FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH:
CRITICAL ISSUES OF POST-PUBLICATION AUTHORIAL INFLUENCE

by

Julia Moss Zarb

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Comparative Literature
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Doctor of Philosophy, 2001

Julia Moss Zarb

Graduate Department of Comparative Literature

University of Toronto

The divorce of the author and the text has arguably been one of the main projects of twentieth-century critical writing. Formalist theories, in particular, have dominated with an idea that the author is, and must be, irreparably separated from a text after the point of publication. This dissertation investigates theories that both challenge and support the proposition that the post-publication voice of an author may have some critical merit. It is undertaken using personal correspondence between the author, Julia Moss Zarb, and four Canadian writers; Robert Kroetsch, Carol Shields, Matt Cohen, and Marie-Claire Blais. Each chapter works from a different angle to examine the possible uses and limitations of extra-textual communications. The chapter, “Process is Always in Process,” for example, presents a theoretical dialogue between Kroetsch and the author regarding issues of intentionality. The chapter, “Process Pre-Staged,” on the other hand, offers a consideration of the interaction between Blais’ expressions in personal correspondence and the body of selected published texts. Throughout the work, conflicts between the reader’s and the author’s authority are in central focus.
Ultimately, this dissertation identifies critical value as potentially arising out of a situation where the reader is empowered with the interpretive discretion to allow or disallow post-publication authorial statements into the reading process. Whether drawing on phenomenology, postmodernism or genetic theory as tools for comprehending the reader/author/text rapport, or employing a comprehension of poststructuralism and New Criticism to divine deep-seeded modes of resistance, it is arguable that interpretation of post-publication authorial statements during the reading process creates, for the reader, a potentially significant liminal effect. Throughout this course of inquiry, it becomes apparent that an author's own words may be used with a pre-meditated conservatism to open points of entry and re-entry into his or her works. With an awareness of the difference in degree between allowing a writer to guide towards an alternative means of entering a text and accepting his or her input as directive, each chapter demonstrates that consideration of an author may create a portal through which a reader may approach a work.
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Introduction: From the Horse's Mouth

"A poem is never finished, only abandoned."

Paul Valéry

"Reading oscillates to a greater or lesser degree between the building and the breaking of illusions."

Wolfgang Iser

Critics spent the majority of the twentieth century writing literature into tight corners—demystifying the writing process and, in doing so, almost theorizing themselves out of existence. In the trajectory from late eighteenth-century Romanticism to twenty-first-century postmodernism critical evaluation has changed from an approach to the author as an originating source to consideration of the author as more of a hosting entity through which the text passes. Rather than being considered as muse-driven, the contemporary author is many times cast into a role of providing a surrogate womb, gestating language and code together, in the generation of a text. After delivery, the author is detached and collapsed into a name on a book's cover, not expected or invited to provide any further contribution.1 The process of motivated

1 The difference between such textual traces of an author and the author's
detachment from authorial influence has in many ways been one of the great projects of the twentieth century critical process. The work of animating the text has been passed, in large part, to the reader, and meaning has consequently come to be regarded in many theoretical circles as the product of mining and analysing textual detail.

Until the rise of academic criticism, theory, and graduate schools, around the turn of the last century, the author was frequently perceived as the living extension of his or her work. This is still true today, in some segments of Western society, given the currency of direct contact with the author in everything from Oprah on television, to articles in newspapers, to popular book clubs and bookstore promotions. For many, this process has remained unchanged since the turn of the nineteenth century. In much of popular culture authors continue to be sought-out for advice on understanding their writing. Often the reader undertakes this pursuit with a goal of gaining insight into a text's original inspiration. For academics and critics (often one and the same), however, accepting this guidance from an author potentially impinges on the freedom of interpretation.

The literary critical enterprise is too far evolved to allow the author to re-emerge in a role of directing reading. Contemporary anglophone critics, in particular, have been effectively emancipated from the dominion of the author owing in large part to New Criticism that forcefully emerged as anti-intentionalist in the early decades of the twentieth century. At this time, acceptance of an inscribed signature are developed throughout this work.
author's stated intention was tantamount to giving the author the last word on textual meaning. The New Critical stance on intentionality was most forcefully set into motion by C.S. Lewis and E.M.W. Tillyard, in large part as a result of their disagreements, in *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy*. It was developed by the further disagreements of others such as W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley in their pivotal article, “The Intentional Fallacy.” The general New Critical position on authorial influence is most clearly asserted in this article’s declaration that “[c]ritical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle” (487). This statement is written resolutely as contrary to an idea that the writer, as metaphoric oracle, is capable of validating or negating interpretation. Although there is in this declaration an implication that critical inquiries may be answered somewhere, and a suggestion that disagreements may somehow be settled, it is evident in much of New Critical theory that there is no case where such resolution comes from the author.

This perspective incorporates a critical agreement that post-publication, as Wimsatt and Beardsley argue, the text is “detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it” (471). These critics warn, “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a literary work of art” (271). Statements of intention, defined as the author’s “design” and “attitude,” as Wimsatt and Beardsley claim (272), or “motivation,” as suggested by D. O. Nathan (252), have little New Critical application. Such intangible elements as the author’s intention are considered inconsequential in
comparison to the tactile offering of the text.

Although of later vintage, and with a different theoretical foundation than Wimsatt and Beardsley, Roland Barthes proclaims a similar outlook in his article, "The Death of the Author." Arguing that the recording of a text marks the dying of the author, Barthes asserts: "Writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away" (142). Barthes, as intellectual coroner, calls the time of death: "the author enters into his own death, writing begins" (142). The writer, by this account, is perpetually DOA, dead on arrival. Authors, and their intentions while writing, meet their own vanishing at the moment of writing. "Language knows a 'subject,' not a 'person,'" he writes, adding that this subject is "empty outside the very enunciation which defines it" (145). As Barthes suggests, indications of voice are constructed out of words: "it is language which speaks, not the author" (142). The author transmogrifies from literal to literary.

In place of an actual person Barthes posits an idea of a textually manifest author, or scriptor, who is "born simultaneously with the text" (145).² The scriptor becomes a medium for words making “language hold together” (145).³ This theory essentially assigns the name of ‘author’ to the writing

² Scriptor is a term also in use by genetic theorists referring to the author’s function as both a writer and reader of his or her own text (Bowman 628).
³ Although language-centric, the notion of the scriptor allows enough latitude for Barthes to expand a concept of the author, in his later writing. Despite the stridency of his early declarations of authorial fatality, Barthes’ later work evolves the notion of the scriptor into a more tangible presence. In
process itself. In The Pleasure of the Text, Barthes expresses a similar theory in this address to his reader: "for you I am neither a body nor even an object [...] but merely a field, a vessel for expansion" (5). Such estrangement is inevitable because the laws of time and space dictate that there is an inescapable anterio* to the writing process. There is no access to the true-author, no way to approach the writing-self, to enact or even re-enact the time of creation. Yet as David Bleich intimates in his phrase referring to the "real, but permanently unavailable, historical author," there is nevertheless a person implied by every text, even if that person is inaccessible ("Conception and Documentation" (263). Authors cannot simply be consulted; they are not easily located.

It is easier to accept this idea in theory than in practice. Despite various formalist theories that the author is, and must be, irreparably separated from a text after the point of publication, the reader's awareness of what might be considered as the real author's vicinity, at some level, seems unavoidable. On this point, Seán Burke argues throughout The Death and Return of the Author that "[a] massive disjunction opens up between the theoretical statement of authorial disappearance and the project of reading without the author" (154).

Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, for example, his remarks on the process of writing could be read as expressions of his own intentionality. Similarly, in S/Z, Barthes relaxes his earlier stance by offering an evaluation of a textual plurality and openness that could support the admission of extra-textual elements into the many interpretive layers that constitute reading. Although D.G. Jones asserts that the "post-structuralist (and I presume postmodernist) perspective specifically rejects the idea that texts (or authors) are organic wholes or wholly coherent," the example of Barthes' text, where the living author is also the
An author is invariably indicated by each text. At the very least, as John Shawcross implies, a work "encases the authorial presence as craftsperson" (199). The author is implied to exist as a specific individual rather than a mere function. As Mikhail Bakhtin writes, "[a] living human cannot be turned into a voiceless object of some second-hand, finalizing cognitive process" (59). The author doggedly remains the person behind (and often within) the written work.

An awareness of an author as a person related to the text often turns a reader's head towards a questioning of what he or she intended when writing the work. As Robert Magliola, quoting Husserl, suggests, this is because communication's "corresponding physical and mental experiences" motivate the recipient to "strive to reenact the intending sense" ("Problem of Validity" 101). Investigation is sparked because, in Bleich's terminology, the "reading experience produces the motive for learning about the author" (239). As the predominantly French school of genetic critics have long recognized, there is reward in piecing together an idea of motivation behind a text. Focusing on stages of avant-texte manuscripts, genetic critics such as Frank Bowman argue that such extra-textual focus on the author's intention increases the pleasure of the text: "Voyeurism is one of the sources of pleasure these studies offer; we see the author at work... whereas much literary theory has told us that we textual subject, contradicts this over-generalization (letter)."

Throughout his survey work, "Genetic Criticism," Bowman uses Barthes' differentiations between levels of readerly pleasure as asserted in The Pleasure of the Text.
should suppress any such interest as individuous and misleading" (643). Such spectator-curiosity on the reader's part begins the re-animation of the writer in the process of reading.

The practice of integrating an evaluation of an author into reading might be considered permissible since readers are, in Umberto Eco's terms, "entitled to try infinite conjectures" ("Reading My Readers" 821). Such license is somewhat supported by Wolfgang Iser's indication that the text gives readers openings for endless speculation; "stars in a literary text are fixed," he writes, yet the reader's interpretation creates the "the lines that join them" and as such are "variable" ("Reading Process" 382). The pursuit of less inhibited inference, inevitably incorporating extra-textual material already in the mind of the reader, is of merit in itself. In The Canadian Postmodern, Linda Hutcheon writes that contemporary postmodernism recognizes such readerly activity as not only worthwhile but also rewarding, offering "delight in exploring not just the authorial process of their text's creation, but also that parallel and equally necessary process of the text's recreation in the mind of the reader" (45). Iser sanctions this activity mobilized in the reader's mind, arguing that the value of literature is delivered through its meaning, in giving readers insight into "the workings of the human mind" and establishing connections between "literature and consciousness" ("Indeterminacy" 6). Iser writes that reading is: "a process

5 Contextualizing the genetic critics as French, Bowman asserts that "These studies come as something of a surprise after a period and from a culture in which resolutely immanent analyses of literary texts prevailed, together with a sharp questioning of the authorial voice and indeed of the
of seeking to pin down the oscillating structure of the text to some specific meaning" (10). It is during this process that textual and extra-textual implications and associations unite in an upward spiral as each reader broadens his or her reading by supplying extra-textual detail.

Such a concept in many ways depends on an acceptance of the reader's inference, and not only textual detail, as generating meaning. According to Iser, the textual pattern "varies according to the imagination that is forming it. So the reading becomes an act of generating meaning" (25). The contemporary critical reader's inferential choice to accept textual and authorial indeterminacy also prepares him or her to look at intentionality as auxiliary to the process of reading. Any reader considering analyzing the issue of the post-publication relationship between reader and writer requires an appetite for crossing borders between text and context, between writer and reader. Such activity demands an acceptance of the possibility of multiple, plausible meanings. Working with arguably subjective material transports the reader beyond many boundaries, particularly those of formalist literary criticism that endorses disinterestedness and objectivity. Schools of poststructuralism and postmodernism, however, seemingly advocate a controlled embrace and measured consideration of extra-textual detail that may prove useful in this pursuit. It is probable that, in the current era, the reader may have enough leeway to look to an author with an option of admitting or rejecting what is useful for a given reading.

subject" (627).
If this is to take effect, and the author be revived in any form, and attention paid to his or her intentionality or opinion on a text, it is only at the discretion of the reader. Positioning the authority of the contemporary reader, Hutcheon poses the rhetorical question, "is the inferring reader ultimately the one with the power, the power to ignore or misread?" (Theory of Parody 89). Ultimately, writer and reader are involved interactively to produce a text that changes with each separate reading. As Andrew Brown comments, Barthes tends to "[ignore] the fact that the author-function of framing has merely been delegated to the reader" (118). Picking up this task, the reader can depend on both author and text to present intellectual material to manufacture meaning. Allowing some dimension of authorial play in the process of interpretation enables the reader to open, and even define, his or her own perceptions of potential intertexts. The author, or at least the perception of the author by the reader, may be considered as part of the marginalia that supplements textual tapestries. Readers cannot escape what they know but bring it to every reading, to the extent that individual perspectives produce, almost rewrite, new and different texts with each separate approach.

There is a certain danger, however, in acceptance or even awareness of an author's presence during a reading. Touching on an age-old uncertainty as to which comes first, the artist or the art, Barthes asserts, "the Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book" (145). The concept of belief, in this case, becomes synonymous with a reattribution of authority over a work—as though an author could add to the text. The author,
in this case, would be considered to have a perpetual creative function. At the extremity of this argument the text becomes hyper-extended beyond its own boundaries until it is reunited, post-publication, with the author in a sort of Barthesian nightmare. In The Pleasure of the Text, Barthes reminds that the author is "lost in the midst of a text (not behind it, like a deus ex machina)" (27). Heeding this caution against believing in an author as authority, consideration of the author's statements may be pursued without involving the development of, or even return to, a literary environment in which the author holds a seemingly muse-given power over the text. It is not necessary to discount the author to ensure that such privilege not be granted. To do so could have the same effect on reading as throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

At least some aspect of the author may be salvageable from such dissipation. It is difficult, however, to resolve the issue of authorial slipperiness and determine which aspects may be saved. As Raymonde Debray-Genette writes: "Barthes veut ainsi marquer 'la mort du grand écrivain.' La notion même d'écrivain se dissout dans l'incertitude [...] dont on ne sait plus, ou pas encore, comment l'appeler: écrivain? intellectuel? scripteur?" ("Génétique et poétique" 23). It is evident that there are so many theories as to the identity of the author, primarily within the text, that even the idea of an author as a singular entity is decomposing. Yet, there is significance in the differences between the author regarded as authentic, the author regarded as a function, and the author

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6 In order to accurately reference citations—and because of the myriad complexities of translation—all quotations are provided in the original language.
perceived as a concept. In some senses progressing from Barthes’ idea of the scription, Michel Foucault writes that the authorial function “does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects” (271). By Foucault’s argument, the reader “codifies” a writer as the “result of a complex operation which constructs a certain rational being that we call ‘author’” (268, 269).

Rather than pursuing fruitless attempts to access the ‘real’ author, there may exist a viable alternative in examining a reader’s metonymic construction of an author as a character. The metonym, in this instance, is a catchall for everything influencing awareness of an author. It is built by reading from an author’s body of work, and from criticism on that work, as well as interviews and personal communications. In this scenario, the author is an amalgamation of a reader’s aggregate perceptions of him or her, and is therefore available for examination through the eyes of this reader. Such a practice is integral to the process that Bleich calls “motivated resymbolization,” involving the reader’s construction of the author (262).

The story of the author, as told by the reader, emerges for examination. Within and beyond the text, encounters with the author, or at least what Foucault regards as the “several selves” of the subject, are unavoidably events that influence reading. Commenting on both Foucault and Barthes, Maurice Couturier writes:

[...] une théorie intersubjective du roman, montrant que l’auteur et
Taking the lead from such theory, it seems that there is valuable critical potential in examining the author and reader in such a virtual duel over textual meaning. While theories that suggest contact between author and reader may often refer, in a formalist sense, to the author within the text, the arguments that unfold throughout the chapters to follow indicate that this confluence may extend to interaction beyond the boundaries of the printed text.

Stanley Fish writes that even if it is ideal to approach a text independently of extraneous influence, this is “violated,” in actuality, “all the time by practices that are at once routine and obligatory” (“No Bias” 739). One reason for such violation is the influence of what a reader takes for knowledge of an author. This is, as Fish implies, a long-standing practice as exemplified by statements from such New Critics as Tillyard suggesting that the “facts of a person’s life” are “data for the mental pattern of the man’s life” and as such they “may substantially help our understanding of the mental pattern as revealed in his art” (43). Such facts and data, however, are not encyclopedic but the product of readerly choice in the development of a theory of a writer’s psyche.

Biographical information is frequently brought into play in developing an concretization of the author. Fish argues that biography is inevitably inferred
and cannot "be divorced" from the text ("Biography and Intention" 15). Yet, the process of sorting through biographical fact is itself extremely subjective. Fish reminds that what constitutes biography is still questionable and involves a "choosing of one kind of biography over another" (12). Selection of relevant material often reflects as much about the character of the reader as that of the author.7 As Bleich indicates, in biography, "What is or is not claimed about an author, however, is determined by either the biographer's community or the reader's demands for biographical explanation" (262). Biographic details are often sought with a motivated agenda. "It is all too easy," however, as Tillyard writes in "The Personal Heresy," "for the reader to use biography as an illegitimate short cut into the poet's mental pattern as revealed in his art" (43). It is evident in the contemporary politics of identity that there is a high risk and frequency of biased reading in relying on an inference about an author based on demographic detail such as race, gender, sexuality, or nationality. Neither the reader nor author can adequately measure, without a degree of subjective inference, the impact on such elements of an author's life, or more significantly, on his or her writing. Meaning, writes Fish, is not "specifiable apart from the contextual circumstances of its intentional production" (11). There is a convergence between context and intention that cannot be broken down on the basis of any such element.

An emergent critical inquiry focuses on whether there is information

7 Although the same applies to critical biographers, their perspectives and methodologies often counter such pitfalls of individual subjectivity.
about an author that provides not a "shortcut" but possibly a supplement to meaning. The issue becomes one of determining what "data" are useful and separable for examination. Even if, as Barthes persuasively declares, "linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I" (145), there is some vestige of the author that remains in the record of that instance and may contribute to the reader's supplemental view. In the school of genetic criticism, as detailed by Bowman, theory is based on a focus on avant-texte elements, "the study of drafts, notes, and manuscripts" (627). According to such studies, pre-textual material may be considered as reflecting a stage of the text, thereby reflecting its genesis.

There are traces, sometimes metaphorically referred to as the signature of the author, woven throughout every work. These elements may be manifest in a particular style or preoccupation, or in suggestions of self-reflexive detail. By Foucault's assessment, the author is manifest with "similar validity in works, sketches, letters, fragments" (270). The reader, in mining such elements, reconstructs an author out of what genetic critic Marion Schmid describes as "material traces of writing" (12). Whether evident before, after, or within the text, these traces are the tracks of the writing-self. "Material traces," in other words, carry imprints of the authorial self that may coalesce in a reader's production of the authorial voice.

Yet, like searching for elements of biography, consideration of such traces is a motivated pursuit elemental to reading, as French genetic critic
Debray-Genette asserts: "[...] de la lecture d’un mot, jusqu’au classement des folios, cahiers et autres carnets, notre attention est sélective et nous avons en fait une certaine idée préconçue de ce que nous cherchons" (23). As discussed, such motivation arises out of a reader’s perception of an author. It is also directed by the brand-effect of the author by “la marque du nom individuel” that Gérard Leclerc writes, almost a decade later, is “Le Sceau de l’œuvre,” in his essay of the same name (9). It is this name that governs everything from interest to purchase, as Leclerc suggests, since “c’est le fait qu’il [le lecteur] accorde sa confiance à telle marque, et achète un nom autant qu’un bien” (12). The reader’s collection of fragments of information becomes commodified, increasing the value of the text.

Whether such elements are consulted during reading depends, to a certain extent, on the reader’s perspective on the elasticity of the text—his or her perceptions of textual determinacy and related issues of objectivity. In the “old paradigm” of New Criticism, Norman Holland writes, “the illusion of objectivity” was like “a security cloth” for literary critics who influenced general readerly perception (“New Paradigm” 335). According to this school of thought the text, as suggested by Wimsatt and Beardsley, is considered a receptacle of objective meaning: a work “can be only through its meaning—since its meaning is words—yet it is, simply is, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant” (469). This argument is in many ways tautological, in that a text can be no more than it is, with neither more words nor fewer.
At issue is the interpretation of the static form of the text. The "best artist," according to some New Critical thought, as expressed for example by Warren Tallman, "constructs his work in such a way as to admit of no interpretation but the single intended one; its single intention being a single effect" (qtd. in "Intention" 140). The idea of the 'single best' points to a concept of a definitive, pre-existent meaning held within the text and waiting to be found—albeit by different and varied readings anchored in the text.

Subscription to this argument rests on an assumption that the text alone provides adequate evidence for interpretation, and that context creates only meanings like "red-herrings," for the reader to chase ("Irony and the Artist's Intention" 247). The establishment of textual determinacy provides a perfect foil to efforts to find extra-textual significance.

Some theorists, however, point to instances in which contextual elements become relevant despite such risks of distraction. Bleich states, for example, that "meaning is constructed and conferred on objects and not extracted from them" ("Subjective Paradigm" 30). Similarly, Iser indicates that although communication may be influenced by many factors it is, ultimately, "exercised by the text, it is not in the text" ("Interaction" 110). By such theories, whether deemed reader-response or even phenomenological, the perspective is shifted to crediting the reader with producing meaning rather than being focused on the text as the sole origin of significance. Arguing that meaning is a

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8 This issue has been explored not only by New Critics but is central to most major theoretical lines of inquiry.
product of the process of reading echoes the rhetorical question of whether a tree makes noise if it falls in the woods with no one to hear it—both examples point to the function of experiential perception.

The process of conjecture, beyond the text, that happens during reading is launched because, as Iser claims, each literary text is suspended in a "peculiar halfway position between the world of real objects and the reader's own world of experience" (110). In Iserian theory, this causes a "fundamental asymmetry between text and reader," and challenges each reader as he or she struggles to come to a satisfactory interpretation, balancing a sense of the text and a sense of the world (109). Since each reader's equilibrium is individual, readings are inevitably diverse. By Iser's argument this "imbalance is undefined, and it is this very indeterminacy that increases the variety of communication possible" (110). In bringing the reader's perception into the equation the text becomes a vehicle signalling, rather than a vessel holding, significance.

As Iser writes, the text's intention is uncovered through the "unformulated part of the text, and this indeterminacy is the force that drives us to work out a configurative meaning" ("Reading Process" 386). Iser asserts, "Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves" (111). The reader, in other words, reacts as much to what is not in the text as to what is present. The reader's perception of an author is also brought into play in both the identification and the filling in of such gaps. Iser recognizes points
beyond the text, stating that a "gap arises when the engaged reader sees a
space between a text, and a supplemental view of the author" (111). The act of
resolving the disconnection between an interpretation of a text and a reader's
perception of an author in many ways gives rise to meaning. Likewise, by
corollary of Iser's argument, the reader's agreement between a text and his or
her supplemental view of an author is also potentially important in the
development of meaning.

Yet, such theory exposes a text to an infinite variability of readings and
readers. Fish's admonition on this topic cannot be underrated. He questions
the practicality of reader response theory since, by its nature, it tends to "open
up the act of interpretation to the infinite variability of contextual circumstance"
("Rhetoric" 221). He implies the danger of such extreme indeterminacy: "What
we seem to have is a tale full of sound and fury, and signifying itself, signifying
a durability rooted in inconclusiveness, in the impossibility of there being a last
word" (222). While it is inarguable that such inconclusiveness is critically self-
perpetuating, there may be as much value as danger in unrestrained
interpretation. The authorial voice need not be excluded on the grounds of
increasing indeterminacy. The existence of indeterminacy depends, in
essence, on the relationship between reader and text. It exists regardless of
the author's post-publication position. The author may, in fact, proffer
expedient detail without taking on a totalizing neo-Romantic authority over a
work's meaning. The author's word is arguably most useful when its value is
considered as indeterminate. He or she cannot have the authoritative last word
when, as Fish stresses, the last word is impossible.

Fish's statements regarding such boundless abandon bring to the forefront the role of the critic. Saying that anything is possible is not the same as saying anything goes. Umberto Eco writes: “To say that the interpretation of every text is potentially unlimited does not mean that there are no criteria for interpreting it” (“Reading My Readers” 821). Although critics have had varying roles over time, the critical function “exposes,” in Donald Pease’s terms, “limits, inconsistencies and unwarranted assumptions,” as he states in synopsis of Foucault’s theory (114). While considering intentionality may expand a reader’s interpretive paradigm and the authorial voice may, ideally, further critical argument, the critic is called upon to put theory into practice. I would extend Antoine Compagnon’s assertion that “Entre la pratique et la théorie, se tiendrait l’idéologie” to a statement that between theory and practice there is the critical reader (19). The critical reader relies on literary theory to ensure that the psychology of the reader does not allow the text, as Bleich observes, to “dissolve into the arbitrariness of subjective perception” (3). This process is essentially a test of theory’s viability. Yet there is as much merit in the attempt at such a process as in the result itself. Campagnon writes: “La théorie de la littérature n’est pas la police des lettres;” it is the critic instead who must attempt a regulatory role (18).

Here, ironically, Wimsatt and Beardsley’s anti-intentionalist doctrine may be applied: “[t]he poem is not the critic’s own and not the author’s” (487). It is the critic’s role, in analysis, to regulate against misappropriation of the text by
either party. Yet, to say that there is no ultimate textual ownership is not to say there is no role for either critic or author. Authors and critics both form sub-groups of readers, making each published text a compound of seemingly endless significations generated by past and present writers and readers. Pease writes that in some senses “the author and critic are participants in a still-emergent social process,” as the critic publicizes the findings of his or her reading (112).

The critic’s role is public in that, as Holland writes, literary criticism satisfies our “desire to talk about what we read” (387). Yet criticism is not a conversation, it is a calculated pursuit: “We do not write articles in order to report to no one in particular in no context in particular our unmediated experience of a literary work” (“No Bias” 744). Although critics are valuable for their formulation and observance of shared interpretive structures, writers (and critics) such as Burke suspect criticism as having an agenda in dealing with the author: “The critic sets out to show that he or she is a better reader of the text than its author ever was” (143). Critics seem to be hierarchically at the top of the reading chain and have been granted (by other critics as well as students) a phenomenological confidence in their interpretations. Criticism itself functions as an antidote to author-centric subjectivity. The critical reader, in particular, has achieved the upper hand in determining the common good, for the benefit

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9 For a relevant expansion of the idea of the politics of interpretive power, see Norman Holland, in “I-ing the Theorists,” within The Critical I. Holland explores the assumptions of Foucault, Eco, Iser, Fish, Derrida, Barthes, Saussure, and Chomsky regarding the critical role of “the I, the person engaged
of the general reader.

Like all methods and individuals approaching a text, critics present an inevitable degree of bias. In Campagnon's terms, "La critique apprécie, elle juge; elle procède par sympathie (ou antipathie), par identification, et projection" (20). Perhaps, within the context of such subjectivity, the critical reader has the liberty to look, once again but from a distance, at the influence of the author on critical interpretation. Relating to the pre-textual materials, but applicable to all extra-textual materials, Debray-Genette writes: "C'est peut-être donc la littérature contemporaine qui [...] a excité à nouveau notre curiosité pour les manuscrits, mais d'une manière non plus seulement érudite. Elle a averti notre regard et l'a tourné vers des phénomènes que les 'savants' avaient un peu négligés" (22). Perhaps a less formalist, structuralist or erudite approach allows the critic to look beyond the text for meaning. Although textual geneticists acknowledge that there can be no return to the moment of writing, critics such as Debray-Genette point to the critical value of examining a representation of the author's understanding of the creative process: "Un écrivain sait ce qu'il a voulu faire, mais non pas ce qu'il a fait, c'est-à-dire ce qu'on lit qu'il a fait" (21). The writer knows at least what he or she was trying to do, if not the entire effect achieved. The critical reader, however, may, compare intention to what was accomplished in the text.

Critics, by Pease's account, generalize from the text back into life, reactivating the author (116). This was the motive behind my own contact with
several authors—I wanted to examine whether the theory of value in bringing post-publication authorial traces into a reading was as possible in practice as it seemed in theory. A contemporary context in which the reader’s opinions carry weight allows me, as a critical reader, to pursue such a question, even without promise of resolution. In Death and Return of the Author, Burke writes, "Recourse to the author is deemed paleocritical," yet it is my contention that a return to the author, from the perspective of the reader, is only possible after a history of divorcing the author from the text (17). As Eco asserts:

Authors can humbly make an empirical contribution to literary theory and to the philosophy of interpretation. They must treat themselves as guinea pigs [...] in order to show how many discrepancies can be found between the intention of the author and the intentions of the readers, and both types of evidence can become matter for discussion about the conjectural intention of the text. ("Reading My Readers" 822)

Critics have needed the space created in order to, now, reconsider whether the author may hold any non-totalizing role within the process of the text.

The act of considering the post-publication authorial voice is dependent, in large part, on materials available for interpretation. In writing to the authors under study I have prompted the generation of material for study. The letters I have received are, by their nature, limited. They do not represent an entire study of each author's perspective. They reflect authorial thoughts, frozen in the time and place of writing. They represent only points in the each author's
evolution of thought concerning their intentions and their texts. They are useful as sample material to test against this dissertation's central hypothesis; that such statements may have critical value. Like the fragments noted by leBlanc, in the following excerpt, these letters offer only glimpses into the mechanics of these authors' texts.

Qu'il s'agisse de manuscrits autographes (cahiers de travail, notes documentaires ou de régie, plans, scénarios, résumés, esquisses, brouillons, documents successifs d'ensemble, etc.), de tapuscrits et de dactylogrammes (annotés de la main de l'auteur ou non), de documents extérieurs à la genèse de l'oeuvre (journal intime, correspondances, entrevues, enregistrements sonores ou audio-vidéos), ces documents peuvent servir à retracer - même si elle n'est que partielle - les différentes phases de travail de l'écrivain. (Letter)

The letters examined throughout the following chapters operate much like the peripheral materials noted by LeBlanc. They may not have literary value, in and of themselves, but they serve to animate my own understanding of the works under study.

Their use is varied. On one hand, Robert Kroetsch's communications lead me, or at least accompany me, through an intricate theoretical network. On the other hand, my communications with Matt Cohen challenge my reading skills as I attempt to set aside bias in the pursuit of finding value in his words. Personal correspondence between myself and Carol Shields leads me to a new
perspective on the construction of The Stone Diaries, whereas my communication with Blais enables me to better understand the way her own story impacts my interpretation of her works. My goal in examining personal correspondence between myself and these contemporary writers is to mediate (but not mitigate) their voices in pursuit of enhanced critical understanding of their works.

