But the real spark of the book is not post-colonial, but post-post-colonial.” The basis of this claim for post-post-coloniality is that whereas the post-colonial is fixated on history, the post-post-colonial “couldn’t give an f-word” for it, as the reviewer states in the novel’s idiom. However, contrary to the reviewer’s assertion, history is rampant in the novel. The reason that history is inescapable for the characters lies partially, at least, in the fact that they reflect the “helpless heterogeneity” Caryl Phillips contends Smith “recognizes and celebrates.” In *White Teeth*, Smith has created characters of mixed race, mixed cultures, and mixed languages. She has created, in short, a portrait of hybridity in a North London borough. This portrait, however, I argue contrary to Phillips’ claim, is not an outright celebration of hybridity, but neither is it a denunciation of the processes that have led to the existence of such hybridity. Instead, Smith is part of a generation of writers who have written about hybridity—racial, cultural, and linguistic—as part of the practice of everyday life.

As Smith writes about a multicultural and multiracial North London community with humour and compassion, she also deflects some of the optimism by presenting such poignant images as angry young men “who roll out at closing time into the poorly lit streets with a kitchen knife wrapped in a tight fist” (282). The novel presents what Linton Kwesi Johnson calls a “culture of racism” as ordinary—an everyday part of living in London. That ordinary includes a recognition of history, a negotiation of a mixing of cultures, and an acknowledgement of the politics of everyday life in London (overt racism and violence included). Just as *White Teeth* is not a spectacle of a “reinvented Britain,” either as a happy or as a disastrous multiculturalism, it does not foreground the culture of racism and the specific brand of racism that meets those of mixed race, nor does it erase it. This novel draws the everyday—in a comic portrait of a hybrid community and in a portrait of quotidian

racism—in order to show both as the legacy of the history of multi-Britain.

In *Black Berry, Sweet Juice*, Hill paints a portrait of the everyday life of a man of mixed race in Canada. This portrait is supplemented with a series of quotations from more than thirty interviews with the adult-children of mixed race unions. The interviewees comment on topics ranging from racism and prejudice, to lost family history, to the problems of finding a good hairdresser. Through the juxtaposition of interviews and personal recollections, Hill addresses some of the most controversial issues to arise out of discussions of mixed race identities. The interviews, however, tend to be used as further evidence to back up Hill's own observations, rather than as forums to initiate debate and discussion over contentious topics (The exception to the interview as evidence lies in the judgmental words issued over a young man who argues that his dreadlocks are not a political statement). Though the words of the interviewees are presented sympathetically, and often somewhat objectively, they are almost always presented out of context. This is sometimes jarring to a reader forced to leap back and forth from anecdote to social commentary.

Hill addresses important questions such as: "Why do some black women resent black men for choosing white women as partners? Why do we use absurd terms such as 'one quarter-black' or 'half-black' even though scientists proved long ago that race has no biological basis? What have Canadians learned about themselves as a result of the sensational custody fight over a biracial child?" The answers to these questions come in Hill's entertaining mixture of personal and intellectual engagement. Sometimes, though, I would not have minded a bit more academic rigour. At one point, for example, Hill states with horror that his white mother's family accused her of insanity when she announced her marriage to a black man. The horror of the personal situation could have been augmented by noting the long history of the equation of mental deficiency or illness with the love between people of mixed race as scholars such as Anne McClintock have done on several occasions.

Hill persuasively argues that if "race" is in itself a socially constructed, genetically "meaningless," and arbitrarily assigned term, then so is "mixed race." And yet, I wonder if the arbitrariness of the construction of race makes it meaningless or if, instead, the arbitrariness of it is precisely what has made it such a damaging term in the past. This arbitrary and meaningless term has been used to justify the most evil acts of inequality and injustice. The results of such arbitrariness, then, are not arbitrary. Hill's book details the personal implications of such arbitrariness well, using illustrations of his family history.

