Canadian Literary Urbanism

by

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Abstract

This dissertation provides the first sustained theorization of Canada’s urban literature. Critics have lamented the seeming absence of urban writing in Canada. A comprehensive reading of Canadian literature and criticism reveals that there is indeed a substantial body of city writing, and that critics have addressed Canada’s history of urbanization. The critical problem that demands reconciliation regards a pervasive geographical illiteracy. By historicizing and close reading Bertrand Sinclair’s North of Fifty-Three, Stephen Leacock’s Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town, and Douglas Durkin’s The Magpie, I show that frontier, small town, and country places are effected by urbanization. In doing so, I encourage you to abandon “urban” as a worthwhile generic category and instead consider urbanism as a subject that relates to the building of cities, the amalgamation of populations within dense environments, the imposition of human geometry onto the landscape, and the “citification” of society, culture, and politics.

By placing literary studies, geography, and historiography in critical exchange, I demonstrate that the “urban” typically serves as a decoy for a secondary concept. Canonical critics (Lionel Stevenson, Northrop Frye, and Linda Hutcheon) consistently summon a rural/Canadian-urban/American dichotomy to theorize a national identity that resists American imperialism. However, city-set texts are, paradoxically, represented by rural space, hence the urban has not
been marginalized but misplaced metaphorically. Similarly, “Canadian literary urbanism” offers the first comprehensive analysis of the supposed “urbanization” of Canadian literature that occurred during the millennial years. By analyzing postmodern-hipster fiction, I argue that writers (Andrew Pyper, Russell Smith, Hal Niedzviecki, Lynn Coady, R.M. Vaughan, and Dionne Brand) have been using urban space to transcend the limits of “official” or “boutique” multiculturalism, and to fictionalize the rise of what Charles Landry dubbed the “creative city.”
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Introduction:
Notes Towards a Canadian Literary Urbanism

“Canadian Literary Urbanism” encourages you to alter radically your thinking about the urban, urbanization, and cities. It will change your understanding of what urban literature is and its historical relationship to Canadian literary discourse and national development.

I

The millennial years will surely be remembered as Canada’s urban awakening. During the two decades bracketing 2000, the city became the focal point of national development and culture. Recovering from the constitutional hangovers of the 1980s and mid-1990s, pundits, politicians, and artists transited downtown to discover new national narratives, new national projects. Russell Smith, and other Toronto journalists/authors, demanded a revolutionary, urban literature that would, like the skyscrapers surrounding their homes, reflect the glass-and-cement realities of everyday Canadians. Paul Martin’s 2004 “new deal for cities,” the central plank of his election campaign, brought the problems facing Canadian municipalities to the forefront of political debate, and the aspects of the platform he did manage to institutionalize have helped cities tackle their chronic deficits.¹ He decreed, “Our great cities are our global signature. With

¹ Martin explains that many cities do not have the legal authority to collect enough taxes to fund the programs they are now responsible for. He argues, “The challenges you face were intensified after the federal belt-tightening that has taken place in recent years by provincial and federal governments alike. Let’s just take two examples: housing and urban transit. Both present daunting challenges that simply must be tackled in order to secure the quality of life we all desire for the future. But the solutions—that is to say, the development of affordable rental accommodation
the capacity to move capital with a click of a mouse and the freedom of the world’s best and brightest to locate where they choose, global competition, increasingly, is not between countries—it’s between cities” (“Speech”). A year later, Dionne Brand published *What We All Long For* (2005)—a text that critics have been hailing due to her use of urban space as a new allegory for transnational belonging. In 2008, Quebec City marked its birthday with 400 candles. Richard Florida, the successor of Jane Jacobs as the world’s “urban guru,” migrated to Toronto—a move that local and national media celebrated as an affirmation of Canada and Toronto as premier “creative class” destinations.² David Miller (2003, 2006) and Naheed Nenshi (2010) swept to victory promising to revitalize Toronto and Calgary respectively by improving their cities’ transit and culture. In 2010, Vancouver hosted the Winter Olympics, and Toronto—which for years had been masquerading as New York City, Boston, Chicago, and even London—finally got to play itself in the blockbuster *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*—a fanboy epic based upon a comic book series set in the Annex. These events, and others, inspired an urban euphoria in Canada.

Perhaps sensing the national mood, the city also drew the attention of literary critics. Eva-Maria Kröller, in a 2001 *Canadian Literature* editorial, declared that, “the urbanization of Canadian literature is well underway” and called upon Canadianists to redraw their literary maps to reflect the nation’s millennial, urban reality. A decade later, Kröller’s comments seem prophetic, as several monographs have answered her call. David Arnason and Mhari

and the required investment in new transit infrastructure—are simply beyond the capacities of local governments acting alone” (“Speech”).

² *Toronto Life* declared Richard Florida the “Man of the Year” for 2008. See Miner.
Mackintosh’s *The Imagined City: A Literary History of Winnipeg* (2005) provides exactly what its title promises; Justin D. Edwards and Douglas Ivison’s *Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities* (2005) introduces and collects the first volume of essays devoted to Canadian city-writing; Amy Lavender Harris’s *Imagining Toronto* (2010) includes an impressive bibliography documenting the city’s writing; and Colin Hill’s *Modern Realism in English-Canadian Fiction* (2012) offers the first, comprehensive analysis of roughly forty, largely forgotten examples of urban realism. If there were a mass-market glossy devoted to Canadian literary criticism, it would surely include ample articles and lists attempting to explain the sudden “hipness” of cities, the urban, and the urbane.3

Such scholarly enterprise not only testifies to urban literature’s newfangled status, but more importantly, provides an unprecedented opportunity to come to terms with Canada’s urban history. The first drafts of this dissertation shared these critics’ sense of surprise and bewilderment regarding the actual volume of city writing in Canada. Harris, for example, concludes *Imagining Toronto* by explaining that when she began her study, she only anticipated finding about a dozen novels and a similar number of poetry collections, but “it did not occur to me that there would be much more—that there was more to the city’s literature, in fact, than anyone had ever estimated” (295). Hill too notes that criticism and literary histories all-but-deny the presence of urban writing in Canada, hence, he was unsettled to find such a flood of urban realism produced between 1919 and 1950 that, by all previous accounts, didn’t exist (220). As Edwards and Ivison propose, the dominant myths of Canadian culture privilege rural spaces and erase the presence of city-set literature (6). Our national narratives, they allege, encourage us to

3 *Maclean’s* devoted two issues to the newfound importance of cities: 3 June 2002 and 8 September 2008.
believe that Canadian is synonymous with rural, small town, and northern isolation. The working title for this study was, for many years, “Canadian Urban Fiction.” It was a literary historical thesis that would recover Canada’s “lost” urban literature and, once and for all, refute the myth that this northern nation lacked such a fiction tradition. But there were literary archeological “digs” underway across Canada and, when considered as a whole, recent scholarship had already proven the study’s original thesis. Scholars have so thoroughly documented the existence of a voluminous body of city literature, that we may now entertain foundational theoretical questions.

II

In 1998 the hip-hop performance group, Rascalz, were informed prior to the Juno Award Ceremony honouring the “best” in Canadian music of the previous year that they had won the category for “Best Rap Recording.” They declined the prize. In a statement delivered by the group’s manager they explained, “We are honoured to be recognized by our peers for this reward, and unfortunately, cannot accept it, because we do not feel part of the Juno celebration. […] In view of the lack of real inclusion of black music in this ceremony, this feels like a token gesture towards honouring the real impact of urban music in Canada, and our industry in particular” (qtd. in LeBlanc 54). They were outraged because Juno producers had once again excluded the presentation of “Best Rap Recording Award” along with other trophies for urban music from the televised ceremony. Red 1, one of two Rascalz MCs, explained that white

4 The Junos began honouring the best “Rap Recording of the Year” in 1991. CBC Television broadcasted the ceremony from 1975 to 2002, when the rights were transferred to CTV. The awards for urban music were presented off air, at the less prestigious ceremony for technical achievement, until Rascalz’ intervention.
businessmen (i.e. older Canadians) are happy to “capitalize on urban music and make their money on it, but when it comes to giving us our respect, it’s a hard thing. It’s always a struggle” (“Rascalz”). For Red 1, this disrespect was not necessarily directed at Rascalz but symbolized the broader ghettoization of black and youth culture represented by Canada’s inner-city vibe (Flynn C4). Cultural institutions are unwilling to accept the country’s multiethnic reality. The following year Rascalz once again won “Best Rap Recording” for “Northern Touch”—a nationalistic, hip-hop anthem celebrating the resilience of Canada’s black music. On national television, they accepted the trophy and performed their international hit. “Urban” music had symbolically entered the Canadian mainstream.

1998 also witnessed the publication of Concrete Forest, an anthology of urban literature produced by young writers. Hal Niedzviecki, the collection’s editor, alleges the “literati and the publishing establishment have been reluctant to usher in this new urban writing” because the fiction does not reaffirm the values or experiences of Canada’s dominant population group: the ethnically “white” baby boomers (xiv-xv). Large publishers, government granting agencies, and award ceremonies had all but ignored the “new urban writing” and ghettoized young writers to small presses and Do-It-Yourself publications such as zines and websites. However, Niedzviecki explains Concrete Forest marks a dramatic change in Canada’s literary culture because McClelland & Stewart—one of the country’s most important publishing companies—agreed to release the anthology and bring youthful, urbane narratives into the literary mainstream. Paralleling the music industry, 1998 marked the first time a large publishing company endorsed Canada’s “new” urban culture.

5 However, Mike Bullard, the ceremony’s host, reaffirmed the Anglo disrespect for black music when he described hip-hop as “the sound of a drive-by shouting” (McKinnon “Misconductin’”).
There are similarities between the Rascalz’ and Niedzviecki’s interventions. Both identify the institutional marginalization of urban experiences; both allege that older, power-entrenched Anglos promote anti-urbanism. But the significant difference between the two critiques is that Rascalz use “urban” as a synonym for “black”—the denigration of “urban” music exposes the longstanding, official disrespect for African-Canadian culture—while Niedzviecki uses “urban” as a metaphor for a new type of national belonging “that is something more than a multiplicity of self-contained regions and ethnic groupings” (xii). We have here the fundamental problem that prevents the formation of an urban culture, consciousness, and criticism in Canada: the multiple, indeed contradictory, understandings of “urban” assure that the word lacks definitive, critical power.

Justin D. Edwards and Douglas Ivison gesture toward these critical Towers of Babel in their introduction to Downtown Canada (2005). They explain, “the imprecision with which terms such as ‘urban’ and ‘city’ are used reflects a failure to truly comprehend and engage with the urban. In other words, the looseness with which these terms are used betrays an ignorance about the nature of cities and urbanism as a way of life” (3). While Edwards and Ivison pinpoint a pressing critical issue they, oddly, do not explain what we may accurately label “urban” or “city” literature. Rather, they demonstrate how the widespread misuse of geographical terms reveals the marginalization of urban literature and themes. While they identify one of the major issues preventing an urban criticism, they nevertheless perpetuate critical misunderstandings by refusing to provide a theory of urban literature.

We have a comprehensive theory of city writing that examines the relationship between real-and-imaginary places. It is informed by Northrop Frye’s “theory of modes,” in which a critic identifies themes found commonly in texts and explains what the themes tell us about a
particular place. Historically, Canadian critics have drawn upon Frye’s “theory of modes” to explore the relationship between landscape, nation, and identity. Indeed, critics commonly contextualize “urban writing” as a sub-genre of regionalism. Michelle Gadpaille’s survey of “Other talents, other works: 1960 to 1982” argues that some of the period’s Toronto literature is regionalist in its outlook: “It is perhaps surprising to find Toronto fiction described as regional, but it is an apt term for a kind of city novel that emerged during the last few decades, depicting the urban area as a landscape and producing a neighbourhood fiction strongly imbued with the regionalist’s sense of place” (836). According to Gadpaille, the difference between Toronto fiction of the centennial years and previous eras is that earlier authors—she only mentions Morley Callaghan—universalize their representation of the city, while later authors strive to document a “valid fictional locale.” Janice Fiamengo agrees with this view in her entry “Regionalism and Urbanism” for The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature (2004). She explains, “The implicit and explicit thrust of much regional writing is against ‘central’ Canadian places: Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver, the urban centers of culture and political power. And yet the experience of living in a large city, as many Canadian writers have demonstrated, is not necessarily an experience of power and centrality” (256). She adds that “urban literature” is regionalist because “urban living can involve both deep intimacy with a specific place and a profound awareness of disempowerment” (256). Fiamengo makes a strong case for including “urban literature” within the framework of regionalism, and notes a long tradition of Canadian writing interested in documenting the specific geographies of Canadian cities; yet, she limits her delineation of urbanism to texts set in identifiable Canadian cities.6 This claiming of the city as region suggests that critics have no other method of reading the city.

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6 Fiamango’s overview of regionalism problematically assumes that regional writing necessarily adopts the
There is a parallel trend in which geographical terms categorize regional genres. Colin Hill’s exhaustive study of modern realism adopts similar labels when he sub-divides the modern-realist movement into three forms: prairie, urban, and social realism. What distinguishes the genres is their marked “predisposition for a particular subject matter”, but he admits that such generic boundaries are “arbitrary” (222). For Hill, urban realism denotes “a tendency in much modern-realist fiction to investigate the modern urban experience, and to unfold in a realistic cityscape.” The study, it must be acknowledged, outlines the aesthetic practices of modern realism and contextualizes the emergence of the movement within Canadian literary culture.

Hill’s monograph critiques theories of regionalism and his qualifications seem to originate from his dismissal of the geographical determinism fallacy: “Yet much as my discussion of prairie realism revealed the inadequacy of regional labels applied to a diverse body of texts that can only be partly accounted for in regionalist terms, discussion of urban realism in this chapter acknowledges the inadequacy of a generic heading defined by a particular kind of geographical space” (222-223). While Hill’s argument provides a compelling critique of geographical determinism and cultural nationalism—by demonstrating the aesthetic commonalities among the genres and thus proving how cultural nationalist canonized prairie realism primarily due to its positioning and politics of the margin. The argument seems to implicitly echo Linda Hutcheon’s description of regionalism in her introduction to The Canadian Postmodern (1988), in which the “margin” becomes the privileged space of literary and critical production. Urban literature is too diverse to label central or marginal; rather we must ask what specifically about a text’s urbanness results in its marginalization. We will revisit this issue at the chapter’s conclusion, but, for the moment, it is worthwhile to note how critics often assume that “regional” writing must also be “marginal” or “ex-centric.”

Hill continues to explain that it is only theme and setting that truly distinguish the genres. One of the major problems with reading urban literature within the conceptual framework of regionalism is that geography merely becomes a theme that may or may not be “widespread.” Walter Pache’s entry on “urban writing” in The Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada (2002) similarly limits his discussion to a handful of themes and “narrative poetical models in which urban experience in Canada has been given literary representation” (1149). It is undeniable that a literary urbanism relies upon thematic criticism, but we must take our analysis further by placing these themes in dialogue with the historical and material legacy of urbanism, so that they no longer remain arbitrary.
thematic content rather than its aesthetic innovation—this study, along with a growing body of scholarship, reiterates that the topography’s influence on literature is not “arbitrary” nor is it deterministic. The frequency with which scholars use geographic concepts demonstrates that they are indeed perceived to be of relevance to literary studies. But, as Hill suggests, geographic adjectives, especially when they categorize genres, remain “arbitrary”. The “wheatfield,” as it were, is always in the eye of the beholder, who is, sometimes, in a condo.