It is my intention, as the following chapters focus on each of these authors in turn, to analyze how my personal contact with this small but divergent group both challenges and reinforces the theory that post-publication authorial statements have critical value. Any answer to this issue only comes through practical application, as the ensuing chapters demonstrate. Each chapter is divided informally into two parts—a consideration of my perspective on an author within a critical and cultural context, including a rationale for inclusion of each author and their works, and an examination of the influence of the author’s post-publication communication on my reading. The only measure possible seems to be whether it expands Barthes’ “bliss” of the text (Pleasure 4). In gauging success in these terms, I am guided by Barthes’ evaluation of the value of certain texts that challenge “the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories” (14). I have contacted these authors not to provide an explanation or a memory but to augment the process of my reading. My dialogue with these authors increases the reverberation of their speech and, as a result, tempers our dialogue.
This project, in many senses, is an attempt to sample my own interaction with various authors to test the validity of the proposition that the post-publication voice of the author may have some critical merit. It is tempered by the fact that it was carried out over time and throughout my own developing interpretation of the issue of intentionality. It is not based on scientific method, since all of the questions posed to the authors under study took a somewhat varied form. It is based, instead, on the evolution of my own inquiry. While my focus with each author was on drawing out their sentiments regarding the issues at hand, the following chapters demonstrate that my use of each response was different. My interpretation of Kroetsch, for example, varies from the others; perhaps because Kroetsch is the only writer with an academic and critical writing background. Perhaps, on the other hand, it is because Kroetsch was the first writer contacted, and therefore the first with whom I undertook the struggle of whether theory would support even a consideration of listening to the author during the critical process. The first chapter, then, is an exploration of the theoretical issue—aided by Kroetsch's parallel inquiries into the subject of intention. As the chapters unfold, my acceptance that there is value in considering intentionality intensifies; there is an increasing focus on the test of applying it to literature versus testing the basic hypothesis that it may be useful at all. In each case, the authors' cooperation in an act of on-command self-reflexivity, such as I requested, enabled me to better comprehend my own reactions to their texts.
I have not consulted the oracle or looked for a conduit to the past of the text. I have undertaken a critical exercise of considering whether my extra-textually influenced perception of the author both creates a sense of indeterminacy and fills gaps while I read in a process "supplying meaning to the damaged parts" ("Indeterminacy" 1). This process in many ways involves an extension of what Bauer refers to as "listening to the refracted speech of the author and entering the dialogue which constitutes the novel" (161). For better or for worse, my approach seems to amplify the fact that all reading, in Iser’s terms, "oscillates to a greater or lesser degree between the building and the breaking of illusions" ("Reading Process" 386). Such illusions arise out of the text, and out of the literary context, in which the author plays a vital role. Bowman notes that this is very similar to the process of writing suggested by Delcambre and others, as "elaboration and re-elaboration" (638). He points out that "there are many parallels between what goes on in the writing of a text (where the author is constantly reading his text) and what goes on in its subsequent reading by others" (639). In moderation, the value of reading post-publication authorial statements of intentionality lies in the semiotic process of opening a reader to the recognition of multiple possibilities of meaning. While the divorce of the author from the text has been one of the projects of twentieth century criticism, there have also been many points at which the author is reintroduced, in some form, into the field of textual interpretation. In the later years of the century, in particular, there has been a marked interest in issues of autobiography and also in the theories of genetic criticism. Thought in
these areas extends, to some degree, into regarding the author during the process of creation. While not directly addressing intentionality, these theories do allow the reader to look at the author as more than a textual function.
Chapter Two

Process is Always in Process: Robert Kroetsch and Intentional Theory

Robert Kroetsch's writing is reflexive not only about the inherent and inevitable illusions of fiction, but also the processes of his texts' own production. His prose, poetry, and arguably his critical works each have metafictional traits with the primary effect of bringing to the surface a writer/writing/story split. The play of these seemingly disparate elements within his writing offers a continuing text-based trompe l'oeil, often diverting attention from "product (the story told)" to "process (the storytelling)" (Narcissistic 5). It is this quality in his writing that drew me to initially contact Kroetsch—like a child who didn't want the story to end, I wanted to engage him in dialogue. As a critical reader, however, I have been able to select elements of his letter of response in the project of unraveling my questions about the theory of intentionality.\(^\text{10}\) Using his correspondence enables me to test the synergy between my extra-textual idea of Kroetsch and the subject found within his letters to me, as well as within certain published texts.

As Edward Said asserts, the "writer's life, his career, and his text form a system of relationships which provide the reader with a comprehensive portrait of the author" (227). Analyzing these elements "permits one to see a sequence of intelligible development" (235). They can be combined to be read as a

\(^{10}\) Copies of communications between Kroetsch and myself are contained within the 'Correspondence' section of this project.
statement about the author (234). Kroetsch's continued publication and promotion as a professor, literary critic, editor, and poet influences me like a brand-effect, or what Gérard Leclerc refers to an authorial capacity to become one of the "marques commerciales" (11). I look to Kroetsch with a pre-staged expectation that since many works in his œuvre involve a high level of discursive control, in his postmodern perambulations across literary boundaries, he will be responsive to my inquiries. Also, given his penchant for equine imagery, it seemed appropriate to go straight to the horse's mouth and by questioning him personally to avoid the inherent contradiction of looking only to theory and criticism for particulars to inform my perception.

Yet before drawing any conclusions as to the value of this act of communication, I must first address the impossibility of connecting directly with a voice that is paradoxically suspended in the process of writing and fixed in the space of the text. In many of Kroetsch's works the product, or the story told, is actually the packaging of Kroetsch's authorial voice in the process of writing. According to Linda Hutcheon, whose various terms (if not positions) are borrowed here in developing this argument, much of modern metafiction is characterized by such "narcissistic narrative[s]"11 where writers like Kroetsch seemingly construct their own reflections by means of, I would argue, "process

11 This terminology was originally presented by Hutcheon in a formalist context, rather than in the intentionalist manner in which it is used here. Hutcheon's arguments are more focused on the textual self-reflexivity than authorial self-reflexivity.
made visible” (Narcissistic 6). As the analogy developed throughout his novel The Puppeteer suggests, it is as though you can see the strings move when you read much of Kroetsch’s writing.

Such textual strategies, sometimes manifest through apparent autobiographic detail or authorial self-reflexivity that re-directs attention out of the text and onto the author, create a focus on the dynamics of Kroetsch’s implied presence during my (critical) reading process. Kroetsch’s seeming accessibility as an agent of communication seems so familiar as to draw me towards an active dialogue with the author. As Julie LeBlanc writes, “certains documents peuvent [...] être traités comme un phénomène ‘d’endogénèse’ (ils peuvent donc être intégrés dans le ‘devenir’ du texte [...])” (personal correspondence). Engaging with Kroetsch, in other words, tantalizes me as a reader with the possibility of an expanded future for his texts.

For readers, such as myself, who find themselves personally engaged with the authorial presence, the act of progressing through many of Kroetsch’s works is often more provocative and rewarding than any sense of a total final product—his writing animates the process of reading. As Hutcheon suggests, the net effect of “barring its fictional and linguistic systems to the reader’s view is to transform the process of making, of poiesis, into part of the shared pleasure of reading” (20). In my conversation with Kroetsch inspired by his texts, it is not

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12 Although Hutcheon resists using the term postmodern to describe such texts while writing Narcissistic Narrative, later works (including an introduction to a later edition) adjust this perspective to broaden the application of the term postmodernism to include much of contemporary metafiction.
surprising—or necessarily negative—that there is at times some slippage on my part between engaging with Kroetsch within the boundaries of a text and Kroetsch as I encounter him beyond his work.

Yet this idea of co-operative involvement and "shared pleasure" can be deceptive. I, like any other reader, become "caught in that paradoxical position of being forced by the text to acknowledge the fictionality of the world he too is creating, yet his very participation involves him intellectually, creatively, and perhaps even affectively in a human act that is very real, that is, in fact, a kind of metaphor of his daily efforts to 'make sense' of experience" (30). Yet despite my own seemingly personal engagement during the reading process I am inevitably generalized by the text itself. Unlike the situation with his private correspondence, I can be certain that Kroetsch did not write his books with me particularly in mind. As the schools of phenomenology and reader response criticism (which thread their way through postmodern theory) at times assert, a reader becomes "a function implicit in the text, an element of the narrative situation. No specific real person is meant; the reader has only a diegetic identity and an active diegetic role to play" (Narcissistic 139). The writer cannot know who will pick up a book or read a poem. The act of communication—writing and particularly publication—however, forces an author to depend on this faceless reader for completion. Despite the reader's potential for a significant sense of connectivity with the text, this actual disconnection points to
the inherent artifice in textual production and reception as well: the text is essentially a medium and not a participant in the communications act, no matter how much verisimilitude is created by any given work.

Yet this acknowledgment of limitation is not by necessity a detraction. It can, for many, increase the pleasure of reading. As Barthes implies in The Pleasure of the Text, and elsewhere in his writing, it is not by suspending disbelief that we, as readers, are rewarded, but by watching ourselves in the process of suspending. As Roland Barthes writes, "Only when we know [...] what we are doing when we read, are we free to enjoy what we read" (S/Z xi). Accordingly, the reader's extent of engagement, rather than his or her level of belief in the reality of the process, may be considered a measure of textual success.

With Kroetsch, for example, I am engaged on many levels, actively motivated to elucidate meaning. This is more of an intensification of the readers' role as examined by Barthes and Hutcheon among others, than a new function. Although arguably brought to the forefront in modern metafiction, this basic "non-passivity is true of all reading, as psycholinguists, speech-act theorists, and phenomenologists have argued for years" (xii). As Barthes suggests, the incitement of activity is a central "goal of a literary work [...] to make the reader no longer a consumer but a producer of the text" (14). Yet there are few points in Kroetsch's works at which I am able to rest on a sense

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13 Phenomenologists have particularly refined this function to include an implied, ideal reader but the issue of the impossibility of speaking directly to
of determinacy or meaning attained. Instead, every reading, including my own, becomes a re-creation, or even a separate and different creation. As each reader engages in part of the text's continuing movement, s/he takes up various threads (for a time, at least) and weaves a version of meaning. While it may not be the result of an entirely personal relationship, reading a dynamic text, such as Kroetsch tends to produce, is nevertheless singular.

Despite the individuality of the reading process readers do not have a free rein in their methods of deciphering meaning. Readers are still regulated by certain conventions of reading. In the context of this project many such principles arise out of an arguably New Critical or formalist climate within this century that has engendered a wariness of looking towards the author during the reading process. This resistance is based primarily on a struggle for the post-publication control over the meaning of a work (an endeavour into which an author is rarely admitted). As W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley's archetypal statement that "critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle" (10) implies, a writer cannot be considered a mouthpiece of a text. The writer is not a conduit to textual meaning, especially after a work "is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it" (18). In a separate article, "The Authority of the Text,"

individual readers remains.

14 Barthes is among many critics—from structuralism through postmodernism—who have explored the expanded role of the reader caused by textual indeterminacy. Such theories are in use, and referenced frequently, throughout this project.

15 The grouping of New Criticism and formalism is done with awareness
Beardsley reinforces the idea of the writer's disconnection from his or her work by commenting on how meaning can continue to change after an author dies. Death invariably ends an author's post-creative interference with a work's meaning. It is tempting to wonder if this is why dead authors are so often privileged for academic study. Since the debates of C.S. Lewis and E.M.W. Tillyard, mentioned earlier, the dismissal of the author's opinion as inconsequential after the text's inception has been basic to many North American tenets of reading, primarily those influenced by New Criticism, as we have seen, over this century.

On the heels of such critical thinking, theorists such as Barthes (who may have diverged from New Critical thinking in some other ways), still assert the immateriality of the author's post-creative role. Such thinking is reflected in Barthes' proclamation of the figurative end of the writer in his paper "The Death of the Author." Barthes' espouses a perspective whereby the author becomes primarily a subject and function of the text. Yet, accepting the notion of the author as only a textually manifest literary subject is somewhat problematic. The connection I seem to have with Kroetsch, as I reach to his letters to augment my reading, leads me to examine the question of what to do with the literal subject who has slipped away.

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that the two schools have focuses in parallel, but do not necessarily equate. Yet this dissertation also explores the ways in which Barthes' process of regarding the writer's role changes somewhat between "Death of the Author" and his later Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes.
Whether living or dead, most authors leave some trace of their presence beyond the boundaries of their works of art. This is, as Leclerc asserts, “Le sceau de l'œuvre [...] la marque stylistique qu'y 'imprime' son créateur” (150). Although scholars in other eras have connected the post-publication expressions by authors with a reading of their texts, we are conditioned, as post-New Critical readers, not to follow such paths of inquiry:

[In the collective name of scientific universality and objectivity, of novelistic realism, and even of our own formalist anti-Romanticism, we have tended today to suppress the role of the textual producer. Metafiction, however, would contest this suppression. The Romantic 'author,' as originating and original source of meaning may well be dead, as Roland Barthes argued years ago, but his position—one of discursive authority—remains, and increasingly is the focus of much contemporary literature and also much theoretical debate. (Narcissistic xv)]

Considering Kroetsch only as a narrative function of “discursive authority” within the text, however, seems to reduce the potential of considering what that authority—or if not authority, at least input—may provide for my reading. It may be limiting, in other words, to admit only the consequence but not the creator of writing into my individual reading. My discovery and interpretation of Kroetsch’s signatory traces give me a chance to expand my reading.

It may be impossible to altogether ignore any knowledge of the author as creator. Readers (to paraphrase Barthes in S/Z), cannot escape from what
they know—including their perception of the author—but bring it to every reading in the form of individual perspective. As Barthes writes, every reader who is the “I’ which approaches the text...[is] a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite” (S/Z 10). Included in the myriad of influences on each individual is the voice of other past and present readers, including writers in the role of readers. Because they are constituted and constructed by similar systems, readers become “irrecoverable” from the text (10) and reading becomes a self-perpetuating and infinitely self reflexive-chain. Although, as this project unfolds, I attempt increasingly to analyze this self-reflexivity, it is only useful to a point—after which it becomes self-indulgent.

Since, in general, confluence of textual interpretations is almost inevitable then it seems practical to explicate its critical potential. In exploring the convergence of influences on readers of each separate text, it may prove critically worthwhile to focus on extra-textual authorial voice as an augmentation to the process of individual critical readings. Given the many components of authorial voice, implied author and even extra-textual author, the subject may be approached in the same way as a reader approaches a fragmented text—by, examining the elements rather than the totality influencing any insight. This is a process I began with Kroetsch before inviting his commentary. To me he was established, as Leclerc reminds, as a type of author who would help me with my pursuits.

Accordingly, it may now be a function of time and place that I am, as a contemporary reader, able to look towards the discursive testimony of the
author without joining the critics whom Hutcheon describes as having "fallen
back into a modernist or even Romantic concentration on the mental processes
of the historical artist" (xvi). I too would consider such a reading as falling back,
since this thinking points to a determinacy and level of authority that I, as an
active reader, resist as restrictive. Instead, I would like to move forward—with
recognition of the bias involved in this positive endowment—into a literary
present where postmodernism has allowed readers the educated discretion to
moderate the extra-textual elements of their readings. 17 As a reader educated
within a context of postmodern theory, albeit also influenced by a broad scope
of modernist reading, I am constantly aware of my inevitable and arduous role
of co-producing what I read.

My awareness of Kroetsch in his various roles demonstrates that despite
various formalist theories that the author is, and must be, irreparably separated
from a text after publication, a reader's insight into an author's presence, at
some level, seems unavoidable. 18 Sean Burke argues that the author is, to use
his (borrowed) phraseology, always already present in a text. Consequently,
he claims, "[a] massive disjunction opens up between the theoretical statement
of authorial disappearance and the project of reading without the author" (154).

17 In a statement resonant with her consistent stance on the heritage of
postmodernism—Hutcheon asserts, "Metafiction is not new; nor is it in any way
more 'evolved' or aesthetically better than other forms of fiction" (Narcissistic
xvii). It is my contention that consciousness of the reading process that is so
forcefully evoked by postmodern texts leads to further examining the scope of
what the reading process can offer.

18 In "Particulars of Space," I have explored how the publication process is
in many senses a continuation of the creative process, due to the relationship
Mikhail Bakhtin suggests, it is the author's humanity that makes it difficult to entirely turn off awareness: "[a] living human being cannot be turned into a voiceless object of some second-hand, finalizing cognitive process" (59). The author doggedly remains the person behind (and, problematically, within) the written work. Bakhtin implies that the author as an individual may have something to offer: "[i]n a human being there is always something that only he himself can reveal, in a free act of self-consciousness and discourse, something that does not submit to an externalizing second-hand definition [Bakhtin's emphasis]" (59). It seems, for this reason, that it may be useful to engage the author directly in an act of discourse with the hope that there will be a hint or revelation to add to the reading process.

Although subjective, this authorial voice may be allowed to proffer expedient detail without taking on a totalizing neo-Romantic authority over meaning. As a reader, I am not in a position to grant Kroetsch a voice beyond the text but I am able to consider its actuality. I may listen to him simply because he might have something to say which would increase the dialogic activity, the dialoguing textual voices and semantic levels, of the works and issues under study. My task then becomes focused on sorting through the cacophony of our voices to decipher what may be critically useful. This exegesis is not undertaken in pursuit of a definitive reading, but only as an attempt to find another (potentially critical) angle to work from, another point of entry into a text. During this process, I must consistently mediate, but not between writers and editors.
necessarily mitigate, Kroetsch’s voice. The voice must somehow further a
critical argument without being allowed to dominate or without itself being
appropriated. In order to achieve this I, as one subject in/of this project, must
attempt to be as objective as possible, under the circumstances. Although I
cannot claim to be neutral, I can still be discerning. I must, and inevitably do,
remain accountable for my reading. The onus is on me to maintain a critical
distance through a consistent self-monitoring as I consider any authorial
influence on my reading.

Yet, whatever my perspective, there exists a boundary with the strength
of an aegis separating reader and writer. This lack of connectivity would be
easier to accept if it weren’t for the scenes playing in my (individual) mind of my
sister telling me of watching Kroetsch watch Russell Brown positioning The
Words of My Roaring into the Canadian/prairie/postmodern landscape.7
Kroetsch, sitting in the audience, head resting on one hand, glasses dangling,
and taking notes. Taking notes on himself—I acknowledge some slippage
here. My sister and I wonder what he is writing and how it is part of the body of
his work. “Process is always in process,” Kroetsch writes in a letter to me: the
writer’s writing is always in the present tense. Whether it is Kroetsch listening
to a critical reading of his work, or I thinking of Kroetsch’s response, there is
some way in profound postmodern style, that the personal element here
becomes significant, or at the very least brings to the surface an overt

Russell Brown, "Kroetsch and the Prairie Postmodern." Defining the
Prairies: A Multidisciplinary Conference on the Canadian Prairies. Winnipeg,
awareness of process. I really would like to know if Kroetsch agrees that *The Words of My Roaring* is an earlier example of the Canadian postmodern, as Brown suggests, than *Beautiful Losers*, as Hutcheon suggests. For that matter, I would like to get all three into a room and hear them debate. At times, these things do happen, readers and writers sidestep the text and in some manner make contact. In a sense, it is matter of the forum: at an academic conference, for example, it would be conceivable to hear this public discussion among the three writers mentioned above.

Presentation here would consist of discourse on published texts. Included could be an opportunity for the reader/listener to question the writer directly, request expanded arguments, request clarification. And, having been to these conferences, I know there is often a subtext being written in real-time as questions progress—personal agendas, personal conflicts, and personal convictions. Ironically, such academic conferences are staged using conventions of the text: the (living) writer presents his or her post-publication opinions in the role of subject, as the audience actively processes and even co-produces meaning. In this scenario, for example, I would be one of many transcribing opinion and argument into part of my own critical reading. The conference process is a real-time reenactment of the author/text relationship—with a critical exception: the writer's opinion is not only relied upon, but is central. The writer is allowed to continue speaking after the fact; in conferences, even in university classrooms, s/he becomes part of the dialogue.

University of Manitoba, September 25, 1998.
This is possible because the author is acknowledged to be influencing the critical reading but not the determinacy of the text already written. It is accepted because in this context it is allowed that admitting a writer into post-publication dialogue has no direct impact on the determinacy of the text: it does not purport to extend the text, clarify it or add to it. Its impact is on the indeterminacy of reading.

Yet for the written text, the literary institution imposes what in *S/Z* Barthes asserts is a "pitiless divorce ... between its author and its reader" (4). This leaves the reader with a "poor freedom" to "either accept or reject the text" (4). Such polarization of the reader's reactive range is arguably a reflection of an encoded validation of the single true reading implied by textual determinacy. Such statements imply a stance that the work is of fixed meaning and that a better work will communicate its intended meaning without deviation or disruption. In fact, the frequent New Critical use of the term fallacy implies an emphasis on truth-value as a measure of a work's success. The use of such qualitative language is indicative of a position that texts have acceptably predetermined meanings to be accessed by the reader. This seems to rest on an assumption that the text alone provides adequate evidence for the best possible interpretation, and that considering context creates only meanings like "red-herrings" for the reader to chase ("Ironic and the Artist's Intention" 248).

Yet critics such as Barthes have challenged this notion with the assertion that the ideal text is a "triumphant plural" in which "the networks are many and interact [...] a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds" (4). Kroetsch,
whose writing reflects a similar comfort with multiple, plausible meanings, has also challenged the value of such singularity. When confronted with the idea of right or wrong readings Kroetsch's questioning seems appropriate: "Why the seductive invitation of an announced boundary?" (Letter 174). Perhaps this boundary is seductive because it implies a safe resting point. Meaning corralled in this way is something that can be more readily grasped, attained and brought to closure. Readerly activity is not required to go beyond a frontier created by a definite reading. Yet such closure is what Kroetsch describes as the "pathetic longing for the essential answer, the inclusive narrative" (Letter 174). By the use of such emotive language in combination with such a judgmental term as "pathetic," Kroetsch positions totalizing readings somewhere between readerly self-indulgence and naïveté.

Hutcheon problematizes determinacy as a readerly imposition, and implies that some authors inscribe indeterminacy as a counter-measure:

"[Postmodernism explores] the impossibility of imposing that single determinate meaning on a text. Yet it is also true that it does so, not so much by means of textual difficulties alone, but—paradoxically—by overt, self-conscious control by an inscribed narrator/author figure that appears to demand, by its manipulation, the imposition of a single, closed perspective. At the same time, of course, it works to subvert all chances of attaining such closure" (xiii). Although writers, such as Kroetsch, who seemingly manifest such presence overtly in texts seem

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19 Page numbers referenced after personal letters and interviews of the writers under study may be found within Chapter Seven of this work.
to be more directorial, they are actually relinquishing a degree of potential control over reading by leaving room for the reader to launch into individual semiosis. Such texts as Hutcheon describes are too process-oriented, with too many loose-ends in the form of hints and fragments of meaning, to achieve closure as a product. Such texts put process into a type of perpetual motion: "Process is always in process and has to give up on goal, certainty, resolution, finality" (Letter 175). The overt manifestation of the creative process in the seeming activity of an author such as Kroetsch arguably renders a text technically incapable of closure.

Irresolution is inevitable, not only because a text may be in perpetual process, but also because the authorial voice (whatever its source or medium) is inherently inaccessible without mediation. The author is not a stable or fixed entity whose voice is easily reached. Yet, it is not necessary to reach this voice in any entirety. Since it is not a definitive judgment on a work that is being sought, but rather glimpses into the text's inner patterns, it is acceptable to apply fragments of an authorial voice to a reading. An author's stated intentions do not need to be read instead of, but can be read in comparison to, the reader's interpretation of the intention of the text.

In his article, "In Defense of the Author," Hirsch asserts the author as a necessary, and inevitably inferred, element of the text that cannot be exiled. In elaboration of a similar point Booth writes that "for some critical purposes it [...] makes sense to talk only of the work's intentions, not the author's [but] our court of final appeal is still a conception of the author" (11). Although Booth
writes more likely of the implied author, it is nevertheless this conception that allows the reader confidence in interpreting authorial statements within and beyond the text.

It is, however, difficult to determine how the reader comes to a perception of the author. At some point, the reader must commit to an understanding, a "decision about the author's own beliefs" (Rhetoric of Irony 10), a conviction that s/he "is really saying such-and-such, which is in harmony with what I know or can infer about his [her] beliefs" (12). In considering the author, it is only possible to make an educated guess at what Booth calls "likely intentions" that may have been involved in the development of a work (11). Intention, as a generic term, has been described as the "design or plan in the author's mind," his/her "attitude," ("Affective Fallacy" 3) or "motivation" (Irony and the Artist's Intention 252). It has also been defined with an almost legal specificity as a writer's "premeditation" ("Intention" 135), over which s/he retains "intellectual copyright" ("Intention" 141). Yet access to elements of intention is controlled—at least in part—by the author. On a similar note, Kroetsch writes that "(the) 'subject', has a hand (literally, at least for the moment, a hand) in the making of a text. But how is the subject constructed? How does the subject construct itself?" (Letter 175). By Kroetsch's own philosophy, articulated in these lines and, most extensively, in The Lovely Treachery of Words, the

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* Kroetsch's theories of particulars creating an identifiable textual archaeology expressed in The Lovely Treachery of Words are explored later in this chapter, and throughout the following chapters.
reading process involves an active construction of the subject through textual particulars that hint at larger patterns.

When asked if, based on knowledge of such patterns in his career, critical writing, poetry, and novels, I could fairly infer intentions from his work, he banter: "Yes, I think it is 'fair' of you (I would not say it is fair of just any old anyone) to build a theory of [...] intention in my work from [...]. I think it is fair of you because I think you are being fair. A taughtology [sic]." With this (mis)spelling of tautology he ironizes the educated guess, the inevitable appeal to learned, or taught, information for justification of inference. In a sense, he is also ironizing my question by allowing me my inferences—which are after all, not his but mine. As much as his answers to my inquiries relate to his writing, the questions and my arguments also consistently reflect my own sensibilities. In Labyrinths of Voice, Kroetsch states, "I think criticism is really a version of story [...]. I think we are telling the story to each other of how we get at story. It is the story of our search for story" (30). By ironically inserting the critic into the role of the writer, implying that both are creators of fiction, Kroetsch undermines the notion that one is entirely separable from the other. Criticism, as he implies, is still an act of creation as authors such as Oscar Wilde, in "Critic as Artist," have long argued. As such, it cannot be entirely differentiated from other modes of writing.

Claiming to "have difficulty with categories," he answers my inquiries in such a way as to demonstrate a resistance to the divisive impulse involved in isolating/segmenting critical subjects. In reinforcement of this fact, Kroetsch
suggests that he is "too much inclined [towards discursive] transgression"—a statement which, in the context of my questioning, seems to be an intentional mocking of academic convention. The title of his critical text, *The Lovely Treachery of Words*, which arguably valorizes a maverick sensibility, as well as his frequent use of sarcasm and his repeated questioning of tradition, reinforces this reading. As a reader, I can infer that Kroetsch's remark on his transgression is meant to be ironic, or is meant to be self-critical, or is, to the satisfaction of his critics, justifiably self-condemning. Yet there is no definitive answer; as Kroetsch suggests, the "problem with the study of authorial intention is the question of how we construct the author" (Letter 175). But he writes that the "problem is so difficult that most critics run and hide. Think of me as hiding at the moment" (Letter 175). He chooses to retreat into language, forcing me to see the irony of asking a character I have constructed for truth. While not as immediately gratifying as determinacy, this line of thinking keeps me active as a reader, since process takes the place of product, or meaning attained.

In part, the open-endedness of reading comes from the ways in which the subject constructs him/herself. Using language resonant with his chapter title "Unhiding the Hidden," Kroetsch attempts to teach me by example that language is a curtain controlled by the author and my position of trying to open it, to find meaning, is inevitably frustrating. "A curious pun—hide," Kroetsch writes, resurfacing. To hide can refer to concealing, but also to revealing. It is both the noun referring to the skin and the verb referring to the process of
taking the skin off. Searching for intention is like trying to skin a text, to disclose its covert meanings. "The truth is veiled," he writes in *The Lovely Treachery of Words*, "[e]xcept that we are, perhaps, being teased into looking behind the veil" (181). In our correspondence, he is doing the teasing. By ironizing a popular expression about truth leading to freedom, he articulates the paradox of appearance creating reality: "The truth shall make you veiled. That's the way it is, in Canadian writing" (181). He does, nevertheless, encourage my participation in a dialogue: "And that involves your own risking of your own dislocations and uncertainties. Why should I have all the twisted ankles?" (Letter 175). The process of conjecture can be hazardous to writer and critic, potentially making both vulnerable by dislodging them from established pre/occupations.

Kroetsch leverages the conversational implicature of the dialogue. He employs the personal voice as a means of approaching his readers. By using oral conventions involving colloquial language and informal grammatical structure, he appeals to an informal discursive code which, because of its quotidian use, is presumably shared by readers. By initiating casual communication through the use of the (English Canadian) vernacular, the code of affective expression in daily living, and by (purportedly) not claiming authority as professor, critic, poet, or novelist, Kroetsch attempts to equalize the relationship between himself and his readers. In this way, he draws them into what seems like a companionable dialogue. It is perhaps in validation of this level of discourse that Kroetsch (while perhaps being kind to me) risks
academic censure and states: "I take intention to be valuable to the study of texts" (Letter 174). Interpreting intention is a process-based activity of engaging not only with author or text, but with a combination of the two.

This initiation of a dialogue with the reader is a means by which the writing subject constructs him/herself. Functioning exogenetically, as outlined by Pierre-Marc de Biasi, in his article "Qu'est qu'un brouillon?," which details not only the use of letters and notes but also situations that are traceable from textual genesis to the published text, Kroetsch's voice points to himself as the past of his own work. As LeBlanc writes in further explanation of exogesis: "elle se fait donc 'l'écho' du contexte biographique et historique" (personal correspondence). Kroetsch draws me to look at the process of textual creation through the use of a voice that is so casual it seems spontaneous. Leclerc asserts three levels of textual signature, the first which pre-dates writing, the second which begins articulation, and third which is represented by the written work as "le sceau de l'auteur" (10). Kroetsch seems to craft a deliberate exogesis as he uses the vernacular to point back to the different stages of creation—seemingly to the points at which he was thinking and beginning to write.

The character he creates in this process takes on the role of "mediator" of interaction between author and audience (Said 142). Kroetsch builds this persona into his poetry by use of auto-representative voices that engineer direct, seemingly personal, relationships with readers. The character created is not just that of a poet but that of 'Kroetsch,' as constructed by himself. This
strategy is well exemplified by Kroetsch' lines, written in "The Sad Phoenician": "I do have feelings, just because I'm a poet doesn't mean/ I have no feelings of my own, poets are human" (Field Notes 58). This statement, like the entire poem, has a conversational and somewhat belligerent tone. It is a direct appeal for readerly empathy on the basis that the poet, like the reader, is an actual person. This voice is also defined as a character within the long-poem "Seed Catalogue." The reader is offered a sense of a genuine person, albeit a constructed character, filled with childhood memories and involved in a mature self-reckoning as an adult. The poet-character emerges as the force infusing meaning into catalogue entries, consumer letters, childish rhymes, facts relating to a 1919 fire and to his grandfather's will. It is through a belief in the plausibility of this man that the reader is able to picture him irritating a woman at "Terminal 2, Toronto," or getting drunk and "shouting poems" at the Chateau Lacombe.

Yet as personable as his intra-textual character seems, Kroetsch's response to my inquiries contains reminders not to become complacent about knowing this character; Kroetsch inevitably keeps some of his agendas hidden. He does not often allow his writing to be undermined by having too much presented on an easily accessible, denoted level. As an alternative, Kroetsch plays with the idea of silence as a tool that can lure the reader into a search for what has been called "unexpressed 'translitteral' meaning" (Muecke 39). Silence can be read as an invitation to probe behind the veil of language, to find the author who is playing hard to get. Kroetsch seems to imply, however,
that he has at times been too concerned with creating such complexity. In apparent reference to the discursive gymnastics performed in attempts to construct meaning, he writes: "I wonder if I got into a game with silence in which the silence forced me to the wall" (Letter 176). Kroetsch's ongoing concern with the perils of silence is reflected in such titles as "For a Poet Who Has Stopped Writing" and "The Silent Poet Sequence," and such subheadings as "The Silent Poet Eats His Words" and "The Silent Poet Craves Immortality." In the paradoxical act of writing silence he asserts control, letting irony undermine its power. Textual silence is often only revealed through the implied secret. In texts that have an established authorial presence, usually through some degree of self-reflexivity, hinting at a secret is tantamount to dangling a carrot in front of a reader's nose, tempting him/her with a promise of ever-elusive keys to meaning.

In The Lovely Treachery of Words Kroetsch seems to answer part of a question he poses to me: "What is the place of 'secret' in all this?" He writes that "[e]arly in A Short Sad Book, Bowering's narrator, or Bowering, or Bowering disguised as Bowering, remarks, 'Do you know I am keeping secrets from you & I want you to discover them & I will be disappointed with myself if you do" (184). Secrets create character, they weave layers of fictionality into a text which, both in isolation and combination, offer possibilities for multiple meanings. Implying that a large part of his character is masked by secrecy, Kroetsch, in one poem, writes the following line: "L'autre. The author. I'm not myself today. The other is a tramp/Confloozied" (Field Notes 226). The aural
echo of autre/author/other reinforces the semantic resonance between these words. In a quintessentially modern sense, the author, manifested within the text, is never the self but an/other presenting an image of the self. Ironically, the author who creates the text remains outside of it. S/he is not the narrator or the character but somewhere on the periphery as the perpetually implied but never grasped other.

The self-reflexive text, like the oral text that asserts the author as elemental to the process of communication, in particular reminds us of the author's suspension between text and context. The activity involved in chasing different authorial elements keeps the reading process in motion; there is no easy resting point. As Kroetsch suggests, the writer brings about this antilogical position: "the writer manifests agency by using irony; the writer, in that very process, runs the risk of losing agency" (Letter 174). Kroetsch implies that some writers seem to revel in such duplicity:

George Bowering writes and publishes under pseudonyms. But at the same time he invites us, if only through the indirections of criticism and scholarship, to find him out. Unless George Bowering itself is, in a way, a pseudonym. Of George Bowering. In a way the Canadian writer, writing, writes from behind a pseudonym. That's the narrative strategy. We assume that one of the Georges, at least one of the Georges, in *Burning Water*, is George. We assume that. (*Treachery* 184)
In fact, this idea of the writer being a pseudonym for himself is not only a strategy of writing, a way to remain veiled or hidden, but an inherent paradox of the writing process.