In Hill's mathematics, Black + White = Black. I wonder, however, about the different experiences of someone who grows up as a black child and learns to combat racism from her stroller and someone who chooses to identify as black. One

of Hill's inset interview stories concerns a woman who grew up as a white girl in Toronto, only to learn that her black grandparents had chosen to pass as white. "After a long midlife journey [in search of family history], Catherine now sees herself sometimes as a person of colour and at other times as a white woman with black ancestors." Similarly, I wonder if someone who grows up as a black minority in rural Eastern Ontario is going to meet with the same responses to her blackness as someone who can choose to identify as black in an urban setting? I do not want to fall into the trap of quantifying race and racial oppression here. Hill convincingly warns against the radical shortcomings of such a trap. I simply want to point to the fact that while Hill more than adequately opens up the very difficult topic of mixed race identities to discussion, there is still much work to be done in fine-tuning that discussion.

As with Smith's novel, Hill's portrait is not an outright celebration of hybridity, but neither is it a denunciation of the processes that have led to the existence of such hybridity. From the fictionalized depiction of mixed race identities in *White Teeth* to the realistic personal reflections in *Black Berry, Sweet Juice*, it is clear that the politics and poetics of hybridity are not even approaching disentanglement.

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*The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice*

by Uma Parameswaran

Broken Jaw Press, 2001

78 pages, \$13.95

Review by Debra Dudek,  
University of Winnipeg

Uma Parameswaran's novella *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice* demonstrates how fiction can work explicitly for social change. Parameswaran is frank about the personal and political impetus for the book in both her Foreword and her dedication: "This book is for my husband and his dream of establishing a help centre for South Asian Canadian women in Winnipeg." In the Foreword, Parameswaran speaks about her "activist spark" and about the novella being written in part as a response to an invitation to speak at a fundraising event for the Emily Stowe Shelter for Women in Toronto.

Parameswaran also provides background to her writing process, claiming that a newspaper clipping from *The Indian Express* out of Bombay reported on how

women from India who are living in the United States are often abused and abandoned by their husbands. The article, Parameswaran claims, "set three characters in my head clamouring to be heard—I have named them Ita Gill, Amita Eggill and Namita Neggill" (9). In *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice*, the reader meets only Namita, but Namita contains within her name the other two women, and so I look forward to hearing their stories as well. For now, Parameswaran has given her readers Namita and her story that, as Parameswaran makes clear, is about an urgent need to recognize what has been accomplished and what needs to be addressed. This story is a tribute to the dedicated people who run women's shelters and women's organizations. It is a story of our cities, of the social assistance and other safety nets that picked her up and helped her back to her feet, and of the legal system that in the final count failed her. Between the lines, it speaks of the changes we need to make in our laws to build a better Canada (10).

While the legal system may have failed Namita, overwhelmingly this novella is a story about everyday successes and about the people who help make those successes possible.

The novella is set primarily in Winnipeg, and for those readers who live in or are familiar with Winnipeg, the novella is delightfully local. The readers who do not know Winnipeg will learn about it with Namita as she sees defining features such as Corydon Avenue, Wellington Crescent, Assiniboine Park, and blue "skies like nobody's business" (16). When the novella opens, Namita has lived in Winnipeg for four months, and within the first chapter we learn that during those four months Namita has been served divorce papers, threatened with deportation, thrown out of her in-laws' house, and coerced into a shelter. Parameswaran smoothly moves her readers between past and present, signaling such movement with paragraph breaks and/or memory devices. For example, when Namita is sitting in Assiniboine Park waiting for Krista, Namita's counsellor, to finish her run, Namita watches the mallards land on the duck pond. Namita observes as the seemingly brown ducks transform into birds with "bright turquoise" backs and "brilliant patch[es] of peacock blue" on their necks. "Peacock blue. Namita's memory raced home to Jaipur" (20).

These remembered moments home in Jaipur are as comforting as the moments in Winnipeg are lonely. Parameswaran's meticulously rendered details of Seth Govind Das's estate and of Namita's home life with her siblings and Biua-Ma show the reader how harmonious Namita's life was before she married Tarun and moved to Canada. However, the divisions between home and away, between Jaipur and Winnipeg are not portrayed in binary terms; the options are not so clear as to fall into easy solutions. For Namita, going back to Jaipur is failure. The voice in her head, the voice of her family tells her, "girls should know that their new home was

where they belonged” (25). The rest of the novella outlines the trials that Namita faces in order to belong in this place that is new to her.