The issue here is not regarding validity of regionalism, but rather regards its inability to theorize comprehensively the urban. There are texts with rural settings in which the characters are profoundly influenced by the city. Consider Susanna Moodie’s Roughing It In the Bush (1852). Moodie and her narrator are unabashedly urbane. As she travels along the St. Lawrence down into the southern Ontario to present-day Hamilton, she carries with her the values and ideals of metropolitan London. Northrop Frye refers to this fact when he writes, “Susanna Moodie in the Peterborough bush, surrounded by half-comic, half-sinister rabble that she thinks of indifferently as Yankee, Irish, native, republican, and lower class, is a British army of occupation in herself, a one-woman garrison” (“Conclusion to the first edition” 360). Isolated from British hierarchies and standards, Moodie reacts in disgust and, generally, condemns every settler she meets until she moves to Peterborough to live with her extended (and very British) family. Her experiences demonstrate that a city and its culture can profoundly shape one’s character and beliefs, and that the city’s influence does not suddenly dissipate when an urbanite leaves downtown. Rather, Roughing It shows us that one may embody a place’s values and that metropolitan influence spans the globe, moving with the circulations of people, commodities, and culture. We find a similar problematic in Sinclair Ross’s As For Me and My House (1942). His two urbane protagonists struggle to maintain their cosmopolitan values in a socially-conservative, monocultural small town. Their training in the unnamed city produces their artistic
attitudes and their liberal morals that are fundamentally irreconcilable with small-town life. Indeed, Mrs. Bentley “saves” her family by forcing them to move back to the city. *As For Me and My House* remains a testament to Canada’s rural past despite the fact that the novel criticizes the insidious aspects of small-town life and presents the university city as a pastoral retreat. Surely, we can call Ross’s classic an example of urban writing or, at the very least, admit that it communicates something important about urban consciousness. The same is true of Stephen Leacock’s *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912), with its ironic pastoralism that mimics the nostalgic gaze of an urbanite as the narrator remembers his lost, small-town past. These problematics, and others, evidence the need for a radical, new way of thinking about relationships between the Canadian urban and Canadian literature.

Despite the centrality of landscape and geography to the study of Canadian literature, until recently, critics have avoided a theoretically informed reading of the topography. Scholars rarely qualify geographical concepts, hence suggesting that the meanings of urban, rural, city, or country are self-evident. But critics use “urban” to categorize feminist, socialist, immigrant, African-Canadian, and hipster writing; and “urban” often (implicitly) describes how a genre assumes a distinctive form when a text is set in a city. One intellectual, however, has dared to ask what is “urban fiction?”—Caroline Rosenthal. Her *New York and Toronto Novels after Postmodernism* (2011) argues that “urban fiction” is no longer an appropriate term for the study of literature, unless we are analyzing a very specific type of modernist writing that creates a synoptic portrayal of the city—a genre that is apparently alien to Canadian literature.

Rosenthal’s intervention compels, but its ahistoricism silences the tick-tock of literary history. She seems oblivious to the large volume of urban writing that was published in Canada prior to the 1980s. Similarly, her “after-postmodernism” positioning suggests that modernists
ignored the city’s heterogeneity—a contestation that is simply false. For example, in “Everyone Knows the Rules,” Hugh MacLennan complains that every time he visits someone’s cottage, the guests eventually hint that he should write a book about their faux-backwoods adventures. MacLennan always dismisses the idea because the city offers more fertile fictional terrain: “Any city on earth has as many separate facets as it has human beings who encounter it. If a hundred people who live in Montreal were to put their feelings about the city into words, no two portraits would turn out the same” (62). For MacLennan, it is precisely the city’s heterogeneity that makes the environment more attractive to him as a writer. Indeed, J.G. Sime’s *Sister Woman* (1919) includes thirty sketches about “urban working girls” in Montreal. As Sandra Campbell explains, “Sime’s characters are immigrant women from England, Scotland, Ireland, France, and Eastern Europe. As a result, the multicultural, occupational, and immigrant realities for women in early twentieth-century Canada are central to the stories” (“Bio-critical” 207-208).

Rosenthal’s study flags an important urban problematic, but the issue does not spawn from new theoretical and ontological turns, nor is it pertinent to only post-millennium writing.

Despite the undeniable plurality of urbanities, we need a criticism that recognizes “the city [as] more than the mere setting or backdrop for the plot and its characters in urban fiction” (Rosenthal 2). Rosenthal rejects the universalism and rigid ontological categories that postmodernists typically attribute to modernist thought. But there is, nevertheless, the potential to theorize a more comprehensive understanding of the urban that identifies specific universals, without occluding its inherent multiplicity. How can we approach such drastically different experiences without producing grand generalizations? Rosenthal contends we must theorize specific groups and how they represent the city, an argument that suggests the need for yet another adjective to qualify the word “literature.” (“Urban-African-Canadian” literature or “urban-English-Caribbean-Canadian” literature, anyone?) For “urban fiction” to remain a
productive term, she explains, a text must include three aspects: “First, ..., the city must still inform the mode of representation in some way; second, urban space must be a vital means in creating the characters as well as the plot; and third, the specific urban condition in some way must be an underlying discourse of the text” (2). The principles of Rosenthal’s definition are sound, but her description is unsatisfactory because it neglects to explain what she means by “urban.”

Literary critics have primarily approached “urban” as an adjective. Hence they use “urban” much the same way as the *Oxford English Dictionary* prescribes: to designate something “relating to, situated or occurring in, or characteristic of, a town or city, esp. as opposed to the countryside” (“Urban,” def.1.a). See for example, the distinction between prairie and urban realism, in which the primary difference between the two genres regards the settings and themes associated with the opposing geographies. True? Then, why is prairie realism not called rural realism? Furthermore, if we categorize genres via setting, would country and city realism not serve as more accurate terms because urban realism rarely refers to a text set in a town or a suburb? We see a similar trend in American literary criticism that has identified numerous genres that assume a particular form when the setting is the city, such as the urban novel, the urban pastoral, the urban sublime, and the urban romance. The common idea informing all these labels involves categorizing literature via place. The urban pastoral was theorized and advocated by a group of writers hailing from suburban and small-town communities who found New York City to be a more “natural”, i.e. pastoral, environment. The New York School “proved that the

8 Such generic headings are, of course, useless for novels with multiple settings such as Douglas Durkin’s *The Magpie* (1923) or Hugh MacLennan’s *Two Solitudes* (1945). Hill circumvents the issue by focusing on a text’s thematic content; hence while *The Magpie* is set on the prairies, its representation of the Winnipeg General Strike and social unrest makes the text “urban realist”, even though the rural periphery is presented as an idealized alternative.
green pastures celebrated by Robert Frost and Winslow Homer were not the only places conducive to pastoral mediation. Like rural dreamers chewing on shoots of hay, members of the School calmly waited for their surroundings to work inspirational magic on their consciousness” (Gray 2-3). If it is the city as a place that epitomizes these genres, then why do critics overwhelmingly use the term urban as opposed to city?  

This dissertation dissents from this critical practice that considers city and urban to be equivalent concepts. If we re-read the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, we notice that urban can also refer to a town. Hence, urban pastoral becomes a contradictory heading, for one of its key tenets involves rejecting suburban and town life in favour of the big city. If we place literary scholarship in dialogue with the social sciences, we begin to understand that our literary tunes about the geography are significantly off beat. For the social sciences, urban and rural categorize broad, demographic phenomena. Statistics Canada, for example, has tracked the urban-rural divide in each census. However, an “urban” area had a population of at least 1000 people until 1971 when the government agency added the qualification that such an area must have a density of at least 400 people per square kilometer (“From Urban Areas”). From such a perspective, Stephen Leacock’s Mariposa (Orillia), Alice Munro’s Jubilee (Wingham), and Margaret Laurence’s Manawaka (Neepawa) would be considered “urban,” but cultural nationalists have used both texts to evidence the predominance of non-urban spaces within the

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9 While it is impossible to prove, one possible explanation regards aesthetics. Writers and critics may commonly use “urban” to label movements and aesthetics relating to the city simply because “urban” sounds nicer or more erudite. (Anyone can say “city”; only intellectuals say “urban”). Also, the tendency to use urban and city as synonyms may originate from a writer’s desire to avoid repetition. The early drafts of this dissertation certainly perpetuated this practice but as I realized there was a pertinent critical need to refine the understanding of both urban and city, I consequently changed my prose to emphasize my contestation regarding critical precision.
Canadian imagination. This dramatic example exposes the degree to which urban describes more than a type of place and the extent to which literary critics have been ignorant of geography as a subject. Literary critics need to rethink their familiar geographical vocabulary, for towns are also “urban places” and “urban” describes a particular set of social, economic, and spatial relationships produced by urbanization. We need a new theoretical model that takes us beyond the cityscape so that we can account for how the aforementioned texts represent urban lifestyles, social relationships, and epistemologies.

This dissertation implores critics to advance their analyses of cities and urbanization. Let us abandon thematic paraphrases and adopt a practical geographical vocabulary. Geographers have become increasingly interested in qualitative analysis and have turned to literary studies for theoretical models that will render the topography legible. The most vocal proponent of the transdisciplinary synthesis has been Edward Soja. His *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) tracks how Marxist thought began reshaping his discipline in the 1970s, and how the ongoing dialogue between the two philosophies produces a “socio-spatial dialectic,” a “dialectical materialism that is simultaneously historical and spatial” (79). In his follow-up monograph, *Thirdspace* (1996), he theorizes a super “trialectic” that also incorporates transdisciplinary knowledge: “it cuts across all perspectives and modes of thought, and is not confined solely to geographers, architects, urbanists and others for whom spatial thinking is a primary professional preoccupation” (3). Central to his polemic is the notion that there is an opportunity to place

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10 Those desiring to maintain the supremacy of rural space within the cultural imagination frequently draw our attention to the definition of “urban centre” to suggest that the government has inaccurately labeled small towns and country villages as “urban” to perpetuate the political marginalization of rural communities. For example, Roy MacGregor cited Statistics Canada’s definition of an “urban centre” to launch a tirade against the “myth” that Canada is an urban country (“Who says” F8). Contrastingly, pro-urban critics continually refer to the urban/rural divide to evidence the gap between the government policy and Canada’s “urban reality.” See, for example, Simmons and Simmons’ *Urban Canada* (1974) or Alan Broadbent’s *Urban Nation* (2008).
various disciplines in dialogue because, he argues, the postmoderization of critical theory brings space to the forefront of academic debate. Geographers have much to learn from thinkers such as Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, and Homi Bhabha, and vice-versa. However, the turn to space in Canadian literary criticism has produced a troubling irony: while critics frequently cite Soja as a theoretical source, scholars have largely ignored his plea for transdisciplinary research. We have, for example, Edwards and Ivison who argue the theoretical works of Lefebvre, Soja, de Certeau, Massey, and others have “engendered new ways of seeing spatalization and the textual practices that contribute to an understanding of positionality and the locatedness of subjectivity” (5). They then proceed to disparage thematic criticism for its alleged rural-centricism, and conclude that, with an attention to space, “we can partially reclaim a sense of the placeness of Canadian writing, which has been in part negated as a result of our disavowal of thematic criticism, through an engagement with the materiality of Canada’s urban spatiality” (6). The issue here regards not their desire to reassert the relevance of place in Canadian culture—which is, indeed, a worthwhile argument—but that they are unwilling to produce new literary maps by drawing upon geography and urban studies research. They adopt Soja’s real-and-imagined dialectic and all but circumvent the potential of transdisciplinary research to revolutionize literary studies’ theorization of geography. Canadianists have long understood the importance of place and space; however, criticism tends to appropriate what is familiar and comfortable from spatial theory and attempts to create “new geographies” for Canadian culture, but seldom advances beyond conservative and déjà vu formulations. In contrast, this dissertation encourages

11 Ato Quayson’s “Kòbòlò Poetics: Urban Transcripts and their Reading Publics in Africa” provides a valuable model that shows how interdisciplinary research is necessary for literary discussions of the city. He explains, “For us, then, an interdisciplinary perspective is necessary to understand the changing forms of African urban” (416). While Quayson focuses on the particular challenges posed by the African context—the continent’s oral tradition, the dual influences of the Bible and the Koran, and, particularly, Accra’s colonial history—, we will see that the Canadian setting offers its own problematics that encourage us to place multiple disciplines in critical dialogue.
scholars to adopt a literary urbanism, a critical cocktail that blends the theoretical and practical insights of geography, urban studies, historiography, and literary studies. In doing so, it paradoxically demands that you abandon “urban” as a worthwhile generic category and instead consider urbanism as a subject that relates to the building of cities, the amalgamation of populations within dense environments, the imposition of human geometry onto the landscape, and the “citification” of society, culture, and politics.

III

In her seminal *The Life and Death of Great American Cities* (1962), Jane Jacobs argues that urban environments, with their high-property values and small spaces, inspire human ingenuity. In one of her more oft-quoted paragraphs, she explains, “As for really new ideas of any kind—no matter how ultimately profitable or otherwise successful some of them might prove to be—there is no leeway for such chancy trial, error and experimentation in the high-overhead economy of new construction. Old ideas can sometimes use new buildings. New ideas must use old buildings” (188). Jacobs is, of course, discussing what we now call gentrification, a form of urban renewal that appropriates old, useless buildings—such as abandoned factories—and transforms them into useful spaces: lofts, offices, studios, etc. Gentrification is an appropriate metaphor for what this study accomplishes. For it imbues old structures with new architecture. “Canadian literary urbanism,” like good, sensitive, postmodern design, simultaneously reinvents familiar spaces while recalling their histories.

This dissertation focuses on the relationship between urbanism and the nation. In our transnational, globalized age, such an interest in the nation may seem old-fashioned, perhaps
even nostalgic. But like a moose in a streetcar, the nation is the beast that demands reckoning. We cannot erase its presences, as the white commuters in Austin Clarke’s Toronto do to the city’s black population, by looking out the window or staring more intently at newspapers or white, female flesh. The critter is there, in our faces, stinking of musk, its feet and antlers clanking violently against the too-small aluminum container, poking holes in the ceiling, denting the walls, shattering windows. Even if someone came along and shot the animal—preferably with a tranquilizer—it would be impossible to ignore its intrusive spectacle. The question that writers and critics keep returning to again and again is the notion that Canada lacks an urban literature and that our national myths are somehow responsible for erasing our cities from the national topography. This narrative becomes even more compelling now that literary archeologists have unearthed “towers” of city writing. If Canada is one of the most urban countries in the world, why have our cultural histories hidden our landscape of telephone poles, railways, highways, cellular towers, and skyscraper-studded cities?

The fact of the matter is that Canada’s national myths are urban, that the nation’s canon is urbane, and our literary critics have addressed the nation’s history of urbanization. Indeed, the series of “myths” that this dissertation has in its crosshairs are of a more recent vintage and regard the notion that older cultural nationalists connived to mask the presence of our political, economic, and cultural capitals. You will discover that the city-slickers responsible for inventing an alleged anti-urban bias in Canadian culture are those who wish to grant the urban a “marginal” status so that, following the logic of Canadian postmodernism, the space becomes paradoxically central within contemporary culture. Indeed, a comprehensive reading of Canadian literature and criticism does not support the contention that urban authors have been marginalized, that the canon privileges rural spaces, and that our mythic imagery consists of animals, minerals, and plants. We have but to look at our currency to understand that such
rhetoric is bad tende. Behind our beavers, moose, loons, and bears stands the Queen, the figurehead of London’s and Britain’s power, an appropriate reminder that the country’s first settlements were spatially organized to facilitate the systematic massacre of animals and the efficient movement of pelts to Europe (the schooner on the dime). Or if we turn to our bards, we have E.J. Pratt’s “Towards the Last Spike,” a poem that depicts an epic battle between the recalcitrant geography and Canadian civilization. As the workers staple the railroad to the land, geometry conquers geography so that goods, people, capital, and cities may penetrate the west and exploit the nation’s riches. See also Hugh MacLennan’s *Two Solitudes* (1945) that concludes its description of Canada’s epic geography by placing Montreal at the centre of all things Canadian. How can anyone reasonably claim that Canada’s myths are anti-urban when two of its most important epics are about urbanizing the nation? Even the progressive and radical traditions have highlighted the importance of cities, primarily by allegorizing the cityscape as a symbol for corruption, exploitation, conservative hierarchies, and the horrors of liberal-capitalism: Archibald Lampman’s “The City of the End of Things” with its nightmare vision of the alienating, industrial city; the social realists of the 1920s and 30s with their amputated proletariats, sexually exploited working girls, and transient rioters; or, more recently, the novels set in gentrified neighbourhoods that lament global capitalism and neo-liberalism. If you look right, left, or centre, you’ll find the city.