Although issues of autobiography are developed extensively in the next chapter, it is worth noting here that the genre greatly underscores issues of subjectivity. Despite dangers of encouraging pseudo-psychological conjecture, autobiographical or biographical detail may at times provide a sort of intertext that allows other layers of reading. This is particularly evident in the function of creating characters by transforming living people into art—often, in the process, fictionalizing them as they become anchored by selected details of time and place. Autobiography as a genre essentially reflects an author's attempt to inscribe him/herself within a work. It is what an author says about him/herself after the fact. Kroetsch writes, "I do not believe that either biography or autobiography, as currently conceived, is much more than a failed fiction" (Letter 175). The claims of these genres seem too great since, by fixing life-stories into text-form, they downplay substantive effects of time or space or changing perception. Autobiography may disappoint as both truth and fiction, as Hutcheon's writing on orality suggests when applied to the presentation of experience, "transposition into print," the process of recording, "involves a kind of double or even contradictory movement," which distances the reader from the text (Canadian Postmodern 49). There is apparently a fundamental paradox to the process of writing down the spontaneous spoken word or
experienced event; the real experience can only be re-created but never re-
experienced in writing.

Kroetsch refers to a talk "I Wanted to Write a Manifesto," in which he
includes autobiographical details and says, "The question I face in reading the
essay I wrote is—was I being fair to myself. The answer: of course not" (Letter
176). By this statement Kroetsch foregrounds the fallibility of autobiography
since even the best intentions do not guarantee authenticity. He writes:

The fallacy of narrated memory surely gets in the way of our
textualizing an author's life. I am trying to write something
about myself that I call 'The Poetics of Rita Kleinhart' and I am
having one hell of a time of it. Chaos and cliché war in the most
remarkable ways. Perhaps I have to reconceive what intention
might be. But we're getting off track. (Letter 175)

In identifying himself as Rita Kleinhart, Kroetsch at the least issues a warning
not to be too naïve in accepting autobiography or declarations of intention
verbatim. Ironically, the overt fictionality of the pseudonym provides a more
trustworthy representation of the author than autobiography. Nevertheless,
Kroetsch asserts that the "current interest in what (auto)biography might be is
encouraging....[E]ither or both of those concepts would be helpful, if realized, in
the enlarging of the possibilities of meaning" (Letter 175). Rather than trusting
such works at face-value—which is tantamount to accepting that they have a
pre-determined truth value—the reader may be better rewarded by moving to a
different level of analyzing the writer's reading of self.
What is often considered to represent the voice or the hand of the authentic author, however, may only be what Kroetsch, echoing Leclerc and borrowing from theories of Derrida and Foucault, labels as "the notion of signature," the proxy that stands in for character in written language (Letter 175). Signature is representational; reading it as truth is like expecting to find an actual person affixed to a letter received through the mail. Its particular flourishes may reflect character but they also remind of the artifice of transforming the living individual into text. Referring to this conspicuous marking of character Kroetsch writes, "[o]urs is a culture that trades a lot in the idea of signature, and signature (at least in part) resides in intention."

Signature must be valued for its implicational function, for what it reveals of text and context. By emphasizing the various means by which an author is textually re/incarnated Kroetsch warns readers against gullibility; signatures have been, quite notoriously, forged. The character or mediator that is manifest through signature elements is a personification of the authorial process. It is through dialogue, and other elements to be discussed later in this chapter, that process is communicated. In validation of this rapport Kroetsch writes, "I return to the idea of process. I return to...dialogue. Keep talking. Keep listening. Keep talking." With the implication that failure to engage in this active reading is a symptom of readerly laziness and complacency, he warns that the "dismissal of intention allows or enables the reader to escape from a dialogue into a monologue" (Letter 174). This statement implies that it is the role of the reader
to keep the dialogue alive. I continue with a struggle to find and maintain my own voice in this discussion of finding a signature.

In order to navigate courses of probable meaning Kroetsch advises, "the readers as well as the author must know the markers" (Letter 174). With this statement his philosophy converges with speech act theory, which according to Patterson, dictates that "vital to any successful act of communication are the interpretive conventions that govern it, and to which (to some degree intentionally) all parties of the act of communication must agree" (138). Kroetsch implies that writer and reader, the participants in the act of textual communication, must concur that certain indicators are meant to convey more than others. The writer encoding texts with meta-literal signifiers may face the consequences of unintended readings. Kroetsch writes: "I used to feel hurt at bad (unfair?) readings of my intention. Really hurt. And I was hurt often by readers who didn't see the parody or ironic intent. This confession undoes everything I have said so far" (Letter 176). Allowing the reader to interpret intention is fine, it seems, as long as he or she doesn't misinterpret. Kroetsch reveals the danger of inscribing intent; 'correct' interpretations may lead to added literary meanings but faulty readings reveal their foundations as unreliable. For better or worse, the reader taking inferential risks to progress in dialogue co-produces the text, but in so doing tends to re/direct meaning tangentially.

Since signification may be interpreted differently by each reader approaching the text, chances for (mis)understanding are inevitably frequent.
Even readers sharing the writer's cultural code must resist claiming too much authority because, as Kroetsch reminds, "the rules of any discourse are shaky, unstable, contradictory" (Letter 174); interpretive competence is not entirely achievable. Yet there are more objective signals offered by the text itself that may counterbalance some discursive shakiness. Better clarity of dialogue (though not resolution) may perhaps be achieved by looking at markers that, according to Kroetsch's critical theory expressed in The Lovely Treachery of Words, are provided in marginal particulars that inform "hints and guesses that slowly persuade us toward the recognition of larger patterns" (7). With "imaginative speculation" (7). Readers can follow "traces" of evidence to multiple meanings (Labyrinths 10). Textual fragments, located in what Kroetsch defines as archaeological layers (7), provide interpretive material. The subtle presence of markers is witnessed by Barthes who writes, "[although] all criticism [...] rests on the notion that the text contains insignificant elements [...] everything signifies something. For proof, we have only to examine the basic (and thus seemingly unimportant)" ("Death of the Author" 51). Whereas Barthes might argue that resulting meanings are unintentional, Kroetsch implies that the writer during the creative process, at least, deliberately imprints some.

Throughout his writing Kroetsch's experimentation with different markers underscores the potential for meaning created by manipulating discourse. While certain phrases used in titles such as 'lovely treachery of words,' or 'silent poet' could be considered as intentional ironies, signified by their meta-literary connotations, other meanings are often unintentional—a result of discursive
instability. Often words combine and mean differently than an author intends. Words may even take on additional meanings over time or in new contexts. Accidental irony found within texts can easily make the writer a victim of his or her own creation. Accidental irony, Kroetsch implies, has a value of its own: "One should and will have 'accidents' as a writer. That's one of the ironies. And yet, perhaps, one should go for the big accidents, the thruway pileups. Why cut your thumb while slicing bread?" (Letter 174). Kroetsch seems to advocate risk-taking, in both the interpretive and creative processes, as a means of crossing conventional literary boundaries and exploring multiple significations. Relying on accidents to produce meaning is more of a gamble, however, than attempting to inscribe or interpret intention. Authorial agency is potentially undermined in texts that reveal ironies and other meta-literary contents as based primarily on discursive quirks.

Resisting the implied fatalism of accidental meaning, Kroetsch points to at least some meaning being created by the author-persona who autographs his texts. He reiterates: "I still come down on the side of signature (and a considerable awareness—a considerable intention)." (Letter 175). In Kroetsch's work his persona character is the medium who carries the message urging the reader to search for signaling:

I used to believe in something called a contract with a reader, and those phrases were signals. Do I still 'believe' in the contract theory? There's something wrong with it, though I don't quite recognize what. Perhaps I resist the deadening notion of a
contract. It seems to resist ideas of process. It seems, in scary ways, to resist discourse. (Letter 174)

Kroetsch ultimately implies that the writer's post-publication voice can be relevant to the reader's construction of the text, and by extension, relevant to its critical deconstruction. Since this process demands active participation, Kroetsch's discomfort with the idea of a contract between writer and reader is not surprising. Contract, because of its purpose to define terms of an agreement, counters the process of dialogue; it resists further inquiry. The value of asking an author for a personal perspective is undermined if it produces only definitive answers.

Unfortunately, inscribing conspicuous markers would give away the secrets of hidden meanings. Conversely, markers can in Kroetsch's words "indeed be too subtle, partly because our writing system has difficulty with tone of voice. How do you write down a voice? We enter into discourse questions [...]" (Letter 174). How do readers infer a literary tone? Possibly by deciphering the presence of textually encoded signals. Although recognizing authorial attitudes can cue readers to the presence of diverse meanings, other factors may also be considered. Reading must be expanded beyond what an author says or writes about a work to include such details peripheral to the narrative as "titles, epigraphs, [and] supplementary statements" (55), as well as footnotes and cover-flaps. In this process, however, it is advisable to heed Booth's warning that although it would be "foolish to ignore them," it is best not to take such indicators at "face value. They may or may not be reliable clues as to what
the work achieves" (Rhetoric of Irony 55). Whether these meanings are equal to those arising out of more textually based theory may be a matter for individual reading. In this process Kroetsch acknowledges that the "unnerving task for the reader is to try to recognize the exchange between the intentional and the unintentional" (Letter 174-175). While authorial intention will probably never fully reveal itself through a text or through a writer, its consideration can be productive in the mobilization of readers' minds into various interpretive directions. It may not provide material for a complete reading but, in its competition with more accepted means of academic study, it can keep things interesting.

Yet admitting perception of the author, based on intra- and extra-textual markers, into reading may still encounter resistance. As Hutcheon inquires in the following statements:

Might metafiction, in its self-analytic overtness, be seen as pre-empting the critic's role as commentator? [...] Whatever the reason, critics and theorists today have seemed much more willing to read and assimilate the latest theory, hot off the press, than to trust to the insights revealed by the self-reflexivity of the equally recent fiction. I suppose that this is nothing new: we have always tended to prefer to leave to time and the anonymity of communal consensus the responsibility
of deciding from which literary works we are willing to learn.⁹

(Narcissistic xii)

To this I would add that an unwillingness to consider how our perception of the author as encountered beyond the text affects the reader’s role as (critical) commentator, and threatens to stifle the process of reading. While it is tempting to wrap the text like a product, the interplay of Kroetsch’s writing within and outside of his published works reveals the value of accepting the text to be a process always encountered in medias res.

Ironically, the best way for Kroetsch and me to remain in active dialogue is to answer questions with questions. Employing this postmodern strategy could perpetuate our conversation indefinitely, but inevitably some conclusions are drawn which lead, eventually, to closure. I’ll leave the last words on the powers of intention to Kroetsch who ends our correspondence with his signature irony:

I am tired. It is 7:45 on a Saturday morning, and all this thinking has tired me out. I had intended to do my laundry this morning. The sun is shining on the Winnipeg winter landscape. I think I’ll go for a drive in the country.

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⁹ Although, since this preface was written in 1980 (re-issued in paperback in 1984) there has arguably been an increase in acceptance and analysis of self-reflexivity as a genre, the point of mistrusting self-reflexive insights—or at least resisting their interpretation—remains strong. As this passage suggests, there seems to be a perceived threat of relinquishing critical authority by accepting self-reflexive directives towards reading.
Chapter Three

Process as Product: Boxing Carol Shields

Carol Shields' novel *The Stone Diaries* is presented as a circumlocution of the quiet and relatively non-momentous life of Daisy Goodwill. The protagonist exists as a compilation of peripherals—Thematically, she is an amalgamated reflection of her own life events; structurally, she is a composite of narrative surfaces. The novel is presented primarily in the guise of autobiography, yet since it is Daisy's and not Shields', its obvious fictionality engenders an ambiguous (and somewhat parodic) referentiality of the self.\(^20\) Despite the inherent implication that autobiography provides some sort of actualization of the author, the purported subject shares neither a name nor a birth date with Shields. As a result, the author is not an overt narrative character, and yet neither is she hidden behind the scenes. Along with a myriad of other complexities, such incongruity creates a chain of self-reflexivity making her position seem much like that of Kroetsch in the previous chapter, equivocal at the very least. As with Kroetsch, if the novel is Shields' puppet then the reader can see the strings working; if Shields is a ventriloquist we can see her lips move. Shields' manipulations of novelistic composition are so conspicuous within the text that attention is repeatedly drawn to the process of textual production, which in turn draws

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\(^{20}\) This thesis subscribes to Linda Hutcheon's definition of parody as "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the heart of similarity" (qtd. in Perloff 20).
attention to the construction of the author. It is this process of continually pointing to
the author that is, ultimately, the product boxed by the novel.\textsuperscript{21}

Shields' overtly implied presence as author—or textual producer—creates a
large part of the novel's effect. Her presence is recognizable in the games she sets
forth for her readers. So much meaning in \textit{The Stone Diaries} is dependent on twists of
voice and tricks of narrative and photographic representations. Such play results in the
novel pointing to its own mechanics which, in turn, point to the mechanic—who is, in
this case, the author. As Michel Foucault suggests, texts frequently "pointe vers cette
figure qui lui est extérieure et antérieure, en apparence au moins" (qtd. in \textit{La Figure} 7).
Shields seems to embody such a character who is somehow connected yet also
spatially and temporally removed from the text. While the disconnection between
author and published text remains in many senses irrefutable, as addressed in the
previous chapter's discussion of critics ranging from Wimsatt and Beardsley to
Barthes, Shields' dalliance with auto-referentiality draws attention to several perceived
connections between writer and writing. This dimension of reader-response is well
elucidated by Maurice Couturier in his assertion:

\begin{quote}
[I]l est apparu que la recherche ne pourrait plus progresser
beaucoup si l'on s'obstinait encore à exclure l'auteur du
champ discursif: on a beau multiplier les actants du texte,
on aboutit toujours à un moment ou à un autre à une
impasse. Peut-être parce que ces actants du texte, qui
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{21} Shields personal correspondence analogizes the novel's structure to
stacking boxes. This concept is explored throughout this chapter.
n'ont pas le statut de sujets à part entière, entrent en
rapport avec des sujets qui, eux, sont bien réels même s'ils
sont d'abord sujets de leur inconscient, à savoir l'auteur et
le lecteur (9).

Perhaps it is because of some level of belief in a rapport with the authorial personae
and their entwinement with textual characters that critical readers—myself included—
are drawn to invite a writer into discourse.²²

Admittedly, my inclination to turn to Shields, the individual, is derived at least in
part from a sense of anteriority, as Foucault suggests. As Barthes writes on a similar
note in "Death of the Author," “the author, when believed in, is always conceived of as
the past of his own book” (145). In the context of his article, this statement has
negative implications because it misplaces authority on the author rather than on
language that renders every text “eternally written here and now” (145). Yet Barthes’
focus is on the linguistic function of the writer or "scriptor" who, he argues, is “born
simultaneously with the text” (148). Others, like David Bleich make similar claims that
the author is on some levels produced by the text—or at least by a reading of the text.
Bleich asserts that the "substrate of factual reality associated with a work of literature
is the individual author and his having created this aesthetic object" ("Conception and
Documentation" 238). From this point, he indicates that considering the author's
existence beyond the immediacy of the text may be a positive element of the reading
process. He writes: “reading experiences produce the motive for learning about the

²² Varying levels of authorial persona and voice are the particular focus of
the following chapter.
Knowledge of an author can help explain these experiences and motivate reading interests” (238). As indicated by this reflexive movement, reading may require an accommodation of perceptions of both author and text.

Although opinions of an author are created through many layers of inference built on a range of experience, from reading interviews and biographies to attending lectures, as a critic I am tempted by the analytical possibilities promised by questioning the living person who both constructs and is contained by a work such as The Stone Diaries. As Gérard Leclerc has made me aware, I am hopeful that the author I find presented in the text will be available to me “autant qu’un bien” (12). From Bleich’s writing, I infer that it is a pursuit of enrichment that drives me towards contact with Shields in the first place. My impulse to approach her is quite arguably motivated by my inference of an available author, indicated by her apparent presence in the novel. Yet, the real-life author is not part of the packaged goods I have purchased with the novel. My access to her is limited to what I can reconstruct of scattered empirical details. The published text lacks her signature and bears no photograph. She is represented only by her printed name, birth date and a short biography. She is, in many ways, a concept built in my mind via my own interpretation of such textual clues. Perhaps because I subscribe, at some level, to the Bakhtinian theory that “when a human being is in art, he is not in life” (2), she seems irretrievable from this sparse information. I access her, originally, through art and it is a significant leap to attempt to access her in life. As Bakhtin implies, art and life seem to formulate an either/or equation. For this reason, I am surprised when the living author bridges this dichotomic gap and responds to questions I initiate in a letter with a generous
three-page response ending with a personable scrawl of “Carol.” My challenge is to interpret whether, for my purposes, such a letter operates on the level of art or the level of life.

The letter itself is a fusion of self-analysis, rationalization, and elucidation.

Reading and re-reading this communication, over time in the years since it was written, I realize that I have again and again mined its ideas in my interpretation of Shields’ writing. It has informed my perception of this woman, as author, to the extent that it is difficult to know where her intention and my inference begin and end.

Referencing Foucault, Norman Holland asserts in “I’ing the Theorists” that we as readers construct an author “to justify our own critical practice” (176). As much as it has lead me into a variety of readings, Shields’ letter has been an ongoing source of reflection and even justification of my own critical perspective. Likewise, reading inevitably involves looking at “somebody’s meaning—if not the author, then the critic’s,” writes E.D. Hirsch, in the context of his article “In Defense of the Author” (13).

Although Hirsch reveals a certain discomfort with an idea of multiple possible readings, he does elucidate an interesting element of the issue of reading in relation to the author: “Whenever meaning is attached to a sequence of words it is impossible to escape an author. Thus, when critics deliberately banished the original author, they themselves usurped his place” (14). Hirsch’s terms reflect a polarized dynamic between writer and reader where one if not the other is in ultimate control. Yet he does point to a fundamental aspect of critical reading, better expressed perhaps in “The New Paradigm: Subjective or Transactive,” by Holland: “literature endures while
we change. Yet as we change, we change it" (350). Reading, as part of the process of textual production, is variable and reflects as much about the reader at a given time as it does about the text.

I approach The Stone Diaries, then, as co-producer and immediately draw on the epigraph which contains a reference to character "shaped in a slant/ of available light." In an effort to increase the light available to me, I add the particulars of Shields' letter to my reading which began in 1994 in Toronto, Ontario and continues into the early millennium in Raleigh, North Carolina. In S/Z Barthes describes the text as a "network with a thousand entrances" where each entrance aims at "a perspective (of fragments, of voices from other texts, other codes)" (11). As a reader I collect fragments from Shields' letter as part of my own navigation of the network of the text. I employ different fragments at different times. In this sense, her written response provides an augmentation not to the text, but to my reading. I look to Shields not to authoritatively supply missing details but to enhance my own grasp of possible meanings. As Barthes asserts, "[r]eading is not a parasitical act, the reactive complement of a writing which we endow with all the glamour of creation and anteriority" (10). I cannot be led by Shields' status as author into any belief that she offers access to privileged or determinate meanings within the text, but I can take her words and fold them into my own readings. Much as I would make use of a critical perspective, I can incorporate her words into my reading process.

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23 These theories are influenced by High Modernism as exemplified in the various writings of late nineteenth-century critics such as James Jeans and Arthur Edington.
I may dissect elements of her letter for layering into my own critical perspective. In this process, I retain critical distance—room to make judgments based on my individual sense of relevance. My reading remains my own. I want to be offered details but I do not want to be guided. This is not simple, as Dale Bauer warns: "[w]e cannot posit our own readings as acts of disengagement or as acts of critical neutrality" (15). Shields' letter is written authoritatively but I cannot limit myself to nodding at her messages with interest or respect. The letter may instead function less socially and more critically, like material written by other critics that becomes part of my argument in the form of quotations and references.

In "Reading My Readers," Umberto Eco demonstrates a case in point by proffering an interpretation of his own writing: "I am here, in these pages, to react to the papers presented at Hamilton College in April 1991. Not to say when and where they are wrong (a crime I would never commit), but in order to show how an author might react when trying to compare some readings of his/her text not to his/her conscious intentions, but to his/her text qua text" (820). As Eco implies here, the post-publication reactions of a writer may have a value as a part of the activity created by multiple readings—a level of activity most often reflected in critical dialogues. And, as Eco suggests, there is potential for layering an author's post-publication voice into an approach to a text with much the same treatment as the voice of another reader of even another critic. Eco writes, "I think that it is [...] possible (it should be) for authors to act as reasonable but not particularly privileged readers of their own texts" (822). This idea of "reasonable" but not "privileged" readers provides a good working definition of critical writers, yet since they have already established their voices in this
I have not been drawn to question them further. My focus, instead, is on whether creative writers can play this role in relation to their own texts. It seems that their voices, equalized by my resistance to a sense of anteriority that evokes authority, can function in parallel to critical commentary. In this way, authors can enter a dialogue with other critical interpretations of their work. As a reader, I can also bring my understanding of the author's perspective into my own reading.

The post-publication attitudes of the author—revealed primarily through personal contact, reported interviews or authorial presentations—can be useful when approached as having an intertextual-type relevance to an author's œuvre. In Room of One's Own, Eleanor Wachtel presents a useful exemplar by placing an interview with Shields alongside the author's creative stories and in the context of critical essays on her work (36). Wachtel, who is credited with compiling the work and who also provides the journal's introduction, seemingly looks to Shields to expand her own reading. Her questions follow an apparent agenda as she elicits thematic commentary from Shields. Wachtel, for example, draws out an historical detailning of the evolution of Happenstance and A Fairly Conventional Woman. In the related dialogue, Shields states that A Fairly Conventional Woman is a written response to Happenstance because "people had asked me whatever happened to Brenda [Jack's wife from Happenstance] when she went away" (35). This statement is a catalyst for me to reexamine the assumptions I built after reading a very different edition of the text published by Random House of Canada, in its Vintage Books series, that contains both novels under the title of Happenstance: Two Novels in One about a Marriage in Transition. My initial reading of this edition has been that it was intentionally
constructed to reinforce this idea of connectivity between the two novels: Brenda and Jack Bowman's stories each occupy a separate half of the book—functioning as a physical metaphor for the disparate yet parallel perspectives of the characters. One half is inverted against the other and, consequently, no matter which way it is read one character's perspective is always upside down. In my reading, there is no correct beginning or end since the start is as easily justified at one end as the other is.

This reading makes sense, at least at first glance. Yet Shields' statements in Wachtel's interview cause me to re-examine my Random House edition and recognize that this is true more in theory than actuality. The conventional back-cover notations of price, publisher's logo, ISBN number, bar coding and photo credit all exist on Jack Bowman's side of the novel. Similarly, the publisher's note with review excerpts introduces Brenda Bowman's story and makes it, effectively, the book's beginning. In this way, despite purporting to equalize the stories, my edition gives priority to Brenda's story. Yet this is contrary to the novel's chronology and the stated intention of the author to write one story in reaction to the other. Reconsidering the novel(s) in this light, I realize that shifting the weight of primacy to Brenda's story adjusts the focus of the entire work. The first story is positioned as original, a point of reference demanding consistency from the second story. An entirely different reading could ensue, based on this shift in perspective. While the disparity between publication and presentation messages is retrievable from details supplied by the text and other sources, my awareness of it comes as a result of reading Shields' words on the subject—or more particularly from allowing her to
influence my reading. She has not given a definitive direction, but rather her post-publication words give me a different angle from which to examine the process of her novels. Wachtel's interview with Shields is available to augment interpretation of the other papers within A Room of One's Own, and this constructive offering is, arguably, in keeping with a general mandate of critical writing.

Through her letter and my reading of The Stone Diaries, Shields and I continue a dialogue that is an extension, in some ways, of the dialogue begun between me as reader and herself as writer within the text. It is conducted in a certain space that is created by writing, by her novel and her letter and by this text. In "Re-covering 'The Purloined Letter': Reading as a Personal Transaction," Holland describes such connectivity as "transactive criticism," exemplified by his approach: "I want to place myself in relation to this story and Derrida and Lacan [who have each written on the story]" (362). Holland asserts "all criticism is at least de facto transactive. It becomes de jure transactive when the critic explicitly builds on his relationship to the text" (363). This level of engagement with a work creates what Holland describes as a "feedback loop," a cycle which is a "continuous transaction" that begins and ends with the reader but incorporates the text (366), opinion regarding the author, and "highly personal associations" along the way (368).

Yet, as Holland suggests throughout "I'ing the Theorists," interpretation empowers the interpreter to take the lead. My dialogue with Shields exists only through my process of inference. Although my reading may seem sensible within my own frame of reference, inevitably the same mixture of elements can have a varying
impact on different people. In "I'ing the Theorists," Holland explicates this aspect of reader response through the writings of Iser, Eco, Foucault, and Fish. Drawing from these theorists, he concludes that "personal identity governs" reading, as well as the "responses we share" that characteristically depend "more heavily than others on codes with canons we share with others" (186). He accommodates the idea that readings change based on "sex, education, class or personality," but asserts that shared perceptions also impact reading.

Likewise, Shields' letter reflects her own individual reading of her work—a reading into which she draws her own history as relevant. She writes: "I'm afraid I can't be very helpful since I'm not adept at critical analysis, particularly as it attaches to my own writing. I seem to lack the vocabulary and the will (no doubt one of the reasons I dropped out of the doctoral program eons ago)" (Letter 182). In this statement it seems the idea of 'will' is particularly notable, implying that critical reading requires a volition to approach a text with a certain set of expectations. She goes so far as to set strictures on the degree of activity she prefers from her readers as she describes her perceived audience with the following statement: "I like to think that I'm writing for the careful reader, the attentive reader, but not the reader who has a yellow highlighter in hand" (Letter 183). As a critical reader I do, however, hold a metaphorical yellow highlighter. The yellow highlighter is, in fact, the ultimate tool supporting what Barthes identifies as the process of reading: "to read is to find meanings [...] to name them [...] I name, I unname, I rename: so the text passes. It is a nomination in the course of becoming, a tireless approximation, a metonymic labor" (11). The critical reading, particularly, follows a conscious agenda of recording,
is isolating, connecting, and rearranging points for constructed readings—it is a
motivated cycle of interpretation. Yet though her statement implies that Shields
recognizes her readers' response, she also puts parameters on the desired level of
reaction. Her writing is offered as a gift to a careful reader but not one who will break
it down and treat it with surgical detachment.

Although she seems to welcome the idea that her rhetoric, as Stanley Fish
suggests, is heuristic and available to the "clear-eyed observer" (206), she also seems
to resist the implied deconstructive activity of the critical reader. In "Rhetoric," Fish
explores the process of critical reading and incorporates Paul de Man's warning that it
is an act of perpetual division and reduction of the text. The idea that criticism, with its
motivated deconstruction, loosens and weakens narrative structures, as suggested by
Fish's article, resonates with Shields' wariness of critical practice. Shields seemingly
reflects a certain circumspection about the idea of critical reading yet, ironically, she
has recently retired from University of Manitoba where her words have for years taken
on critical authority for her classes, inevitably, at least. This letter, like all authorial
statements after the fact, could easily reflect thinking that has since changed. People,
unlike texts, are not two-dimensional.

Yet the idea of time takes on less significance in a reading, such as this, where
the author is not considered as authoritatively directing interpretation. To give the
author this control would involve following his or her every whim and changing
sentiment over time as it relates to writing; in short, it would be difficult and pointless.
Authorial perceptions, like my own, may vary over time. As theorists such as Holland,
Iser and Fish assert, readers are neither automatic nor predictable ("l'ing" 116).
Likewise, Shields' letter cannot serve as a definitive answer to The Stone Diaries or even an elucidation of her textual strategies. It simply offers another possible approach to her work as part of the patchwork that constitutes my perception. 

Considered in this way, the letter functions like a snapshot capturing some aspects of a certain subject. Like a photograph, there is much that is inaccessible and irretrievable beyond the edges, and much that has happened before and after. Shields' letter is a product of time and place, as E.D. Hirsch, in "Past Intentions and Present Meanings," rhetorically suggests: “How can the contents of historical meaning transcend what was possible within its historical origins?” (84). Shields' letter could not have foreshadowed Larry's Party, written later, but since it is elemental to my reading and not a part of her text, I may approach that text from a perspective influenced in some way by this letter. The letter signals me to approach Shields as a player in the process of the novel—I am much more aware of the choreography of my role as her reader and hers as writer.

The Stone Diaries, while a blend of modernism and postmodernism by most standards, reflects what Eco describes as a postmodern characteristic of addressing the “formidable question of the reader's response as a possibility built into the textual strategy” (“Theory of Signs” 184). While the idea of a reader's response as a factor influencing the writing process is not a particularly contemporary suggestion, Eco's distinction seems to be in the degree to which the author seems to consider this interaction. Just as importantly, perhaps, it evokes the question of where we find evidence of such textual strategy. Although textual strategy is arguably manifest within the text itself—a truism given this idea's range of acceptance from New
Criticism through postmodernism—it is difficult to know how the author imagines a reader’s response during the act of writing. The text does not always reveal a clear sense of its own intended audience.

Shields hints that her novelistic strategy involves layering elements meant to evoke varying degrees of reader response, and that this is evident through close reading. She writes, “I always like what Updike once said about putting in surprises for the astute reader” (Letter 183). Since such components, the elements with the potential to surprise, are all that she can control, as she cannot actually control the reader’s interpretation of her work, it seems that she is suggesting the text itself may provide points of entry into an understanding of the author’s intention for his or her reader’s response. In a sense Shields touches on involving the reader in what Perloff insists is a basic postmodern pursuit: “Postmodern inquiry studies the anatomization of thought, not the manipulation of behavior” (15). Unlike reader-response theorists from Holland to Bleich to Robert Magliola, whose critical theory generally points to the value of the reading process being more reflexive than reactive, it is my belief that the return for monitoring our response as readers lies in the recognition of our own analytical process more than in examining the emotive effect of a text on an individual.24

24 Awareness of the anatomy of the thought process is perhaps enhanced by exploring the effects of “combinatory procedures,” as in the example of Annette Kolodny’s “Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism,” which Ralph Cohen cites as containing both theoretical and autobiographical discourses (qtd. in Perloff 15).
Nevertheless, Shields does expect a certain reaction from her readers. To this end, some textual elements have been subject to more manipulation than others: "[o]f course I want my reader to understand my intention, and I suppose I do leave markings" (Letter 182). It is these signs, presented once again as gifts or rewards, that Shields asserts as being worth analyzing—their are the "surprises" she offers almost as enhancements of the entire product, the text (Letter 183). Her use of language here is noteworthy, since surprises increase when something disrupts expectations, and there is a disconnect between expectation and reality. In the case of a written text, surprises frequently happen when frames shift and genres bend.

In the essay "Do Postmodern Genres Exist?" Ralph Cohen cites Jonathan Culler's "reader based theory" that genre is "is a set of expectations, a set of instructions about the type of coherence one is to look for and the ways in which sequences are to be read" (13). When consistency, as perceived through either a shared norm or individual perspective, is broken, then attention is drawn to pieces of a text rather than to an overall effect. It seems significant, in this context, that Shields has given me a somewhat didactic directive to study textual constituents, implying that for the reader the product is not simply the sum of these parts but the act of adding them up. This process can be uncomplicated when authors meet generic expectations and satisfy the "underlying rationale for genre," which is "its assumption that rational demarcation and taxonomy are possible" (Perloff ix). Subscribing to generic strictures involves acceptance of pre-determined boundaries, as Perloff suggests: "When a theory of expectations is divorced from its theoretical frame it can be treated as an unstated contractual relation; of author to reader although the formulation of such a
contract is a legal image, not an actual situation (13). Yet there is a freedom implied in breaking the contract—an idea resonant with the last chapter’s discussion of Robert Kroetsch’s statement that the notion of a “contract with the reader” is somehow “deadening.” The process of creating the textual product is enhanced in Shields’ writing, it seems, by factoring in multiple, possible meanings that arise out of breaking away from generic contracts.