Besides getting used to the weather and the rhythms of a new place, Namita tries to learn a new language. While Namita has spoken English while growing up, she has difficulty with Canadian pronunciation and terminology. Indeed, one could categorize each chapter in the novella in terms of the language that Namita learns. In Chapter 1, Namita learns *laughter* and *sweatpants* from Krista, and we see her negotiating between laughter and silence, between sweatpants and saris. In Chapter 2, she learns the language of legal aid and income assistance, and we see her refusing this language, waiting for her husband to tell her it is all a mistake. In Chapter 3, Namita learns the phrase, “You’ve come a long way, baby,” and this phrase becomes her mantra, her way of building self-confidence and vocabulary: “She watched television all day, trying to watch the women’s mouths as they spoke” (54). It is in this chapter that she makes her own phone calls, takes the bus by herself, goes to the temple, makes new friends, and moves into her own apartment. It is also in this chapter that she reconnects with Tarun, and she learns the language that is his brutality. In the final chapter, Namita moves between the language of shelter and the language of the street, and her mantra changes to “You have a long way to go, baby.”

And her going is a going back in order to move ahead. On the street, from a 7-Eleven payphone, Namita calls Bina-Ma:

Namita leaned against the booth and closed her eyes. Bina-Ma knew, had known all along, would always know and feel. Across the world she felt her mother’s arms around her and she pressed her face into the sweet smell of her milk-wet bodice where lay the ocean of nectar, now and forever hers to sip. (73)

This connection, a connection Namita will always be able to access in memory, enables her to confront her in-laws at their “familiar and hated house” (76). Armed with a black plastic baseball bat, Namita challenges her father-in-law verbally and physically, and she discovers she has the language and strength to do both.

Uma Parameswaran’s *The Sweet Smell of Mother’s Milk-Wet Bodice* makes visible a situation that is too familiar to too many women who have newly-arrived in Canada from India. She describes the feelings of isolation and loneliness. She analyzes the legal system and finds it lacking. She envisions a Canada that is attentive to patterns of abuse, a Canada that acknowledges these patterns and refuses to be complicit in them. She is explicit about her strategy for making these changes. She asks and answers:

How can a new immigrant in an abusive relationship, without friend or family or knowledge of the new environment, be allowed to be divorced without spousal support? How can the legal process ignore such basic and well-documented patterns as the abused-woman syndrome of withdrawing charges of violence, and ethnocultural attitudes of dependency? It is time for changes to be made in the legal process. I would like to see laws that would place roadblocks to an immigrant being a party in a divorce-suit during the first two years of her or his stay in Canada. This would ensure that the parties have time to know their way around and be settled in the new country, before they have to cope with the trauma of divorce.

Moreover, anyone who sponsors a person into Canada takes an oath to be financially responsible for that person for a minimum of five years. It is time the system makes these sponsors pay, the same as it should 'deadbeat dads' who are delinquent in their child-support payments. (10-11)

Perhaps I have paid too much attention to the politics of this novella and quoted too much from the "Foreword." Perhaps you want to hear more about and from the novella. I have a response to this criticism: Buy the novella. Read it. You won't be disappointed.

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**UPCOMING CONFERENCES/CALLS FOR PAPERS****Cultural Spaces/Canadian Spaces:  
Cultural Studies in Canada and Beyond**

Special Sessions at the 2002 Congress of the Social Sciences and  
Humanities in Canada  
Toronto, Ontario—May 29, 2002

Organized by Richard Cavell (University of British Columbia) and Imre Szeman (McMaster University). Co-sponsored by *Topia: A Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*.

These special sessions propose to investigate the unique circumstances and context of cultural studies in Canada. Presenters will be invited to trace out different parts of the genealogy of Canadian cultural studies, including its theoretical legacies, the role played by specific institutions, the importance of public policy, and the relationship of cultural studies in Canada to other uniquely Canadian forms of interdisciplinary inquiry, such as Canadian Studies and communication studies. These sessions will also consider Canadian cultural studies in a global frame and provide an opportunity for scholars engaged in a variety of projects to present their work on contemporary culture.