If literary scholars familiarized themselves with the basic concepts of geography and urban studies, they would realize that many of the spaces they considered “rural” were in fact “urban.” However, this epiphany should not encourage us to begin annexing small towns, villages, and northern settings to the rubric of “urban” literature. Indeed, rural or country life advocates have begun criticizing their urbane counterparts for appropriating the countryside. Some provincial governments’ decisions to forcefully amalgamate multiple municipalities within
a single governing body resulted in the political disenfranchisement of rural voices. As Roy MacGregor argues while discussing the amalgamation of the City of Ottawa, “it has created a simmering anger that has fuelled a ‘This Land is Our Land – Back Off Government!’ movement in certain parts of rural Ontario, where landowners feel that they have no say in stringent regulations passed in urban settings with little, if any, sense of rural realities” (“Who Says” F8). MacGregor continues to complain that politicians, academics, statisticians, and artists have been purposefully manipulating census information and constitutional law to evidence the supremacy of “urban” constituents in an effort to marginalize or negate rural politics. We need to avoid creating a similar problematic in literary studies. Let us cease debating the centrality of urban or rural spaces and instead focus on how they are both inflected by urbanization. It is for this reason that you will find very little of the city boosterism that stigmatizes some scholarship interested in the urban. This study does not offer a canon challenge. It has no interest in proving the superiority or marginality of a particular space. Indeed, it contends that the rural-urban debate is a rhetorical and marketing trope that has impaired literary discourse.

IV

One of the initial goals of this project was to produce an anatomy of Canadian urban literature, identify its genres, articulate its thematic preoccupations, and outline how the body of writing modifies our understanding of Canadian and literary history. But the volume of texts pertaining to the urban is so voluminous and diverse that, like cities, they inherently resist such encyclopedic and totalizing gestures. This study laments its failure to bring critical attention to texts such as Margaret A. Brown’s *My Lady of the Snows* (1908), which offers a sustained representation of 1880s Ottawa and the political unrest during the Long Depression; J.G. Sime’s
modernist, Montreal fiction; Len Peterson’s *Chipmunk* (1949)—an unfortunately titled novel about radicalism and urban alienation; Lawrence Hill’s hilarious *Some Great Thing* (1992)—a text that satirizes race, language, and gender relations in Winnipeg; Daniel Jones’s punk-rock, Toronto stories; the products of the female, 1990s hipsters—Leah McLaren, Michele Berry, and Natalee Caple—that have been ignored by literary critics; and the fictional offerings of up-and-coming authors such as Rebecca Rosenblum, Devin Krukoff, and Mathew J. Trafford. These authors, and many, many others, remind us of how little work has actually been done on Canadian city writing.

This dissertation offers the first theory of urban literature. It analyzes fiction, journalism, and essays that challenge our conceptualization of the urban and encourage us to reform our critical vocabulary. They are not representative of urban literature as a whole but, rather, present pertinent critical problems. The first chapter revisits three canonical cultural-nationalist essays—Lionel Stevenson’s “Manifesto for a National Literature” (1926), Northrop Frye’s “Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*” (1965), and Linda Hutcheon’s “Introduction” to *The Canadian Postmodern* (1988)—to challenge the notion that hegemonic, Canadian “myths” marginalize or exclude urban settings. All three essays use a rural/Canadian-urban/American dichotomy to theorize Canadian identity. But their fissuring of the landscape is allegorical; while “rural” space symbolizes Canadianness, they nevertheless theorize Canada’s history of urbanization and refer to texts set in cities to delineate a national mythology. Indeed, urban space represents the threats posed by American imperialism and unfettered liberal-capitalism. By offering a nuanced reading of cultural-nationalist geographies, this study, once and for all, refutes the “myth” that Canadian culture denigrates urban experiences.
The following three chapters revisit a period bracketed by Wilfrid Laurier’s electoral victory in 1896 and the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, a twenty-year phase of Canadian history in which federal policies nurtured the country’s transformation from a predominately rural, colonial society to a modern, industrial powerhouse. By close reading and historicizing three representations of national policy-driven city building, the chapters show that writers allegorize the geography to negotiate the consequences of economic-nationalism: that the real conditions in slum-and-factory cities contradicted the government’s progress-exalting narratives. Bertrand Sinclair’s North of Fifty-Three (1914) romanticizes the expansion of the Canadian frontier to northwestern British Columbia. As the protagonists circulate between metropolis and frontier, we see that while the mineral-rich periphery is a rural place it is nevertheless controlled by powerful urban mavens. To classify moral and immoral forms of capitalism, Bertrand creates an allegorical geography in which a burgeoning, frontier community symbolizes a responsible form of capitalism that promises to develop the nation properly without pitting man against man. Similarly, Stephen Leacock’s Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town (1912) satirizes the Mariposans’ greed and hypocrisy. To mirror the small town’s developmental hubris, Leacock uses an ironic geography in which the community’s degree of urbanization is hyperbolized and then ironically deflated. The strategy allows Leacock to condemn the immorality he associates with unrestrained liberal-capitalism, while, nevertheless, endorsing the federal government’s program of nation building via city building. Douglas Durkin’s The Magpie (1923) further complicates the country-city divide by aligning each space with, respectively, federal and municipal authority. His text subtly draws upon the city’s history to suggest how Winnipeg’s civic leaders institutionalized a hypocritical, laissez-faire capitalism that, on the one hand, pillaged the municipality’s financial resources to encourage growth while, on the other hand, rejecting any protectionism or organization that would benefit the proletariat. Durkin reminds us
that “city” also refers to one of the three levels of government in Canada, and he uses the pastoral countryside to symbolize a highly idealized form of the national policy as a solution to class conflict.

The final chapters offer the first sustained analysis of a group of 1990s writers that sought to replace what they perceived to be propagandistic, rural-centric national myths with a new mythology that mirrored Canada’s steel-and-glass geography. The three chapters present a radical re-reading of hipster urbanism by showing how young bohemians synthesize the rural-urban, square-hip, and central-marginal dialectics to critique the limitations of “official” multiculturalism that defines citizens solely through their ethnicity. But instead of merely noting the shift from a rural to urban nationalism, this dissertation ponders what precisely it is about urban space that the authors glorify. By placing two hipster novels—Russell Smith’s *Noise* (1998) and Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For* (2005)—in dialogue with the city of Toronto’s economic development strategy, the study demonstrates that, like their turn-of-the-twentieth-century counterparts, their representations of the “new” urban geography actually mediate the tensions and contradictions inherent in what Charles Landry dubbed “the creative city.” The analysis reiterates one of this dissertation’s primary conclusions—that the “urban” typically camouflages an ideology—while historicizing and theorizing one of the most distinctive archetypes of urban life: the hipster. Indeed, the hipster has his or her citizenship in a transnational space, where the nation exists only as currency, a fluctuating value that is as liquid as air, and like air, absolutely borderless.
Chapter 1 The Rural/Canadian-Urban/American Dialectic: Cultural Nationalism and the Legacy of Literary Urbanism

Where is Canada’s literary urbanism? The question has been asked often enough, especially by those who believe they are literary innovators. Regardless, it is an appropriate query to initiate a broader discussion of Canada’s urban literature or its alleged absence. It flags a critical conundrum that has baffled authors and critics alike. If Canada is one of the most urbanized countries in the world, why has the national imagination failed to come to terms with Canada’s everyday reality and its history of settlement and development? After undertaking a comprehensive reading of Canadian fiction and criticism, this dissertation concludes that such fiction is rarely “marginalized” or “demonized” due to city settings. Rather, the urban typically serves as an avatar for a secondary concept. To support and contextualize this chapter’s theoretical argument, we reread three canonical cultural-nationalist essays: Lionel Stevenson’s “Manifesto for a National Literature” (1926), Northrop Frye’s “Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada” (1965), and Linda Hutcheon’s “Introduction” to The Canadian Postmodern (1988). We will see that, with a few exceptions, cultural nationalists have not marginalized urban literature, rather that they continually use the city and urbanization as stand-ins for the threats posed by American cultural, economic, and ideological imperialism. It is undeniable that flag-waving narratives often instigate a rural/Canadian-urban/American duel to imagine the nation, but the symbolic denigration of the urban does not necessarily correlate to the rejection of urban literature by cultural nationalists.

Revolutionary Urbanism: The Rural-Central/Urban-Marginal Dichotomy
Numerous pundits have tried to explain the “invisibility” of cities, urbanites, and urbanization in national culture. Some contemporary authors have argued that Canada does not have an urbane literature, that artists have only recently begun to represent the land of concrete, steel, and glass. The hipsters of the 1990s—Zsuzsi Gartner, Hal Niedzviecki, Andrew Pyper, and Russell Smith—claimed to be revolutionaries, the leaders of a national metropolitan awakening. They declared that they were the first to represent downtown Canada and that the “old guard” was repressing their uprising, which sought to reconcile Canadian culture with the population’s urbanity. But, as Northrop Frye often remarked, revolutionary traditions tend to have a major defect, “an undervaluing of history” (“Conclusion” 370). The hipsters’ insurgent posturing necessitated ignoring literary history. Ironically, the rural-oppressors they lambasted—Morley Callaghan, Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, etc.—wrote canonical, urban novels. To feign innovation and to manufacture a generational conflict they jettisoned a long history of urban writing (Edwards and Ivison “Introduction” 8-9). But that has not prevented their converts (usually members of Toronto’s media and arts industry) from rewriting history. For example, in a 2009 This Magazine editorial, Darryl Whetter complained, “Most Canadians don’t live on, or even near, farms anymore. More than 80 percent of Canadians live in cities, yet the CanLit spotlights continue to shine on rural literature, usually of yesteryear.” Whetter offers little evidence for his argument beyond vague references to Russell Smith and John Metcalf, and he seems unaware that Smith abandoned the rural-urban dichotomy many years earlier after admitting that his polemical arguments were naïve. Despite the obvious fallacies, these urban revolutions demonstrate that such narratives have currency in contemporary Canada, and that editors of major arts periodicals believe rural “myths” still define national culture and hence must be challenged. Ironically, such rhetoric negates the cultural legacy of urbanism and exposes a widespread ignorance of Canadian literary history.
A more troubling trend regards the frequency with which literary critics adopt parallel rhetorical strategies to bluff innovation. Scholars demanding a critical urbanism have perpetuated spatial popularity contests and have avoided the historical research that is required to establish an urban tradition. In their introduction to a special issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature*, Linda Warley, John Clement Ball, and Robert Viau endorse the turn to space in critical social theory and argue that literary criticism has all-but-ignored the presence of urban writing and spaces in Canada. Why? Because of the hegemony of thematic criticism and cultural nationalism. They write:

> There is no doubt that land and the natural environment continue to be important symbolic concepts around which formations of identity accumulate; however, critics have begun to ask why particular images of the land and the natural environment are so often repeated, whose situations within and relationships to particular spaces are deemed most noteworthy, and why, when the majority of Canadians live in large and small urban centers, cities and city life are so often absent from our critical conversations. (2)

Like their artistic counterparts, the editors expunge a heritage of urbanism. They seem unaware that thematic critics, whom they so harshly criticize, actually analyze urban writing. Indeed, one of the major critical fallacies that this chapter debunks is the allegation that “city and city life are so often absent in our critical conversations.”

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12 We do not need to belabor this argument because this chapter’s analysis of Northrop Frye’s “Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada” demonstrates the importance of urbanism and urban literature to his cultural nationalism. However, for the moment it is worth noting that Margaret Atwood’s *Survival* (1972) includes two chapters on urban writing, “The Reluctant Immigrant” and “Quebec: Burning Mansions.” John Moss’s *Patterns of Isolation* devotes chapters to Hugh Garner’s *Cabbagetown* (1950) and the œuvres of Morley Callaghan and Hugh MacLennan. Similarly, Macmillan’s series on “themes in Canadian literature” includes *The Urban Experience* (1975), alongside other texts such as *The Prairie Experience* (1975) and *The Frontier Experience* (1975).
If there is a “myth” that merits busting, it is the misconception that urban writing is new to Canada and that scholars have only recently begun “urbanizing” Canadian studies. Yet, the millennial years are quickly becoming associated with the foundation of a Canadian literary urbanism. For example, in 2001, Eva-Maria Kröller argued that after years of denial, Canadianists were turning their attention to the city. She begins her brief article by discussing Russell Smith’s Globe and Mail column that frequently laments the marginalization of urban writing (especially his own). Kröller credits Toronto’s literary-dandy with highlighting the increasing prominence of urbanism within cultural discussions, but briefly mentions Gabrielle Roy’s Bonheur d’occasion (1945) and Garner’s Cabbagetown (1950) to suggest that city writing is not necessarily as new as Smith wants his readers to believe. But noting the proliferation of urban writing since the early 1990s, she argues, “Canadian literature too requires re-mapping, and the speed of developments can be gauged in some measure from the currently more than usually wide gap between literary production and the reference works describing it” (8). While Kröller correctly identifies how literary encyclopedias had yet to convincingly document the changes in Canada since the early 1990s, her comments ignore a large volume of scholarship, especially journal articles, that had begun to “remap” Canadian literature and criticism.

Perhaps answering Kröller’s call for new literary maps, Justin D. Edwards and Douglas Ivison attempt to shift the study of Canadian literature away from the country’s rural past to its urban present in their Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities (2004). Oddly, the editors criticize Niedzviecki, Pyper, and Smith for masking the presence of earlier representations of the

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13 Kröller’s article seems to originate from her work editing the Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature (2004) that would eventually include the aforementioned entry by Janice Fiamengo on “Regionalism and Urbanism.” Kröller’s “The City as Anthology” was published in 2001, so her argument predates the appearance of Walter Pache’s entry on “urban writing” in The Encyclopedia of Canadian Literature (2002) and anticipates correctly an explosion of urban-centric remappings of Canadian literature.
city, and yet their introduction uses identical rhetorical strategies to invent a critical revolution. They decree:

No longer are we content to engage in thematic studies which privilege the wilderness, rural areas, or the small town as the place upon which Canadian identity is constructed. Instead we seek to bridge the gap that exists between the lived experiences of most Canadians, who overwhelmingly live in urban environments, and the public mythology of Canada and critical production on Canadian literature and culture, which has, until recently, largely focused on rural and wilderness spaces and small towns. We seek to shift the focus to that most placeless of places, the city. (6)

Ironically, Edwards and Ivison bulldoze pre-existing urban criticism so that they may feign innovation. Indeed, the us-them dichotomy that they summon here does not advance the study of literary urbanism. Edwards and Ivison’s torqued-up rhetoric relies upon too-easy simplifications and is not supported by comprehensive or thoughtful research. The advocacy of an urbane cultural nationalism has failed to advance the understanding of literary urbanism; indeed, there is research here that suggests revolutionary rhetoric has achieved the exact opposite effect. Instead of continually begging the question, let us consider what cultural nationalists have actually written about urban literature.

Americanism and the Retardation of the Canadian Nation-State

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14 Despite their advocacy of a vague form of urban cultural nationalism, Edwards and Ivison’s two essays on city writing do identify a series of critical issues that deserve further critical attention, especially their insightful observation that critics continue to confuse basic geographical terms. But their essays do not demonstrate knowledge of literary history, cultural nationalism, or thematic criticism. Hence they deserve praise for drawing attention to literary urbanism and its critical hurdles, but their rhetoric is, at times, a little over-the-top.
In 1948 the paramount threat to the Canadian polis was the American crime comic—those extremely popular, ultra-violent, pulp fictions of the urban noir. The point is supported by a true story: two Dawson Creek boys, aged eleven and thirteen, murdered a random man on the highway. The police and the community were baffled. Why would two good, Canadian boys arbitrarily slay someone? The teenagers, it was discovered, read about eighty comics a week and “faced with no other explanation concerning the motive, the prosecution, the Department of Health and Social Welfare, and the presiding judge all condemned the comic books for motivating the crime” (Beaty 88). The Federal government was quick to act. In early 1949, E. Davie Fulton, the local MP, authored and convinced Parliament to pass a private member’s bill that amended the Criminal Code of Canada to make the possession and distribution of a crime-themed comic book a criminal act. The bill was supported by nationalist chest-thumping that promised to protect Canada’s youth and hence the nation’s future from America’s insidious culture of juvenile delinquency; and as well as some eager lobbyists from Canada’s publishing industry that saw an advantage to outlawing American comic books that, not coincidentally, accounted for one-third of magazine sales in Canada (Beaty 90-91). The murderous misdeeds of two, good ol’ Canadian boys could only be explained by blaming urban American comics, and instigated a furor of cultural nationalism and protectionism.