Shields embraces this essentially postmodern activity of challenging margins, as she reports in Wachtel’s interview, describing postmodernism as “a very forgiving mode,” which, because anything goes, “can be too clever,” but “it gets you off the ground” (45). However, as Cohen reminds, “the very concept of transgression presupposes an acknowledgment of boundaries or limits” (17). It is this play on “generic expectation” that Shields confronts, for example, in The Stone Diaries where she allows the novel to get off the ground by writing against the conventions of autobiographical form (6). Once cued that this novel challenges the conventions of its purported genre, the reader’s mind opens to expect the unexpected and hold a vigilant watch for disruption. The reader makes a transition from what Barthes suggests is a very readerly type of trust to approaching the text with wariness and scrutiny, much as Shields claims to approach writing, “with one eyebrow ever so slightly lifted” (Letter 182). Rather than being absorbed in a reading dictated by the narrative, the reader becomes more aware of an involvement in the reading process through an almost Brechtian type of alienation effect.

In The Stone Diaries, Shields plays with the dialogic capacity of the novel to gain positive “indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness” [sic] from
alterations of convention (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 7). The novel, according to Bakhtinian theory, is the ultimate dialogic vehicle. It is an amorphous “genre-in-the-making” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 11), which only benefits by challenges made to its form. As Perloff implies that this meta-genre is elusive: “As Jacques Derrida says in *The Law of Genre,* 'every text participates in one or several genres, [...] yet such participation never amounts to belonging’” (qtd. in Perloff ix). As Perloff asserts no text “has traits that will identify all the texts within that class. Moreover, as soon as a given text is identified as belonging to a specific genre, that genre is no longer the same: participation inevitably means difference” (5). She also writes that “generic classes are inevitably fluid” (6), allowing, according to my interpretation, writers such as Shields to layer genres overtly. As Shields herself notes to Wachtel on the topic of postmodernism’s “anything goes” model, it “gives you permission to let the story go in curious angles” (45). By constructing an autobiography that paradoxically renders its own subject and contents fictional, Shields expands her work’s narrative possibilities.

The novel does not confront a single prescriptive definition of autobiography perse, but rather reflects generic characteristics that are more or less a collective metonym or shared norm. As Perloff writes, “Postmodern genre is thus characterized by its appropriation of other genres, both high and popular, by its longing for a

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25 “To mention the multiple discourses that Bakhtin defines as characteristic of the novel is to note only one of the modernist theorists who accept multiple discourses and discontinuous structures” (Cohen qtd. in Perloff 11).

26 Discussion of the disruption of genre inevitably evokes issues of class and history, as noted by Davis and Schleifer in their Foreword as well as other authors anthologized in *Postmodern Genres.* Since a full study of Shields'
both/and situation rather than one of either/or" (8). In this vein, The Stone Diaries reveals a variety of manipulations of appropriated genres. It draws, for example, on the psychological novel's focus on intimate analysis of character versus a focus on plot. It also borrows from the epistolary novel, a form that has been part of Canadian women's writing tradition arguably since Frances Brooke's History of Emily Montague. Likewise, The Stone Diaries also touches, somewhat parodically, on the sentimental novel. Instead of showing a reward for virtue or honour, as convention would dictate, Shields endows the heroine with a rather commonplace life. There are also elements of the novel of sensation when Daisy accidentally kills her mother-in-law, yet even this convention is challenged by Shields' devising of the most prosaic murder possible. Even the roman du terroir is somewhat ironically confronted in The Stone Diaries as building out of the soil takes on a bizarre twist as a monolith is created out of stone. By bringing her confrontations of generic formulas into the novelistic form, Shields disrupts each genre and perhaps more positively expands the novelistic genre as a whole. Although, as Bakhtin reminds, "The basis for a genre theory of mixed forms or shared generic features is as old as Aristotle's comparison of tragedy and epic" (12), and such tensions between fiction and reality are not new to the novel, there is a certain free-play of meaning launched by such postmodern combinations. In fact, it is this process which is the product of The Stone Diaries.

In my reading, Shields' letter contains statements accentuating my perception that manipulations of generic convention and related structural layering are a part of

generic confrontations is beyond the scope of this chapter, focus remains on the implications of challenging certain generic formulas in The Stone Diaries.
Shields' narrative game, and central to the textual strategies which continually draw her role as producer into the forefront of the text. In this process she claims:

\[\text{The pattern (or task) I have assigned myself holds fairly steady. I love narrative structures, and have found enormous pleasure in creating them and working them out. Sometimes they seem arbitrary to me, as though I'm pushing my narrative into too tight a cupboard, setting out my narrative knives and forks in too tidy a drawer. (Letter 184)}\]

This granting of such primacy to thematic and structural tactics is apparent not only throughout The Stone Diaries, but also within Larry's Party written several years later, where protagonists express themselves by building monoliths and mazes that are closely reflected in the twists and turns of the narrative.

Shields' voice, as I find it within and outside of the text, is important to the palimpsest she creates in bringing disorder to the "too tidy" narrative. The epigraph to The Stone Diaries, for example, mocks conventional novelistic boundaries between truth and fiction. Its poetic quotation is, on closer look, another parodic example of the novel's artifice. The words "nothing she did/or said/ was quite/what she meant," from Judith Downing's "The Grandmother Cycle," offer a particularly poignant perspective on the novel's subject, Daisy Goodwill. Yet the poem is no more authentic than any other narrative construct within the novel. Its fictionality is marked by the curious lack of any date but "Autumn" in the publication information, and also by the fact that the writer credited is depicted in a fictive photograph and recorded in a family tree as a narrative character, Daisy's granddaughter. The surreptitious prelude is part of a
game Shields plays with the idea of authenticity—and an example of making authenticity seem irrelevant, since the poetic lines fulfill the same function whether created by Shields or an outside author. It is one of many challenges to proscriptive ideals of truth offered by the text.

Shields' readers participate in a project of narrative building as they attempt to decode her maneuvering of such semantically relevant novelistic elements as the epigraph, chapter headings, photographs and subject voice. Readers may collate various significations into a somewhat cohesive sense of a narrative that ironically gains meaning by revealing its own emptiness. The work asserts itself as a compilation of surfaces glancing off each other to form a story about losing referentiality. As Daisy herself realizes, "her autobiography [...] would be, if such a thing were ever to be written, an assemblage of dark voids and unbridgeable gaps" (76). Text and subject constantly reflect (upon) their own constructedness, revealing in Daisy's words that "the kernel of authenticity, that precious internal ore" is lacking in their composition (75). Shields makes the concept of (a) real character, in life or art, seem like a fictional conceit. She seems to subscribe to a Bakhtinian theory that: "[a]part from its surface manifestations, its ability to express itself, its visibility and audibility, character possesses no fullness of reality, no fullness of being" (Bakhtin 141). She plays with this idea throughout the novel, implying the impossibility of capturing or creating character in both fiction and real-life. This also sets off a resonance pointing to an analogy of the process of the text where, inevitably, "what is told is always the telling" (S/Z xi).
Autobiography implicitly claims to bridge a gap between written and experienced worlds, but by challenging its conventions and creating doubt about even the existential possibility of a core of meaning, Shields plays with the "surface manifestations" of Daisy's life. She places Daisy within a framework of autobiographical conventions that traditionally celebrate a noteworthy individual. Bakhtin describes, from his male-oriented perspective, this tradition in which the account of an individual "relies exclusively upon those aspects of his personality and his life that are turned outward, that exist for others in the same way they exist of [sic] the individual himself" (137). Shields engages this convention, exploring ways in which Daisy's experience is "turned outward." In many ways Daisy is as decorative as her name implies and, like a flower, her value is often presented as being in the enhancements she brings to the lives around her.  

Shields marshals Daisy through her various personae as child, daughter, wife, and mother. Daisy is most often defined in terms of her relationship to the men in her life, taking on their names and relinquishing her own. In Daisy's own account, in the form of her narrative voice, she labels herself in terms that describe the ways in which others see her. She is Mrs. Flett or Mrs. Greenthumb, the bride or the children's mother, but she names herself as Daisy only as a small child and an old woman, when her use to others is at a minimum, and she finds herself alone. Daisy is in many ways a paradoxical

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28 There is also an echo here with the Henry James' title character in Daisy Miller. Although beyond the scope of this project, this line of inquiry might reveal a significant intertextual relationship.
compound of the fragility that her floral name implies and the hard endurance that her surname suggests.

Shields ironizes the idea of documenting a "noteworthy life" by cataloging, with mock precision, chapter titles which record the progress of Daisy's undistinguished existence. She problematizes the traditional mandate of autobiographies, as suggested by Bakhtin, to commemorate a subject's socially approved accomplishments that reveal his/her life to be a series of important passages. Historically, this is manifested in an account "broken down into precise and well marked epochs or steps" (130). In The Stone Diaries, however, Shields reveals the arbitrary pomposity of attempting to perform such an inventory on a life.

She writes, in her correspondence with me, that she has made her chapter titles "just slightly 'off" in an intentional effort for them not to be taken at face value as categorical markers. Her titles, in the context of autobiographical convention, reveal themselves as ironic. The first section, "Chapter One: Birth, 1905," is straightforward enough until compared with "Chapter Two: Childhood, 1916," which in being isolated as a single year, beginning and ending at age eleven, suggests a sadness and evokes questions of how the intervening and following years would be labeled. It is arguable that "Chapter Three: Marriage, 1927," is similarly undermined by the following "Chapter Four: Love, 1936." The romantic pairing of 'love and marriage' is transposed, the words separated and undermined by their reverse order. There is a similar irony in the isolation of "Motherhood, 1947," despite Daisy having several children over many years, in contrast with "Work" which spans only a time period of 1955-1964, negating her role in keeping her home and caring for her family which
continues throughout her lifetime. Chapters seven and eight, contain the single words "Sorrow," and "Ease," respectively. In a game of pairs, which often incorporate polarities, joy or happiness might be expected in juxtaposition to sorrow, but ease implies resignation more than an end to suffering. "Chapter Nine: Illness and Decline, 1985," like other titles marks only a point in a continuum of Daisy's life (it rhymes too—making it a tidy narrative package).

The final chapter, "Death" is notable for its lack of a date. The family tree also records no date of Daisy's dying. Since the book ends after she dies, this causes her to recede into fictionality: she can only both live and be dead if she is a created character. Daisy's perspective may also subtly ironize the autobiographical genre in which the voice, according to Roland Barthes, speaks about itself as though it were "more or less dead" (qtd. in Death and Return 58). In many ways Daisy is absent from her story even during her narrative life. The insistent superficiality of the surfaces that Shields uses to define Daisy creates, paradoxically, a sense of the subject's internal emptiness. Most of the intimate moments that give Daisy's character substance seem to involve her recognition of the "vacuum [...] in the middle of her life" (75). She may "only stare at this absence inside herself for a few minutes at a time," because the void has such blinding force it is "like looking at the sun" (75). It is perhaps bitterly ironic that the (self-) recognition of something absent could be so painful.

The presence of an absence could not be evoked without a container, a narrative vehicle, to be regarded as empty. In her letter Shields writes that she has intentionally constructed The Stone Diaries as a "a set of three nesting boxes" (183). Given the maternal implications of nesting, it is not surprising that she writes: "I, the
author, make the big box" (183). The meaning of "make" is appropriately ambiguous here: as author within the text it could suggest that Shields is the box, as author outside the novel it could imply that she is the creator of the box. Daisy's role is clearer. As narrative voice, she is part of the novelistic process and progress: she "is making the inside box." Shields writes of the inner box as though she is surprised by what Daisy has made; it "turns out to be empty, holding Daisy's absence from her own life story" (183). The boundaries between Shields and her character(s) seem somewhat amorphous even in her own perception.

The image of nesting boxes, shapes which conform to each other's contours, reminds me of stacking Russian matrushka dolls, each painted intricately but similarly, decreasing in size and ultimately containing nothing. Perhaps, as a result of reading Shields' letter describing the "curiously physical" act of narrative construction, the face I put these containers is that of the author I infer (182). As a reader, I hold these boxes—almost as though gift-wrapped. Perhaps my reading forms a larger fourth box; I may become a stacking doll whose features reflect the nesting dolls I have received. This is improbable; I am distinct from the novel, standing back and trying to look at a cross-section of the layers Shields describes. Even though the author has one foot in and one foot out of the text, her connection to the work is much stronger. She is a sort of liaison. Her purpose, both within and outside the narrative, seems to be the protection of a fragile inner box of nothing, which would, ironically lose its function should it be filled. My purpose as the reader seems to be to keep the process that boxes the product animated.
In the inner box, in Daisy's *histoire manquée*, there is an evocation of the historical absence of women's individual stories. Elizabeth Cohen, points out that "before modern times only a very few, non-élite people have represented themselves to us in somewhat autobiographical form" (qtd. in Kadar 83). Women, especially those represented as having such commonplace lives as Daisy Goodwill, have (it seems) constituted a great portion of the non-élite. In *The Stone Diaries* Shields challenges the use of elitist criteria, not by validating Daisy's life but by showing that these standards for judgment make her life seem empty.

Despite a pervasive feminist ideal of approbating women's lives, Shields, in her letter, points to a greater responsibility of women's writing. She responds to John Barth's idea that "the central question of fiction is not: What happened/[sic] but 'Who am I?" by suggesting: "I think many women writers would modify that question slightly to read: 'Who are we?' and 'Why are we what we are?'" (Letter 183). These questions resonate with Marlene Kadar's argument that life writing opens up a whole genre for women who are "trying to answer whose life it is anyway" (159). Connecting these statements to *The Stone Diaries* makes an answer seem almost tautological: we are as empty as Daisy Goodwill if we let our lives be defined externally.

Is Daisy's emptiness, however, as complete as it seems? Shields writes in her letter that "it was my intention that all the voices in the book be filtered through Daisy's sensibility." If Daisy is the hub of voices, where does she root her perspective? If Daisy contains a central void, where does she get the insight to create such substance? How does she gain a sensibility? It is almost impossible not to elide the narrative voice with the implied author, especially when faced with such profound
warnings about Daisy imposing "the voice of the future on the events of the past, causing all manner of wavy distortion" (148-9). When is this future, and whose is it? Distortion of details is not as disconcerting as the elusiveness of Daisy's voice.

Perhaps this dislocation is appropriate for a voice that is fundamentally empty. Reading the statement that "[Daisy's] is the only account there is, written on air, written with imagination's invisible ink"(148-9), creates a sense of contradictions. Daisy's account is a tangible, written record in the form of the novel; stone diaries cannot be written on air. It is not surprising, given such confusion, for Shields to find that "only a few reviewers seem to have understood" that the narrative voice is located in Daisy. The issue is problematized by the fact that, although concerned with feelings of inauthenticity, Daisy never refers to the overt fabrication of her own autobiography. It is this gap in self-reflexivity that baffles at times, leading the reader to conflate narrator and author. Shields, confounded at readers missing this central point of Daisy's role, writes in her letter:

I suppose this must be seen as a failure to 'mark' my intentions. I felt I made this quite clear: each chapter has one moment when Daisy is alone, lying down on her back, collecting herself as it were, and acknowledging herself as the author of her autobiography. Perhaps I could have signaled more loudly, putting a box around the paragraph—why not? (182 -183).

This is not necessarily a "failure"; the passages she refers to, and others reinforcing this idea, do exist. The problem (if there is one) is a result of Daisy's voice being
scattered, necessitating collection. Confusion may arise out of one of the novel's most compelling strengths—Daisy's fragmented voice contains its own dialogism.

In Wachtel's interview, Shields also reports of reviewers who missed her point. She takes responsibility for what she seems to perceive as narrative failures, flaws in her product.

Daisy's fluctuating perspectives, her multiple personalities make her a more believable character than she would have been if she had been given a conventionally monologic narrative voice. Since, however, she refers to herself in first- and third-person voices, and because she moves unfettered in and out of the minds of other characters, Daisy seems inhumanly omnipresent, unlimited by restrictions of time or space. The considerations behind Shields' creation of a subject lacking in fixity are, perhaps, suggested by this Bakhtinian example: "If I tell (orally or in writing) an event that I have just lived [...] I find myself already outside the time-space in which the event occurred. To identify oneself absolutely with oneself, to identify one's 'I' with the 'I' that I tell is as impossible as to lift oneself up by one's hair..." (Bakhtin qtd. in Death and Return 28). Instead of testing the plausibility of Daisy lifting herself by her own hair, Shields plays with the idea that such an act is impossible (or builds a narrative out of watching the act).

She engages a novelistic convention that Bakhtin labels as a chronotope or the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships [...] artistically expressed" (84). She does not subscribe to a linear time-space dynamic. The telegram telling Daisy's father of her wedding to Barker Flett, for example, is dispatched "minutes before the ceremony [...] framed in the past tense: 'We have just
been married. Letter to follow" (153). This is one of the few overt documentations of Daisy's voice and it is, appropriately, written from a perspective that is both anticipating and reflecting but not experiencing. It arises out of a chronotope that is itself similarly fragmented.

Unity of time and space is (generally) required to establish authenticity; something with no date and no referent could not be considered as documentable. Shields manipulates this dynamic in *The Stone Diaries* by draining documents included as part of the text of their truth-value. The family tree that precedes the written work is based on the fictional relations of characters, many of whom are purportedly represented by a series of photographs within the text. In this novel, time and space frequently lose their meanings; recorded dates and provided materials have only simulated functions of supplying autobiographical credentials. By providing photographs to document the family history of her invented subject, Shields ironizes autobiographical conventions which valorize the impulse to "deconstruct the real into details" (Bakhtin 144). She undermines, by extension, the practice of looking to the past as a source of "authenticity and value" (Bakhtin 18). She implicates not only the process of fictionalizing in writing itself, but also the inevitable illusions fabricated by attempts to reconstruct the past out of obscure or peripheral details.

Photographs within autobiography respond to what Bakhtin argues is a "need" to formulate "a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin to reassure us as to our ends, since ultimately we have never believed in them" (19). Photographs seem to provide evidence of authenticity. There is a "certaine conceptualisation de l'image photographique comme 'analogon parfait' du réel, 'miroir' de la réalité,
‘émanation fidèle’ du référent représenté” ("L’Image photographique" 221). Yet Shields, in an overt move of authorial power, ensures that we are not reassured, as Bakhtin suggests, since details within the photographs are not consistent with what we know of the narrative characters. Not only is Daisy absent from the display, leaving an “unbridgeable gap” in our perception of her, but peripheral and central characters share equal space and demand equal attention. The cohesion of the written story is undermined by Shields’ featuring of such minor characters as Daisy’s grandmother Hannah Goodwill, and her mother’s parallel guardian, Bessie McGordon, the matron of Stonewall Orphan’s Home, along with various children, friends and grandchildren who remain on the edges of the novel. The photographs add a visual layer, enhancing and complicating narrative enigmas.

The author seems to be standing just off camera, mocking the reader who combs the photographs for traces of authenticity. In our correspondence, she writes that: "the photographs glance off or even contradict what they are intended to represent." The reader may be aware, as LeBlanc asserts, that "la photographie donne lieu à d’importants problèmes référentiels, voire spatio-temporels, qui mettent également en cause ses pouvoirs représentationnels. Nous reconnaissons que toute empreinte photo-chimique fige l’objet dans une certaine instantanéité, la démunit de son dynamisme et de sa dimension diachronique" (224). Shields engineers a frustration of this expectation, causing a sort of Brechtian alienation from the work as a reader realizes the gullibility involved in trying to fit a real photograph to a fictional person. If the reader does not realize, however, they are cut off from a layer in the
novel of such complexity that it challenges all other meanings. They may experience the narrative but not the sense of the work.

For those who do recognize the duplicity of these photos, Shields may lead them to regard their own desire to validate as almost compulsive. In Daisy's voice, she asserts that this is characteristic of contemporary society:

When we say a thing or event is real, never mind how suspect it sounds, we honor it. But when a thing is made up—regardless of how true and just it seems—we turn up our noses. That's the age we live in. The documentary age.

As if we can never, never get enough facts (330).

The photographs, being “just off” frustrate the pursuit of authenticity. Again, Shields points to her intention to jar the reading process, to interrupt and to surprise. In this way, the photographs continue Shields' game of beguiling her readers. Their effect is integral to the product the readers gain in reading The Stone Diaries.

Upon finding, for example, that the photograph of Daisy's parents, Mercy and Cuyler Goodwill, does not fit the facts supplied by the narrative, a reader may be tempted to consider the visual image wrong. Mercy is described in the novel as obese and soft, with her “puffed little topknot of hair, her puffed collar and shoulders,” but the photograph depicts her as solid, but not giant, with rather severe hair, features and clothing. Likewise, Cuyler is frequently referred to as a small, slight man an “inch or two shorter” than his wife (33). The photograph, however, shows an average sized man who is taller than the woman, presumably Mercy, whom he stands beside.
Perhaps it is not the photographs, but Daisy's narrative that is erroneous. Shields writes, in an omniscient voice that reminds of her ultimate authorial control:

you want to take Daisy's representation of events with a grain of salt, a bushel of salt. She is not always reliable when it comes to the details of her life much of what she has to say is speculative, exaggerated, wildly unlikely [...]. Daisy Goodwill's perspective is off. (148)

The voice here seems to be speaking as almost an aside, telling the reader to drop the novelistic pretense for a moment to listen to the truth, as told by the author. It seems as if it is this same voice, in her letter, that describes the photographs as being "off" (182). The same voice who, in The Stone Diaries, refers to Daisy's perception as "off." While I try to resolve my confusion regarding which voice exists in art and which in life, if the two states are assumed to be mutually exclusive, I come to the conclusion which seems to be that neither images nor letter nor narrative voice should be trusted; it is all, after all, subject to interpretation. Although somewhat indirectly, Shields' letter has augmented the process of my reading by allowing me to return and closely examine the narrative strategy that is implied by her use of the term "off" to indicate textual indeterminacy.

Shields recycles the photographs she presents in her novel. They are removed from their origins and given invented identities. Certain photographs reveal multiple "duplicities of representation" (Death and Return 57). Even when regarded in relation to their own labels they seem suspect. The three (re)presentations of Clarentine, for example, do not seem to depict the same person. Although age accounts for some
difference in the two portrait images, the character, style and facial structure seem too disparate to be plausible. It is unclear, through comparison, whether Clarentine is even in the "Ladies [sic] Rhythm and Movement Club" group photograph. The picture of Victoria is likewise questionable. The angelic, curly haired girl in a lace dress suspiciously resembles a Victorian advertisement. Although the camera "insists on the truth," according to Magnus Flett's argument in the novel (98), it holds no control over what is done with the images it reproduces, or over what they are alleged to represent. Although in a sense, the camera does show the truth in these photos, they do not, and more significantly cannot, represent the fictional characters. Given the medium, they are always, inevitably, of someone else; someone who exists first in life and then in art. The self-reflexive simulation of reality which these photographs involve can be tied to Jean Baudrillard's theory that there is an "escalation of the true, the lived experience" which manifests itself in "a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity" (13). In Simulations, he suggests that artifice can take on a role of creating the illusion of truth. The photographs in The Stone Diaries seem to criticize what Baudrillard terms as a "panic-stricken production of the real" (13), reminding us that the idea of reality is meaningless if referentiality is lost.

Yet photographs, more than the written word, are appropriated materials. They cannot be entirely constructed; they rely, at their point of production, on living people. Shields' photographs are presented as simulacra, "models of a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard 2). Making simulacra out of real people is inherently problematic. It silences and negates them, stripping them of identity. In The Stone Diaries, it ties
them into a web of family which is not their own. The actual people are no longer referents of their own image. The "process of production" which initially connected them to the photographs has been "absorbed" by the process of reproduction in the novel (Baudrillard 98). They become a signal of the process of production in the novel. The photographs must have passed through many hands between their creation and their eventual presentation within The Stone Diaries, where they are published as part of a mass serial (re)production. If, as Baudrillard suggests, "it is the duplication of the sign which destroys its meaning" (98), then Shields has demolished the nexus linking the original subjects to the photographs she commandeers.

Given the act of simulation's appropriative nature it is understandable that Baudrillard regards it as "absolute manipulation" (57). Shields triumphs in the art of the simulacrum, weaving her novel out of synthetic layers which seem deceptively real. Yet the implication that "artifice is at the very heart of reality" is always close to the surface (Baudrillard 151). This statement mirrors the construction of Daisy's character. She is the shell around the void of her own existence. Recognition of this paradoxical building of emptiness and construction of artifice is produced by The Stone Diaries. As the image of the boxes suggests, there may be nothing inside, but that is the point. The novel's complexity is in its ability to engage the reader in both creating, and recognizing the creation, of emptiness.

Shields' control of the multiple levels of autobiographical signification in this text is so polemical that she, and not Daisy, seems inscribed at the center of the narrative. Shields' beguiling presence is unavoidable, her stylistic exploits are conspicuous and seem constantly to remind the reader that she is
the "big box" which Daisy fits inside (Letter 183). Yet she implies, in her letter, that Daisy has a life of her own; she is able to collect herself and make her own box. This ambiguity over who holds the narrative power is evident even on the book’s back cover when the text is introduced as Daisy’s attempt to "tell her own story," and also, with a suggestion that another voice is involved, as "the story of one woman's life."

On one level it is arguable that author and subject, as Bakhtin suggests, "dialogically interanimate one another" (qtd. in Feminist Dialogics 7). On another level it seems evident that Shields, as author within and outside of the work, is the origin and the end of the novel's dialogism. Her own comments on her concentration on narrative structures resonate with my observations of the overt constructedness of The Stone Diaries. She refers to herself almost as artisan, claiming: "when writing [...] I am 'making' an artifact, and [...] the act of 'making' is curiously physical" (Letter 182). The sheer craftsmanship of her work keeps her, as craftsperson, in the forefront. As her reader, I am engaged with her work but, as is the case with many pieces of art, there is a part of me standing back asking 'How did she do that?' and commenting on her artistry. In this way, she seems inextricably linked to her narrative. As though in acknowledgment of this point she writes in her letter: "I've never seen the possibility of separating writer and text" (Letter 182). Yet she is separate from the text. I know this because I wrote to her in Winnipeg, where she exists outside the novel. However briefly, she was unified, by time and space, in a very basic sense at the time of my contact.
If one subscribes to Bauer's "metaphor of authoring as a female act," then it could be argued that Shields has given "birth [...] cutting the umbilical cord" (Bauer 9). Bauer argues that this "letting-go encourages dialogism since the child/text speaks for itself and with others, just as the author/mother moves on to another production existing outside of the text" (9). Not surprisingly, this breaks down; Shields may have cut the cord in one sense, but in another she is a child eternally carried in the womb of the text that she, herself, has also created.

Shields' ability to maintain one foot in and one foot out of her work seems almost paradoxical. This thought, however, is countered by her articulation, in her letter, of a worry that "those who analyze texts sometimes mystify the writing impulse." Perhaps she emphasizes the functional role of the author in order to dissuade me of her own mystique. Yet she does not resist mystifying the writer altogether. She writes, in her letter: "I do see boundaries between writers and their writing voice—when you pick up a pen a second voice comes out" (Letter 183). Her second (dialogic) voice seems almost muse-driven. She also refers to wanting her intentionality, as manifest structurally and stylistically, to be "veiled by what some have called the net of enchantment, the very primal tug of a narrative." As author she presumably causes this enchantment which pulls her into the narrative. It is difficult not to mystify the writing voice. Perhaps only the writing and not the writer should be privileged for study. The writer, Shields implies, is too fickle, too human, to provide stable grounds for increased meaning: "My intentions change every day. I lose sight of what I mean or want all the time." For Shields, intention seems located in her own feeling of process: "Language is something else. I almost always feel secure in my intentions." Yet
perhaps what a writer thinks s/her might mean or have meant offers something of critical value.

My reading of the letter exists in parallel to my reading of the novel. These materials exist on non-intersecting paths and I seem to inhabit the space between them. We are within a sphere which, despite the disparity in our roles, facilitates a certain free-play of multiple, possible voices. In The Feminist Dialogic, Bauer locates this zone within Bakhtinian theory of the dialogic that she paraphrases as “an intermediate (or ambivalent) space between the imaginary (the creation of art) and the symbolic (the text)” (9). It is in this limbo that an author’s post-publication readings of herself writing gain voice and credence.

In my dialogue with Shields I am not actually searching for stability but only for a few glimpses of possible meaning from someone who bridges one of many gaps between myself and the narrative. I add her letter to the dialogic palimpsest of The Stone Diaries in an attempt to expand my own understanding. In this chapter, I engage in parallel discussions with Shields, as she is manifest within her narrative through Daisy's voice and also by implication, and as I have encountered her outside her text. In the dialogics of my own reading, it is at times difficult to identify the which aspect of Shields I am accessing. As Louise Dupré writes:

Qui parle dans la textualité? [...] Du côté du sujet extratextuel, l'écrivain et l'auteur. À la jonction entre le sujet extratextuel et le sujet intretextruel, le scipteur. Et, du côté du sujet intratextuel, le narrateur. L'écrivain, c'est la personne physique qui détient un numéro d'assurance sociale et inscrit comme profession, dans son rapport d'impôt, écrivain. (9)
Recognizing the fragmentation of the author foregrounds, in my interpretation, the similar problematics of autobiography in locating the subject-self. Reading the fictional Daisy's words that "the self is not a thing carved on entabulation," I sense the ironic impossibility of stone diaries—nothing can attain such fixity (231). Accessible only through the medium of language, the author and her characters are constantly elusive. Whereas Kroetsch, in the previous chapter, has joined me in a theoretical dialogue, it is a greater challenge to find value in the utterances of Shields' voice as it exists within her text and as it exists beyond. I am grateful for Shields' response, but she is, in many ways, only one other reader (or character) of a text that also has a life of its own.
Chapter Four

The Anxiety of Confluence: Matt Cohen in Process

I am eight years old. My parents take me to an old Ontario farmhouse, I meet a man who for more than the next twenty-five years will be their friend, and mine. In that time our families grow and change, people move, there are weddings, divorces. Over these years Matt Cohen laces his companionship with readings from novels in progress and discussions on the writers and politics of Canadian literature. Even since his death, my reading of Cohen's work resonates with constant echoes of the man.

In 1978 I am 12 years old swimming in a hotel pool in Calgary while the loud and often drunken group around me maps out a canon of Canadian literature. This is the “Taking Stock” conference: it is “intended to be a sort of coming-of-age party for Canadian fiction” (MacLulich 18). Various writers, academics and publishing industry stakeholders have gathered in reaction to a perceived political and social need to build a tradition in Canadian literature. As implied by the conference title, inventory is taken as the “masterworks of our literary tradition” are purportedly “collected, identified and assessed” (MacLulich 17). The conference issues lists of the ‘top ten’ and ‘top 100’ fictional texts compiled, in large part, according to a survey sponsored by a single publisher, McClelland and Stewart, and organized by one series editor, Malcolm Ross of New Canadian Library. When after the conference Ross professes a guilty
conscience to Jack McClelland, the publisher dismisses him with the statement; "Your problem, Malcolm, is that you are too susceptible to bullshit" (Making it Real 171).

Almost two decades later I am anxiety-ridden by the idea of confluence: can the critical mind work around what it knows socially? The Calgary conference participants implicitly claim to have done this. In, perhaps, looking both to jump-start a literary tradition and to assert a Canadian critical institution, conference participants wrought a canon. They produced orderly lists that in some respects seem tainted because they were evidently conceived outside the bounds of the objectivity that their form suggests: they were born, in part, out of unrecorded meetings, jokes, looks, gestures, arguments and agreements and, in part, out of the agenda of a single powerful publisher. In the context of literary criticism, Stanley Fish asserts that it is precisely such a process of converging influence that, in fact, produces value. He writes that the "merit of pieces of literary criticism is a function of conditions prevailing in the profession" ("No Bias" 741). Perceptions of Canadian literary importance may have evolved because of, or even in spite of, this meeting that fed a perceived need for laying a critical framework.

As reflected by the Calgary conference in its overt assigning of merit, and further articulated by Fish, "the intrinsic [...] is a political rather than an essential category" (745). In few places is prevailing politics more apparent than, perhaps, in the example of Matt Cohen. A prolific author who for all but sixteen days of his life existed outside of the critical mainstream, as quietly
respected but never critically renowned in the tradition of Canadian celebrities such as Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje or Carol Shields. Yet in winning the 1999 Governor General's Award for Fiction, and in dying so shortly thereafter, he has been elevated to a level approaching literary icon and there has been a widespread consensus as to the high value of his works.