*Session 1: Canadian Cultural Studies: Past, Present and Future*

Is there a distinctly Canadian cultural studies? What themes or topics does it pursue? What theoretical forms does it take? How (and why) is it distinct from cultural studies elsewhere?

*Session 2: Cultural Studies and Globalization*

How we represent and conceptualize contemporary space has consequences for the study of global culture and culture in the context of globalization. The papers presented during this session will investigate the problems and possibilities of studying culture in the era of globalization, and consider in particular its impact on the practice of (Canadian) cultural studies.

*Session 3: Cultural Studies in Canada Today*

This session will showcase recent work in cultural studies in Canada on a wide range of topics and issues.

Interested scholars are invited to either direct their proposals to specific sessions, or to submit proposals on current work in cultural studies that the organizers will then assign to appropriate sessions.

A selection of the papers presented during these sessions will be published as part of the University of Toronto Press series Cultural Spaces: <http://www.utppublishing.com/series/culturalspaces.html>

Additional information on *Topia* (including the web-enhanced features for its latest issue, "Music and Memory at the Millennium") can be found at: <http://www.utpjournals.com/jour.ihtml?lp=topia/topia.html>

**Deadline for abstracts: January 15, 2002**

Please send abstracts of up to 500 words to, preferably via e-mail, to:

Imre Szeman  
szeman@mcmaster.ca  
Department of English  
McMaster University  
1280 Main Street West  
Hamilton, ON L8S 4L9

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**Rethinking Commonwealth/Postcolonial Literatures:  
Cartographies and Topographies, Past and Present**

Second International Conference of the United States Association for  
Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies  
Santa Clara University, California  
(40 miles south of San Francisco; one mile from San Jose airport)  
April 26-28, 2002

Guest Speakers and Writers Reading from their Work: Opal Palmer Adisa, Pal Ahluwalia, Arif Dirlik, Chitra Divakaruni, Abdul JanMohamed, Ginu Kamani, Shirley Lim, Satendra Nandan, Joel Tan, Trinh Minh-ha.

Amitav Ghosh's novel, *The Glass Palace*, was recently named a finalist for the Commonwealth Writers Prize. In asking that it be withdrawn from the competition Ghosh objected that "this phrase anchors an area of contemporary writing not within the realities of the present day, nor within the possibilities of the future, but rather within a disputed aspect of the past. In this it is completely unlike any other literary term (would it not surprise us, for instance, if that familiar category 'English



literature' were to be renamed 'the literature of the Norman Conquest?')." This novelist's objections demonstrate that the notion of "commonwealth" or "postcolonial" can be called into question and its implications should be explored as the world's global geo-political economy further expands into the new century. If among Commonwealth or Postcolonial literature and languages we also include, as is sometimes done, not only materials in English from current members of the British Commonwealth (Canadian, Australian, Anglophone Africa, etc.), but also writings in French, Spanish, Portuguese, Kikuyu, and all major South Asian languages, what are the boundaries of this expanding field of research? Papers dealing in some way with aspects of this topic are encouraged, but so too are others that may not seem immediately implicated in the question. Possible topics, among others, would be:

- Multifocal approaches to the study of language and literature: commonwealth, multiethnic, postcolonial, and transnational perspectives
- Commonwealths: global-regional reconfigurations and transformations at the turn of the century
- The impact of technology on postcolonial literatures (Santa Clara University is in the heart of Silicon Valley)
- questions of local or national languages in the creation of "new" literatures
- "Maps" (personal, national, philosophical)
- Close readings of individual works or sequences in one or several authors' writings
- Cross-cultural comparative analyses of texts; US culture and ethnic American literatures
- Pedagogical issues, either undergraduate or graduate
- Proposed panels and roundtables on topics of mutual interest
- Film
- Creative readings by authors

**Deadline for abstracts and panel/roundtable proposals: January 15, 2002.**

300-word abstracts should be sent to:

John C. Hawley, Dept. of English

500 El Camino, Santa Clara University

Santa Clara CA 95053.