Students of Canadian history know that 1949 was important for another reason, it was the year the federal government appointed The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, commonly known as the Massey Commission. It concluded that America’s morally degraded, mass-market pop industry threatened Canadian values and economically prevented the emergence of domestic art. To counter the threat of American cultural imperialism and, correspondingly, the retardation of the polis, the Massey Commission proposed an aggressive campaign of cultural interventionism that sought to curtail the circulation
of America’s high-profile, but low-brow pop, and to encourage a domestic arts industry that would champion liberal-humanist values (Beaty 94-95). To defend the nation state, Parliament quite literally outlawed one of the most distinctive forms of urban literature. Indeed, Fulton’s amendment remains active and is outlined in sections 163 and 164 of the Canadian Criminal Code, which ban the production, distribution, and ownership of child pornography. Ka-pow!

We have here an example of a common rhetorical gesture in cultural nationalist thought that falsely presents urbanism as synonymous with Americanization. One of the major reasons the urban has appeared to be absent within Canadian literary discourse originates from cultural nationalist narratives that present the urban as the spatial manifestation of Americanism. But far from eliding the presence of a Canadian literary urbanism, it has been paradoxically central to the Canadian cultural imagination. Indeed, canonical criticism frequently claims that what defines Canadian culture and, by extension, the nation, is its resistance to urbanism as a symbol for American hegemony. Like a dirty comic book hidden under the national mattress, the urban has troubled cultural narratives. Everyone knows it’s there. But it is only reluctantly acknowledged as an unfortunate part of the national character that must be (hypocritically) censored due to its (alleged) unCanadianness.

The Theoretical Assumptions of Cultural Nationalism

Before supporting our thesis it is first necessary to establish what precisely is meant by cultural nationalism. John Hutchinson has noted that contemporary scholarship tends to generalize and confuse cultural nationalism as a critical concept. Often scholars fail to sufficiently distinguish between the state’s authority and the practice of imaging a nation through
As Hutchinson explains, “what is central to cultural nationalism is not the defence of a language but of a distinctive and historically-rooted way of life. Such a project does have a politics, but it is communitarian and diversitarian. In evoking historical models, cultural nationalists act primarily as moral and social innovators not as reactionaries, in seeking to formulate an indigenous basis of collective progress” (393). Hutchinson's article draws attention to how nationalistic cultural policy is not necessarily the same concept as cultural nationalism. The former describes how governments use policy and law to nurture and protect domestic culture; in Canada, the most historically significant example of such state interventionism is the Massey Commission or, perhaps more accurately, the legislation that actually acted upon the document’s recommendations, such as the Canada Council for the Arts Act (1952). Cultural nationalism, on the other hand, strives to identify, even at times to revive, a “collective personality” with a history, geography, culture, and homeland that can be differentiated from other nationalities (394). Hence, while the Canada Council is legally obliged “to foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts” (8.1), it is not mandated to rouse cultural nationalism (despite having a strong history of doing so).

Within the context of literary studies, cultural nationalism becomes a particular way of reading literature that seeks to discover and articulate a nation’s fundamental characteristics. Such an approach necessarily relies upon the theory of modes, specifically thematic modes, which Northrop Frye outlines it in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). Frye’s theory elaborates upon the core concepts in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, and offers an ontology of literature. He translates Aristotle’s *dianoia* into theme, and uses it to denote what thoughts literature tells us about the world (52-53). Thematic criticism allegorizes fiction and identifies how a text or multiple texts represent a subject. While a cultural nationalist may use any variety of theoretical perspectives to interpret literature, his charting of the nation’s personality produces a series of thematic
statements. Indeed, as Russell Brown argues in his passionate defence of Frye’s theory of modes, critics have routinely confused cultural nationalism and thematic criticism (“The Practice” 659). Many of the critiques launched against the thematic critics—Margaret Atwood, Northrop Frye, D.J. Jones, John Moss, and Laurence Ricou—regard their cultural nationalism as a critical concept rather than an interrogation of theme. Regardless, we do not need to initiate yet another critique of theme, rather we merely need to note the theoretical assumptions informing cultural nationalism.

Imagining Canadianness

What haunts the three canonical essays we discuss in this section is their profound search for a national character, their desire to articulate a sense of Canadianness that will (finally) allow the nation to declare its cultural sovereignty from Britain and the United States of America—that famous identity complex that has nettled and continues to disturb Canadian literary discourse. The authors explicitly declare their cultural nationalist intentions. Lionel Stevenson’s literary history “is concerned only with literature that is inherently of some distinctive Canadian quality” (vii), and his “National Manifesto” attempts to “show that this native Canadian quality is sufficiently distinctive to warrant the acceptance of Canadian literature as a separate entity in the intellectual geography of the world” (viii). The logical predicament here, of course, regards the notion that delineating a national literature correspondingly proves the existence of a national character. Furthermore, Stevenson explicitly assumes the role of a canonical curator who labels what is and isn’t an example of “Canadian” literature and hence defines the nation’s identity by only discussing texts that support his thesis. The “Canadianness” of works that do not conform to his definition is a topic that Stevenson neglects to address.
Frye is equally blatant, although significantly more ambivalent, about the cultural nationalism that informs Carl Klinck’s *Literary History of Canada* (1965) and his own “Conclusion” to the first edition. Frye opens the essay with his famous lament regarding the sub-standard quality of Canadian writing: “The literary, in Canada, is often only an incidental quality of writings which, like those of a many of the early explorers, are as innocent of literary intention as a mating loon” (341). Noting that Canada’s culture fails to meet the evaluative standards of international (i.e. British) criticism, Frye argues *Literary History of Canada* is actually a massive volume of cultural history that “has its own themes of exploration, settlement, and development, but these themes relate to a social imagination that explores and settles and develops” (341). Frye’s project is expressively cultural nationalist, for he presents Canadian literature and his reading of it as treaties that will settle and develop the nation. These land-based metaphors express his goal to map the nation via culture but also suggest how the culture he analyzes participates in, indeed, even endorses, Britain’s colonialism and Canada’s postcolonial nation-building venture.15

Hutcheon’s *The Canadian Postmodern* famously theorizes the prevalence of “historiographic metafiction” in 1960s-and-1970s experimental writing. But her study, which focuses on a theory of postmodernism and its aesthetic forms, becomes an exercise in thematic criticism and cultural nationalism when she attempts to distinguish Canada’s postmodernism from its American counterpart. It is Canada’s “different ideological baggage” that inspired a

15 Our argument here suggests the tantalizing possibility to situate Frye’s representation of urbanization and urbanism within a postcolonial context. Linda Hutcheon’s “Eruptions of Postmodernity” identifies the presence of both postcolonial and ecological perspectives in Frye’s Canadian writing. Diana Brydon in her important “Introduction: Reading Postcoloniality, Reading Canada” concludes by suggesting that older Canadian thinkers, such as Frye and Donald Creighton, deserve re-reading within a postcolonial context and that such a project would challenge the “metropolitan formulations” that, she alleges, have dominated postcolonial discourse.
particularly Canadian ex-centricity (author’s emph. 3). She explains, “since the periphery or the margin might also describe Canada’s perceived position in international terms, perhaps the postmodern ex-centric is very much part of the identity of the nation.” Indeed, Hutcheon borrows many terms and concepts from Frye’s “Conclusion” but adapts them to new historical conditions. Her introduction argues that Canada’s postmodernity spawns from its “cultural history,” and that the nation’s successive identity crises explain the belated emergence of postmodernism in the northern third of the continent (6). Because Canada had yet to effectively delineate a national identity, writers could not logically deconstruct and challenge that identity. While Hutcheon’s cultural nationalism is only whispered, her “introduction” to The Canadian Postmodern nevertheless endeavors to theorize a national, postmodern identity.

Americanization and its Threat to Canadian Sovereignty

All three documents were produced during heightened periods of cultural nationalism, and their canonical status suggests that these narratives of Canadianness articulate some form of consensus; a notion that is further supported by the fact that alternative narratives failed to excite the polis. In the periodicals of the 1920s critics demanded the formation of a national literature that would articulate the experiences and values common to Canadians. The content of such a literature and its aesthetic form were hotly debated. But as Mary Vipond shows, the nationalists of the 1920s believed that “the real roots of the English-Canadian identity lay in its rural and small town past” despite the fact that, demographically speaking, “Canada had become more urban than rural” (73). The preference for rural space was, Vipond suggests, largely the product of anti-Americanism, the desire “to resist the materialism, individualism, and mass culture and modernism symbolized by the United States” (72). The exuberant patriotism of the centennial
years is well documented, and assumes its representative form in thematic criticism. As Russell Brown notes, the timing of Frye’s “Conclusion” was fortuitous: “the anti-American cultural nationalism of the 1960s and the centennial celebrations of 1967 had provoked new interest in the old question of whether Canada has a coherent and distinct culture and tradition, and this ‘Conclusion,’ with its depiction of a ‘Canadian imagination’ shaped by a garrison mentality, answered the question with a strong affirmation” (655). Brown explains correctly how thematic critics revisited the “old question” that was at the forefront of literary debate in the 1920s; a parallel that Vipond also notes (68). And much like their earlier counterparts in the pages of *The Canadian Forum* and *The Canadian Bookman*, thematic critics overwhelmingly associate Canadian experience with rural or wilderness spaces; and frequently indulge in anti-Americanism, a tendency best symbolized by Atwood’s twin theses developed in *Survival* (1972) and *Surfacing* (1972). We may still be too close to the late 1980s to fully understand the nuances and significance of Hutcheon’s work but she is frequently attributed as being the leading authority on literary postmodernism, to the degree that Robert David Stacey suggests that in the 1980s and 1990s “the postmodern seemed virtually the property of Linda Hutcheon” (xii) and even in contemporary scholarship “the dominant view” of postmodernism “has been Hutcheon’s” (xiii). Her writing on Canadian culture certainly revisits “the old question” that preoccupies cultural discourse, but her work, as Christian Bök demonstrates, attempts to reconcile the old myths to new conditions (89); most notably, the failure to renegotiate the Constitution of Canada in the Meech Lake Accord (1987) and the Charlottetown Accord (1992), the passing of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988), and the real threat that Quebec would separate from Canada in 1980 and 1995. These events, and others, created an atmosphere in which Canadians were extremely self-conscious about nationality and identity politics (Kamboureli, *Making* xii).
The texts were also written during historical periods when Canadians were anxious about the increasing influence of American capital and cultural on Canadian life. The 1920s witnessed the deterioration of Canada’s east-west trade flow and its cultural ties to Britain—John A. Macdonald’s dream for a transcontinental nation sustained by exports to Britain had been replaced by the north-south pull of American capital. Indeed, in 1922 American investment had, for the first time, exceeded British capital in Canada; and by the end of the decade Americans controlled 20% of the book value of Canadian corporations, especially in strategic sectors such as mining and petroleum. Similarly, with the dismantling of wartime censorship laws American popular culture began to dominate markets, a trend that encouraged governments in the 1930s and later to adopt interventionist policies and institutionalize cultural protectionism such as those outlined by the Massey Commission. 1963, for George Grant, marks the year in which Canadian nationalism was defeated by continentalism and liberalism; the nation, which had until then striven to offer a viable “alternative to the American republic” (6) had become nothing more than a “branch plant” of American capitalism (46). In Grant’s *Lament for a Nation* (1965), Prime Minister Diefenbaker’s political defeat symbolizes the end of Canadian sovereignty and the nation's increasing subservience to American imperialism. While Grant lamented the disappearance of an identifiable (i.e. Tory) legacy of Canadianism, Frye’s “Conclusion” boldly refutes Grant’s thesis by articulating a social mythology that, claims to, ideologically, unite all Canadians. The uneasy relationship between continental trade and Canadian nationalism once again peaked in the 1980s when Brian Mulroney successfully concluded free trade negotiations with the United States of America (that culminated in the elimination of all tariffs between the two countries) in 1988—the same year Hutcheon published *The Canadian Postmodern*. As Kit Dobson’s *Transnational Canadas* (2009) shows, globalization and multiculturalism challenged the singular narratives produced by earlier cultural nationalists because “more people are able to
articulate their own, distinct visions” (xiii). Yet, paradoxically, the threat presented by American and global capital retrieved the allure of the nation as a way to resist the erasure of the local in lieu of accelerated and liberated global trade flows.\(^{16}\) Hence Hutcheon’s self-consciously paradoxical argument that Canadian identity is an ex-centric one, a theory that articulates a homogenous national identity while contradictorily embracing difference. The three essays we discuss, then, are not only representative of their eras’ literary politics but also mirror broader anxieties in the Canadian polis regarding what were perceived to be the harmful effects of American economic, ideological, and cultural imperialism.

Colonial Anxieties: The Rural/Canadian-Urban/American Dichotomy

Our brief overview provides little in the way of new insight; indeed, the majority of the analysis rehearses the common ideas associated with and the criticisms of cultural nationalism. However, this background information becomes significant when we begin to question how nationalists have represented the urban. Overly patriotic commentators often summon a rural/Canadian-urban/American dichotomy to allegorize the differences between the Canadian and American nations. We find the most reductionist manifestation of this duality in Stevenson’s “Manifesto for a National Literature,” in which he argues that the literal difference between the two nations is that the Canadian topography is natural whereas the American one is urban. He explains, “In Canada the primordial forces are still dominant. So Canadian art is almost entirely devoted to landscape, Canadian poetry to the presentation of nature” (11). In

\(^{16}\) Timothy Taylor seems to have assumed this task. His *Stanley Park* (2001) and *The Blue Light Project* (2011) both use a rather simple dichotomy that places local, street culture against transnational conglomerates.
contrast, the American nation and its literature are obsessed with the urban: “The first great interpreter of the new world, Walt Whitman, wrote scarcely a poem that could apply to Canada without modification, so pervasive is the distinctive quality of ‘Americanism’, and in his successors, such as Carl Sandburg, this feature is still more pronounced” (10). Stevenson’s argument is essentialist. While important poets, Whitman and Sandburg are not representative of the American arts in their entirety, nor does Stevenson recognize transcendentalism’s symbolic and philosophical connection to Nature. Regardless, he continues to argue that the difference between Canadianism and Americanism “resides not so much in the contrast of Canada’s forests and plains and mountains with those of the United States, as in two other considerations: the preoccupation, even in Whitman’s time, with cities and factories and immigrating swarms; and the studied emphasis which our southern neighbours set upon the externals of national consciousness—what is colloquially known as ‘flag-waving.’” He presents two related arguments here. His reading of literary history contends that urban writing simply does not exist in Canada; and secondly, he argues the urban absence proves the distinctiveness of Canadian literature. Both arguments are not particularly compelling as in his later chapters he reluctantly acknowledges the presence of city writing, and hence undermines his premise that America’s urban writing “scarcely … could apply to Canada without modification.” America certainly was a more urbanized country than Canada, but Stevenson’s manifesto was published in the late 1920s after an intense, thirty-year period of rapid industry-based urbanization that was nurtured by protectionist economic-nationalism (see chapter 2). In this sense, his “manifesto” not only mischaracterizes government-sanctioned nationalism but also obliterates the nation’s real-and-imaginary urbanism. Even if we read the dichotomy as a purely symbolic argument, the values or philosophies he attributes to both spaces are problematic. For Stevenson, the prevalence of urban literature in America correlates to a vulgar form of patriotism, an argument he does not
provide any evidence to support; whereas Canada’s devotion to rural space nurtures a
“mysticism” that recognizes “a spiritual meaning in nature and its identity in the soul of men”
(12)—a rejection of rationalism that, hypocritically, describes the transcendental idealism
informing some of Whitman’s poetry.