Immediately following Cohen's death, in an article entitled "An Appreciation," in Toronto's newspaper The Globe and Mail, Margaret Atwood touches on this irony: "After quite a few years in which he'd been ignored by the critics, he heard that his book [...] would be on The Globe's bestseller list. He didn't see it though." Arguably under-appreciated within the Canadian critical context, yet what Atwood calls "a consummate writer," he found that the final days of his life brought an acclaim that comments once made in a personal letter suggest he was accustomed to living without: "I have a book (the Bookseller) [sic] coming out in New York next fall, perhaps they'll send me touring in a private jet or a Winnebago or whatever" (Letter 206). For a brief time before, and for the time since his death, Cohen has been brought into a Canadian literary fold. In large part because such weighty messengers as Atwood and The Globe and Mail have been employed to reinforce the sheer narrative poignancy of his personal story. As Atwood writes in an assessment of the man and his work, "He was very smart, very funny and very intellectually tough, which not surprisingly made him restless and a seeker after new things to write and new ways of writing them [...]. Matt was still in full flight as a writer, still in process. It's our loss, which has so many dimensions, like Matt himself."
In a similar convergence of the man and his writing, my perception of Cohen's character based on years of friendship and my interpretation of his writing have overlapped in a way that has led me to a particular bias on both subjects. Yet, as the title of the above cited Fish article “No Bias, No Merit” suggests, a related partisanship is invariably the origin of the critical process: every reader manufactures value out of a separate, if contextually related, politic. Subjectivity, to paraphrase Roland Barthes in S/Z, is arguably the original sin of every individual as they read under the influence of complex sensitivities brought from beyond textual boundaries. In this sense, bias can generally be interpreted by Fish’s assessment, as “just another word for seeing from a particular perspective versus seeing from no perspective at all” (746). Whether because I am a child, literally and figuratively, of the Canadian critical context or because of the graduate work I have undertaken, my decision to approach Cohen personally about his writing is (or was) inextricably related to this outlook.

My perception of Cohen is perhaps only a microcosmic instance of the collective confluence inherent in the Calgary conference, which in turn is only an example of the process involved in Fish’s “conditions prevailing in the profession” (741). Whether impacted by the personal or political—or more likely a mixture of both—reading is inevitably affected by a layered process of influence that may be critically explored for insight into the production of value. As Fish asserts, “literary works have the shape they do because of the questions that have been put to them” (741). My approach to Cohen has been
an attempt to expand the questions I bring to his writing, and to the short stories that comprise *Freud: The Paris Notebooks*, in particular.

I’ve looked to Cohen from the perspective that the authorial voice could possibly provide an intertext to augment the relationship between a work and myself. As Wolfgang Iser writes, an author’s comments “can disconcert, arouse opposition, charm with contradiction and frequently uncover many unexpected features of the narrative process” (“Indeterminacy” 19). Iser qualifies this statement, writing: “comments do not provide any definite assessment of the events; rather they offer an assessment that contains different possibilities open to the reader’s choice” (19). Although subjective, Cohen’s voice proffers expedient detail the use of which, as Iser indicates, is open to my selection as a reader. My personal contact with Cohen has never been with the intent of asking him to elucidate the meaning of his writing and never to assign him as a totalizing neo-Romantic authority on his work, but rather with the hope that our interaction would somehow illuminate the process of my reading.

Likewise, knowing the author personally, and having had the access to address him directly about his writing, has not given the privilege of a definitive reading. It has offered me an angle to work from. More significantly, it has endowed me with a task of sorting through our voices to decipher what, if anything, in our discourse may be critically useful. Cohen’s comments over the course of several conversations and letters, function as Iser asserts, to “permit new gaps to arise in the text [...] between the narrative and various ways of judging it” (20). There is always room, in my interpretation, for the element of
surprise—whether it comes from within in the text or beyond. In reviewing our communications, I listen to Cohen primarily because I sense he might have some input which causes me to look at his work from a different perspective than I would have initiated on my own. Although I cannot count on him to either actualize or expand upon my reading, I can choose to examine constituents of his communication as they relate to my perceptions. I can bounce his words off of what I believe to be present in the text. In this sense, it is productive for me to stay attentive to the author who doggedly remains the person behind (and often within) the text; to treat the authorial voice as actual rather than entirely conceptual.

The authorial voice may be real but what it says is also fallible. It may, perhaps, be better addressed as a novelistic first-person narrator. Yet my experience in trying to reduce Cohen to this voice tells me that, although convenient, treating the author in this way risks reducing him/her to a two-dimensional character, paradoxically giving him/her a flatness that is not reflected in his writing. My purpose is, in many ways, to test whether there is any critical room to address an author personally, or whether an author should only be approached through the vehicle of the text. Perhaps, in a general sense, this line of inquiry may also help me to avoid basing connections between a perceived subject and his/her text on potentially biased judgments of race, gender or ethnicity. In my case, this goes beyond acknowledging that Cohen is a white male of Jewish heritage. In order to assess value, I must also recognize the presumptions I make of the man whom I seem to have known. I
see Cohen in the light of his family, in the context, primarily, of his country home, in the role of family friend and in the character of dedicated author. In the interests of fair-minded assessment, it is necessary for me to set aside my own predispositions and listen to his words as though meeting him for the first time.

Fulfilling this resolution, however, proves challenging. Since Cohen, as author is not a stable or fixed entity whose voice is immediately accessible, I tend to contextualize this persona within a multi-faceted human character who, in this case, I at times consider as Matt and at others as Cohen. My perspective is primarily dependent on the context, social or critical, in which I approach him, although there is confluence between the two. It is difficult, and probably impossible, to isolate one aspect of a person for study. Yet according to Cohen the authorial persona dominates when discussing writing: “anyone who is writing or talking about their writing is probably necessarily speaking from their official self.” Presumably, then, on May 12, 1995, as I sit at the table in his Toronto home, our dialogue is the product of both of our official selves.29 As friends we talk and have a glass of wine and then switch tracks, almost literally, as I turn on a tape-recorder.

Cohen does imply that speaking with his official self might provide access to the self who writes: “I think there is a connection between the so-called official self who might be the agent, almost the external agent, of the

29 Unless otherwise noted, all citations of Cohen are from this May 12, 1995, interview.
person who writes the books, but when I’m sitting typing I’m not like I am here talking, I’m much more amorphous” (Interview 191). Perhaps the agent can mediate between the outer and internal worlds of this author, and provide me with some interpretive material. In this idea there is an echo of the parable “Borges and I” which Burke paraphrases as a dialogue between Borges’ “everyday, empirical self,” and the self who “exists on a list of professors or in a biographical dictionary” (qtd. in Death and Return 52). Burke notes also that Barthes divides himself into four selves in his autobiography Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes. Such avowed subject divisions support Cohen’s claim that the writing self is somewhat separable from other versions of self.

The authorial voices do not, therefore, unite to form a totality: they may be further deconstructed in order to discover which aspects, if any, are critically practicable. Cohen suggests that his own voice is inherently split: “I don’t even believe in the idea that there is this authentic self, a sort of pre-self, this authentic self after which there [are] contrivances” (Interview 186). At one point in our conversation Cohen humorously reinforces this serious assertion. He claims; “I always call Frontenac county reality. Everything there is real whereas everything outside of it is simply an attempt to imitate it, always unsuccessfully” (Interview 190). Cohen owns a home in Frontenac county, where many of his books are set and also where I grew up. He advises, “you’re one of the very privileged younger people who has managed to grow up in reality. Other people can only imagine what it must be like” (Interview 190).
As friendly and funny as these statements are, they do, through their irony, attest to his distrust of claims to authenticity.

In our discussion, Cohen attributes an overall sense of personal fragmentation to:

- Being some sort of mixed up minority. Being an immigrant.
- Being part of [the majority culture] in a way but not really being part of it just because I didn't come over, my ancestors didn't come over, on the Mayflower. So by being marginal in all these different ways and being someone writing in a language other than what my grandparents spoke—the whole question of authenticity has already become a kind of joke—and that's why I have come to the conclusion that when I write or talk about things like that I'm acting out of some official self or a set of official selves that are publicly joined together. (Interview 187).

Cohen's 'I' seemingly represents a self of the moment rather than a core self. It is more of a situationally reactive representation than a reflection of a real-life character. Cohen seems to suggest that in both art and life the idea of a cohesively defined character is elusive. It is not so much, in this case, a matter of a conflict between fiction and reality as it is the result of a failed expectation that the self can be identified as a whole.

Cohen's sentience of being fundamentally decentred is evident in his account of hearing his work being described on Morningside, a CBC Radio talk show:
I heard these critics on Morningside and they were discussing The Paris Notebooks and one, I think David Staines, from the University of Ottawa, was saying 'well I wouldn't read that book because it's about sex,' and then Aritha van Herk said that 'I don't think you should read it because it's a Eurocentric white male's and they already have all the power' and I thought well that was very interesting in a certain way. She was, I think, reviewing a book by Norman Levine too, and she was saying basically these books shouldn't be read because they're by people with power and David Staines was agreeing. So I was thinking here's two tenured university professors who in a certain way have a lot of power saying about two writers who in a certain way are completely nobodies that they have so much power that their books shouldn't be read. (Interview 188).

The mentality of the Calgary conference lives on as Cohen is so neatly categorized by some academics. Even the public self proves anomalous. Drawing similar conclusions from the "Future Indicative" conference in 1987, Frank Davey writes that "criticism is a political act" and goes so far as to suggest that Canadians are predisposed to regard critical theory as "occurring in some academically pristine dimension" that he describes as "uncontaminated by interest or contention" (8). While these remarks are made in the context of more than a decade ago, they do touch on an applicable contemporary issue
which Davey terms the "cliché of critical practice"—most particularly that "some texts, critics and social groups always 'benefit' from a literary theory" (10).

Cohen implicitly echoes Burke's claim that although the author is "the site of a collision between language, culture, class, history, episteme," s/he is, nonetheless, "irreducible to any one of these forces in particular" (Death and Return 156). Enhancing the irony of the Morningside comments, Cohen who is of Russian Jewish heritage, notes: "If I am Eurocentric, it's a weird moment to be that as a writer, in the sense that that has somehow become the villain, and yet in a sense that is what was always unacceptable about me to begin with, i.e. being Jewish" (Interview 188). The self seems to be a slippery concept. The author may be a product of slippage among various selves.

It is useful in my reading to regard Cohen, the author, in a way I have never seen him as a friend: he writes more from a marginalized perspective than I recognized. This is perhaps partially explained by the fact that I have, for much of our acquaintance, been a child. He suggests that I have been, in a sense, marginal to him: "adults are non-marginal compared to non-adults" (Interview 187). In the roles that we play in this paper, however, the relationship becomes more balanced—although my interpretation is inevitably appropriative because it is based on a reconstruction of his mentality. We seem to approach each other on a common ground, speaking from "official" splintered versions of ourselves as we approach critical issues.

Later, on review, I realize that we are aptly disembodied from our own physical presence and surroundings by the tape recorder, which in separating
our speech from our bodies removes our words from their origin. In reexamining this conversation several years later, after Cohen’s death, this separation seems even more aptly to reflect the fragmented access we have to people’s characters. As I transcribe what we say onto my computer, imposing punctuation on oral utterances that occurred with only analogous pauses and breaths, I edit and arrange our conversation to suit my argument. Perhaps Cohen has also edited his responses, during our conversation, in response to the situation, our relationship, or even as a result of the sentiment of the moment. While I can only guess at what motivated his comments, I can recognize that my own reading is filled with inevitable transformations. I refine Cohen’s words in the same way that wheat becomes flour: he provides raw material and I render it functional.

While it is arguable, in theory, that the authorial voice may be accessed it must be practically considered whether this voice is also assessable. This issue lies primarily in the hands of the reader as he or she makes interpretive choices throughout the process of reading. The reader’s puissance may be increased by texts with dialoguing semantic levels, found particularly in satirical, parodic and ironic works. Parody is, in great part, the result of an interpretive act, a reaction by a reader to a text. It seems probable, therefore, that admitting authorial intention into this reading could increase parodic possibilities simply because it offers the reader more chances to find meaning. Knowing, for example, that Freud: The Paris Notebooks was intentionally parodic from its conception directs me, as a reader, to look for parody at every textual level.
If parody is accepted as, in Hutcheon’s terms, “imitation characterised by ironic inversion,” then Cohen’s act of writing *Freud: The Paris Notebooks* can itself be considered a parodic act (*Theory of Parody* 6). Cohen states that the three stories, which are connected almost novelistically, were written when he was having difficulties “trying to write a much more serious book which eventually turned into *Emotional Arithmetic*.“ He says: “*Emotional Arithmetic* is a book I wrote because I felt I had to write,” but claims that *Freud: The Paris Notebooks* arose out of an attempt to “amuse” himself. He concocted the idea of “this imaginary relative of Freud who would think of himself as being really different whereas in fact he’d be exactly the same but only in the most ridiculous ways” (Interview 191). Cohen imitated *Emotional Arithmetic* by dealing with manifestations of psychological pain but he inverted the seriousness into a humorous explication of Freudian theory.

Freud’s ideas, according to Cohen, are “fundamentally absurd” because of “the sense of completely believing the power of [the] mind to operate upon other minds” (Interview 192). Cohen contextualizes his distrust of what he defines as “arrogant” Freudian theory, commenting: “it is people believing a mythological version of themselves, so Romantic” (Interview 188). He parallels the principles of Freudian theory to “a symphony--it’s like each person is a Mahler symphony and if you just change their first movement and did a few things to the andante the allegro would come out a lot differently. There is a side of us that is a Mahler symphony but there is a side of us that is some ridiculous musical, or possibly even tone deaf” (Interview 192). Cohen
investigates, both conversationally and in writing, the many human inconsistencies and contradictions which in his view Freudian theory does not allow. He argues that Freud was “on the intellectual side” of a “whole nineteenth-century Romantic movement” which, like the scientists of the time, seemingly subscribed to a belief that “they could make everything perfect.” He claims “[...] one of great human cultural moments is this nineteenth-century Romanticism but since we’ve been left with the detritus of it and the failure—it’s hard not to make fun of it to a certain extent” (Interview 192). Whereas Freud: The Paris Notebooks allows humor and irony to trivialize the effect of this failure, Emotional Arithmetic investigates its detritus. The inability to make things perfect is satirized by the first novel’s pathetic and somewhat preposterous characters. It is manifest, in the second work, in the irreversible scars of the holocaust on the narrative’s protagonists. Although the two texts share the same city at times, their connections are primarily on a thematic level. Cohen secures—for the reader who knows—a level of intertextuality which is beyond that which could be found through comparison of the texts alone by revealing the process of parody-therapy which connects Freud: The Paris Notebooks to Emotional Arithmetic.

He capitalizes on the expressive possibilities of parody to make Freud: The Paris Notebooks more than just a self-help exercise. “One of the great things about parody,” Cohen claims, “is that it allows pathos—possibly, probably not because they start with the same two letters” (Interview 199). Beyond its absurdity, he suggests, Freud: The Paris Notebooks “is this very
human story. In a sense the more ridiculous the person, no matter how ridiculous they are, they're still a human being, they're just a normal person being seen as a ridiculous person" (Interview 199). The dialogic complexity of such characters is inferred by the reader who takes Cohen's cue to fill in gaps between the words and ideas.

Sigmund Freud's nephew Robert Freud, for example, is portrayed as foolish in his mimicry of his uncle's beard, his fraudulent use of an Italian accent learned from Sophia Loren movies, his futile fantasies, and his servility to psychoanalytic theory. When a patient attacks Robert Freud he believes that blood thrown at him is his own and, despite his supposedly impending death, he diagnoses her with "a hitherto unrecorded pathology which made it impossible for her to reach satisfaction except through intercourse with a dying man" (Cohen 14). This is followed by "a second insight, a more explosive and universal one...all women were subject to this weird prernecrophilia [sic]" (Freud 14). Freud later expands this idea into a "ground breaking paper, 'Throwing Blood: Notes On the Neurotic Relationship between Menstruation and Art'" (108). Cohen ironizes Freudian theory which, as a cultural icon at least, is notable for its focus on sex and death and its universalizing tendencies; in the process he renders Robert Freud absurd.

Yet this same character who, under stress, inanely repeats key Freudian words "Ego, superego, id" like a mantra (120), later in the story comes to a very human (if somewhat Romantic) point of self-understanding: "He didn't want to change the history of the world [...] [just] have the knowledge his companion
could bear to look at him occasionally with her eyes wide open” (135). Both because of and despite the humor of this character Cohen communicates a sense of Robert Freud's human need and its fulfillment. Even though this character's final escape from the practice, the work, the lover, the wife and the beard which have burdened him is ludicrous and rife with Freudian implication—he goes to live with twin sisters in the Alps—the reader is offered another level of satisfaction which comes with a happy ending.

The character of Judith, the blood-throwing patient, is similarly humanized. She is first introduced through Robert Freud's objectifying eyes, as a “particularly attractive creature” (9), and as a woman on whose “beautiful features raged a battle between triumph and neurosis” (13). When her perspective is voiced, however, her ridiculous compulsion seems touchingly sad. She is an artist who destroys her own work. She wants to love but is held back by her perception of a “terrible mental condition” (86). She wants a remedy, just as her lover, Maurice, believes that she will solve his problems, making things perfect, as he repeats, “from now on” (87). Judith and Maurice’s fates, however, are left open-ended; neither is revealed to be cured, both are left frustrated. There are echoes here of Cohen’s exasperation, articulated in our conversation, with the grandiloquent claims of Freudian theory.

Finding humanity in Cohen’s characters, who are almost all ridiculous, and all somehow failed by Romanticism, is a rewarding act of readerly production. Ironically, the increased demand for a reader’s active participation in the text’s meaning poses less challenge to Cohen than writing more
conventional works, in which the reader is more passive. He describes building the equivalent of a wall of sound into his more traditional prose writing, in the sense of layering and overlapping significations much as Phil Specter manipulated music (Interview 200). In writing *Freud: The Paris Notebooks*, however, he claims: “I made it easier for me in the sense that I didn't bother to create that wall of sound [...]. I didn't bother filling in the gaps” (Interview 200).

There is transference of authority in these different types of writing. Cohen weaves meaning into his more serious novels for the readers to find, but in the more experimental texts he leaves room for their construction of it, allowing them a co-authorship.

Cohen suggests that certain types of readers are more suited for this type of work: “[...] you have to be able to stand the silence between the spaces. The readers who can cope with the silence can read more experimental fiction” (Interview 200). Such a perspective has been widely explicated by reader-response theory which is based on the conviction that textual “meaning is in potentia [...] reading is complementary; it actualizes potential meaning” (Cuddon 770). A work like the *Freud: The Paris Notebooks*, according to Cohen, leaves more in potentia than more traditional works; “these off-the-wall books have fewer instruments and you don't have a 240 piece orchestra, you have 37 pieces or maybe 23—a fairly odd 23 but they bring each other out. So in a certain way the whole narrative human reality of people is allowed a big scope to exist in a more experimental book” (Interview 199).

Since, Cohen states, “a book like this gradually grows into the wall of sound, it
doesn't start off [like that]," it implicitly becomes the reader's role to augment
textual meaning, using the instruments s/he is given (Interview 202).

Ironically, this writing which involves so much readerly complicity was
created with little thought of the reader's role. "I didn't think about it, I was
amusing myself," says Cohen (Interview 198). Substantiating this statement he
explains that the work originated as short stories, not initially intended for
publication. "I wrote what are essentially the first two stories and I was
translating these stories by this Québec writer and he asked me if I'd ever
written anything," Cohen recounts (Interview 193). Instead of mentioning the
multitude of books he has published, Cohen sent the Freud stories to the writer,
who sent them to his Montreal publisher who translated them and published
them in French.

Cohen found that "[o]nce it was out in French it seemed like it should
exist in English," but decided it should be "some sort of triptych, because I
thought of it as incomplete" (Interview 193). Working with translator Claire Dé,
whom he describes as "writer, feminist, structuralist twin of Anne Durant, playful
translator," the book evolved and Cohen "got ideas of how the English (version)
should move" (Interview 193). Knowing that the publication of Freud: The
Paris Notebooks was at once so accidental and contrived confuses my reading.
I am reminded that whatever the power of my position, the author has directed
my reading by the initial act of creation. However much my role as reader is
increased, the act of reading will always be like raising someone else's baby.
Yet in lines referring to Robert Freud's stolen notebooks, "Sooner or
later...someone would pick them up and read them. After all, nothing could be better than being brought back to life in the eyes of a passing stranger" (139). Cohen provides a positive metaphor for the reader/author/text relationship.

It is nevertheless doubtful that I will ever access the full range of parodic instances which the author encoded into this work. On this question of access, Cohen comments; "maybe that's a weakness of the book in a certain way or a weakness of it as a certain kind of book. For me all this stuff about Freud and what I describe as nineteenth-century Romantic mythology, that's what I was brought up on, I didn't need to research it at all " (Interview 202). Before talking to Cohen I didn't know that Freud supposedly slept with his wife's sister. Yet I did know of his misogyny and I did comprehend, even if only partially, that Robert Freud's sexual relationship with his sister-in-law has profound Freudian implications, as do the many sexual sister references in the novel. My knowledge, or lack of it, only closes off some of the work's accessibility. Many forms that Cohen parodies have enough cultural popularity to be somewhat identifiable. He suggests that the "great thing about taking given forms and going off them is that they are given, you don't have to invent them" (Interview 203). They are given, that is, to a group of readers (such as myself) who can recognize the original forms being parodied. Cultural icons provide Cohen with a lot of material to ironize: "[t]here's the whole Freud mythology to play off. Then there's the mythology of the American in Paris, and Paris itself and all the competing and so well developed existing mythologies of Paris" (Interview 194).
In *The Eiffel Tower*, Barthes own explication of Paris, he describes the city as "a kind of superlative capital, [which] summons up that movement of accession to a superior order of pleasures, of values, of arts and luxuries [...]"; it is [...] myth" (13). Cohen trifles with this ideal of Paris. Consider the understatement with which a character insipidly describes it as "a congenial place to be in exile" (25). Cohen weaves the contradictory clichés that characterize this iconic city into his stories: characters go to the opera and diplomatic parties or drink in bars; there are starving artists and wealthy patrons; there is opulent architecture and there are tiny apartments. Cohen's Paris is filled with foul smells, narrow streets, seedy academics, and drugs on all levels of society. Commenting on a commonality between the text and its location Cohen describes *Freud: The Paris Notebooks* as "a hybrid between American postmodernism and European Romanticism and set in Paris, I mean what is Paris other than that anyway [...] it's so obvious" (Interview 203). Like the stories themselves, Paris exists simultaneously, somewhat contradictorily, as fragmented and cohesively patterned.

Cohen's characters' seemingly effortless movements through the social structures of this city complement the sense of Paris as postmodern space. The experiences of characters who would otherwise exist in separate worlds are strangely interconnected. Judith works as a waitress in a small bar, and she holds an art exhibit for wealthy potential clients. Maurice lives beside his friend, a drug addicted Mexican truck driver, and he dines at expensive restaurants with his wealthy patron and cocaine addict, George Hinton
Trevanien. Maurice's landlady, Madame Larousse, becomes his nurse and caretaker. Robert Freud treats his patients but also looks to them for relief in the form of drugs. Cohen's Paris is somewhat carnivalistic in Bakhtin's sense of the word: "All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people" (Problems123). The result, as Bakhtin implies, is a freedom for different interrelationships (Problems123).

One of the most complex relationships in this work exists between Robert Freud and Trevanien, who are each present in all three stories. Freud wears a beard to hide his disfigured face and is described, by Trevanien, as "[m]iddle-aged, vaguely decayed, [with] the slightly battered look of all European intellectuals" (24). Trevanien, in contrast, is depicted by another character as "the perfect American in Paris. Tallish, wide shouldered, thick wavy hair. His button-down shirts are made of real cloth and he always has a jacket" (75). He is regarded similarly by Freud who, finding a package of Trevanien's cigarettes, likens the famous Marlboro man's face to "Trevanien's white nowhere look" (122). Both characters are ironic and exaggerated stereotypes; unmistakable opposites. Yet Cohen writes of their inherent similarity: "Trevanien and Freud, they are a whole pairing. Trevanien saw himself as being so different from Freud and yet I saw them as being so similar. Only Freud could sympathize with Trevanien, and vice versa, because they were very similar. Even though Trevanien regarded himself as being in a totally different world and of a totally different generation. In fact he was part of that
same mythology” (Interview 199). Both characters subscribe to an ideal of perfection, and both are plagued by feelings of guilt and failure at their inability to reach it.

Although they have parallel mentalities, and share the sins of adultery and indulgence in drugs, their similarities extend beyond sympathy or even empathy to the extent that they seem almost transposed or superimposed upon each other. Freud fantasizes, at one point, about sex, a cigar and champagne in a bathtub. Meanwhile, Trevanien soaks in a bath at his mistress’ home, smokes a cigar and drinks a martini. Later in the narrative Trevanien takes his mistress to a nightclub and Freud, sitting in his office, feels the “jolt” of the nightclub music “through his nervous system” (128). This example may be part of Freud’s fantasy, on par with his ensuing image of himself merging with Trevanien. He believes himself to be “on horseback” as he inhales Trevanien’s Marlboro cigarette and moves toward the “perfect eternity of a great white nowhere” (124). Freudian imagery abounds.

This homoerotic episode is resonant with the reverse situation which occurs at the characters’ first meeting. Trevanien offers Freud a cigar, which is a recurring motif in the narrative. Cohen repeatedly spoofs the Freudian phallic symbol; a cigar is never just a cigar in Freud: The Paris Notebooks. Waiting for Freud to accept his offer, Trevanien is charged with an unmistakable sexual tension: “Here he was again playing the role he promised to give up, the role of the young man who [...] would kill himself to charm [...]. His lip was trembling, he could feel his heart pounding; his body had gone rigid”
(27). By infusing his characters with such passion, and breaking them out of the molds of their stereotypes of European academic and American in Paris, Cohen strongly implies that they are, as he has suggested, ridiculous but human beings nevertheless.

Cohen also explores other geographical clichés, particularly those relating to Canada. Whereas Paris offers what Cohen calls a “solid” form to take off on, the Canadian references are somewhat more obscure. They are, however, no less clichéd. At one point Trevanién calls his Canadian protégé Maurice “the lumberjack type,” even though he has shown no signs, except in his nationality, of being in any way connected to lumber or stereotypically lumberjack-like in terms of physique or mode of dress (77). In a similarly absurd example, the only sex that Maurice has in Paris is with a woman who had lived in Iceland and is “lonely for snow” (81). Cohen, however, also has Maurice address a more specifically Canadian issue, the identity of our cultural icons. Maurice counters a suggestion, by a Canadian girlfriend, that he resembles Ernest Hemingway with the protest, “What about Canada? I could look like Mazo de la Roche or Pierre Berton” (68). Maurice qualifies this statement however, as “bitter humor” from his “post-lyrical phase” (68). He, in fact, models himself after Hemingway. Cohen’s focus on the strength of American icons tends to ironize the idea of Canadian iconicity.

Cohen acknowledges that some forms offer more references than others: “by operating in mythologies [...] you’re guaranteed that there’re some people who will know the mythology better” (Interview 199). I, for example, am
at a loss to understand the significance of the zipper on Judith’s dress. I realize, from textual indicators, that the zipper is sexually provocative. Freud first notices it “dividing the left and right sides of her body [...] waiting to be pulled” (9), and it continues, as a motif, to have erotic implications. Cohen clarifies his use of this symbol:

The zipper has two sets of references. One has to do with Joseph Roth and this book called The Zipper..., which no-one could possibly have heard of but I was really into Joseph Roth at the time. The other is this whole idea of the zipper, that you can expose someone. Anyway, you remember this whole idea of the zipperless fuck that that woman [Erica Jong, Fear of Flying]... So she was this feminist—and then you have Freud who is totally terrible about women so it just seemed so perfect to me... to have this completely stupid and really socially unacceptable fantasy to do with this zipper and yet this fantasy had been sociologically central fantasy of women’s liberation and here it was being used by Freud himself, or Freud’s heir, in the stupidest possible way. So I think somehow I was just trying to just get the various stereotypes of males vs. females going from early on. (Interview 203 - 204)

This statement opens up my reading by giving me a point of reference in the mythologies being manipulated. The irony of Robert Freud’s repeated focus on Judith’s zipper is mobilized by listening to Cohen’s perspective. It is in such an
example that Iser's assertion regarding the potential of the author's comments to "permit new gaps to arise in the text between the narrative and various ways of judging it" gains force (20). Cohen has pointed me towards possible connections that have supplemented my reading process. In this instance, considering the options for interpretation that he indicates has led to new understanding; this is not always the case.

My reading of the zipper symbol in reaction to Cohen does not necessarily indicate subservience to his perspective. It is a matter of choice based on what fits into my own reading. Likewise, other points that Cohen elucidated do not seem as relevant by my perception. Sigmund Freud asks his nephew Robert, in the only instance in which he addresses him directly, "Did you ever hear the one about the giant green frog?" Thinking this frog might have a similarly rich point of reference I asked Cohen to comment: "The green frog is the main character in a series of stories which I tell my children. I basically re-cast The Return of the Native into this unbelievably pathetic story about a green frog who comes back and tells all his stories to these barnyard animals, its an incredible tear-jerker and he's also schizophrenic" (Interview 205). While this is interesting socially, and touching on a personal level, it does not affect my critical reading of Freud: The Paris Notebooks. Some references seem best left within the narrative context. Although not agreeing with the author may at first glance seem like I have taken a pointlessly wrong turn in a maze where finding meaning is the goal, it is still productive in demanding that I
more clearly articulate my disagreement. It shines light, in other words, on my own perceptions.

Reacting to a similar sense that the text should, at times, speak for itself, Cohen mentions the epilogue that was almost attached to the connected stories. He says,

I think the Paris notebooks are actually a bunch of notebooks that aren't [Robert Freud's notebooks which are stolen by Trevanien] but that are simply what [these notebooks are] describing. I actually wrote an epilogue for this book in which I, Matt Cohen, described how it is that this book came into my possession. In the epilogue I described how I had found it in the place which in fact I wrote them. It was in a maid's room, no maid was living there, I was renting it. In this epilogue I explained that I had been intending to write a novel until I came across these notebooks and [instead] I interviewed the various characters who were part of the notebooks. " (Interview 202).

His decision not to involve his authorial persona and clarify the enigma of the notebooks "was one of those official moments where one twist seemed pointless. Somehow I was trying to nail down something that should just have been left free-floating. Because it is such a peculiar book I was trying to create an umbilical cord between it and reality and then I guess I thought 'well why?' Why do that to the book, this sort of enclosing of it in some unnecessary way" (Interview 202). As a reader, I am curious to know what is in these
unpublished epilogues, yet I am also aware of Iser's import in writing "the repair of indeterminacy gives rise to meaning" (42). My awareness of Cohen's intentional creation of Iserian-type gaps in this novel draws forcefully draws my focus to the critical potential of their indeterminacy.

Cohen seems to write with a consciousness that, as Iser writes, "a text can only come to life when it is read" and he leaves openings for readerly interpretation (3). Even the issue of the novel's meta-authorship remains open. Cohen acknowledges that he intentionally creates "a question of who actually wrote the text—which of the characters. It could be interpreted either as Trevanien, or possibly this is Maurice's great opus. Maybe Freud himself has written it." Of course, one inevitable answer is that solutions lie in individual analysis. My desire for closure is Romantic or Modernist, maybe even lazy. I am searching for an origin for the work; perhaps I do this even in my approach to Cohen. Yet I do not really want him to furnish explanations; the text would seem weaker for them. Postmodern open-endedness suits this work in which the literal, the textually recorded, provides only one of many levels of meaning.