English departmental FAX: 408 554 4837.

email: [jhawley@scu.edu](mailto:jhawley@scu.edu)

The conference has the support of San Jose State, Stanford, UC Berkeley, UC Santa Cruz, and the U of San Francisco. Membership in USACLALS is \$25, or \$10 for students, adjuncts, and retired professors. Please contact Terri Hasseler, Bryant College, 1150 Douglas Pike Rd, Smithfield, RI 02917, or Amritjit Singh, President, USACLALS, at RIC ([asingh@ric.edu](mailto:asingh@ric.edu)), or see <http://web.bryant.edu/~usaclals/>.

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**ANNOUNCEMENTS & NEWS OF MEMBERS****Federation News**

The AGM of the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada (HSSFC) recently voted for a name change. The former French version of the name was inaccurate, according to many francophone members, and the acronym caused it to be mixed up with SSHRC. It is hoped that from now on people will refer to this important scholarly umbrella organization, of which CACLALS is a member, simply as “the Federation.” The name is the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences/ *Fédération canadienne des sciences humaines*. Isn't it heartening to note that, in French, “humanities” embraces “social sciences”?

**Diana Brydon** (University of Western Ontario), a past president of CACLALS, has recently become Chair of the Management Board of the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program of the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada. The ASPP supports the publication of books in the humanities and social sciences and thus the dissemination of Canadian research in these areas. Congratulations, Diana!

Congratulations to **David Jefferess**, McMaster University, on his acclamation as Student Representative on the Executive Committee of CACLALS. His term of office is from December 1, 2001 to December 1, 2003.

**Guy Laforest** (Université Laval) has been elected President-Elect of the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada—“the Federation.”

**May 29<sup>th</sup>** is being set aside in the week of meetings of the Congress of Social Sciences and Humanities (COSSH) for sessions on professional concerns and for a colloquium on the Congress subtheme of Genders, to be organized by Wendy Robbins and others. Plan to attend this special day.

**Prizes**

CACLALS salutes Commonwealth writers **V.S. Naipaul** (Trinidad) for winning the Nobel Prize for Literature this year, **George Eliot Clarke** (Canada) for the Governor General's Award for Poetry, **Richard Wright** (Canada) for both the Giller Prize and the Governor General's award for fiction, and **Peter Carey** (Australia) for the Booker Prize.

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**Publications**

**Arun Mukherjee** would like to announce the forthcoming publication of his translation from Hindi of Dalit writer Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography *Joothan: A Dalit Autobiography*. Samya of Calcutta is bringing out the book in June 2002.

**Sheila Roberts** is pleased to announce the publication of her novel *Purple Yams*. Penguin. SA. July 2001.

**Jamie S. Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley**, eds. *Mapping the Sacred: Religion, Geography and Postcolonial Cultures*. With an Afterword by Gareth Griffiths. Cross/Cultures 48. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Edition Rodopi BV, 2001.

This new collection interweaves the interpretive methods of religious studies, literary criticism and cultural geography. The essays focus on religious issues associated with the representation of place and space in the writing and reading of the postcolonial. Dr. Scott's introductory essay, "Mapping the Sacred Across Post-Colonial Literatures," argues for the importance to postcolonial studies of recent interdisciplinary work in literature and religion and in the cultural geography of religion. Gareth Griffiths was generous enough to provide an Afterword, "Post-Coloniality, Religion, Geography: Keeping Our Feet on the Ground and Our Heads Up."

***Nation Dance: Religion, Identity, and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean.***

Edited by Patrick Taylor. This book addresses the interplay of diverse spiritual, religious and cultural traditions across the Caribbean. Dealing with the ongoing interaction of rich and diverse cultural traditions from Cuba and Jamaica to Guyana and Surinam, *Nation Dance* addresses some of the major contemporary issues in the study of Caribbean religion and identity. The book's three sections move from a focus on spirituality and healing, to theology in social and political context, and on to questions of identity and diaspora. Patrick Taylor is Associate Professor in the Division of Humanities and in the Graduate Programme in Social and Political Thought at York University, Toronto.

**H. Nigel Thomas** has just had his novel *Behind the Face of Winter* published by TSAR. He will be reading from it at Harbourfront on November 28 and at the Toronto Public Library on Jan. 21, 2002.

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