The factual errors and logical fallacies that inform Stevenson’s “Manifesto” are fairly
self-evident, but the document is nevertheless important because it introduces us to a very basic,
and poorly thought out construction of the related rural/Canadian-urban/American dichotomy.
Perhaps what is most troubling about Stevenson’s manifesto is his inability to distinguish
between the real and imaginary; his understanding of mimesis is (strategically) naïve. The
tension arises from his awareness that a national literature historically necessitates a profound
connection to an identifiable homeland. As a former colony and a new country, Canada lacked
such a relationship to land and nation; a conundrum that becomes even more problematic
because many Canadians were recent immigrants that may have considered a place beyond
Canada’s borders their homeland. He explains, “On this continent the language and the whole
cultural system are not, as in older civilizations, the product of many centuries during which the
natural influences of the country have molded the soul of the people, who have grown out of the
soil and through countless generations have lived in intimate communion with it. In this country
the civilization is not thus indigenous” (6). By forging a mystical relationship between Canadian
literature and the soil, Stevenson attempts to establish a tradition that mirrors the European
models; indeed, this is one of the key characteristics that Hutchinson associates with cultural
nationalism. But Stevenson plants the nation’s roots through literature’s representation of the
land because the population was too new and too diverse to support a narrative based upon
historical and ethnic experience. Hence his anti-urbanism originates from colonial anxieties
about Canada’s relationships to Europe and the United States of America, and a corresponding
desire to sow a national identity predicated upon a profound historical and cultural union with an ancestral homeland.

Escaping the Cultural Legacy of Colonialism

Frye’s “Conclusion” attempts to shift discussions of cultural nationalism away from land-based articulations of the nation and instead searches for a Canadianness structured upon mutual cultural myths that articulate a trans-Canadian ideology. Robert Lecker’s interpretation of Frye’s “Conclusion” argues it attempts to transcend Canadian history to reconcile his theory of Canadian literature with his *Autonomy of Criticism* (Making 201). This is certainly true. But Frye’s evasion of the historical thesis is also motivated by his contention that “there is of course nothing” in the nation’s history of exploration, settlement, and development that “differentiates Canadian from other related cultural developments” (356). Canada’s colonial and pioneer history too closely parallels America’s and hence does not provide a viable basis in which to construct a national identity. Indeed, Frye’s “Garrison Mentality” is the theme that expresses the material and historical development of North America. He writes:

Civilization in Canada, as elsewhere, has advanced geometrically across the country, throwing down the long parallel lines of the railways, dividing up the farm lands into chessboards of square-mile sections and concession-line roads. There is little adaptation to nature: in both architecture and arrangement, Canadian cities and villages express rather an arrogant abstraction, the conquest of nature by an intelligence that does not love it. (349)
What, until now, has gone unnoticed is that Frye’s “Garrison Mentality” surveys the urbanization of North America and argues that it is precisely Canada’s urban history that prevents it from producing a national identity. Canadian civilization, like its American counterpart, began on the Atlantic coast and increased its territory by gradually expanding westward across the continent. Settlements and transportation networks are, of course, the spatial embodiment of this process; and their geometric and environmental violence demonstrates that North America exists to occupy and exploit the land rather than to seek unity with it. Furthermore, metropolitanism—the expansion of the frontier by a series of interconnected settlements—is a process that necessitates the erection of relatively isolated communities and correspondingly encourages the maturation of regional as opposed to national identities. For Frye, it is Canada’s colonial and urban history that vetoes the constitution of a nation.

The garrison contains elements that preclude the imagining of national identity. It incarcerates separatism, regionalism, and localism—all forces that do not recognize difference and seek hegemony at the expense of national community. He explains, “It is much easier to multiply garrisons, and when that happens, something anticultural comes into Canadian life, a dominating herd-mind in which nothing original can grow. The intensity of the sectarian divisiveness in Canadian towns, both religious and political, is an example: what such groups represent, of course, vis-à-vis one another is, ‘two solitudes,’ the death of communication” (351). The “garrison mentality” recognizes that Canada’s population and geography are too diverse to foster a cultural nationalism along the lines that Stevenson’s “manifesto” proposes. Indeed, such diversity undermines national development. Frye’s Canadian polis is threatened equally by the Red menace, the arrival of Marxism, socialism, and communism in the twentieth-century Canada. After a condescending overview of the “Marxist thesis” present in some Canadian writing, Frye proposes that the “garrison” changes into a “revolutionary garrison within a
metropolitan society” in which radicals and hipsters attack “what society accepts as conventional standards” (355). The “revolutionary garrison” paradoxically parallels its earlier counterpart. While it seeks revolution, and hence offers an alternative vision for Canada, it also endeavors to impose a new uniformity onto Canadian culture. The nation’s history is one of environmental destruction and its culture is one of rigid conformity and sectarianism. The “garrison” isolates the same “threatening” characteristics in Canada that are typically attributed to America, and Frye symbolizes these “anticultural” features of modern life via urbanization and the city.

Rejecting the viability of imaging the nation as a place, Frye turns to space. He concludes his “Conclusion” by delineating a “social mythology” that communicates “a pastoral myth, a vision of a social ideal” (362). By exploring Canadian mythology, Frye strategically circumvents the divisive issues that haunt the country’s legacy of colonialism and hence its troubled relationship to the land. F.P. Grove’s *A Search for America* (1927) is his representative text. It chronicles the narrator’s “search for a North American pastoral myth” (363) that has “been abandoned in the United States but perhaps not yet in Canada” (364)—a myth we find in Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854), in Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), and in Walt Whitman’s elegies. What Frye would label “the quest for the peaceable kingdom,” the “reconciliation of man with man and of man with nature” (371). Canada’s belated modernity and modernism becomes, in Frye’s “Conclusion,” an asset that allows the nation to recover and conserve the idealism that has been corrupted by America’s commitment to modernity and its “isms”: liberalism, individualism, materialism and capitalism. Frye retrieves the basic ideological argument that informs Stevenson’s “Manifesto,” and reiterates the mythical connection between Canadianness and a form of nature-inspired mysticism. And like Stevenson, Frye also conjures a rural/Canadian-urban/American dichotomy. For what Canada resists, as a
people, is symbolized by Erastus Salisbury Field’s *Historical Monument of the American Republic* (1876):

> It is an encyclopedic portrayal of events in American history, against a background of soaring towers, with clouds around their spires, and connected by railway bridges. It is a prophetic vision of the skyscraper cities of the future, of the tremendous technological will to power of our time and the civilization it has built, a civilization now gradually imposing a uniformity of culture and habits of life all over the globe. (369)

We have here the garrison’s mythical specter. Frye, again, invokes the urbanized landscape and the city as symbols for “a uniformity of culture” that is being imposed upon the world’s population and which threatens to produce a global “herd-mind”. In a moment of atypical nationalism, Frye labels this threat to the world’s culture “Americanization” (370). If we were to ask where Frye actually disparages urbanism, here it is.

We can assume when critics allude to Frye’s anti-urbanism they are referring to his use of Field’s painting to symbolize what Canadian culture resists. But Frye explicitly qualifies his argument. He explains, “Because the United States is the most powerful centre of this civilization, we often say when referring to its uniformity, that the world is becoming Americanized. But of course America itself is being Americanized in this sense, and the uniformity imposed on New Delhi and Singapore, or on Toronto and Vancouver, is no greater than that imposed on New Orleans and Baltimore” (369-370). The argument reiterates that Canada cannot rely upon its colonial history to produce a unique national identity because it is a history that cannot sufficiently be isolated from that of the United States’. Indeed, a material and historical foundation for cultural nationalism becomes even more challenging in the modern era because, Frye argues, modernity imposes a new, global “uniformity” on the world’s cities and
peoples. But by re-labeling modernity “Americanization” and by continually referring to Canada’s proud tradition of anti-urbanism, Frye contends that what defines Canadian culture is its resistance to Americanism/urbanism/modernism as a way of life.17 “Canadians seem well adjusted to the new world of technology and very efficient at handling it. Yet in the Canadian imagination there are deep reservations to this world as an end of life in itself, and the political separation of Canada has helped emphasize these reservations in its literature” (370). We have here the recovery of Stevenson’s prudery, the notion that what distinguishes the Canadian imagination from its southern counterpart is that Northerners reject modernity whereas the latter’s “flag-waving” literature unabashedly endorses—indeed promotes—the new global hegemony. The cultural predicament that Frye continually attempts to overcome in space is Canada’s “real” commitment to (liberal-capitalist) urbanism and, hence, the unoriginality of the country’s history.

The Rural-Tory and Urban-Liberalism Dichotomy

Despite Robert Lecker’s argument, Frye historicizes the “peaceable kingdom.” The event that establishes and still defines Canada as a nation is the rejection of the American Revolution. In all his essays on the subject, Frye associates the rise of modernity with the revolution, and when he discusses Canadian culture it is the colony’s fondness for the Crown that most strongly influences its identity. As he wrote in a 1952 essay, “What else is ‘distinctly Canadian’? Well, historically, a Canadian is an American who rejects the Revolution. Canada

17 Frye’s argument strongly parallels George Grant’s reading of Canada’s ideological history in Lament for a Nation. There is an article to be written that compares their ideological and highly symbolic use of space.
fought its civil war to establish its union first, and its war of independence, which were fought against the United States and not Europe, came later” (“Letters in Canada” 106). What the Revolution symbolizes for Frye is not only Republicanism but also the liberalism and aggressive capitalism that he so strongly associates with Americanism.18 “What won the American Revolution was the spirit of entrepreneur capitalism, an enthusiastic plundering of the natural resources of the continent and an unrestricted energy of manufacturing and exchanging them” (“Preface to an Uncollected Anthology” 258). Because Frye’s brand of cultural nationalism is predicated upon an ideological tradition, he appropriately expresses this history through geographical allegories. The “garrison” and the “peaceable kingdom” “do not exist as places” because they are myths expressing abstract ideas (“Conclusion” 364). No specific city incarnates the garrison, rather any urbanized landscape evokes liberal-capitalist hegemony.

Correspondingly, Stephen Leacock’s Mariposa or Lucy Maud Montgomery’s Green Gables do not embody the “peaceable kingdom” but rather “the loving delicacy of perception in Grove’s own Over Prairie Trails and The Turn of the Year.”

The Rural-Marginal and Urban-Central Dichotomy

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18 Frye would continue to invoke the city and the urbanized landscape as the spatial manifestations of destructive modernity or “Americanization” throughout his career. However, in the ironically titled “Canada: New World Without Revolution” (1975), Frye would alter his argument to fully acknowledge Canada’s participation and contribution to the “Americanization” of world. In later essays, notably in “Speech at the New Canadian Embassy, Washington” (1989) and “The Cultural Development of Canada” (1990), Frye began theorizing an ecological criticism in which he reasserted his belief that Canadian culture resisted environmental destruction and “Americanization” because the “Canadian economy has been marked by a peculiarly reckless exploiting of natural resources, in which trees, and fur-bearing animals were sacrificed on a scale that has left a cultural residue of intense guilt feelings in the Canadian consciousness” (“Speech” 651). In both essays, Frye’s representation of urbanization and the city became increasingly bitter.
The paradoxes and contradictions we find in Stevenson’s “Manifesto” and Frye’s “Conclusion” prove, for Hutcheon, Canadian identity’s heritage of ex-centricity. Hutcheon argues postmodern writers are always “taking pot-shots at the culture of which they know they are unavoidably a part but that they still wish to criticize. This almost inevitably puts the postmodern writer into a marginal or ‘ex-centric’ position with regard to the central or dominant culture” (3). Because postmodernism seeks to undermine “cultural ‘universals’” by grounding discourse “in the ‘particular’”, it unavoidably challenges “any notions of centrality” and assumes an “ex-centric” political stance. The central postmodern paradox that Hutcheon outlines here certainly describes one of the key features of Canadian cultural nationalism: its perpetual tendency to acknowledge Canada’s similarities to the United States of America and then to paradoxically claim that what defines the nation is its resistance to Americanization. Since the “periphery or the margin” describes Canada’s political relationship to its super-power neighbour, postmodernists know that they are “unavoidably” a part of Americanism but they still wish to take “pot-shots” and “criticize” the dominant culture.

The frontier serves as a metaphor for Canada’s postmodernity, those peripheral wilderness spaces that rest outside of “central” Canada, wherever one chooses to locate it. Hutcheon explains, “the periphery is also the frontier, the place of possibility: Kroetsch’s border town of Big Indian in What Crow Said is deliberately on the border of Alberta and Saskatchewan; Hodgin’s Vancouver Island is self-consciously on the edge of continent” (3). The frontier is an appropriate metaphor for Hutcheon’s theory of Canadian postmodernism because it spatializes the power relationships she tracks. Of course, her dichotomy implies but omits that the metropolis would be the metaphoric centre that the frontier resists, but this is precisely Hutcheon’s point: the geography of postmodern cultural nationalism continually shifts until the nation is devoid of any “firm geographical centre or ethnic unity.” By eliminating all centres in
Canada, Hutcheon invents a trans-Canadian experience of marginality: “Canada can in some ways be defined as a country whose articulation of its national identity has sprung from regionalist impulses: the ex-centric forces of Quebec, the Maritimes, the west. It is a history of defining itself against centres” (4). The problem here is that she seems to purposefully conflate marginalization with the affective politics of the margin to invent a postmodern identity—a strategy that negates the differences between Quebec separatism, the colonization of Native peoples, and southern Ontarians’ American-inferiority complex. Gone are the “particulars” that are supposed to inform postmodern thought; gone are the centres of Canadian power, the nation’s metropolises, hub-cities, and capitals.

Hutcheon theorizes the “frontier” to help us distinguish Canadian postmodernity and identity from its American counterparts. She complicates traditional cultural narratives by suggesting that Canadian identity is feminine and feminist because both share “themes of powerlessness, victimization, and alienation, as well as to a certain ambivalence or ambiguity that makes both Canadians and women open, tolerant, accepting, yet also at times angry and resentful” (6). Perhaps implicitly referring to Margaret Atwood’s Surfacing—in which urbanism and Americanism serve as metaphors for rationality, sexism, and imperialism—Hutcheon suggests there is a common analogy in Canadian culture that associates the United States of America with male aggression and presents Canada as the oppressed but defiant female (7). The argument parallels her previous ones which consistently associate cultural nationalism with the mosaic and with resistance to dominant, i.e. American, culture. But, as Sylvia Söderlind argues, Hutcheon’s gendering of the landscape is essentialist: “While Canada has a good share of strong female writers, the implicit argument that this is a reflection of the country's marginality begs the question. The circular logic that allows for the equation of the Canadian, the feminine, and the marginal seems to me to be predicated on a catachrestic essentializing of the feminine as
marginal” (101). Indeed, Hutcheon’s use of the centre-margin dichotomy persistently and problematically grants Canada and its canonical postmodern writers a marginal identity; a rhetorical maneuver that erases differences between competing groups so that they all may have something in common (and is a not so subtle rehashing of Atwood’s Survival thesis).