My conversation with Cohen provides material which serves as an intertext to my reading of Freud: The Paris Notebooks. Perhaps much of what Cohen sparks in my reading is textually suggested, but some is not, although it is textually reinforcable. While his suggestions influence the pattern and focus of this project, I do take his voice with a grain of salt. As in the cases of the zipper and the green frog, I have found his voice to be more entertaining than critically noteworthy. In the ability to make such a distinction, I have attempted
to create distance, and to maintain a balanced judgment of what is critically relevant. Matt Cohen and I do, however, merge at many points in this paper; we produce a (possible) reading together, albeit through the filter of my voice. At this point, Bakhtin's words seem particularly relevant: "Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for the truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (Bakhtin 110). There is undeniable confluence between the dialogic levels of this paper; objectivity is not attempted but subjectivity does not, likewise, prove to eclipse the potential of explicating a reader/writer/text relationship. As Iser writes, literary criticism satisfies a "desire to talk about what we read"—and my conversation with Matt Cohen fulfills this on numerous levels, not the least of which is a reaching back towards the memory of a living man who could activate my imagination ("Reading Process" 357).
Chapter Five

Process Pre-Staged: The Critic, the Canon and Marie-Claire Blais

The path from individual perception to collective consensus is steep. Once in the reader’s control, authorial fame or obscurity only impacts the author/reader/text equilibrium by a matter of degree. Yet that degree is significant in that popularity can alter the balance of this relationship; although the elements remain the same, the widely recognized author may be brought more sharply into focus during the reading process. The dynamics of this effect are relatively straightforward; the more publicly defined extra-textual author provides a greater mass of material for a reader to supplement in an intertextual manner. Whereas, in the previous chapter, the example of Matt Cohen provides ground to elucidate the impact of a personal relationship on my individual reading, it is the goal of this chapter to examine the extent to which the interaction of personal contact and a shared cultural awareness of Marie-Claire Blais influences my critical rapport with her texts. Throughout the chain of interpretation to follow, private correspondence with Blais complements my assessment of her authorial persona and her writing itself. At issue is the valuation placed on Blais and her writing—by the author, certain communities, and myself, reacting under the influence of forces external to the text. Such sources combine, in effect, to pre-stage Blais’ writing in my mind, and arguably the perceptions of other readers too.
In large part, the matter lies in the extent of the influence that authorial reputation has on a reader. Canadian representations of Blais, for example, not only demonstrate the cultural mechanics of canonization, they also provide a framework for my interpretation of this author and her works.\(^{30}\) On meeting Blais in person at the Eden Mills Writers’ Festival in 1995, an event that has drawn Canadian writers into oral presentation of their works since 1988, the weight of her celebrity left me somewhat awed by her presence. She writes, in a letter to me, “Je me souviens très bien de toute votre famille, at the Eden Mills Writer’s Festival in Ontario two summers ago: we had a wonderful time untill night [...]. I guess, this evening, everybody was terribly shy, but it was a lovely evening [...] [sic]”\(^{(208)}\).\(^{31}\) I bought a half dozen of her books that day, because of an impression of connectivity created by meeting and hearing the living author, and also because I was impressed by meeting an author with such an aura of mystery and renown. My reaction to Blais at this event led me to request her participation in my doctoral project. Consequently, it is the intention of this chapter to elucidate whether the value I received in her response is of a personal or critical nature—and to examine whether a reaction to notoriety can extend beyond the purchase of books into the critical process itself.

In writing to Blais, I consciously invited her into my reading as an experiment in this inquiry. My action in contacting her was only a logical

\(^{30}\) Distinctions between Canadian and Québécois perspectives unfold throughout this chapter.

\(^{31}\) All quotations from Marie-Claire Blais’ letter are transcribed exactly as received, with misspellings, language changes and grammatical errors intact.
extension of the spirit of such festivals as Eden Mills. In a sense, such staged
events are designed to encourage readers' perceptions of post-publication
correlations between authors and their texts. In a Toronto Star review of the
1998 festival, also attended by Blais, Philip Marchand writes that “Outdoor
literary festivals have become part of the Canadian landscape” (N. Pag.). In
the same way that a library, an anthology, or course guideline brings together
texts, these festivals combine authors under an umbrella of Canadian literature.
Commenting, in the same article, on the Ottawa International Writers’ Festival,
founder Neil Wilson remarks, “We continued to bring French-speaking readers,
not ghettoized, but mixed with the Anglophones. We had Marie-Claire Blais
who read with Drew Hayden Taylor [...]. They symbolized the richness of what
is going on in Canada.”32 In this statement, Wilson’s inference of symbolism
depends on an elision of the significance of authors and their writing. He
presents the viability of extrapolating value or “richness” in the body of
Canadian literature out of the authors’ heritage as self-evident.

The acknowledgement by the festival founder of the potential
anglophone/francophone divergence under this umbrella also underscores
what, at times, has been a pervasive perspective on Canadian literature.
Wilson implies that his festival’s collection of writers offers a reflection of a
polarized national scene—however converged in his example. Although
Canadian critics have long valued Canada as a nation uniquely harbouring

32 In this instance, Hayden Taylor as anglophone, although he positions
himself as a native Ojibway, or Anishabai.
distinct literary perspectives, this concept is sometimes simplified to an idea that English Canada and Québec present the nation's primary lines of literary discrepancy. An articulation of an English Canada/Québec binarism marked by polarities is available in the English-language writing by Québec authors such as Philip Stratford or Ronald Sutherland, among others. This is also demonstrated by the example of Ellipse magazine, where each issue uses translation to present English and French versions of the same works as mirroring each other in the physical layout. The French language writing by authors such as Antoine Sirois and Clément Moisan, for example, provide similar illustrations of this agreement on a linguistic, historic, and cultural duality.

This is largely reflective of a mentality that has framed Blais' renown, particularly in her (somewhat paradoxical) production as both a Canadian and a Québécois literary linchpin. In response to acclaim on the publication of her first novel La Belle bête, originally published by the Institut littéraire du Québec in 1959, for example, McClelland and Stewart Publishers issued Mad Shadows, in translation, as part of its deliberately canonic New Canadian Library series. In a parallel move, Les Éditions de Boréal, a longstanding Québécois publishing house, published La Belle bête as part of its Boréal Compact series, dedicated to presenting “des rééditions de texts significatifs”

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33 It is noteworthy, within the context of this dissertation, that Matt Cohen also engaged in an editorial project entitled Parallel Voices, using translation to demonstrate differences and similarities within French and English Canadian writing.

34 See Chapter 3 for the New Canadian Library role in Canadian canonization.
Such special editions tend to function as canonic vehicles to pre-stage works for readers in both the purchasing and the reading processes. On a similar note in, "Le démon de la théorie," Antoine Compagnon writes "on faisait de l'histoire littéraire dès qu'on regardait le nom de l'auteur sur la couverture du livre, dès qu'on donnait au texte un minimum de contexte" (20). The dynamics involved not only in such editions, but also in the language of cover texts, leverage the development of an influential context.

In the linguistic nuances and tacit understanding inherent in the hyperbolic labeling of texts with tags such as of 'well-respected,' 'widely-accepted,' and 'well-known,' Blais' renown is presented as a measure of her value. Perhaps the most poignant example of the suggestion that fame automatically translates to quality is in Harper Collins Oberon Library series quotation by Margaret Atwood: "Marie-Claire Blais is one of the best known and certainly the most acclaimed Québec writer extant" (back cover). The back cover of the Boréal Compact edition similarly lists Blais' accomplishments and heralds her as "Lauréate de plusieurs prix importants." The back cover of McClelland and Stewart's edition of her second novel Tête blanche, published as part of the New Canadian Library series thirteen years after the novel's initial 1959 publication, heralds Blais as a "talent which

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35 McClelland and Stewart's New Canadian Library edition does not translate the French title for the English translation by Charles Fullman—a noteworthy exception, perhaps attesting to Blais' fame as a French-language writer, within the generally Anglocentric New Canadian Library series.
burst upon Quebec's, and the world's, literary landscape when Mad Shadows was published." Likewise, HarperCollins Oberon Library series fills the back cover of The Fugitive with similar international endorsement: consider the unattributed yet somewhat hyperbolic lines profiling her as a "two-time winner of the Governor General's Award and recipient of France's most coveted literary award, le Prix Medicis [...] one of Canada's most accomplished writers." French and English Canadian publications alike share a seeming centric and imperialistic approbation of Blais international celebrity. With a seemingly intentional slippage they each utilize the reputation of the author as a person to create excitement about the written text within.

In his (translated) introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of Mad Shadows, Québec writer Naïm Kattan reinforces the significance of Blais' fame by pointing beyond the Canadian context, writing that "her work has very quickly found an international audience. In the beginning this acclaim was mainly due to the interest shown in her by the American writer, Edmund Wilson" (v). In "Les Carnets de Marie-Claire Blais: du privé au public," Marie Couillard, however, explores the more complex elements of Wilson's strong mentoring role for Blais, and introduces the topic of her exile that seems negated by some of her Canadian-based acclaim. Paradoxically, Couillard, writing out of the University of Ottawa, somewhat undermines the impact of her exploration of notebooks written during Blais' supposed years of

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36 Translated by David Lobdell from the French original, L'insoumise
37 Although he draws reinforcement from her international acclaim, Kattan
exile, 1962-1974, by concluding her analysis with a reference to "un des plus importants écrivains contemporains du Québec" (6). Despite the inevitable conflict that surrounds exile, Blais' is frequently brought back symbolically to Canada, and specifically to Québec, with fanfare.

Canonically claimed by both English and French Canada, Blais is one of the few novelists whose work, as it exists in translation, is part of what Frank Davey labels as a Canadian mainstream, manifest in a domineering "thematic/mimetic canon" that is "federalist, humanist, Ontario based" (681), not to mention patriarchal and anglophone. Blais' translation into English has indeed in some ways diluted her Québec referentiality. Take for example the front cover of the New Canadian Library edition that references "Marie-Claire Blais's [sic]"—a grammatical choice that shows a depth of Anglicization, since an attempt at a French pronunciation of "Blais's" would be next to impossible. Likewise, in Marshall's translation of Kattan's introduction to New Canadian Library's Mad Shadows, there is a reference to "Mad Shadows (or La Belle bête, as it was called in French)" (v). This single statement hints at a claim of progression, or at least a difference, as the novel has moved from French into English. This misuse of the grammatical convention of referring to a text in present tense poignantly evokes a sense of anteriority for the French-language original.

The diffusion of Blais across linguistic and geographical boundaries attests not only to the extent of her fame but to the problematic nature of also strongly asserts Blais as a Québec writer within this introduction.
trying to define her within either a Canadian or a Québécois context. As critics such as Robert Lecker and Frank Davey have recognized along similar lines, the emergence and existence of the Canadian canon has been problematized by such nationalistic attempts. Some, such as Davey and Barbara Godard, assert that most assumptions of binarism only skim the surface of cultural complexities in French and English Canada—not to mention the concept’s implicit negation of a myriad of other cultural segments within the nation. The notion of French and English Canadian polarities, for example, does not entirely address the intricacies at hand when approaching Marie-Claire Blais as a Québec writer whose notoriety extends beyond mainstream cultural, linguistic and geographic boundaries.

Blais is also deeply contextualized as a lesbian writer, to the extent that, in Karla Jay’s “Researching Lesbian Lives,” Blais’ presence within anthologies reviewed is used as a marker to measure the relative merit of their content. Likewise, there are myriad literary forces within French Canada, represented by such individuals as Nicole Brossard, Louise Dupré, and Lisette Girouard who could possibly declare Blais to be not only a lesbian writer, but a feminist, and a Québec poet. Just as Blais’ writing moves across the borders of media, including work in areas of dance, film, poetry, and novels, her recognition extends beyond borders of mainstream versions of culture, nation, and sexuality. Regardless of who claims her, Blais’ actualization as an author

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depends, like a magic trick, on being "legitimized by [a] believing community" (Hawkins and Allen 166). Perhaps the case of Marie-Claire Blais demonstrates that literary status is both an extension and reflection of the social complexities framing an author, and also her readers, myself included.

Society, as Blais' example emphasizes, inevitably resists the cohesion of simple definitions. As Homi Bhabha writes, there is an "impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force" (1). Culture is not so easily elucidated. Like the authorial voice itself, culture is not a fixed attribute of an individual. Which self, for example, is best representative of Canada for the purposes of literary self-examination? How do we fix a nation? By geographical boundary? If so, how do we determine who belongs in this area? Is native-born Tomson Highway a more Canadian writer than Manitoba-born Margaret Laurence, than Sri Lanka-born Michael Ondaatje? Is Matt Cohen a Jewish writer? Do we delineate by political fiat or sexual orientation? By regional identification? If so, is Toronto a nation? What about Québec? Is Marie-Claire Blais a lesbian writer? Is she a Québec writer, Canadian, or expatriate?

The demands of a community to recognize and be recognized are at the heart of these questions: "the construction of canons and literary preferences always responds to the ongoing struggle [...] between different social formations" (McGee 2). Such evident conflict is inextricably linked to the belief that groups, whether based on language, religion, gender, age, race, ethnicity or geographical location, have collective characteristics that may be isolated and marked—the need for which is articulated in culture theory's anxious
questioning: "Do we have a message if we don't speak in one voice?" (Schweder and LeVine 5). Such expression of unified or homogeneous experience has a cultural exigency. Whether regarded from an English, French, or other national perspective, attempts at such dichotomized definition ultimately become coercive in the sense that they cast literature into a role where it is required to hold the political function of an anthem. By this analogy, authors become jingoistic performers—and readers become a public-spirited audience.

Yet, the public image of Blais is exceedingly complex, and it has been built with subtle force. There is an element of her canonic popularity that extends beyond issues of nation or acclaim to a culturally defined agreement on her authorial character. In conjunction with widespread recognition, this public persona influences the reading process. As discussed in previous chapters, it positions the author-persona as a character somehow relevant to the text. In Blais' case, her fame increases the effect of her persona and may heighten readers' intrigue with a portrait of Blais as a genius, tortured and muse-driven since her youth. HarperCollins Oberon Library series, for example, quotes Edmund Wilson saying that Blais "may possibly be a genius" (back cover). Added to this is the somewhat ironic decision to put a photograph of Blais on the front cover of The Fugitive—deliberately asserting a connection between Blais and her work.

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30 For a further explication of Canadian canonicity see Robert Lecker's Canadian Canons and Frank Davey's Reading Canadian Reading.
Interpretations of Blais’ writing may have evolved, and arguably continue
to grow, out of the story of her turbulent youth. Kattan writes, “What particularly
captured public attention was the phenomenon of a twenty-year-old girl being
capable of making such a flamboyant entrance into literature” (v). Similarly,
Georges Dufresne asserts in the Introduction to L’Insoumise, “Je vois en
Marie-Claire Blais notre premier visionnaire presque pûr, notre premier écorché
vif qui se soit délivré de sa peau assez tôt, avant que les poisons ne la
débilitent” (X). With similar engagement Philip Stratford writes about Blais, in
his introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of Tête blanche, as though
she is a fragile muse-driven creature who, he quotes Graham Greene, avoided
the pitfall of having a successful first novel that “sometimes absorbs too much
of a writer’s vitality” (vii). In addition to comments regarding Blais’ “moody
months in Paris,” he refers to her as though from a privileged perspective on
the author as she exists both within and outside of the text. “Otherwise, she
would have been unable to work” (vii), he writes, followed by the assertion that
“writing, with her, springs from this need to reconstitute and restructure as myth
the otherwise unendurable nightmare. Nature, with Marie-Claire Blais, is
ethereal, and volatile” (vii). Although somewhat patronizing, these examples of
slippage in referencing the author within and beyond the text only reflect the
impact of Blais’ story on interpretation of her œuvre.

In a parallel reading, Couillard reviews Blais’ notebooks and personal
documents held in the National Library of Canada. At the outset, she states: “Je
me propose de suivre l’évolution de cette écrivaine de génie à travers ses
carnets intimes" (1). Resonating with canonicity, her statement appeals to the common knowledge of Blais' genius. She provides a reading mediated by this assumption, for it is this belief that seems to inform her comments on Blais' recipes for raspberry jam, drawings in the margins, notes on theater trips, conversations overheard and theatrical happenings. Couillard concludes: "Enfin, ces carnets nous permettent de pénétrer et d'apprécier la sensibilité" (6).

She draws again on the idea that Blais' value, and the value of her subjective writings, is self-evident—otherwise there would be no point of interest for her as writer or her publisher to consider Couillard's critical interpretation of such trivialities as jam recipes.

Yet, Couillard's process may also be considered an extension of Pierre-Marc de Biasi's definition of a genetic exercise, in which "the work of art becomes interpretable through the very movement that gave birth to it" (26). Her inclusion of detail, and in a sense my own impetus to question Blais directly, seems to reflect a motivated attempt to look behind the scenes at not only the avant-texte, but at the author's interpretation of textual genesis. De Biasi's writing on the subject of the rough draft can be expanded to apply here:

From the point of view of a work's genesis, the rough draft can be considered as a sort of text laboratory in which it becomes possible to piece back together an essential phase of the writer's

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De Biasi's "Typology of Genetic Documentation" supports this expansion, including "notebooks, marginalia" among his list of "provisional
work by tracing each one of the writing movements. The rough drafts tell a kind of day-by-day story at once logical, symptomatic of affect, and phenomenological—none other than the life of the writer at work: a secret tale, almost always absent from literary biographies, and which nevertheless constitutes the crux of what we would like to know about the author. (29)

Blais' letter functions in parallel to offer me an alternative vantage point. Blais' letter itself is, in fact, very much a rough draft. Like Cohen's letter to me, it is typed with handwritten accents, punctuation and edits.

Blais' statements move seamlessly from English to French, seeming to reflect a flow of consciousness where each language is used to reinforce a point made in the other. Take, for example, “Je me souviens très bien” introducing a thought and the words “I remember well” closing the same sentence (Letter 210). Couillard also reveals this same transition between languages, in her notebooks, as she quotes Blais: “L'écrivaine est complètement subjuguée par ce livre qui la possède [...]. 'Terrifiant, the story of the devil'” (4). In this example, it seems evident that correspondence with an author may be similar to accessing the writing self. Although admittedly a step removed from the process at the time of writing, it is the next best thing for interpreting de Biasi's “secret tale” of the machinery of the text.

process" materials that launch each writing project (34).
Whether informed by widespread canonic forces or the detail excavated from the periphery, Blais’ perspective on the reader’s potential for unraveling the genetic mystery is significant at this point:

I don’t know if readers assume certain intentions based on what they know about the authors, probably they assume so, but there is a part of mystery in each writer’s work—yes, probably too, the access to authors intentions in any way could be done (up to a point), so many changes are going on during the writing process—by talking to an author or looking at notes made in writing of the book, all the first impressions are there, still in a state of chaos. (Letter 211)

Without any revisions, corrections, marks, dashes, or other seeming manifestation of hesitation, Blais moves straightforwardly from the idea of “talking to an author” to “looking at notes made in writing.” She is clear in an assertion of an existing link between the avant-texte and the post-text.

In analyzing the text in light of the post-textual comments made on the subject of the avant-texte, Blais’ perspective on her youth while writing her early novels provides a starting point for analysis. While her youth itself may not be considered as an original state of intention, it may have provided, as critics seem to indicate, an originating context for her writing. Blais’ responds, when asked about this possibility, “I am sure some connections exist, between Mad Shadows, and my youth, at the time of writing” (Letter 210). This assertion is reinforced later in the same letter as she continues: “Mad Shadow The Fugitive sont des
œuvres d’extrême jeunesse [sic]” (Letter 210). When considered together, Blais’ letter, Couillard’s selected readings, and the text of L’Insoumise create a reverberation of meanings around the issue of youth, providing grounds for an exercise in interpretation.

There is a strong association between Blais’ descriptions, within the same letter, of writing as a “state of chaos” and youth as “un état à la fois violent et émerviellé” (210). Writing and youth are both implied to be conditions of the mind, with conflicting elements of contradiction and commotion inherent in each. Couillard reveals that at age 26, while writing L’Insoumise, Blais was seemingly pushing her health to the limits of tolerance: “Sa santé n’est pas bonne, céphalés, problèmes de vision, les visites chez le médecin et le dentiste se multiplient” (3). Couillard attributes Blais’ feverish state to an imagination continually at work (5). Like Philip Stratford’s comments previously noted, Couillard endorses a notion of Blais’ genius as causal of an intellectual strain that detracted from her physical balance.

In the arrangement of details selected in her writing, Couillard forms a profile of Blais’ physical and intellectual turmoil: “Durant toute cette période, Marie-Claire Blais accorde une grande importance à la discipline, fut-elle intellectuelle ou physique. Ainsi, tient un inventaire de ses lectures, suit des cours d’allemand, d’italien et de flûte tout en s’entraînent à courir et à mieux supporter le froid en prenant les bains glacés” (4). She was also very productive at that time in early 1965, writing David Sterne, Le Testament de Jean-Le-Maigre à ses frères, and working on theatrical productions. Blais was exceptionally
involved in social issues and demonstrations, in reaction to the Vietnam War, and race issues in the United States (Couillard 3). Her behaviour during these times supports a concept that Blais' youth was, both by her perception and her actions, a time of chaos, fascination, and violence. Although Couillard's interpretation of Blais' notebooks leans towards the biographical, it is also feasible to blend such information, resonant with memories touched on in Blais' letter, into a broader interpretation.

With striking parallels, Blais' physical, artistic, and intellectual distress at this point in her youth, as recalled in her letter, and as implied by Couillard, is thematically manifest in *L'Insoumise*. In fact, the decision to write the novel itself seems to have come out of a waking nightmare haunting her at the time: "Le 5 février, Une saison terminée, elle amorce un autre roman sur la passion qui la hante, 'une ouverture en plein cauchemar,' écrit-elle, et qui prendra bientôt le titre *L'Insoumise* " (3). The novel that followed is filled with a nightmarish layering of passions, fears, and memories revolving around a theme of youth's inevitable dreams and disillusionment. In particular, after reading her letter commenting on the paradoxical wonder and brutality of youth, the character of Paul Robinson is brought more sharply into focus. Paul, the son of parents who comprise the two dominant narrative voices, is only made available to the reader through their eyes. As such, he is always one step removed from the reader's direct interpretation. The only avenue for the reader to access Paul's character is through interpretation of excerpts from his diaries,
which are woven throughout the narrative. These journal entries are pivotal to the novel, providing the basis for various intertextual dialogics.

There are exceedingly strong parallels in Blais’ and Paul’s respective notebooks. The similarities between the authentic and the fictional journal entries are remarkable. In Blais’ case, for example, Couillard describes: “Ce sont des dessins non-figuratifs, des paysages, des profiles et des visages, anonyms pour la plupart, exécuté avec toute un panoplie de moyens” (2). They are also filled with notes on “la société parisienne, et l’enfance miserable” (6). As Couillard reports, within Blais’ carnets: “On y retrouve aussi des fragments de conversations entendues ou des scènes croquées sur le vif dans des endroits publics comme les cafés, les bars et les trains. Marie-Claire Blais y continue aussi la transcription de ses rêves” (6). Likewise, Paul’s notebooks contain similar scraps: “La religieuse me souriant tristement dans l’autobus. La jeune fille infirme à qui j’ai cédé ma place” (133). In a journal passage entitled “Paysages Intérieurs,” Paul is tormented by images of himself and his peers going from simple students to soldiers, by the weight of war, and again by a sense of foreboding (126).

Paul’s writing, like Blais’ handwritten additions to the typed letter, is hastily scrawled, “notes rapidement jetées sur le papier” (133). Just as her letter to me varies from sociable conversation to comments on the mystery of writing, to an issue that she labels as “une grande préoccupation,” Paul’s...
entries reflect a correspondingly broad range. Trivia is entwined with lists of people living and dead, and dreams of dying children (128). At one moment, he writes on a level of minutiae about needing to quit smoking, his examination hours and his studies; as his mother notes, his intellectual anxieties are interlaced with quotidian detail: "Ces paragraphes coupés par des notes pratiques (Piscine, jeudi, 8 heures, dentiste, Mercredi, dent cassée [...] Téléphoner au professeur F. math. Sophie. Ce soir avec le club)" (142).

Yet, at the next moment, Paul records his feelings of hopelessness. He recounts, for example, "à l'heure où je vous écris, des milliers de jeunes gens doivent mourir sur les champs de bataille [...]. Mon tour viendra, mon tour approche [...] " (175), or in another instance, he recalls a lurid scene on a train where he realizes that he is surrounded by young soldiers bound for death (131). By my drawing out a comparison between these instances and Blais' carnets, I would argue that the novel's internal oppositions sharply emerge.

Like Blais at the time of writing, Paul's physical regimen and philosophical perplexity seem inextricably entwined. He is driven in his training, he runs and exerts himself constantly, and records these rituals of self-discipline in his journal: "Chaque jour, la discipline du corps. La travail des muscles" (147). He recites like a mantra: "Victoire, victoire. Remporter la course. Gagner la médaille. Tu seras le roi [...] tu dois l'être" (128). Most of Paul's journal entries are underscored by a sense of corporeal tension, a striving almost to the point of self-project.
flagellation. In his frenzied state of activity, Paul conveys a sense of the indefatigability of youth, and even awe at his own potential; he can and must be king. Yet, any such confidence exists in contrast to the frenetic movement of Paul's mind, through nightmarish thoughts of war, violence, and a conviction that his own death is imminent. Paul's psyche seems strained by its own binarism.

Resonant of my interpretation of Blais, herself, I find Paul to be a character who is in many ways unreachable—open to interpretation, yet never fully disclosed. There is an intense counterpoint of intimacy with his lover, Anna, and his remoteness from almost all other characters. Paul is an enigmatic composite of hope and alienation in both his intellectual and social practices. As such, he exemplifies Blais' seeming perspective on an synergy between conditions of writing and youth. Blais' perception of an author's inevitable isolation is particularly evident in her response to a novel by Réjean Ducharme: "'Mon Dieu la vie de l'écrivain c'est cela, cette chambre intérieure, exilée de tous, cette chambre de cauchemars mais habitée de passions'" (Couillard 4). In reading these extratextual points, it becomes apparent that there is a certain narrative sympathy for Paul, as he reflects the paradoxical loneliness of the writer who is secluded within his or her inner world—despite the process of writing, the act of bringing this world to the surface.

Paul's journals provide the "material traces" out of which the rest of the novel is spun by other characters, presented in the first-person voice, as they react to his writing. His journals, the avant-texte to his never-to-be written life, function to stimulate the voices of the other major characters. Paul's mother,
Madeleine, for example, begins her narration on the subject of Paul's diaries. Although exploring her reaction to his writing is the ongoing premise of her communication, she opens with lines that paradoxically disavow her intention to reach an audience: “Mon histoire est si simple, si fragile qu'elle ne mérite peut-être pas d'être racontée; aussi je pense me faire à moi-même ce récit d'une solitude qui ne servirait à personne d'autre” (123). Such self-deprecation is also apparent as she introduces herself in the light she believes she is visible to others, as “anonyme épouse et mère” (123). The truth of her perception is reinforced by the fact that she is only introduced by name in the novel’s second part, narrated by her husband’s voice. Such thematic impotence on Madeleine’s part is reinforced as Blais uses her authorial discretion, or even power, to both animate and silence Madeleine, making her presence within the text felt. Blais as author emerges as the figure breaking into the solitude of Madeleine, and at once dissolving and reinforcing her anonymity.

Like her son, Madeleine provides a commentary that is a fusion of intellectual insights and quotidian details. The reader may examine the tension between Madeleine’s frustrations with domesticity and the life of her mind, to extrapolate the nature of her character. In probing this conflict, it becomes evident that Madeleine’s words rarely mesh with her thoughts. She chooses to behave with a self-protective duplicity. She reports her own deference to her husband, and her scolding of her children, and describes a fear of being otherwise. She identifies this choice as coming from “la voix menue de l'insoumise en moi” (180). Yet beneath this surface, she rebels:
"oui, Rodolphe, je n'ai qu'à 'm'abandonner à toi, et tout ira bien[...]. Mais je ne veux pas me donner" (180). Her awareness of her own falsity as she hides behind her role as wife and mother only serves to underscore her solitude, her fugitive state.

Recognizing that she will not give herself over entirely to these roles may evoke a respect, and even trust, on the reader's part. Her private insight may be given more credence, because of this disconnect with her external actions. Madeleine identifies the labile quality within her son's notebooks, and is led to a recognition of Paul's profundity: "Voyant soudain le monde par ses yeux inquiets, je perdis l'équilibre, je me sentis à mon tour victime de ce cauchemar contre lequel luttait mon fils" (126). Yet she also reads in his writing a sense of optimism: "Paul lui-même écrivait pour rire, afin de se créer un monde plus vivant que celui qu'il rencontrait chaque jour" (144). At least she seems to wish that he has such thoughts, "C'est au moins ainsi que j'interprétai ces lignes" (125), because the alternative would be to view Paul as living without hope.

The split between Madeleine on the surface and in her mind is underscored by her reaction to all of her children. She sees them as having complexity, but treats them as though they too are playing a role. Take for example the metaphor of the egg in François' assertion: "Je ne suis pas ton enfant," dit François, "je suis un œuf, et dans cet œuf il y a un autre œuf, et dans cet autre œuf un petit œuf" (154). This image could represent a metaphor for a growth process where the eggs, like tree rings, expand during
the process of development. However, Madeleine also senses a callous harshness to his anecdote. "'Est-ce qu’il y a un cœur dans le plus petits des plus petits des œufs?" she asks. His reply is only, "'Non, il n’y a assez de place" (154). In response, Madeleine expresses well the volatility of these youths: "Je peux sentir sous leurs boucles légères, leurs bonnes grosses joues, le tourbillon de monsters qui s'agite déjà. Je ne rêve pas. Ces enfants me font peur" (153). She is their interpreter, but does not translate the darker parts where it is evident that compassion is something not innate but to be learned.

Madeleine's descriptions of her young sons remind me of Blais' focus on the memory of Clare, my daughter born in 1994, in her letter to me. She begins by writing about "The small baby (Claire?) is now walking and almost talking, she must be an adorable child, she was already so attentive and graceful" (210). She closes with "I hope also that we could meet again in the future with your family and the talking baby, so fast, how incredible, you must be very proud of her [sic]" (211). Although doubtlessly these lines originate in pure friendliness, I realize that my slippage between a perception of Blais, as author, and Blais, as the person I met, causes a certain conflict. It becomes relevant to my reading that in the letter's dynamics there is a lot of space given to words such as "attentive," "graceful," and "incredible," drawing such attention to a very young child. There is an echo in her consideration of Clare with her presentation of children in her writing—it reminds me of the times
when her writing preserves youth as a hopeful state, filled with the sweetness of naïveté, and a belief in the potential of life.

Yet, the echo seems somehow lacking, like half of the equation, since youth is far from idealized by Blais in her writing. These lines in the letter help me to realize that within her works, very few children are so fair beneath the surface, but most have either an unsettling intensity, or an underlying lack of empathy and capacity for cruelty. Throughout much of her writing youth is presented in carnivalesque parallel to the adult world. Patrice in La Belle bête, for example, possesses a beauty that imbalances every other feature of his character, making him vacant and heartless, an empty beast. Likewise, the young children in L’Insoumise, Marc and François, are sweet and amusing on the surface. Yet, these children, though in a sense peripheral to the narrative, reveal a malevolence that is thematically central.

The children’s characters are echoed in Rodolphe’s behaviour. Just as they have told their mother that they hate her, her husband reacts to her with similar petulance on learning of his son’s death. He remarks that the sound of “cette voix me déplaisait, m’avait toujours déplu, et que je n’aimais plus Madeleine” (189). This quality in an adult is chilling, as though the potential for good to outbalance bad, that Blais’ seems to impart to youth, is lost. In fact, When Paul dies the novel seems to lose its youthfulness, its sense of hope. As though in reinforcement of this, Blais has Rodolphe, who is
unidimensionally uncaring, pick up the string of the narrative after his son's
death. ¹²

At this point, Madeleine is driven back into silence where she is only
retrievable via the perspective of her husband. Yet, Rodolphe's is not
presented as a privileged version of events, for Madeleine's knowledge of
Paul's life has been established and prevails. Whereas Rodolphe believes,
on reading his son's diary, that he has unveiled the homosexuality of his son,
his misconception seems almost laughable after knowing of Madeleine's proof
of Paul's love affair with Anna. As Rodolphe reads Paul's journals his
commentary is interlaced with memories of his son, yet there is no tenderness
but only a harsh justification of grounds for criticism. Rodolphe is shown to be
content with his own lack of understanding: "Je n'avais de Paul qu'une fausse
apparence" (199).

Despite varying degrees of insight into their son, both parents use his
writing primarily as a tool to define their own feelings. In my reading of Paul
as parallel to the exiled author, these parents are positioned like readers
preying on the text in search of significance but unable, or unwilling, to break
through the solitude of the subject. The journals of the son are in some ways
only a reflection of each parent's secrets and fears. Madeleine profoundly
associates the affair with Anna as reflective of her own infidelity, years earlier,
which Paul witnessed, as Anna's child witnesses her with her young lover.