The Rural-Postmodern, Urban-Modern Dichotomy

Perhaps in a gesture of solidarity, Hutcheon also turns to the redundant, modernist skyscraper for her symbol of American hegemony. The shift to the urban is, we can assume, related to her parallel thesis found in her other influential study published in 1988, which suggests architectural theory “offers the best model for a poetics of postmodernism” (Poetics 22). In particular, her theory of “historiographic metafiction” was inspired by her research into architectural theory that identifies postmodernism’s definitive quality as “the parodic recall of the history of architectural forms and styles” (Poetics 10). The new architecture, which had only begun to be theorized in 1980, was produced “in reaction against those deliberately ahistorical, grey, purist monuments of ‘high modernism’ of the International Style that we can see all around us in our urban centres and that have brought about what Jane Jacobs calls the ‘death of great American cities’” (Canadian 10). The International Style emerged in the 1920s but it became a formal architectural movement in 1932 when Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson wrote The International Style as a companion to a special exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art. The movement advocated the adoption of new technologies to make simple, unadorned buildings that were designed for utility. New materials, especially steel and concrete, liberated the construction of skyscrapers. A typical building consisted of a core of steel or concrete, usually built around the central elevator shafts, that was strong enough to support the floors and the surrounding walls
that “hang” off the middle. Hence, its canonic visual characteristic is the four, symmetrical, glass “curtains”. Hutcheon’s metaphoric use of the modern skyscraper is a parodic allusion to Frye’s “Conclusion” that presents the “skyscraper cities of the future” as a symbol for Americanization, modernity, and global cultural uniformity. Field’s *Historical Monument of the American Republic*, it must be remembered, was painted in 1876, so the modernist skyscraper would, logically, become the futuristic, prophetic tower he envisioned. The allusion to Jacobs, who left the United States due to her objection to the Vietnam War, also retrieves Frye’s “quest for the peaceable kingdom” that involves the recovery of American idealism in Canada.

Hutcheon’s metaphoric invocation of our towering cities is, it must be admitted, clever; it expresses the key aesthetic difference between modernism and postmodernism while simultaneously parodying the symbolic foundations of Canadian cultural nationalism. While Hutcheon’s anti-urbanism remains muted for the majority of the essay, her discussion of the International Style makes her geographical dichotomy explicit: each pole becomes an allegorical container for ideological beliefs. Yet, much like Frye, the topography is not only allegorical but the ideas are actually in conflict.

Geographical Allegories and the Canadian Pastoral

Our re-reading of cultural nationalism reveals the presence of a dichotomous, geographical allegory. Richard Cavell alleges that such an approach to the landscape “defeatures” the topography because the discussion of the land remains abstract. While analyzing Frye’s “Conclusion” he explains,
This *defeating* of the landscape, be it as archetype or urban wilderness, is ultimately a repudiation, in both the critical and literary traditions, of the materiality of cultural production. It is not simply that the urban experience has been the source and centre of Canadian literary experience; it is, rather, that the experience of the land has consistently been negated in the service of colonialist abstraction. (15)

Cavell argues that Frye’s allegorical topography corresponds to a “refusal to acknowledge the urban in Canadian criticism” and, correspondingly, a “refusal to acknowledge this long history of abstraction, of colonization, or expansionism, of environmental carnage” (29). But, as we have seen, Frye does address Canada’s traumatizing colonial history and he even argues that Canada resists the “environmental carnage” that Cavell alludes to. While Cavell brilliantly identifies these geographical allegories, his critique of cultural nationalism ignores Frye’s careful qualifications and conflates Frye’s discussions of a space’s material and mythic history.

We must approach the rural-urban dichotomy on its own terms. As W.H. New argues in *Land Sliding* (1997), it is ultimately arbitrary what value each space represents; “Violence occurs statistically as often in city and in small town; sophistication and naivety are possible anywhere; and ‘real life’ eludes identification with any one setting alone” (156-157). Hence the common maneuver that presents the urban as a new or more “authentic” alternative to rural space merely inverts each pole’s allegorical function. By continually focusing on what space cultural nationalism allegedly privileges, we limit our critical discussions to spatial popularity contests. It is more important to be conscious of how cultural nationalists *make* their arguments and to use this knowledge to question the ideological values they attribute to Canada.

When we do so, we realize that cultural nationalists have not marginalized urban literature. While Frye and Hutcheon clearly present the frontier as an allegory for Canadianness,
they both explain how urban texts also contribute to the nation’s heritage of anti-Americanism. This argument may seem paradoxical but it must be remembered that the frontier only symbolizes resistance to Americanization. Frye argues that Gabrielle Roy’s *The Tin Flute* (362), Morley Callaghan’s *The Loved and the Lost* and *Such is My Beloved* (363), Archibald Lampman’s *The City at the End of Things* (368), Hugh MacLennan’s *The Watch That Ends the Night* (367), and Earle Birney’s *Trial of a City* (370) all contribute to Canada’s “quest for the peaceable kingdom.” Hence contemporary urban advocates have paraphrased the paraphrase and have thus, ironically, blinkered us to cultural nationalism’s ideological underpinnings. Indeed, we know that rural space represents something other than anti-urbanism because Frye uses the urban “garrison” as an avatar for both liberal-capitalism and Marxism; for Frye argues that the social(ist) realists—the group of writers who offered the most sustained critique of liberal-capitalism and industrial-urbanization in Canadian literary history—produce a “revolutionary garrison within a metropolitan society” (355). Because Frye places social realists and urban realists in different allegorical spaces, despite their shared aesthetic practices and their similar representations of nightmarish cities, it is clearly their opposing “solutions” to the urban problematic that differentiate the genres. On the one hand, social realists, by definition, advocate revolution, on the other hand some urban realists, such as Callaghan and Roy, express a “nostalgia for a world of peace and protection, with a spontaneous response to the nature around it, with a leisure and composure not to be found today” (362). Frye’s pastoral myth is a Tory-myth because it fundamentally rejects revolution in all its forms. This does not mean that he erases Canada’s legacy of urbanization and all its consequences, but that he seeks to remedy modern evils via a highly idealistic and materially impractical program of ideological and environment reconciliation.
A New Direction for Canadian Literary Criticism

E.D. Blodgett argues, English-Canadian culture has been “possessed by space” but there has not been a similarly vigorous interest in history (15). The widespread ignorance of basic geographical terms supports Blodgett’s argument because the failure to accurately discuss the geography evidences the disavowal of place and history. By limiting our study of the urban to otherwise abstract (and thematic) conversations about space, we have silenced Canada’s urban history. Edward Soja’s contention that geography and urban studies must begin placing the “real-and-imagined” city in dialogue, and his related plea for transdisciplinary research also applies to literary studies (*Thirdspace* 56). Indeed, the burgeoning scholarly interest in the urban and the city in Canada and the crumbling disciplinary boundaries present an unprecedented opportunity to re-read, or some cases read for the first time, the country’s voluminous record of urban writing and criticism. Having established an ontological understanding of the urban, we may now begin to interrogate critical and fictional representations of the city. Such an enterprise can only be further enhanced by consulting the social sciences and historiography to analyze the relationships and intersections between real-and-imaginary urbanisms. For, until we do so, we remain stranded in the barren wasteland of thematic criticism with all its paraphrases, subjectivity, and geographical naivety.
Chapter 2 The Frontier-Metropolitan Dialectic: Allegorical Geography and Bertrand Sinclair’s *North of Fifty-Three*

John A. Macdonald’s campaign poster for the 1891 general election provides a symbolic entry point for the issues the following three chapters interrogate. In the middle of the poster Macdonald waves a massive British North America flag. A farmer and an industrial labourer hoist the former Prime Minister in the air. Behind the farmer, on the left side of the poster, is the idealized agrarian landscape of western Canada with its seemingly unending fields of golden wheat blanketing the landscape until they reach the Rocky Mountains. Behind the labourer, on the right side of the poster, a colossal factory smokes with productivity and a large train steams towards the prairies. The poster communicates the core ideals of Macdonald’s domestic policy: that his program of economic-nationalism would unite the country through shared prosperity. Immigrants would settle the agrarian west and exploit the country’s natural resources and a protective tariff would nurture the manufacturing sector in the industrialized east. Essential to this vision was the transcontinental railroad that would harmonize the two sectors and regions. Westerners would sell resources to eastern settlements and, in return, easterners would transform the staples into manufactured goods to sell to domestic and foreign markets. The transcontinental railroad would form the life-blood of the nation transporting resources, manufactured goods, and people across the country. At the bottom of the poster is the slogan that would grant his election its nickname, “The Old Flag. The Old Policy. The Old Leader.” The slogan and the flag introduce a secondary goal of Macdonald’s national policy: it would protect Canada from American imperialism and would maintain the country’s cultural ties to
Britain. Hence Macdonald not only envisioned a role for the federal government that would nourish growth but also articulated an idealized form of national community and purpose.

This chapter concerns itself with the three ideas symbolized by Macdonald’s poster: urbanization, economic-nationalism, and the rural-urban dialectic. This chapter reconsiders the representation of Canada’s modern urban fiction by demonstrating that the label “urban” may productively be re-conceptualized to also refer to texts that represent urbanization. The first quarter of the twentieth century provides a valuable historical context because it was a period of intense, nationwide industrial-urbanization. But, as theorists such as Derek Gregory, Neil Smith, and David Harvey argue, urbanization is an “unequal” process; different regions develop at different paces and the capitalist economic system necessitates that certain places remain underdeveloped. Although it was the period in Canadian history when the degree of urbanization was most disparate, it was also the moment when even small towns, especially those located on the transcontinental railroad, anticipated accelerated growth. Hence in the early-twentieth century we find the urbanization of Canada in medias res—at a time when it was unclear if individual municipalities, and by extension the nation, would actualize the country’s transformation from a predominately rural, colonial society to an urban, modern nation-state.

The federal government’s agenda of economic-nationalism significantly complicates the discussion of urbanization. As W. H. New explains, “It is easiest to characterize the years between 1867 and the First World War as an age of expansion: Victorian, progressive,

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19 In the 1891 and earlier elections the Liberals supported the construction of the transcontinental railroad but objected to government intervention and felt that the existing line between Toronto and Halifax, which travelled through the United States of America, was adequate. The Conservatives felt that the railroad must pass entirely through Canada primarily due to defence concerns. The other important issue regarded government intervention in the economy. Until the 1896 election Liberals were devoted freetraders and rejected protectionist policies. The Conservatives successfully convinced Canadians that both Liberal policies threatened Canadian autonomy and risked encouraging American economic and cultural imperialism. Hence the “Old Flag” symbolizes the national policy’s promise to maintain Canada’s cultural ties to Britain via economic policy.
nationalist, Imperial. The age was also one of definition. The prevalent idea of nationalism declared a fundamental belief in cultural uniformity” (*A History* 79). While New does not address the relationship between economic-nationalism and Canadian literature, he nevertheless evokes one of the major conflicts we identify in this chapter: writers tend to celebrate the goals of economic-nationalism while simultaneously representing the city as a space of political, moral, and social corruption that threatens national community. To evaluate the era of tumultuous change, writers commonly use the rural-urban dialectic in which the two opposing poles correspondingly represent idealized and corrupt forms of urbanization. The device allows writers to celebrate patriotically the urbanization of Canada while nevertheless disparaging the threatening social changes that accompany the nation’s drive towards modernity. The following chapters, then, interrogate perhaps one of the most significant ironies in Canadian literary development: urbanization was of fundamental importance to Canada’s emergence as a modern nation-state as well as the development of the federal government’s program of economic-nationalism, but the history of the country’s urbanization has been theoretically neglected.

The Golden Era of Industrial Urbanization

The period bracketed by Wilfrid Laurier’s electoral victory in 1896 and the beginning of William Lyon Mackenzie King’s reign in late 1921 witnessed a phase of unprecedented industrial urbanization and rural-to-urban migration. Historians typically attribute the era’s material gains to Macdonald’s and Laurier’s national policies that promoted an agenda that “stimulated home industries, linked commercial and manufacturing interests with national existence and material progress, and committed the country to industrial urban expansion as rapidly as world economic conditions would allow” (Watt “Literature” 474). Macdonald did not
live to see his vision for the country become a reality. He introduced the national policy in 1876 and Conservatives (and Liberals) up until the Great Depression regularly campaigned on versions of Macdonald’s agenda. But the policies were largely ineffectual during his lifetime due to the Long Depression (1873-1896).\textsuperscript{20} It was not until Wilfrid Laurier became Prime Minister in July 1896, campaigning on a Liberal national policy, that the successes of Macdonald’s brand of economic-nationalism became evident. With the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1885 and the improvement in the world economy following the end of the Long Depression, Canada entered an era of staggering economic growth and urbanization. In 1871 only 19\% of the population was urban; by 1891 the number of urban dwellers incrementally increased to 31\%; by 1911 the figure had swelled to 45\%; by 1921 half the population was urban and the country would remain equally divided until the end of World War II (“Population, urban and rural”). What these statistics do not show is that the number of rural dwellers remained relatively stagnant while the urban population rapidly expanded. Indeed, it would take 120 years for the rural population to double its numbers from 3,014,914 in 1871 to 6,389,872 in 1991, whereas the urban population doubled three times between 1871 and 1921, from only 722,343 to 4,353,428.\textsuperscript{21} The Laurier years produced explosive growth and Canada’s transformation into a predominately urban society.

\textsuperscript{20} Margaret A. Brown’s \textit{My Lady of the Snows} (1908) represents the anxieties Canadians felt about the national policy’s failure to bring lasting economic prosperity to the country in the 1880s. Notably, Brown begins the novel with a scene where the heroine, a member of Ottawa’s Tory establishment, expresses alarm about the widespread unemployment and the slum conditions in downtown Ottawa. The novel ultimately endorses the national policy and romanticizes Macdonald’s electoral victory in 1891, despite noting the dangerous rise of unemployment, the horrific conditions in Canadian cities, and threat poised by revolutionary radicals.

\textsuperscript{21} As noted in the introduction chapter, we should be critical of these statistics because an “urban area” refers to a place with a population greater than 1,000. Hence, these figures give us a crude sense of how the population was rapidly amalgamating in “urban areas.” However, the explosive growth in Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver demonstrate that we can say, with honesty and precision, that it was a period of intense urbanization.
Urbanization was an essential tenet of Canadian economic-nationalism and the nation’s spreading urban-industrial landscape served as a metaphor for national unity and purpose. Canadian historians unabashedly celebrate the period as a golden age of prosperity and the emergence of Canada as a world power. Donald Creighton, Harold Innis, and J. M. S. Careless in their national histories attribute economic-nationalism with influencing the core beliefs of Canadian being and culture. Innis, who wrote extensively on the interrelationship between communication technologies, culture, and economics, identifies how the waterways and subsequently the transcontinental railroads powerfully influence the formation of Canadian institutions and the national character. Historians frequently celebrate Canadian cities as monuments to the country’s material gains. As J. M. S. Careless representatively describes early twentieth-century Canada:

The St Lawrence interests of Montreal controlled a golden commercial empire beyond the dreams of the days of the fur canoe or the canal era. Winnipeg grew as Montreal’s outpost, gathering in the western trade, Toronto competed with Montreal to some extent, but thrived on the east-west commerce as the heart of a large industrial region. The outlying sections and their cities also gained from the growth of east-west trade. Vancouver benefited as the Pacific outlet of the continent-wide system, and British Columbia supplied the prairies with fish, lumber, fruit, and minerals. The Maritimes advanced less, but were aided by the development of Saint John and Halifax as the winter ports of east-west commerce. (Canada 311)

Careless evokes the enthusiasm and nationalistic tone that saturates historiography’s romance with the early-twentieth century. He presents the great cities mothered by the national policies as
symbols of the young nation’s material achievements and economic prosperity.\textsuperscript{22} And he reasserts the highly romantic notion that the railroad bound the disparate regions, geographies, and peoples together with stitches of oak and steel.\textsuperscript{23}

Moving Beyond the Rural-Urban Dichotomy

Perhaps one of the greatest paradoxes in Canadian cultural thought involves the vastly different national narratives imagined by historians and literary critics. To indulge in analogy, historians tend to privilege the urban side of Macdonald’s poster to theorize forms of nationalism and national belonging whereas literary studies overwhelmingly prefer the rural side of the poster. When discussing early-twentieth-century Canada, literary scholars adopt an anti-urban perspective that downplays urban themes, city settings, and urbanization within national narratives. Desmond Pacey’s \textit{Creative Writing in Canada} (1952) representatively proclaims the “gradual displacement of an agricultural and rural way of life by an industrial and urban one is, however, only the most striking of the social developments of the last half century in Canada” (198). Despite noting the significance of urbanization to Canada’s history, he maintains that “even more important than our social history in giving our literature a distinctive form and

\begin{itemize}
  \item[22] The preface to Hugh MacLennan’s \textit{Two Solitudes} presents Montreal’s urbanization of the regional landscape as a metaphor for national unity. Careless’s description of Laurier’s Canada strongly parallels MacLennan’s highly nationalistic representation of Montreal. If this chapter included a fourth text it would be MacLennan’s national epic. The novel fully endorses the ideals informing economic-nationalism but recognizes that, in practice, the national policy encouraged class disparity and hence fueled both socialist and separatist critiques of the nation-state. Only through a significant serving of romance and idealism is MacLennan able to (symbolically) abate these threats.
  \item[23] George Grant’s \textit{Lament for Nation} (1965) is relevant here. One of the essay’s key arguments concerns how the dismantling of the national policies resulted in America symbolically annexing the Canadian economy and culture. The turn from economic-nationalism towards continentalism entailed the death of the Canadian nation. While Grant does not explicitly discuss the urbanization of Canada, he nevertheless outlines how the national policies nurtured Canadian nationalism and provided a narrative of national belonging.
\end{itemize}
flavour has been the Canadian climate and landscape” (199). More recent scholarship tends to repeat such sentiments. Walter Pache’s entry on “Urban Writing” in the Encyclopedia of Canadian Literature offers the term “missing metropolis” to describe the lack of urban writing until the 1920s and what he associates with a form of anti-urban cultural nationalism (1150). Noting that Canada lacks equivalents to Charles Dickens, Oscar Wilde, Walt Whitman, or Upton Sinclair, he suggests “these violently diverging city myths are not met by Canadian equivalents: rather, Canada is mythologized as non-city and non-literary, as rural and loyal British hinterland” (1151). Even Glenn Willmott’s otherwise insightful study on modernity in English-Canadian fiction reiterates the “virtual absence of urban settings and the preponderance of rural and wilderness settings in Canadian fiction written between 1900 and 1960” (Unreal 146). A trend, Willmott contends, that forces critics to theorize an alternative modernity and correspondingly a radically different form of literary modernism based upon rural, regional, and colonial experiences rather than the urban modernisms typically associated with Europe and the United States of America. This chapter asks: what happens to our understanding of Canadian literature when we situate modern fiction within the contexts of the nation’s (lost) history of urbanization?

In the previous chapter we considered how cultural nationalists use the rural-urban dichotomy to produce an idealized form of national belonging and history that “contains” the threatening aspects of modernity within the corrupt, urban pole. By introducing urbanization as a third term, we complicate the rigid structure of the rural-urban dichotomy—when we do so, we realize that the poles need not be oppositional. Bertrand Sinclair’s use of the device in North of Fifty-Three (1914) demonstrates that the rural-urban dualism is not dichotomous but dialectical and it can more accurately be understood as an abstract geographical allegory. From such a perspective, the city and the frontier do not refer to specific places but rather dialectically
negotiate corrupt and idealized forms of urbanization. By recognizing that “rural” or “frontier” spaces participate in the nation’s urbanization, we find a possible explanation as to why cultural nationalists privilege “rural” spaces. More specifically, they, both physically and symbolically, affirm the federal government’s program of economic-nationalism but conveniently avoid the social and cultural problems that were ravaging Canadian cities and expose the fundamental contradictions within the government’s program of institutionally nurtured, rapid industrial-urbanization.

Bertrand Sinclair’s North of Fifty-Three is a characteristically minor Canadian text. It is occasionally mentioned in literary histories for its representation of Vancouver and the development of British Columbia’s frontier. Given the novel’s relative obscurity, a brief summary is necessary. There are two parallel plot lines in which a young woman flees the sexually corrupt city for the wilderness where she meets and eventually marries a self-sufficient, “Adamic” frontiersman; and a second in which the couple returns to the city only to reject it as a space dominated by immoral businessmen. Both romance plots rely upon a binary that contrasts the immoral city to the pure frontier. The first half of North of Fifty-Three follows the misadventures of Hazel Weir. She is engaged to a realtor and spends her days working as a stenographer. But she catches the eye of her elderly employer, who sexually harasses the young woman and demands her hand in marriage, which she refuses. He is critically injured during a horse riding accident and on his deathbed changes his will to imply an indecent relationship between the two. Granville’s society takes notice. Rumours run rampant until Hazel’s female peers and her fiancé reject her as a morally insidious woman. Socially ostracized, she heads north to fill a teaching job in one of British Columbia’s newer settlements but she becomes lost in the woods until she encounters Bill Wagstaff who forces her to spend the winter at his homestead. A gentleman, Wagstaff teaches her the ways of the frontier and allows her to return
to Vancouver in the spring, with an envelope full of cash at that. In the city, Hazel re-encounters her former, apologetic fiancé who explains that shortly after her departure the conspiracy against her was exposed and he once again desires her hand in marriage. Hazel rejects his request and feeling alienated by the materialistic city flees to the wilderness where she marries Bill. The first half of the novel develops a simple dichotomy between the frontier and city, where the latter is condemned as hypocritical and morally corrupt while the frontier remains a pure alternative.

The novel, until very recently, has not been subjected to substantial literary criticism but those that have discussed the text have emphasized the importance of the rural-urban dichotomy. James Doyle’s *Progressive Heritage* devotes a few paragraphs to Sinclair’s oeuvre and situates the author within a group of early twentieth-century writers such as Ralph Connor (Charles W. Gordon), Colin McKay, Douglas Durkin, Stephen Leacock, and Jessie Georgina Sime, who were not necessarily socialists but rather progressives who express anti-nationalist and anti-capitalist sentiment. Doyle notes that Sinclair’s fiction advocates a form of capitalism that champions “fair dealing” rather than the exploitation of man by man (43), and his novels often rely upon a frontier-metropolis dichotomy whereby the rejection of the city advances the notion that “industrial capitalism is by its very nature unable to create durable prosperity” (45). Lindsey McMaster argues that Hazel Weir, the novel’s female protagonist, is one of many representations of the urban working girl in early twentieth-century Canadian literature. The working girl embodies the modern city’s “potential for immorality and cultural disruption” (*The Working* 44) and is “a major part of Sinclair’s project” that critiques “industrial urbanization” (55). She adds, Hazel is “clearly the touchstone for judgments on city life and the moral cesspool of urban industrialism” (57). Both readings offer a traditional understanding of the rural-urban dichotomy in which the city symbolizes corruption and the rural periphery serves as an ideal alternative.
Literary scholarship has, historically, relied upon a similar form of the rural-urban dichotomy to evaluate Canada’s drive towards modernity. But unlike the “Old Flag Poster,” in which the transcontinental railroad evokes the interdependency between rural and urban settlements, literary critics approach the two poles as oppositional. Indeed it is undeniable that many draw upon the rural-urban dichotomy to define the unique aspects of Canadian culture; typically with the rural pole symbolizing whatever a critic deems to be a positive aspect of Canadian life and identity. McMaster’s reading of the North of Fifty-Three invokes a very similar reading of the rural-urban dichotomy as proposed by Stevenson, Frye, and Hutcheon. Hazel represents the “corruption inherent in the urban working scene, where the artificial and exploitative environment leads to both corporate and personal corruption” (66). Hazel’s story evokes the widespread anxiety about young women entering the urban work force, where women face not only the dangers associated with some jobs—especially those in factories—but also the lecherous machinations of male employers and customers. McMaster’s interpretation of North of Fifty-Three outlines Sinclair’s critique of industrial-urbanization as exploitative and corrupt; every character that originates from the city, including Hazel, is presented as immoral. In this sense, North of Fifty-Three seems to parallel strongly Frye’s “quest for the peaceable kingdom,” in which modern, urban society is condemned and the frontier offers an alternative pastoral ideal. When Hazel retires to Fort George, she escapes the corruption inherent in the urban milieu and, as McMaster notes, the novel contains the urban working girl within the frontier so that her independence is no longer a threat to socially conservative Canada. She explains, “With his socialist ideals, Wagstaff hates to see Hazel as a wage earner because to him it renders her an instrument of corporate exploitation and a victim of moral corruption; but all he offers her instead is wifedom in the backwoods, and neither he nor Sinclair seems to be troubled by this” (65). McMaster reads the text on a very literal level in which Sinclair’s invocation of the rural-
urban dichotomy not only disparages industrial-urbanization, it also contains the social threats posed by the entrance of women into the work force.

Regional Urbanization and Allegorical Geography

What needs to be remembered about the rural-urban dichotomy is that each pole is an allegorical abstraction. Richard Cavell has offered the term “defeatured topologies” to describe how the dichotomy is an abstraction that has little to do with Canada’s actual material conditions. His argument draws upon Henri Lefebvre’s contestation that space becomes “representational” when it embodies and articulates an ideology. He explains, “what we call ideology only achieves consistency by intervening in social space and in its production, and by thus taking on body therein” (44). Cavell argues that the rural-urban dichotomy in Canadian literature expresses a colonialist ideology that approaches the landscape as an abstract allegorical construction that elides the nation’s occupation and exploitation of the land (15). What alarms Cavell is that such an abstract reading of the landscape erases the importance of place and correspondingly a materialist history of the landscape. By approaching the rural-urban dichotomy as a purely literary device, writers and critics “defeature”—or strategically de-emphasize—a place’s “real” materiality and history. Cavell’s account offers important insight into how the rural-urban dichotomy has tended to obscure a sense of place and history in critical conversations.\(^{24}\) It is not so much the case that the urban as been elided, as Cavell suggests, but

\(^{24}\) Cavell’s argument reiterates a growing consensus that Canadian literary criticism, especially that produced by cultural nationalists, has attempted to imagine Canada as a space while, problematically, de-emphasizing the relevance of history. Robert Lecker, for example, has argued that Frye’s “Conclusion” rejects a historicist understanding of Canadian literature and encourages his readers to move “beyond history” (*Making* 204). E.D.
rather that the negative aspects of Canadian society and history have been contained within urban space so that they may be allegorically rejected and resisted.

Such spatial abstractions confuse discussions of urbanization because they semantically obscure geographical concepts and conflate the “real” with the “allegorical.” Indeed, the allegorical formula is especially problematic when interrogating Canada’s history of urbanization because metropolitanism is a regional process that transcends the dichotomy’s leaden geographical borders. Willmott troubles the regional-national and rural-urban dichotomies to question the notion that Canada’s modern literature is overwhelmingly rural and regional, and hence non-modern. He argues, “both the rural countryside and the wilderness frontier provide settings that throw the invisible machinery and machinations of modern life into unique perspective” (Unreal 146). Central to Willmott’s thesis is that urbanization fells the geographic barriers constructed by the rural-urban dichotomy by suggesting how even rural spaces are urbanized. Thus Canada’s tradition of rural and regional writing presents a “unique perspective” on modernity because it depicts a form of urbanism that has been typically ignored in modernist scholarship. He explains, “From this viewpoint we can see that the Canadian rural landscape is no Eden of premodern farmers ready to quit the land for the seductions of the city. Those farmers are already living in an invisible city, with its modern modes of production and class-social structure” (152). Willmott’s decision to call his synthesis the “invisible city” is unfortunate because the term creates a semantic nightmare. It obfuscates the differences between types of places—for example a small Atlantic village becomes a modern city—and urbanization

Blodgett has suggested that “English Canada is possessed by space” and that literary histories emphasize that it is space, not history, that must be overcome to create an autonomous national culture (15).
is not “invisible” rather a place’s infrastructure—ports, canals, roads, railroads, power lines, telegraph poles, and radio towers—materially manifest urbanization. In its most reduced form, Willmott insightfully proposes that rural or regional places also participate in “modernism as an ‘art of cities’” because such spaces are urbanized. In this regard, his argument demonstrates convincingly how placing geography studies in dialogue with literary studies complicates the spatial underpinnings of the rural-urban dichotomy but his terminology remains problematic.

Willmott’s thoughts on modernity do, however, provide a means to transcend the limits of the rigid rural-urban dichotomy by introducing urbanization as a third, dialectical term. Structural urbanization is a branch of urban studies that examines the spatial formations of cities and metropolitan regions. By emphasizing the intersection between economics and urbanization, structural urbanization explores how cities grow and contract over the landscape and over time—what are called urban forms—and attempts to understand urbanization as a grand-scale spatial and historical process. For example, Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies* identifies four distinct phases of American urban development: mercantile (pre-1820), competitive industrial (1840-1870), corporate monopoly (1871-1920), and state managed Fordist (1920-1970) (174). The two relevant phases are the mercantile and competitive industrial urban forms. The former describes how the mercantile economy necessitates a few port cities that export resources gathered in nearby small towns—a theoretical form of development that corresponds to Innis’s “staple thesis” and Creighton’s “Laurentian thesis.” The latter describes a model of development defined by industrial-urbanization that witnesses the amalgamation of people, industry, and capital within competitive cities. Such cities collect the region’s natural resources and create wealth through value added manufacturing (as opposed to exporting resources). In this sense, the urban and rural economies became even more interdependent. The reliance on industrial technology “redefined the form of the city and instigated a remarkable—and more opaque—
social and spatial ordering of urban life. Accommodative technologies of transport and building (for example, the railway and the lift) accelerated this intensification and its associated wellspring of agglomeration economies” (177). Communication technologies, especially rail, made the spatialization of social and economic structures visible. The illusory social, cultural, and economic separation between rural and urban space was challenged by the new industrial landscape that quite literally mapped how communities and spaces were interconnected; hence Willmott’s advocacy of the “invisible city” to describe how rural spaces also became urbanized during Canada’s modern period is semantically problematic. While the “invisible city” is certainly a phantasmal term, it poetically describes the processes of regional urbanization.

The City-Frontier-Urbanization Dialectic

A theoretically informed reading of Wagstaff’s business ventures challenges the overly simplified readings of the rural-urban dichotomy offered by Doyle and McMaster, and instead encourages us to adopt a critical frontier-metropolis-urbanization dialectic. Wagstaff plans on making bundles of money and he supports the industrial-urbanization of the frontier, but he rejects the callous, corrupt business practices of his contemporaries in Vancouver and Granville. His narrative compares a business ethos that manipulates the financial system (financial capitalism) against one that contributes to the real economy (resource extraction and industrial capitalism). After discovering a massive gold deposit around Hazelton—a community located roughly 1000 km north of Vancouver—the couple returns to the regional metropolis where Bill enters a venture with non-other-than Hazel’s former fiancé. The mining business exists simultaneously in multiple places. Bill will manage the mine in the north while the business’s financing and administration will take place in the city. The two places represent two different
approaches to business: in the city the financiers create artificial wealth by manipulating the financial market while the exploited, rural labourers participate in the real economy and produce an actual product. Indeed, it is Wagstaff’s goal to bring the “honest” business practices of the wilderness to the city.