¹² Like Carol Shield's Happenstance, the alternative perspectives of
spouses are presented back to back in L'insoumise.
While Rodolphe reveals no secret from his past, his focus on Frederick—and ultimate agreement with what he believes has been an attraction to the young man—is rife with suggestions of the father's latent homosexuality. Madeleine reveals a consciousness of this, questioning whether it is Paul's world that is affecting her, or simply a desire to explore herself: "l'insoluble récit intérieur que chacun espère définir" (126). The mother and father form a co-authorship, making a novel out of the words of their dead son—and like the author he is not accessible to debate their readings. Perhaps when Blais writes in her letter that this novel is a "young work with many voices, young and older," she is pointing to her perspective at the time, at least as manifest in the novel, that giving in to adulthood is tantamount to losing passion (211).

Paul's writings reflect a fear of losing passion; they are not only filled with his angst, loneliness, and love but also with quotidian details that balance the emotional weight of his writing against banalities. It is as though the lack of structure in his journals reflects a sense of abandon, or at least a rare autonomy, as he writes. This may be similar to what Blais' refers to in writing:

Je n'aurais sans doute pas écrit le même livre sans cet état à la fois violent et émerveillé de la jeunesse, lorsqu'elle se livre aux travaux de l'écriture. I could say the same for the novel The Fugitive [sic]. (Letter 210)

Writing for both Blais and Paul is portrayed as a release, a way of holding on to the passion of youth.
It is noteworthy that Blais has used the word "carnets" in L’insoumise to refer to Paul’s diaries, and that Couillard applies the same word to describe the Blais journals under study in her paper. Significantly, the word carnets suggests more of a notebook than a journal or diary. In a way that supposedly private journals would not, the use of the term carnets draws attention to the author by evoking a question as to the rationale behind such documentation. It summons ideas of motivated recording, commentary, and deliberate remembrance. The issue of intention becomes central: is the writing process in a carnet initiated and continued as a preparation for further writing? Does it serve a future use or is it an exercise in releasing the dreams and nightmares of the psyche?

Blais’ original and Paul’s fabricated notebooks have parallel functions. They are both in many ways archival, pieces of data in their raw form possibly waiting to be construed as information, or knowledge. The notebooks can be loosely defined as what geneticists label as avant-textes. While not full manuscripts, they provide “material traces of writing” which Marion Schmid asserts, in “An Anatomy of Genetic Criticism,” as being central “objects of inquiry” to potentially open the system of the text to broader interpretation (12). In this case, Blais’ letter provides “objects of inquiry” similar to the carnets of both the novel and her own records. All are similarly structured with snippets of memory and sporadic commentary as they move from subject

43 The word carnets has also been used in the title of de Biasi’s 1988 work on Flaubert’s Carnets. Such context indicates that the word has literary
to subject, time to time and language to language in a seeming stream of consciousness. Yet, these apparently informal, unrefined and even personal communiqués in the letter and Blais' journals resonate with the form and content of Paul's notebooks that are calculatingly contextualized within the mechanics of the novel. The novels' carnets are the result of conscious production, edits, and publication.

In a sense, the novel presents a counterfeit of the other communications under discussion. Like Carol Shields' nesting boxes analogy explored in Chapter Two, this reading creates interactive levels of voice. Blais carnets and letter form an outer box, which Madeleine and Rodolphe are within, looking into the inner box that contains Paul. Paul's box is, like Daisy Goodwill's, empty—he is only available through the vehicle of others. Within L'Insoumise, each voice seems isolated in time and space. They lack the unity of a family, but are nonetheless inextricably intertwined within the narrative. As Madeleine comments on this isolation: "Cet acharnement à arracher de son violent mystère l'âme des autres" 139), the network of voices can be a nightmare.

L'Insoumise has elements of Bakhtin's polyphonic text, presenting "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" (6). As he writes in "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel," certain texts are endowed with "a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights"(7). Yet, Blais seems to imply that the unmerged voices are a function of her youth at the time of implications which may have motivated Blais' choice for use in L'insoumise.
writing. Commenting on this web of voices, Blais writes: “Ce choeur de voix unies ou désunies est une grande préoccupation pour moi, il me semble que dans le monde actuel, toutes les voix, même les plus modestes, doivent être écoutées” (Letter 211). As author, Blais takes on the role of giving sound to the unheard voices, repairing their silence through the metaphor of writing.

Blais asserts the value of allowing such voices, both within and beyond the text, to interact. In her own work, for example, she refers to outside interpretation as broadening meaning, rather than reducing it to nothingness. As a case in point, she writes:

I am sure some connections exist, between Mad Shadows, and my youth, at the time of writing: when I saw the wonderful ballet Mad Shadows at the National Ballet, (from the young creator then, Ann Ditchburn) I felt these connections were very strong, probably because suddenly I saw the work outside of my own perceptions, through a new invention, a new mind, a new spirit.

(Letter 210)

Even in this praise, Blais reveals a current belief in the power of youth, as she describes the “young creator” and the effect of her mind and spirit on her work. With a recognition of the potential of adding another layer of interpretation, Blais graciously invites another voice into the process of production.

The reverberation between the voices of her novels, and her correspondence provide other points of entry into Blais' works than I may
have taken without reading the extra-textual materials. In my original letter, as one of several questions, I asked whether she perceived her youth at the time of writing La Belle bête and L’insoumise as a factor in their development. The particular emphasis on youth in her response led me to a similar focus in my reading. This focus was reinforced by my perception of the author which was in many senses pre-staged by the canonic aura surrounding her. The fame of her story inspired me to look at Blais in light of issues of youth. This pre-condition in some ways leads me to over-intellectualize everything she writes, regardless of forum. How much value is there in her seeming agreement with a perception that her youth was critical to her writing at the time? How much hindsight is perfect vision? The significance seemingly rests in the expansion of my interpretation that her communication has launched. The letter witnesses Blais as a “being-in-advance of itself,” where the “Dasein, its futurity, is through and through implicated with its past,” to use the terms of Magliola in “Heideggerian Hermeneutics” (59). Blais is in many ways looking back on herself and forward at the same time; she has invited me, in our correspondence, to do the same.
Chapter Six Conclusion

When Life Hands you Limens...

Whether drawing on phenomenology, postmodernism or genetic theory as tools for comprehending the reader/text rapport, or employing a comprehension of poststructuralism and New Criticism to divine deep-seeded modes of resistance, it is arguable that interpretation of post-publication authorial statements during the reading process creates a potentially significant liminal effect. The preceding chapters reflect my own critical decision to examine the impact on varying processes of reading as I (deliberately) cross a threshold between reader and author. Throughout this course of inquiry, it becomes apparent that an author's own words may be used with a pre-meditated conservatism to open points of entry and re-entry into their works. Each chapter demonstrates that such consideration of an author creates a portal through which a reader may approach a text. The act of reading, in this case, offers a nexus uniting author/reader/text in time and space for the purpose of investigation. In effect, the divergent communications of each author studied assist me in framing a new understanding of this dynamic. So powerfully are the roles intertwined that I now regard this relationship as being of a circular or even co-dependent nature.

The preceding chapters confirm Bakhtin's assertion that "no voice can resist the other voices which influence it" (166). Attempting to dissociate one's reading from awareness of an author, on some level, is a prospect as impossible as unringing a bell. My original act of contacting
these authors, in fact, displays a related slippage between engaging with the author within the boundaries of the text and the author as perceived beyond the text. Such confluence exists because the cycle of communication is in constant motion and continues, or even intensifies, while reading occurs. As the chapter titles suggest, the notion of process is central to this project, since it is during this time that the reader extracts meaning from his or her coinciding perceptions of author and text.

For the critical reader there is merit in the essentially problematic exploit of drawing an author into the act of interpretation. This value is delivered by the addition of dimension to the “intention of the text,” as Umberto Eco writes in “Reading My Readers,” the “discrepancies” between “the intention of the author and the intentions of the readers” provide the basis for “discussion about the conjectural intention of the text” (822). From this perspective, author and reader share a common ground as they approach the text in the role of reading. The resultant dialogue, as in my example, increases the scope of interpretation.

Each author’s response to my request for contact in some ways violates an implied contract between writer and reader—a compact based on a shared agreement that the author is, for all intents and purposes, dead after publication. This idea resonates with the first chapter’s discussion of Robert Kroetsch’s statement that the notion of a “contract with the reader” is somehow “deadening” (Letter 174). Each author’s response, however, implies a desire for reanimation. Only Carol Shields overtly questions the value of her post-publication voice.
Although in her letter she writes, "I've never seen the possibility of separating writer and text," she indicates that this is not so much an issue for the reader as the writer: "I don't see that the author's interests or biases, or even such ramblings as you see on this page, have much to do with enlarging meaning for the reader. I'm curious about the life of writers, but my curiosity has little bearing on the book in hand." Yet, even so, Shields offers a detailed analysis of her own creative ideology in her return letter. As in the replies of the other authors, I infer such cooperation as an act of participation in a dialogue on the subject of intentionality. I also infer an awareness that, because of the nature of our discussion, each author leaves the conversation open-ended and expects me to draw my own conclusions. The complicity in communication by these writers consequently casts them all as Phoenix-like in the project of constructing a reading rebuilt out of their own ashes.

The impact of each author's communication on my analysis is varied. In part, this is a result of my different approach to each person. Although they were given almost identical questions, my pre-formulated biases have influenced my interpretation. My learning curve has been effected by an original critical stance shaping my mindset as I have approached these authors. This predisposition is exemplified in the first chapter, on Kroetsch, as his seeming agency of communication in the engagement with his reader on a familiar level is shown to attract my attempt at dialogue. He was initially approached because of the potential I hoped would be created by correspondence with a writer who crossed over so many boundaries in the course of his professional life. In a sense, I invited
him to cross yet another boundary. Similarly, the nature of Shields’ works, and The Stone Diaries in particular, drew me to initiate contact with her. Her narrative structures seemed to invite a closer intercourse with the author at play behind the scenes. My personal relationship with Matt Cohen led me to approach him, since I wanted to examine whether our existing relationship helped or hindered my interpretation. At almost the opposite extreme I was drawn to Marie-Claire Blais because of her fame and the romance of her story.

My initial perceptions of these authors, however, did not arise out of a vacuum. I was influenced by their public personae as, to some extent, they each seemed to confirm my pre-characterizations. Kroetsch, in his letters to me, was multi-dimensional and led me towards a focus on the issue of intentionality as it applies to critical thinking. Shields, on the other hand, offered material that was pointed more towards the product of the text, framing her narrative strategies. Cohen, however, strengthened my recognition of a personal impact on my reading process—made especially poignant since his life ended during the writing of this work. Blais, however, led me to re-cast all of my perceptions because during the process of interpreting her writing I came to recognize that even my personal reactions are a result of influence by canonic forces.

The canon, in this instance, has been at work on me as a reader. Within Canada there are several canons of influence and, as Foucault finds, “The modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation of discourse are different within each culture and are modified within each” (273). My perception throughout this project has been that of a child of an
arguably domineering anglo-centric Canadian cannon. Using my own reading as a case in point, it has been most useful to examine these authors from this perspective. Rather than, for example, explicating a Québécois perception of Marie-Claire Blais, it is more relevant to my line of inquiry to explore an anglo-centric perception of her fame.

Because of the language difference in her writing Blais presents perhaps the greatest contrast to my own position. The others, however, have distinctions manifest on a level of more segmented communities. Kroetsch is very much rooted in his geographical region; Shields is both American and Canadian in her heritage; and Cohen is both Canadian and Jewish. Recognizing the local and individual aspects of these authors and their texts lessens any temptation towards unified expression which would, in this case, be unduly coercive (Davey 253-66). Instead, their diversity as it exists within this project may be considered as reflexive of the Canadian cannon which exists in many ways without collective harmony. Such ingredients as a writer's perspective, his or her presumptions of a shared discursive community, his or her choices of language and form, however, enable all such literature to be appreciated for its variety. In his critical text, The Lovely Treachery of Words, Kroetsch augments postmodern theory by urging Canadians to focus on the "particulars of place," to develop a "local pride" which "does not exclude the rest of the world, or other experiences; rather, it makes them possible. It creates an organizing centre" (6). Canada is an
organizing centre for this project, but the particulars of each author's heritage create an engaging diversity that is also fundamentally Canadian.

For both myself and the authors, our post-publication communications enabled a productive self-reflexivity in both national and individual terms. This parallel act of reading contravenes a convention of "academic criticism" which, as David Bleich protests, "separates itself from its subject" ("Forms of Self-Inclusion" 60) and tends to espouse "a philosophy of intellectual separation, strong boundaries, territory" (61). My position is perhaps in line with what Bleich would describe as a "more engaged critical stance"—although still supportive of a great degree of intellectual separation (61). Such distance is advisable since it supports critical autonomy, and engenders the flexibility to re-interpret and change over time. As Dale Bauer summarizes, there is "no final or definitive criticism [...] because each generation enters a new dialogue with the text" (159). Throughout this project modern, poststructuralist, postmodern, phenomenological and genetic critics have a voice in the dialogue. Yet all these voices are segregated to a degree, since no critic can claim to be (literally) on the same page as these authors. As a reader, I approach the text with a knowledge of my entire self. Yet I only access aspects of these authors made available through my own perceptions.

As Kroetsch suggests, the "problem with the study of authorial intention is the question of how we construct the author" (Letter 175). But, he writes, the "problem is so difficult that most critics run and hide" (Letter 175). While it is beyond the scope of this study to unravel this issue in its entirety, it has been productive to analyze the liminal material through which I've gained varying levels
of access to authors. In the first chapter my approach to the writing self of Kroetsch occurs through the examination of his signature within his texts—and attention to the signature which extends across his oeuvre. In the chapter on Shields, her writing presents me with insight into the author as artisan, as she describes the crafting of her works. With Cohen I am able to access a writing-self that is different from the person I had known. With Blais I am given a personal twist on a collectively contrived persona, as I read both synergy and discrepancies between her memories and her story.

My dialogue with these authors increases the reverberation of their speech and, as a result, tempers our dialogue. Kroetsch’s correspondence leads me into a concentration on a reading of the issue, playing with the critical and theoretical implications. Shields’ draws me towards a reading of the authorial function of her narrative building. Cohen points me as much towards context as text, and Blais leads me on an exploration of her own mythology. Yet every dialogue proves as fragmented as the authorial persona itself. It is only the illusion of a dialogue that is created. More appropriately what takes effect is a combination of two monologues. Like a movie making twins out of one actor, a split screen combines and divides the writers and myself in the process of both reading and writing.

What, then, is the value of this approach? Any import rests in the mind of the reader—it is the reading that is changed and not the text. Yet this does not necessarily contradict Stanley Fish’s assertion that the New Critics, including Wimsatt and Beardsley, and even deconstructionists such as
Derrida, have established that "what matters finally is what the work itself says rather than the conditions of its production" (9). The text is ground zero of the interpretive process; it is the point from which interpretation begins and to which it returns. It is inevitably the measure against which the extra-textual is gauged.

The conditions of production are only ever accessible in part, by different readers and at different times. Evidence of these conditions is so piecemeal, manifest only in traces and fragments, that no two interpretations would ever be likely to converge. Such arguably subjective material as extra-textual detail also decreases the likelihood of duplication in perception. Quoting Caryl Emerson, Bauer asserts that "no two individuals ever entirely coincide in their experience [...] every act of understanding involves an act of translation and a negotiation of values. It is essentially a phenomenon of interrelation and interpretation" (162). Variances in interpretation would be most decipherable in critical readings. Different critics would arguably employ the same materials as I have used throughout this project in the application of variant methodologies. Another reader of these authors' letters might, for example, pursue a cross-reference with other interviews in order to find a common thread that would indicate an ongoing preoccupation of an author. Others might take the letters in an entirely biographical context since each imparts personal information. Shields and Cohen, for example, both mention their incomplete doctoral degrees—which might lead to a comparison of these author's academic and
creative stances. A genetic critic might expand genetic theory to argue that, even though post-textual, such materials reflect elements of textual genesis. While my approach has incorporated each of these aspects to some extent, a stronger focus in any single direction would generate a very different reading.

It is apparent that my communications with Kroetsch, Shields, Cohen and Blais provide grounds for exploration of the synergy and contradictions between their statements, their personas, and their works. I cannot claim to have truly accessed any of these authors. As Barthes reminds: "'one never knows if he [author] is responsible for what he writes (if there is a subject behind his language) for the very being of writing [...] is to keep the question Who is speaking? from ever being answered'” (qtd. in Death and Return 157). Instead, what I have accessed leads me to recommend an expansion of the range of critical investigation into the question of "Who is speaking?" This inquiry is fecund even without the closure of an answer. As long as the author is present within a reading there is a perpetual echo of the question. This reverberation can either be dealt with as a distraction or as a critical opportunity.

Taken opportunistically, post-publication statements may be considered as claims to intention that, as Burke asserts, may be “recognized and respected, but on condition that we accept that its structures will not be fully and ideally homogeneous with what is said or written that it is not always and everywhere completely adequate to the communicative act” (141).
They are useful in many ways precisely because of this tension with the text and the reader. Similarly, Derrida, quoted in Burke, explains: "the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance" (140). Statements of intention, in other words, may be practicable at some times and under some circumstances.

What, then, is the place of authorial intention? It does not provide grounds for determinacy; nor does it resolve what Kroetsch describes as the "pathetic longing for the essential answer" (Letter 174). It can, however, perhaps be useful during the perpetual process of critical reading. As Burke says, "the critic undertakes not only to reconstitute the intentional forces within the text, but also to assign their proper limits" (141). Statements of intention can introduced into the reading process since, in Bakhtin's terms, "[I]n a human being there is always something that only he himself can reveal, in a free act of self-consciousness and discourse, something that does not submit to an externalizing second-hand definition" (59). Yet these statements must be moderated, taking "the form of following the line of authorial intention up to the point at which it encountered resistance within the text itself: from this position the resistance can then be turned back against the author...what he wished to say does not dominate what the text says" (Death and Return 141). By expanding the viewpoint on the author, beyond a dichotomic position where s/he is either granted authority or considered dead, the reader can find an alternative means of weaving the
post-publication authorial voice into reading. Authorial intention, as reported by an author, can be used with a conservative reserve to compare against a reader's own interpretation of the intention of the text.

Although this mode of investigation sometimes leans towards informal versus critical analysis, it is fruitful when used with caution. In a sense, only an aware critical reader should undertake this exercise, in order to resist hinging interpretation on an author's commentary. Perhaps more adept at handling indeterminacy, the critical reader's challenge is implied by Fish's perspective: "When the criterion of verisimilitude has been replaced by a criterion of appropriateness, meaning becomes radically contextual, potentially as variable as the situated (and shifting) understanding of countless speakers and hearers" ("Rhetoric" 212). The critical reader must remain in control of authorial influence and in communication with the text.

There is a difference of degree between allowing a writer to guide towards an alternative means of entering a text and accepting his or her input as directive.

I have, throughout this work, attempted to keep this distinction clear. As a result, this project provides an exploration of various facets of the complex issue of intentionality, approached through the liminal opportunities produced by post-publication materials. Each author has been instrumental in facilitating such cross-border dialogics. The effect on my reading, as Kroetsch reminds, "involves your own risking of your own dislocations and uncertainties. Why should I have all the twisted ankles?" Like Barthes who
describes such activity as producing the real pleasure of the text, I have risked dislocation and achieved a relocation of my critical perspective. I invite my reader to interpret the original communications (to follow) in the light of the ideas explored in this work. Whether they are of use in elucidating meaning, or not, testifies both to the predisposition of my reader and to the success of my arguments.
Chapter Seven

Correspondence
Robert Kroetsch
Questions on Ironic Intention

*Many theorists negate the importance of the connection between writer and text, but some suggest that analyzing authorial intention is of significant value to the interpretation of textual meaning. Do you regard intention as valuable to the study of texts?

*Since irony is not, in Hutcheon's terms "lexically decipherable," and its existence relies on textual and contextual markers, and on reader interpretation, it may be argued that analyzing intention is a particularly cogent means of anchoring textual ironies. Do you regard ironic intention as categorically different from general literary intention?

*What do you consider as textual markers of intentional irony? Can these markers be too subtle?

*There are many instances in your writing in which self-reflexive irony intensifies a play of meanings. Would you consider phrases such as 'lovely treachery of words,' or 'silent poet' as intentional ironies marked by their meta-literary connotations? Or, would your development of characters such as those within What the Crow Said, or "How I Joined the Seal Herd" better exemplify intentional irony?

*Is intended irony more valid than unintended or accidental irony? Does looking for intention limit the ironic possibilities of a text?

*I can see how a study of authorial intention could easily become a study of an author as a character extending from text to text. Does the fictionalization of the writer which is implied by this process obstruct the possibility of finding intention? Does analyzing intention create an illusory connection between reader and writer?

*Is intention, by your definition, entirely textually rooted or does knowledge of the author's interests and biases enlarge the ironic context and provide more possibilities of meaning?
*Since such an interpretation of intention involves varying levels of pre/judging the author, is there a danger of sexism, racism or any other bias interfering with a reading?

*Is it fair to build a theory of ironic intention in your work based on the intertextual knowledge of your critical writing, your poetry and your novels?

*Is this a question of readerly competence? Since irony is, arguably, produced by reading, what level of analytical skill or literary expertise is needed to recognize intended ironies?

*Are you likely to use more overtly intentional irony in poetry, prose or critical theory? How is irony useful to you in the process of your writing?

*Is irony useful as a dissimulative tool? By using irony can writers carry out the 'un-naming, uninventing, and unriddling,' which you advocate for Canadian writers in The Lovely Treachery of Words?

*Any other comments on ironic intention in the Canadian context?

Dr. Robert Kroetsch
Department of English
625 Fletcher Argue Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3T 2N2
Dear Julia,

About intention.

I'm trying. I'll try to write down some thoughts. That would best trying to talk them.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

27 Jan 94
to: Julia Moss

fm: Robert Kroetsch

26 February 1994

indirect responses to your questions/observations in the order of their appearance

1. I take intention to be valuable to the study of texts. Ours is a culture that trades a lot in the idea of signature, and signature (at least in part) resides in intention. The dismissal of intention allows or enables the reader to escape from a dialogue into a monologue.

2. Ironic intention might often be the sign of literary intention, mightn't it? I have difficulty with categories. I'm too much inclined toward transgression. Why the boundary? I ask. Why the seductive invitation of an announced boundary?

The textual markers can indeed be too subtle, partly because our writing system has difficulty with tone of voice. How do you write down a voice? We enter into discourse questions; the readers as well as the author must know the markers. The rules of any discourse are shaky, unstable, contradictory.

The writer manifests agency by using irony; the writer, in that very process, runs the risk of losing agency.

3. I agree that my phrases such as "lovely treachery of words" and "silent poet" are intentional in the ways you suggest. I used to believe in something called a contract with a reader, and those phrases were signals. Do I still "believe" in the contract theory? There's something wrong with it, though I don't quite recognize what. Perhaps I resist the deadening notion of a contract. It seems to resist ideas of process. It seems, in scary ways, to resist discourse.

4. Accidental irony. One should and will have "accidents" as a writer. That's one of the ironies. And yet, perhaps, one should go for the big accidents, the thruway pileups. Why cut your thumb while slicing bread? Get out there to where the ironies undo the pathetic longing for the essential answer, the inclusive narrative. The unnerving task
for the reader is to try to recognize the exchange between the intentional and the unintentional. I still come down on the side of signature (and a considerable awareness— a considerable intention), but art forms like film are rewriting the notion of signature. I cling to a soggy conviction that I, however much I might grant to language and genre, have a considerable personal responsibility. My intention is intentional.

5. The problem with the study of authorial intention is the question of how we construct author. The problem is so difficult that most critics run and hide. Think of me as being in hiding at the moment. A curious pun— hide.

6. I do not believe that either biography or autobiography, as currently conceived, is much more than a failed fiction. And yet I am persuaded that either or both of those concepts would be helpful, if realized, in the enlarging of the possibilities of meaning. The current interest in what (auto)biography might be is encouraging. Which is to say—

7. Yes, (the) "subject" has a hand (literally, at least for the moment, a hand) in the making of a text. But how is the subject constructed? How does the subject construct itself?

[you have your work from here to the year 2000 cut out for you]

The fallacy of narrated memory surely gets in the way of our textualizing an author's life. I am trying to write something about myself that I call "The Poetics of Rita Kleinhart" and I am having one hell of a time of it. Chaos and cliche war in the most remarkable ways. Perhaps I have to reconceive what intention might be. But we're getting off track—

8. Yes, I think it is "fair" of you (I would not say it is fair of just any old anyone) to build a theory of ironic intention in my work from . . . (see your questions). I think it is fair of you because I think you are being fair. A taughtology. And that involves your own risking of your own dislocations and uncertainties. Why should I have all the twisted ankles? I return to the idea of process. Process is always in process and has to give up on goal, certainty, resolution, finality. I return to (Bakhtinian?) dialogue. Keep talking. Keep listening. Keep talking.
I should refer you (academic discourse) to my essay, "I Wanted to Write a Manifesto," a talk I gave, a talk that was published in part somewhere in Belgium, a talk in which I read some of the details from my own, if you will, life. I probably won't send you the essay even if you in your polite way ask for it. The question I face in reading the essay I wrote is--was I being fair to myself? The answer: of course not.

9. Perhaps I have answered 9. I like the fact that you pose 12 questions. The epic impulse is always with us, and where/how does the ironic reside in the epic?

I used to feel hurt at bad (unfair?) readings of my intention. Really hurt. And I was hurt often by readers who didn't see the parodic or ironic intent. This confession undoes everything I have said so far.

10. Irony is in my bones because I am aware that when I write something I am writing something other than what I am writing. I retrieve myself from slippage and reversal by the claim of the intentional. It was, I claim, my intention to step on the banana peel.

One of the things I did in some of my poems was to try to be ironic by claiming (pretending?) not to be ironic. Sometimes I wish I had written more critical essays. I wonder if I got into a game with silence in which the silence forced me to the wall. I am currently writing a novel. About that I am silent.

11. I am tired. It is 7:45 on a Saturday morning, and all this thinking has tired me out. I had intended to do my laundry this morning. The sun is shining on the Winnipeg winter landscape. I think I'll go for a drive in the country.

Dissimulative, you say.

What is the place of "secret" in all this?

Please give me credit for the following: while attempting to respond to your questions I have resisted all impulses to run to the Hutcheon texts in the next room.

12. Who am I to guess at the intentions of other Canadian writers? They're a slippery lot, but some of them are not slippery enough. Eiron tempted to become, what is it?--agon? I forget.
4081 Cedar Hill Road
Victoria BC  V8N 3C2

2 December 94

Dear Julia Moss,

Your essay--first off, this is to give you permission to publish whatever materials of mine you have quoted in your essay, "From the Horse's Mouth . . ."

And I very much enjoyed reading the essay--the play of your mind through possibilities and--well . . . even through silences. I very much like your style--and I take it style is a pun here.

The Rita Kleinhart piece--a big section is to appear in OPEN LETTER; then, next fall, a larger version will be published in a book of sort of personal (about writing, not about my personal life) essays that I'm putting together for Red Deer College Press (title: A Likely Story).

You asked about The Ledger-- I had nothing to do with the choice of various types etc. A remarkable young couple was running--or going broke running--Applegarth Follies. Stan Dragland at Western would probably know their names. They were doing remarkable things but one day decided to disappear into New York and silence.

Your doctoral studies suggest a new clarity on our critical horizon. Good luck to you . . . I'm trying to say that I hear in your work new possibilities for critical writing.

Come January I drive to Manitoba to teach again and to meet with my own graduate students. . . . The wine, the wine. The wine awaits me in Winnipeg. I have it hidden away and will drink it on a special special occasion. But what occasion can measure up to such a wine?

Sincerely,

Robert Kroetsch
4 081 Cedar Hill Road  
Victoria BC V8N 3C2  

4 February 1997  

Dear Julia,  

You have written a fabulous essay--I look forward to reading the published version not only of the essay but also of your thesis.  

You must be in contact with Ted Davidson, there in Durham. Please say hello to him for me. I wouldn't mind having his address, if he could send it along (my phone number is also a fax number: 250-477-8606). I'd like to tell him how much I like his Coyote book.  

I was married to a woman from Wilmington and spent some great vacation time in North Carolina. I'm sure you're enjoying yourself. By the way, I had a good visit with your father in Winnipeg a couple of years ago and heard about your many accomplishments.  

All the best,  

[Signature]  

Robert Kroetsch
Carol Shields
November 30, 1994

Dear Carol Shields,

I am writing with the hope that you will respond to some questions I have which have been generated by my work as a Ph.D student in Comparative Canadian Literature at University of Toronto. Last year I corresponded with Robert Kroetsch to produce a final paper, "From the Horse's Mouth: A Dialogue with Robert Kroetsch," for a course with Linda Hutcheon. I want to build on related ideas in an independent study which I am now doing with Magdalene Redekop. I hope to combine these projects and add other authors to form a doctoral thesis, under the supervision of Linda Hutcheon at the University of Toronto. I am fascinated by issues of intentionality and authorial positioning and I know your perspective as both author and academic would be invaluable to my work.

I enjoyed The Stone Diaries first as a casual reader and now even more as I explore it critically. I find that the implications of autobiography as a fictional genre are particularly relevant to my interests. Your novel evokes issues of how far we can go in asserting the 'life of the author'--questions which are of fundamental importance in the contemporary somewhat-postmodern literary/theory context which encourages so many crossings of traditional boundaries. I would like to address the idea of trusting (that there is) an author behind/within the text. I am, in general, attempting to assess whether intentionality is accessible and/or desirable for the study of Canadian texts.

I realize that this is an imposition and but I would be grateful for your reply! I have tried to word my questions to allow brief or more detailed answers (of course, more is better). Since I am working within a course deadline, I would appreciate hearing from you as soon as possible. If the answer is 'no' could you please let me know by return mail or fax. Thanks very much.

Sincerely,

Julia Moss
Questions on Authorial Intention

- Many theorists negate the importance of the connection between writer and text, but some suggest that analyzing authorial intention is of significant value to the interpretation of textual meaning. Do you regard intention as valuable to the study of texts?
- What do you consider as textual markers of intentionality? Can these markers be too subtle?
- Did you place any textual markers of intentionality within *The Stone Diaries*?
- There are many instances in your writing which could be considered self-reflexive. Are there any instances that you intentionally used to point to your role as author?
- Is intended meaning more valid than unintended meaning?
- Is interpreting intention a question of readerly competence? Does it depend on a level of analytical skill or literary expertise?
- Is intention, by your definition, entirely textually rooted or does knowledge of the author’s interests and biases enlarge the scope of possible meaning?
- Can intention be accessed? If so, can it be assessed?
- Any other comments on authorial intention in the Canadian context?
Dear Julia,

I wish you success with your thesis, but I'm afraid I can't be very helpful since I'm not adept at critical analysis, particularly as it attaches to my own writing. I seem to lack the vocabulary and the will (no doubt one of the reasons I dropped out of the doctoral program eons ago!). I'll have a stab at some of your questions, but please forgive me if I respond in block-paragraphs rather than separate points.

Yes, I do regard intention as valuable, and no, I've never seen the possibility of separating writer and text. I worry, though, that those who analyze texts sometimes mystify the writing impulse. I always feel when writing that I am "making" an artifact, and that the act of "making" is curiously physical. I'm not sure how to say this, but I feel, when writing, that I have one eyebrow ever so slightly lifted. Perhaps it's intentionality that's responsible. Of course I want my reader to understand my intention, and I suppose I do leave markings, to use... your word, here and there. In the Stone Diaries I tried to do this partly through chapter titles, making sure that they were just slightly "off." In a similar way, the photographs glance off or even contradict what they are intended to represent.

It was my intention that all the voices in the book be filtered through Daisy's sensibility, and only a few reviewers (one of them the reviewer for the Los Angeles Times!) seem to have understood that. I suppose this must be seen as a failure to "mark" my intentions. I felt I made
this quite clear: each chapter has one moment when Daisy is alone. Lying down on her back, collecting herself as it were, and acknowledging herself as the author of her autobiography. Perhaps I could have signaled more loudly, putting a box around the paragraph—why not?

On the other hand, I always like what Updike once said about putting in surprises for the astute reader. I do see boundaries between writers and their writing voice—when you pick up a pen a second voice comes out—but I'm not sure how important this is for a reader.

I see The Stone Diaries as a set of three nesting boxes. 1. the author, make the big box. (And I expect the reader to understand that.) Daisy is making the inside box, and the inner box turns out to be empty, holding Daisy's absence from her own life story. This structure was with me all the while I was writing the novel; it kept me on course.

I read recently that John Barth believes the central question of fiction is not: What happened?" but "Who am I?" I think many women writers would modify that question slightly to read: "Who are we?" and "Why are we what we are?"

I like to think I'm writing for the careful reader, the attentive reader, but not the reader who has a yellow highlighter in hand. I suppose I'm saying that I want my intentionality veiled by what some have called the net of enchantment, the very primal tug of narrative.

I don't see that the author's interests or biases, or even such ramblings as you see on this page, have much to do with enlarging meaning for the reader. I'm curious about the life of writers, but my curiosity has little bearing on the book in hand. I once wrote a book (Happenstance) from a male perspective, and I asked my publisher to print it under a male pseudonym, feeling my gender would throw bricks in the way of enjoying the book and seriously undermine its credibility (the publisher refused, probably wisely).
I'm not sure how closely intentionality can be tracked. My intentions change every day. I lose sight of what I mean or want all the time, though the pattern (or task) I have assigned myself holds fairly steady. I love narrative structures, and have found enormous pleasure in creating them and working them out. Sometimes they seem arbitrary to me, as though I'm pushing my narrative into too tight a cupboard, setting out my narrative knives and forks in too tidy a drawer.

Language is something else. I almost always feel secure in my intentions. It is my greatest pleasure, in fact—making something out of language.

Not sure if any of this will be useful.

All good wishes,
Question regarding the "official self" mentioned in phone call of 10 May 1993:

- "Anyone who is writing or talking about their writing is probably necessarily speaking from their official self, and that when you're in your official self of course you have only an official self's appreciation of your non-official selves. It seems to me that it is impossible to write or to discuss literature or whatever without contrivance, and it seems to me there are two reasons for this--one is that in learning how to write and figuring out to write what I wanted to write learning how to contrive was obviously an essential part of this. I don't just write down randomly any word that comes into my head or if I do, I then change it. And secondly because I don't even believe in the idea that there is this authentic self, a sort of pre-self, this authentic self after which is these contrivances so in a sense I'm already in a position of saying that all selves are somewhat contrived because otherwise I'd have to agree that there is such a thing as an authentic self then I'd be stuck with various questions I can't possibly answer and I think that probably just comes out of being some sort of mixed up minority which I along with many other people are. Being an immigrant, not being part of the majority culture, I mean being part of it in a way but not really being part of it just because I
didn't come over, my ancestors didn't come over, on the Mayflower. So by being marginal in all these different ways and being someone writing in a language other than what my grandparents spoke the whole question of authenticity has already become a kind of joke and that's why I have come to the conclusion that when I write or talk about things like that I'm acting out of some official self or a set of official selves that are publicly joined together."

**Question regarding my (Moss) observation of encountering this "official self" for the first time:**

- "The reason it would be the first time is because I'm an adult and adults are non-marginal compared to non-adults...they get to be grown up or at least appear to be"

**Question as to whether this "official self" is marginal:**

- "My grandparents all came from Russia...they were Russian Jews, they spoke Russian. Then my parents were born here. My grandparents never spoke Russian from the moment they got off the boat, they spoke Yiddish. My father could speak [Yiddish] fairly well, my mother can speak it a bit, she understands it. They are really quite assimilated."

**Question as to whether his heritage led to writing books that are not Canada-centered:**

- "For me there was a period in my life when I did consider myself...well I didn't think too much about my European past as other than a Jewish past..."
or whatever. Since I spent a year in England as a child, and I started going back once I was 21, I really got interested in that European heritage...in European writing and so much of what I'd learned as a child had connected to that naturally, so many of the books I had read—had read them all in English of course—I'd read a lot of European literature in translation and...being there I feel very at home with it. Not more at home than I do here necessarily, no in fact less. I feel I'm from here but nonetheless I felt very at home with it. I feel at home in that tradition as well as in this tradition and I think now, to be a sort of white middle-aged male, what other people call (if I am Eurocentric) it is a weird moment to be that as a writer. A weird moment in the sense that that has somehow become the villain and yet in a sense that is what was always unacceptable about me to begin with, i.e. being Jewish. So that when, for instance I heard these critics on "Morningside" and they were discussing The Paris Notebooks and one, I think David Staines, from the University of Ottawa, saying "well I wouldn't read that book because it's about sex," and then Aritha van Herk said that "I don't think you should read it because it's a Eurocentric white male's and they already have all the power." I thought well that was very interesting in a certain way. She was, I think, reviewing a book by Norman Levine too, and she was saying basically these books shouldn't be read because they're by people with power and David Staines was agreeing. So I was thinking here's two tenured university professors, who in a certain way have a lot of
power, saying about two writers, who in a certain way are completely
nobodies, that they have so much power that their books shouldn't be read."

**Question or whether it makes a difference if reader sees you as
marginal and Jewish, or Eurocentric and white.**

- "No, because I think the vast majority of readers don't care about that
  kind of thing and in fact I don't think I am marginal. I mean marginal is a
category, it's not a thing I worry about a lot. In Canada the sort of Anglo-
Saxon literary establishment—the literary establishment has been much
more Anglo-Saxon and a sort of continuation from the British tradition than
other parts of the political power structure—so in fact in Canada one is not
marginal because one is Jewish or because one is the child or grandchild of
immigrants. I mean most Canadians are from somewhere. In Canada, in
general, it is normal to be a bit from here and a bit from there. So, in a
sense, that's what everyone is and readers expect that. But, there's some
weird literary reality in which the Canadian voices which have been taken to
be the most Canadian, or the most Canadian moments, are the sort of small
town Protestant Christian—sort of small town Protestant conservative
voices—and I think there is something very specially Canadian about those
voices. They reflect a kind of Canadian rural reality which is really distinct
from American or British, so it is something very distinctly Canadian. People
like Sinclair Ross, Margaret Laurence, Timothy Findley (in his sort of one
foot in one foot out way), Robertson Davies, Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood,
they all have that sort of small town Protestant Conservative skepticism, a sort of dour side.

**Question regarding his focus on small towns in Canada:**

- "I couldn't have said what I just said then because I hadn't figured it out, and a lot of it wasn't true because it was 1970 after all. I was born in Kingston, and brought up in Ottawa, and so I really felt I was returning to the Ottawa Valley after a half-uncomfortable sojourn in Toronto. I was returning to my sort of home territory. I still feel it is my home territory. What was home about it was the landscape and maybe that voice which I just talked about was one that I had become very used to listening to. It is one that I really understand well and one I was able to use in the Salem novels and I think I really return to it at times. *Emotional Arithmetic* is set there too. For me that landscape and that place is just so familiar to me, so real to me it's more real than everything else. I always call Frontenac County reality. I explain to my family, and people, that they've now entered reality—everything here is real whereas everything outside of it is simply an attempt to imitate it, always unsuccessfully."

- Julia: "That's reassuring, having grown up in Frontenac County."

- Matt: "You're lucky, you're one of the very privileged younger people who has managed to grow up in reality. Other people can only imagine what it must be like."

**Question regarding the voices who write and the implication that different selves write different novels.**
• "I think there is a connection between the so-called official self who might be the agent, almost the external agent, of the person who writes the books, but when I'm sitting typing I'm not like I am here talking, I'm much more amorphous. I don't know what I am. I'm not paying any attention to myself. I think there is part of one that is operating [as] a technician, but part of one is more or less investigating whatever vein happens to have been opened up by whatever writing. So, when I was writing the Salem novels let's say there was a kind of weird Ottawa Valley reality which was so much a part of my childhood growing-up, and parts of my adulthood that I have total access to, I could have just written the Salem novels forever. The Freud book is a much more contrived thing, but it also has a whole history within me of having read Freud when I was a teenager, and it has a whole history of sort of absurd theater that also goes through my life."

**Question regarding issues of parody, humour, absurdity, mock-Surrealism:**

• "I was living in Paris and I was trying to write a much more serious book which eventually turned into _Emotional Arithmetic_. I was having a very hard time with it, so I thought well the least I deserve is to amuse myself with a completely different project. So, then I thought as I was walking along, of this whole idea of this imaginary relative of Freud who would think of himself as being really different whereas in fact he'd be exactly the same but only in the most ridiculous ways, in the sense of completely believing the power of his mind to operate upon other minds, which I guess I do think is
fundamentally absurd. Although, part of me thinks it's a great idea if people could help each other, change each other, but a lot of me, practically speaking from what I've seen in life makes me think that that is silly. I mean people can be helpful to each other, I hope they can, but on the other hand Freudian therapy has always seemed very silly to me even if it works. This whole idea of you operating on the deep sub-conscious."

- Julia: "It is sort of arrogant."
- Matt: "Arrogant, and also its people believing a mythological version of themselves, so Romantic. I think its Romantic in a sort of a silly way, but in a fun way, a way I really like. Its like a Mahler symphony—it is like each person is a Mahler symphony and if you just change their first movement and did a few things to the adante the allegro would come out a lot differently. In a way, it is true, but I don't know if people really are Mahler symphonies. I mean there is a side of us that is a Mahler symphony, but there is a side of is that is some ridiculous musical, or possibly even tone deaf. I think that Freud belongs to this whole nineteenth century Romantic movement, obviously on the intellectual side, just as scientists at that time really believed that they could make everything perfect. And I think it's great, I think that one of great human cultural moments is this nineteenth century Romanticism but since we've been left with the detritus of it and the failure. It's hard not to make fun of it to a certain extent. I really liked the idea of this Freud sitting right up, right where I used to walk around, on top of the bank. I'd make up these little stories to myself and I started writing them down. So
then I wrote what are essentially the first two stories, and I was translating these stories by this Québec writer, and he asked me if I'd ever written anything [the stories were sent to the writer who sent them to a publisher who printed them in French translation]. Once it was out in French it seemed like it should exist in English."

**Question as to whether it was the same as the first text translated to French:**

- [Until seeing it in French] I thought of it as some sort of triptych, because I thought of it as incomplete, but I had never thought of it as being a book until this guy proposed it and I just said OK. During the translation by a woman called Claire Day (writer, feminist, structuralist twin of Anne Durant, playful translator), the stories continued to evolve, as we would consult. So, once they moved a certain way from the original English in French, then I got ideas of how the English [version] should move. So, when Quarry Press offered to publish it as a book in English I thought I would add the third story and re-write the first two.

  [On seeing translation] Certain things worked better than others, and since it had never been the final draft in any book sense I then fixed it up so the translation would be better...then I just kept going."

**Question about how they were primarily a pass-time, the publishing process seems almost accidental:**

- "That's nice, it really fit because I was only doing the stories to amuse myself. The novel I was writing, which began as a spy novel set in Moscow, was giving me troubles. So, I just wanted to do them for fun because
they're so odd I couldn't imagine them being really in a book until it happened. [Similarly, Cohen wrote other texts only to amuse himself]

Peach Melba, I wrote purely to amuse myself, a mix of poetry and prose.

Korsoniloff, I regarded as a novel, traditional, whatever novel meant to me at that moment. Peach Melba and A Search for Inspiration, that Leonardo book I did with Tony Urquhart, were purely for amusement. I've got stuff in my file drawers that I have no idea that will ever be published, it's sort of fun to write like that, in a way, no it is fun, its lots of fun."

Question as to whether it is ironic that these parodic books are fun, and easier to write:

• "It is easy in a sense, it's play. There's the whole Freud mythology to play off. Then there's the mythology of the American in Paris, and Paris itself, and all the competing and so well developed existing mythologies of Paris. There're a lot of givens to which one can take a different angle. And then the actual construction of the book...I saw as the English book took shape, in terms of cultural mythology I was working off of these European cultural moments. Also with a Canadian creative writing student being in the centre in a way, and therefore all the ideas of what literature was became a given from which I could vary for the actual structure of the book."

Question as to role of reader in a book written without the intention of publishing:

• "Emotional Arithmetic is a book I wrote because I felt I had to write the book but I actually couldn't imagine readers for it. It was turned down by a
lot of publishers who also couldn't imagine readers for it. Although now it's been published in quite a few places, and it's had lots of readers [and a film script]. At a certain place in the writing of a novel, at least late on in the writing of a novel, to me it seems that novel (a novel by me) tends to be literary fiction of some sort and therefore I imagine the readers of what we call vaguely literary fiction will read it and see it in context of so called literary fiction. It's hard not to know that because I've been writing for 25 years, and I've published so many books...in various countries, and I've gone and given readings, I know how people in different countries will say [things like he writes like John Irving] or like this or like that. You know that they're reading you in the context of other books, just like I do as a reader. I know that my novels will be read like that, whereas something like the Freud book because it only became a book at the last moment, and it's published by literary press...and though you'd think that literary fiction and a literary press would go together they don't really at all. Literary presses don't publish so-called mainstream literary fiction very much. They tend to publish more off the wall things, or more imperfect things. If you asked either the man on the street, or even the professor in the academy, to name ten books of literary fiction very few of them would have been published by literary presses. They would have been published by very big presses intending to hit the literary fiction market. Literary fiction is almost a market niche; it has a sociological as well as a literary meaning. Whereas the Freud book, there are some people who have really liked it, but I would
suppose that very few people have read it. I don't think of it as being a book that a lot of people have read.

There's two sides to looking at every writer's work, one is that part of their work which can really appeal to the readers of the day, reading it from whatever the readers of the day's motives are. I've always known that I was a prolific writer, and therefore some of my books would be better than others—that was a given, I'd have to write the bad ones to write the good ones. But I also think that the better books, books that are really good in their own way, don't have a popular handle at the moment. It doesn't mean that ten years later that won't be the book that everyone's reading. The eye through which people see things changes and so the thing seems different. It was clear to me when I was writing the Freud, and even when it was published; it wasn't a book that would be seen as a big book. It got good reviews (I'm not saying that people didn't like it or that it was ignored), it was prominently reviewed. It was always a book that a few people would like and most people would ignore."

**Question as to whether this anything to do with the fact that it is fun to read:**

- "I think that it is that it's fun, well instead of this Protestant small town voice. I think in Canada the biggest books are books that are like Mommy's and Daddy's. I've always known from when I started writing that I wasn't cut out to write books that were like Mommy's and Daddy's. It doesn't appeal to me, somehow as a writer I'm too irresponsible."
Question on whether he resists the essentializing task of bringing everything together:

- "Well, everyone brings everything together in their own way. You could bring everything together into the character, let’s say, of this sort of ‘would be Freud in Paris,’ or you could bring it all together into some, let’s say, fantastic 83-year-old woman who has this giant tribe of dependents. Now, obviously if you pick the latter this would be considered to be a more universal book. Whether it really is or not, or whether it would be ten years later who knows?"

Request for clarification of ‘Mommy’s and Daddy’s’:

- "[For a long time in Canadian literature] soft voices, in which resonated the moral infrastructure that was Canada, that sort of conservative, Protestant moral infrastructure, had to be part of those voices...I’m not sure it is the essential nature of Canada, the resonance of what we take to be authority, or what a lot of people take to be authority. But, a lot of people reject that type of authority... it is the resonance of authority. Somehow you hear that tone and you know it’s the CBC and not some university radio station, and similarly in books. But fashions change and what seems so central today suddenly seems quaint or off the wall tomorrow."

Question as to whether Freud: the Paris Notebooks offers a case in point—post-everything, postmodern, postnational:

- Matt: This is also true of stories, main work of 1980's was short stories.
"There is the official self who's here now—some writers are much better at having an official self in the sense that they might even know who's going to read what—but people who write for a living have to [for financial reasons] write a lot and let what happens happen. Despite all this talk of official selves there is the informal side in which, with each book if I really want to write it, I think 'why not' I'll write it then it will be over then I'll write another one."

My comments regarding how Freud: the Paris Notebooks made me work hard as a reader. My awareness of gaps in meaning made me sense that I did not get a lot of jokes, but that made it richer, and seemed to enhance the ones I did get. I was conscious of Matt as team-captain, his presence close to the surface.

"In a book like this there is a lot more space for the reader. A lot is demanded of the reader. Since it is not reader-tailored I take it for granted that they know a certain amount about Freud. Well, I don't take it for granted, I didn't think about it, I was amusing myself. Freud is famous for having gone to bed, or possibly having gone to bed, with his wife's sister. Necessarily, Robert Freud obviously knows that Freud did this, this is one of the things he's famous for, and we know that Robert Freud would know all about Sigmund Freud, that's a given, even though we don't know all about Sigmund Freud, because each of us knows what we know. There's this whole level of playing off of Robert Freud's knowledge of Sigmund Freud, and the reader's knowledge of Sigmund Freud, and my knowledge of
Sigmund Freud which is obviously limited—I knew enough to write the book. On another level, there is this very human story, in a sense the more ridiculous the person, no matter how ridiculous they are; they’re still a human being after all. They’re just a normal person being seen as a ridiculous person. So, this whole idea of blood on his tie, or whatever, he’s still a guy, albeit a ridiculous guy. One of the great things about parody is that it allows pathos—possibly, probably not because they start with the same two letters. I always think of my books as being musical pieces for some reason, with different instruments in the orchestra or different instruments playing, different books have different instruments. In the Freud book, in these off the wall books, they have fewer instruments and you don’t have 240 piece orchestra, you have 37 pieces or maybe 23 (a fairly odd 23) but they bring each other out. So, in a certain way the whole narrative human reality of people is allowed a big scope to exist in a more experimental book."

**Question as to whether it is important to get every allusion:**

- "Well I don’t know because I only know what it's like to be me. By operating in mythologies like this, you’re guaranteed that there’re some people who will know the mythology better. Whatever I know about it there are lots of people who are going to write more."

**Question regarding inevitable inferences of Freudian meanings not intended:**
- His feminist French Marxist psychoanalyst friend interpreted it (as a joke) through her "dense knowledge of Freud."

- "The hardest thing for a reader, and this is why this sort of novel doesn't have the sort of mass audience that Gone With the Wind does, is that you have to be able to stand the silence between the spaces. The readers who can cope with the silence can read more experimental fiction."

**Question as to whether readers fill these gaps and silences:**

- "I guess there's a whole range of those who fill it up with imagined things or theory, it's harder to allow yourself to just read"  

**Question as to whether he includes surprises for the astute reader:**

- "All my books have surprises for the astute reader. Possibly, I put them in just to amuse myself. Every book could be just turned a little differently and seen different ways. In the process of doing so many revisions, I do a lot of revisions, I try to see the book from all angles and try to make it make sense in all the different ways and in doing that there are these little intricate moments that I know that probably no-one will notice but make the whole thing work better anyway. One builds these things in and hopes someone will notice them but it doesn't really matter if they don't."

**Question on the issue of this book being so different on re-reading:**

- "A book like this [Freud] gradually grows into the wall of sound, it doesn't start off [like that]. This book can be read as the stories of the different people, it starts off being, let's say, the Freud story, then it becomes the story of Maurice, or Judith, or these other characters."
Question regarding his level of satisfaction gained by creating narrative and structural symmetry:

- "In every book, no matter what it is, there are moments when things cross each other. In this book, because you see the structure, because so much of the wall of sound effect is left out, part of the fun is turning it to see where different things cross. This whole thing of turning blood is so absurd, so perfect. Trevanien and Freud, they are a whole pairing. Trevanien saw himself as being so different from Freud and yet I saw them as being so similar. Really, Trevanien and Freud were the only two characters in the book who could sympathize. Only Freud could sympathize with Trevanien, and vice versa, because they were very similar. Even though Trevanien regarded himself as being in a totally different world and of a totally different generation. In fact he was part of that same mythology."

Question as to why Trevanien takes the notebooks:

- "I guess that's him taking this text, and possibly he is the author of this text. There is a question of who actually wrote the text—which of the characters. It could be interpreted either as Trevanien wrote it, or possibly this is Maurice's great opus. Maybe Freud himself has written it."

- Julia: You leave room for this ambiguity by having the notebooks empty.

- "I think the Paris notebooks are actually a bunch of notebooks that aren't this but that are simply what this is describing. I did consider this and I had a really tough time with it. I actually wrote an epilogue for this book in which I, Matt Cohen, described how it is this book came into my possession. In
the epilogue, I described how I had found it in the place [where] in fact I wrote them. It was in a maid's room, no maid was living there, I was renting it. [It was] a seventh-floor room in Paris rented from the same woman, a very suspicious woman, who was renting us our apartment. In this epilogue I explained that I had been intending to write a novel until I came across these notebooks and I interviewed the various characters who were part of the notebooks.... But it was one of those official moments where one twist seemed pointless. Somehow, I was trying to nail down something that should just have been left free-floating. Because it is such a peculiar book I was trying to create an umbilical cord between it and reality and then I guess I thought, well, 'why do that to the book, this sort of enclosing of it in some unnecessary way?'

Question again regarding issues of parody and pathos:

- "Constructing something where you can see the seams is, in fact, a lot easier.
- Julia: "It is hard for me to imagine that something which makes me work so hard could have been easier to write."
- Matt: "Well that may be part of why it is harder for you, because I made it easier for me in the sense that I didn't bother to create that wall of sound. I didn't bother filling in the gaps. Maybe that's a weakness of the book in a certain way or a weakness of it as a certain kind of book. For me all this stuff about Freud and what I describe as nineteenth-century Romantic mythology, that's what I was brought up on, I didn't need to research it at all
this is all known stuff. To make a hybrid between American postmodernism and European Romanticism and set in Paris, I mean what is Paris other than that anyway, it's so obvious. For me it was so natural to sort of walk that tightrope, sort of exhilarating. The great thing about taking given forms and going off them is that they are given; you don't have to invent them. Going off them is so easy, and it is fun. That whole tradition, that set of traditions, is so solid, so ideal and easy to do that with, because it is so strong, not because it is vulnerable, but because it is so strong. The plus side of it being accessible to readers is it's a tradition everybody knows, in their way."

- Julia: Then parody in that sense is very accessible.
- Matt: "I think it is totally accessible because that's the great thing about pop art, the very attractive thing. I mean you see a Campbell's soup can and we've all seen them in our cupboards. It is like pop art in the sense that the symbols are so known."

**Question about the zipper. Would knowing a specific reference make it stronger for me?**

- "The zipper has two sets of references. One has to do with Joseph Roth and this book called The Zipper (which no-one could possibly have heard of) but I was really into Joseph Roth at the time. The other is this whole idea of the zipper, that you can expose someone. Anyway, you remember this whole idea of the zipperless fuck that woman [Erica Jong, Fear of Flying]. So she was this feminist and then you have Freud who is totally
terrible about women so it just seemed so perfect to me [to bring them together]. To have this completely stupid, and really socially unacceptable, fantasy to do with this zipper and yet this fantasy had been sociologically central fantasy of women's liberation and here it was being used by Freud himself, or Freud's heir, in the stupidest possible way. So I think somehow I was just trying to just get the various stereotypes of males vs. females going from early on."

- Julia: "Like the homo-erotic scene with the cigar."
- Matt: "It was my whole idea of Trevanien becoming submissive. He needed to be accepted so badly, so basically he needed to submit. Somehow the cigar was so perfect, you know Freud having said 'sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.' And yet, for Trevanien to be talking about cocaine which is not a cigar. If you get all these things going, some of these things just happen in the writing, it's gratuitous. They all fit together so they can't help it."

"In reality there were these cocaine papers that had just been published in French. At the time, I was writing, but it had been known for a long time. It was in my mind. I thought this was a great link between Sigmund Freud and that whole American drug thing. Here's Sigmund Freud using them to, or supposedly using them to, research his drug papers and here's people using them for fun. Robert Freud was not a cocaine user, was not a drug taker. I thought it made an interesting triangle—between Sigmund Freud, Robert Freud, and the American, and then Maurice who was into the hash,
ultimately deciding that drugs were self-destruction. It just seemed to have to be part of the mix."

• Julia: "even in the use of drugs vs. alcohol?"

• Matt: "Maurice saw drinking as mythologically acceptable for a writer."

• Julia: The American/Canadian in Paris thing? Irony of Trevaniën giving Maurice money to write?

• Matt: "yeah, well the Empire and the colony..."

• "The drugs and the Freud, to me they're part of the same gamut in the sense that Freud, and the Freudians and Robert Freud, were very concerned with the structure of the mind, people's ideas about themselves, and drugs are in a way such a method of destroying or changing ideas about yourself. So, it seemed to me there had to be a counterpoint between those two. Plus, it is common knowledge that Freud only got his sort-of Mahler-like ideas about himself by having his sort of late twentieth century infatuation with cocaine. So it was sort of like bright lights, big city but it was Vienna."

**Question regarding the green frog in the novel:**

• "The green frog is the main character in a series of stories which I tell my children. 'The Return of the Green Frog,' which is based on The Return of the Native but of course my kids have no way of knowing that. I basically re-cast The Return of the Native into this unbelievably pathetic story about a green frog who comes back and tells all his stories to these barnyard animals, it's an incredible tear-jerker and he's also schizophrenic."
Dear Julia,

It was great to hear from you. Clare looks like she's having a bit too much fun -- are you sure this is allowed? Sounds like you and George are really enjoying it too. No, I've never been to North Carolina, or anywhere that might be called "the South" (unless Florida or California count, but I feel they don't.) I have a book (The Bookseller) coming out in New York next fall, perhaps they'll send me touring in a private jet or a Winnebago or whatever and I'll get to visit.

I'm sorry to hear that academic/is finally disagreeing with you -- though as a PhD dropout myself who has never regretted it, what can I say except that my excuses were so convincing (to me -- my parents were horrified that I was giving up a lifetime of monthly cheques) -- The problem is, of course, that although for quite a while you're encouraged to think -- if you just do this paper or that degree or this dissertation, or hang in 23 years for tenure, it will all be over, it's never over, it just gets worse. Or so it seems. Though there are the rare few who manage to have enough of a life outside that they're immune...

Business school sounds like an exciting idea. (But what if you have to go into business???) Anyway, you must be sincere if you're taking math classes -- I mean, I know people used to try to get you to study French, but this is really serious...

We're having a great time here. I finished the novel I was working on last summer, for the nth time, then wrote some short stories and am now working on a new novel that seems destined for the wastebasket. Daniel is in the equivalent of Junior High -- his studies are taken very seriously and he gets marked on various things every 5 minutes. Madeleine is in primary school and, at this moment, her whole class is on a 1-week ski break babysat by the teachers and financed by the school. Weird, what? It's the French way -- it's supposed to get them all to know each other better and be more like each other. We also -- Patsy's idea -- have a dog. She meant it to be a bichon frisé but it turned out to be a small white mutt. Oh well. Saved herself a lot of embarrassment in my opinion.

I thought your paper on the Freud book was very interesting, especially your placing that book in various kinds of counterpoint to Emotional Arithmetic. I also liked your Freud-Trevanian coupling, and I suppose I saw Maurice in there as some kind of half-acknowledged son. Anyway I liked it a lot and am glad it did well.

If you're in Verona or Toronto this summer give a call -- we'll be back end of June. Patsy sends her love, and best to George --

Matt

P.S. Did you did your mirror of 'reality'
will cause a time tourist invasion?
Marie-Claire Blais
Dear Marie-Claire Blais,

I hope that you remember me from the Eden Mills Writer’s Festival in Ontario two summers ago. We had a lot of fun that day, and also having a drink in the hotel that evening. I am John Moss’ daughter and was there with my very small baby, who is now walking and almost talking. I remember I tried to talk with you in French but was so bad and embarrassed! I did take a course and became much more comfortable with speaking French, but I’m still too shy to write in it.

I am now living in North Carolina and working on the thesis for my Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at University of Toronto, under the supervision of Linda Hutcheon. I am exploring issues of intentionality and would be very grateful if you would give me your views. I remember we were talking about intentionality and whether it effects a book’s meaning. I already have correspondence from Robert Kroetsch, Carol Shields and Matt Cohen regarding their thoughts on intentionality, and I know that your perspective would be very useful to my work.

I use intentionality as a general sort of term to describe what an author feels s/he meant to do when writing, creating a certain narrative structure or using certain symbols. I also use it as something which is inevitably inferred by readers, as in the case of those who draw connections between Mad Shadows and your youth at the time of writing, or those who infer your presence as an anchor for the many voices in The Fugitive. I am not, at this point, pro-intentionality, I only want to look at it as a critical and theoretical issue. I want to question, in particular, whether any aspect of intentionality may add a layer of meaning to a reader’s understanding of a work.

The following is a list of questions relating to intentionality. Please use them as a guide, if you like, or just write on the issue in general. Any response would be appreciated.

Do you regard intention as valuable to the interpretation of textual meaning?

Do you think readers assume certain intentions based on what they know about the authors? i.e. that a feminist writer automatically writes feminist texts?

Is it possible to access an author’s intentions in any way--by talking to an author or looking at notes made during the writing of a book?
Other authors have suggested that the writing-self is different from the public or social self, do you find this to be true?
Is it possible to trust and/or assess statements of intention?
Is there a danger, for the reader, in looking at intentionality to expand possibilities of meaning?
Could intentionality be useful if the author is regarded not as an authority but as another reader or critic of the work?
How do you feel when critics draw connections between your life and your work, as they do so often with Mad Shadows?
The Fugitive has so many layers of voice, do you think the (implied) authorial voice forms a layer—especially since it is not only Madeleine’s story as it seems at the beginning but a complex web of stories?
How do you relate to your books in translation? Do you feel more distance when discussing them than you do when discussing your works in the original French, or is it an issue at all?

I hope to hear from you and add your voice to the debate within my thesis. I would like to look at Mad Shadows and The Fugitive, in both their English and French forms, in relation to what you have to say—even, and perhaps especially, if you are anti-intentionalist! I think there are some compelling arguments for and against considering direct authorial statements about a work. I am trying to test the idea of intentionality by putting it into practice in my thesis.

It would be very nice to meet you again someday. I appreciate your consideration—merci!

Sincerely

Julia Moss
Key West, March 16, 1996,

Bonjour Julia, how nice to receive your letter in Key West while you are in Durham, North Carolina. Je me souviens très bien de toute votre famille, at the Eden Mills Writer's Festival in Ontario two summers ago: we had a wonderful time until night with your wonderful parents, I remember very well. The small baby ( Claire ? ) is now walking and almost talking, she must be an adorable child, she was already so attentive and graceful. I guess, this evening everybody was terribly shy, but it was a lovely evening with the finishing touch, the drink at the hotel. You know that I did as I said to your father, the great explorer and writer - I had recommended him for the Royal Society, everything would have been well, except that the jury needs more documentation on the academic dossier of your father, I am sure, John could contact the Royal Society about it ( the academic records, send these dossiers to the jury and then I will renew my recommendation for his works ), so I am glad we could communicate again je suis contente de savoir aussi que tout va bien pour vous, la petite fille, et les travaux importants entrepris à North Carolina.

if I could help you for your thesis in Comparative Literature at University of Toronto, under the supervision of Linda Hutcheon, I would be glad to do so. Your subject ( issues of intentionality is a very interesting one ) to answer your questions, I am sure some connections exist between Mad Shadows, and my youth, at the time of writing: when I saw the wonderful ballet Mad Shadows at the National Ballet. ( from the young creator then, Ann Ditchburn ) I felt these connections were very strong, probably because suddenly I saw the work outside of my own perceptions, through a new invention, a new mind, a new spirit. Je n'aurais sans doute pas écrit le même livre sans cet état à la fois violent et émerveillé de la jeunesse, lorsqu'elle se livre aux travaux de l'écriture. I could say the same for the
novel *The Fugitive*, also a young work, with many voices, young and older. I don't know if readers assume certain intentions based on what they know about the authors, probably they assume so, but there is a part of mystery in writer's work - yes probably too, the access to authors intentions in any way could be done (up to a point), so many changes are going on during the writing process - by talking to an author or looking at notes made during the writing of the book, all the first impressions are there, still in a state of chaos.

Yes, I do think that the writing-self is very different from the public and social self; writers often neglect the social and public self.

Yes *The Fugitive* has many layers of voice, it is a web of stories as you say, Madeleine, Rodolphe, Paul, the children. Ce chœur de voix unies ou désunies est une grande préoccupation pour moi, il me semble que dans le monde actuel, toutes les voix, même les plus modestes, doivent être écoutées. *Mad* Shadow *The Fugitive* sont des œuvres d'extrême jeunesse; dans des œuvres plus récentes comme Le Sourd dans la ville, Pierre, Visions d'Anna, et surtout le dernier livre Soifs, qui vient d'être publié en octobre, chez Boréal pourrait répondre davantage à vos questions about this complexity of the "web of voices, web of stories, " all so human.

I hope also that we could meet again in the future with your family and the talking baby, so fast, how incredible, you must be very proud of her, my address here until middle may is 1023 Catherine street Key West, Florida 33040 USA, my consideration to your father, and
Chapter Eight

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