I refuse to exploit my fellows along the accepted lines—or any lines. I don’t have to; there are too many other ways of making a living open to me. I don’t care to live fat and make some one else foot the bill. But I can exploit the resources of nature. And that is my plan. If we make money it won’t be filched by a complex process from the other fellow’s pockets; it won’t be wealth created by shearing lambs in the market, by sweatshop labor, or adulterated food, or exorbitant rental of filthy tenements. (276)

Wagstaff’s speech qualifies the romance’s didacticism. It acknowledges that Bill will lead the push to industrial-urbanize the northern frontier but he desires a form of development that avoids the corruption, materialism, and individualism that he associates with Vancouver. Wagstaff fully endorses the capitalistic exploitation of Canada’s resources and the nation-building program of industrial-urbanization. But, he attributes the negative “side-effects” of the smoke-stack development—exploitation, class warfare, inflation, and slum dwelling—to an elite group of corrupt, urban financiers that adopt the principles of laissez-faire capitalism. While Bill has “no illusions” about his business partners and their ambition to turn the mining venture into a “get-rich-quick scheme,” he feels that if the company is profitable and he influences the corporation’s management, then they can make a fortune digging valuable rocks out of the land.
Sinclair’s novel, then, offers an important representation of British Columbia’s transition from a “mercantile” to a “competitive industrial” urban form. As Laurier’s railroad progressed north, Vancouver’s metropolitan influence correspondingly expanded. J.M.S Careless’s “metropolitan thesis,” which builds upon and criticizes the insights of Innis and Creighton, offers the most compelling analysis of the country’s transition to the “competitive industrial” model; but rather than focusing on the city’s spatial form, as Soja does, Careless theorizes how a regional city influences the culture and society of a vast area. He uses the term “metropolis” to “denote a dominant large city, whose commanding status essentially expresses the commercial, transport, industrial, and financial function of control or influence which it exerts over extensive and productive hinterland territories” (Frontier 61). While working in a different intellectual tradition than the Marxist geographers, Careless’s “metropolitan thesis” offers a history of regional urbanization in Canada. Wagstaff’s conflict with the Vancouver financiers dramatizes such a process. It depicts the concentration of capital and industry within a large regional city. Wagstaff lacks both the resources and a knowledge of the financial system to raise the massive amount of capital necessary to fund the mining venture—he needs money not only to pay the miners until their product hits the market but also capital to buy the expensive industrial equipment required to operate a mine and connect it to the railroad. Hence he must sell shares of the land and control of the business to the financiers to raise investment capital. By doing so, Wagstaff brings the distant frontier within Vancouver’s influence; even though the physical mine is located in the frontier, it is, essentially, a metropolitan business, as it is not only administered in the city but also necessitates the industrial-urbanization of the frontier.

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25 The expansion of both transcontinental railroads greatly accelerated the urbanization of British Columbia. When construction began on the first transcontinental line in 1881 only 18% of the province’s population was urban; by 1891 the figure reached 38% and by 1911 52%. The statistical data suggests the degree to which people migrated to urban centres and how immigrants predominately settled in cities.
The railroad further complicates the dichotomy. Each time the couple reunites, the train’s tracks have expanded further north. The first time Hazel returns to the wilderness to marry Bill she meets her lover in Hazelton. Bill visits the small town to file the paperwork to claim his golden land. But the couple’s reunion and marriage is juxtaposed with the discovery that the railroad will be extended north and very close to Bill’s homestead. As a land office bureaucrat explains, “We’ll have rails here from the coast in a year. Better freeze onto a couple uh lots here in Hazelton, while they’re low. Be plumb to the skies in ten years. Natural place for a city, Bill. It’s astonishin’ how the settlers is comin’” (192). The frontier is about to be urbanized by Wilfrid Laurier’s expansion of the Grand Truck Pacific which was being jointly funded by the British Columbian and Canadian governments (189). It is not coincidental that this revelation takes place in Hazelton, a town that happens to have the same name as the novel’s female protagonist. The setting also serves as the location where Hazel and Bill are married—an act that symbolically unites an urban working girl—perhaps one of the most urbane figures in modern Canadian fiction—with a hyperbolic frontiersman. The railroad expansion and Hazel’s movement north forebodes the urbanization of the frontier. As the bureaucrat predicts, Hazelton did actually suffer from realty speculation after it was announced that the railway would run through the town. Indeed, the speculation led to the development of three separate municipalities that bitterly battled one-another for control of commercial traffic. Hazel’s migration to the frontier is, then, symbolically more complex than a simple rejection of industrial-urbanization; like the railroad, she is the harbinger of the urbanization of the north and its potential to produce national wealth or yet another corrupt city. The foreshadowing of Hazelton’s development, especially the realty speculation, expresses an anxiety about how the railroad could transform not only the physical environment but also the social environment. The industrial-urbanization of the frontier risks importing the corruption associated with the city. The bureaucrat, who is one of
Bill’s frontier friends, adopts the speculative practices of financial capitalism and the materialism symbolized by the city when he realizes the railroad would travel through the outpost town. The more the frontier is integrated within Vancouver’s economic and cultural purview, the greater the threat that the city’s rampant corruption and immorality would correspondingly spread across the frontier.

Bill’s business partners do eventually take the company public—a decision that allows its financiers to make a quick buck on the stock market without actually creating any material product, a decision that also results in the financial ruin of the men who work in the mine who are junior investors. Enraged, Bill pummels his partners, condemns the company on the stock market floor, and forsakes the city—actions that devastate the company’s stock and nearly bankrupt his investors. As a local newspaper reports, “Husky Mining Man Tumbles Prices and Brokers. Whips Four men in Broad Street Office. Slugs Another on Change. His Mighty Fists Subdue Society’s Finest. Finally lands in Jail” (294). Hazel, again enjoying decadent city-life and the pleasures of bourgeois society, ironically believes the rumours circulated by her friends that Bill unjustly ruined the business. Pampered by wealth and society, Hazel refuses to accompany Bill who flees to the frontier. But she is once again socially ostracized because the bourgeois women are bitter about their husbands’ financial losses, morally disapprove of Hazel’s separation, and view her as someone below their class now that Bill is no longer a rich gold miner. Rejected by the hypocritical city a second time, Hazel returns to the wilderness and the couple reunites.

Synthesis: The Urbanized Frontier
When the couple meets again at the novel’s conclusion, we find that the “rural” frontier has dramatically changed. When Hazel returns to the homestead the Grand Trunk Pacific was “bridging the last gap in a transcontinental system, its trains westbound already within striking distance of Fort George” (330). The settlement, literally and symbolically, becomes the final frontier opened up by Laurier’s national policy and promises a new beginning, a new era of morally sound prosperity. The narrator writes: “Fort George loomed up a jumbled area of houses and tents, log buildings, frame structures yellow in their newness, strangers to paint as yet. On every hand others stood in varying stages of erection. Folks hurried about the sturdy beginning of a future greatness” (330). *North of Fifty-Three* ends on a highly nationalistic note. While the majority of the novel presents the city as corrupt, it endorses capitalism and specifically the tenets of the national policy. Indeed, the endorsement of economic-nationalism is further emphasized by the presence of the Lauers, the Wagstaffs’ German immigrant neighbours who greet Hazel in Fort George and escort her back to Bill’s homestead.\(^{26}\) One of the major differences between the Conservative and Liberal national policies was the Grits’ advocacy of liberalized immigration encouraging peoples beyond the commonwealth to move to Canada. The Lauers are precisely the type of Europeans that Clifford Sifton, Laurier’s Minister of the Interior, aggressively courted. Yet while Fort George symbolizes the ideals of Laurier’s national policy, unlike Vancouver, Granville, and Hazelton, it combines the progress associated with the city with the communal values associated with the frontier—the spatial embodiment of Hazel and Bill’s marriage.

\(^{26}\) We may speculate that their surname also refers to Laurier but the connection is only implicit.
The final scene invokes a form of the pastoral. The new settlement is certainly less developed than the regional metropolis but it is a booming municipality free of the moral corruption and degradation that defines the bigger city. It promises not only an era of new prosperity but one founded on honour and a compassionate business ethic. It is greatly mistaken to call *North of Fifty-Three* an anti-capitalist and an anti-urban novel because it concludes by offering a burgeoning, national policy settlement as a symbolic ideal. For Hazel, “Granville and all that Granville had stood for had withdrawn to a more or less remote background” (338).

Sinclair’s use of place here is significant. The quote appears immediately after the description of Fort George’s transformation. It is relevant because it is Granville and what it symbolizes that disappears into the background, instead of the city. Hence, the novel’s conclusion presents two different cities that fulfill two separate symbolic functions. While Granville is the corrupt city that so regularly appears in Canadian literature, a second city serves as an idealized alternative embodying the positive aspects of Macdonald’s export-driven nationalism. Fort George is fully integrated within the transcontinental trade network and along with the railroad, the city will compete with Vancouver and Hazelton to urbanize the frontier so that its resources may be extracted and exploited to accumulate national wealth.

Sinclair’s use of the frontier-metropolis-urbanization dialectic is significantly more complicated than critics have suggested. The binary symbolic system seems to be primarily designed to offer clear, moral conclusions. The representation of the frontier and city space remains remarkably consistent throughout the novel—they correspondingly symbolize idealism and corruption. But as Fort George develops, it more readily symbolizes an idealized form of economic-nationalism and industrial-urbanization. *North of Fifty-Three*, then, presents a rather ambivalent representation of Canada’s development. Granville and Vancouver clearly represent the troubling social and moral changes accompanying the nation’s industrial-urbanization, but
the text concludes by nationally idealizing a frontier city. It is, perhaps, more accurate to say that *North of Fifty-Three* rejects the decadence of city living and the potential for capitalism, particularly financial capital and laissez-faire capitalism, to promote brutal exploitation. But the novel’s romantic hero fully endorses and even spearheads the region’s urbanization. The reservations and criticisms of industry-based urbanization that Doyle and McMaster identify are certainly present in the text, but both critics’ discussion of industrial-urbanization are decidedly one-sided and evidence the lasting critical misunderstanding of the urban within Canadian literature.
Chapter 3 The Town-City Dialectic: Ironic Geography and Stephen Leacock’s *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*

Stephen Leacock’s *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* negotiates similar moral and social issues as Sinclair’s *North of Fifty-Three* but Leacock’s sketches are conceptually more complicated. The critical debate about Mr. Smith, for example, suggests some of the inherent problems that arise when reading Leacock. Even a hundred years after the cycle’s publication, critics are still debating whether Mr. Smith is a positive (and hence idealized) influence on the community, or the embodiment of destructive, immoral forces like individualism, materialism, and laissez-faire capitalism (Willmott “The Cost” 47-49). The critical congestion originates from the collection’s significant irony: the temporal distance between the narrator’s “present” location in the city and his nostalgic recollections of his childhood town, and the distance between how the Mariposans perceive themselves and their actual material conditions. See Gerald Lynch:

> Because Leacock treats his subjects humorously, ironically, and satirically, many of the questions that arise from the incongruity between appearances and reality remain unresolved. In *Sunshine Sketches* Leacock’s irony does not simply suggest the truth of the opposite to what is stated (the irony of *Arcadian Adventures* is nearer to this handbook definition of dramatic irony). Leacock accepts the possibility of truth in both appearances and reality. (*Humor* 58)

My own reading of *Sunshine Sketches* accords with Lynch’s argument about the ironic distance between appearance and reality, and that both can be considered “true.” But by focusing on the town’s relationship to the city, we complicate how many critics have attributed the small town’s
vices to the city and argue that the cycle is mainly about understanding Mariposa as its citizens do: through the community’s relationship to the regional metropolis. From such a perspective, *Sunshine Sketches* develops a similar thematic statement as *North of Fifty-Three* but the rural-urban dialectic is ironically collapsed within a single location.

Despite the noted ambiguity between appearance and reality, critics have overwhelmingly associated the immorality and corruption in Mariposa with the nearby city. Frank Watt, for example, argues that, “Mariposa, the most peaceful and the most foolish of small towns, stands as an unconscious critique of the big city ways it tries to ape” (“Literature” 40). Adding that while Mariposa is not idealized, its “only virtues are its sunshine and its littleness, its failure to achieve the larger vice of modern industrial urbanism, hard as it tries to do so.” From Watt’s perspective, Mariposa presents a half-hearted critique of steam-engine urbanization that is eventually rendered “innocuous if not innocent” due to the cycle’s irony and pastoral motifs. Lynch, who accepts many of Watt’s premises, argues that, “Mariposa is the Canadian past, at once individual and collective” that provides a nostalgic alternative to the individualistic and materialistic city (57). For Lynch, Mariposa is an idealized and temporary space—a space where Canadians mature before they proceed to the city to make the big bucks (Mr. Smith) and one nostalgically remembered by old, rich urbanites who long for simpler, purer times but never return (the narrator). While both readings touch upon some of the pertinent issues that the cycle negotiates, they rely upon categorizing events and characters along a Mariposa-Plutoria axis where the small town represents an idealized state while the city in Leacock’s *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich* (Plutoria) symbolizes corruption. Leacock’s critics expect each space to represent a single, consistent idea. In other words, there is a tension in Leacock scholarship: critics continually describe how the irony destabilizes the difference between two
opposing concepts and yet they routinely offer conclusions that ignore how Leacock also uses geography ironically.

Linda Hutcheon insightfully describes irony as “risky business” because it foregrounds the conflict between authorial intention and the reader’s interpretation of the text. She explains, “The major players in the ironic game are indeed the interpreter and the ironist. The interpreter may—or may not—be the intended addressee of the ironist’s utterance, but s/he (by definition) is the one who attributes irony and then interprets it: in other words, the one who decides whether the utterance is ironic (or not), and then what particular ironic meaning it might have” (Irony’s 11). Hutcheon’s comments seem particularly relevant to Sunshine criticism because of the issue we outlined above: critics continually acknowledge how irony creates a plurality of potential meanings but critics nevertheless suggest that their own particular interpretation is correct. The issue here does not regard what values or morals Leacock endorses—indeed, there is a consensus that the sketches villainize destructive forms of materialism and individualism—but rather how Leacock communicates these reservations about modern life. Hence, it is generally assumed that Leacock’s irony is intended to satirize modern immorality but there seems to be little agreement regarding what exactly is ironic, or not, or if Mariposa is an idealized space, or not. Glenn Willmott, attempting to end the Mr. Smith debate, argues the sketches are not mimetic, as most critics read them, but rather literary abstractions that present a dialogical contest between utopianism (Mariposa) and plutocracy (the city) (“The Cost” 73). For Willmott, Smith is the ambivalent embodiment of both ideas: “Smith is not a villain” but “it would be pointless to argue that he is not an insistently self-interested opportunist or that such qualities are not identical to those that Leacock saw purified in the culture of plutocracy.” Willmott’s reading convinces and his thoughts on Sunshine Sketches suggest the benefits of moving beyond an either/or reading of
the cycle. But his dialectical analysis still insists upon a rigid understanding of the city-town dichotomy that maintains Mariposa’s separation from Hogtown.

Ironic Geography

Mariposa’s delusions of urban grandeur are a product of its strategic location along the railroad between the regional metropolis (Toronto) and the resource-rich frontier (Cobalt, Sudbury, North Bay). The town’s developmental hubris is actually representative of the growth ethos that defined many municipalities during the years of economic-nationalism. Frye refers to this tendency in Canadian culture as “adolescent dreams of glory” that “haunt the Canadian consciousness (and unconsciousness);” notably, “the predictions that the twentieth century belongs to Canada, that our cities will become much bigger than they ought to be, or, like Edmonton and Vancouver, ‘gateways’ to somewhere else, reconstructed Northwest passages” (“Conclusion to the first” 347). Frye’s description of the naive “dreams of glory” allude to Wilfrid Laurier’s prediction in 1904 that the “Twentieth Century belongs to Canada,” that the tenets of the Liberal national policy—liberalized immigration, a second transcontinental railroad, and the maintenance of the protective tariff—would continue to nurture the nation’s explosive growth. J.M.S. Careless’s “metropolitan thesis” and his reading of Canadian history are relevant here. Communities, across the country, felt that they could replicate Montreal’s, Toronto’s, and Winnipeg’s successes by creating a crossroads on the railroad to service, control, and profit from the trade flows (Frontier 12). Hazelton and Fort George in Sinclair’s North of Fifty-Three certainly harbour such ambitions but Mariposa is the ironic embodiment of the process where the small town continually expects explosive growth but never achieves its lofty ambitions.

Understanding regional urbanization and its cultural dimensions (metropolitanism) is important
for appreciating *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* because it helps to explain an unacknowledged facet of the cycle’s humour and irony, how the collection depicts a broader national phenomenon, and the experience of urbanization in “small town” Canada.

The problem that Mariposa encounters is that it is not one of the glimmering spaces of Canadian economic-nationalism: it is neither the burgeoning, commodity-rich frontier nor it is the big, industrial city, but rather finds itself located in between these two places. To return to our symbolic frame narrative, a small town like Mariposa does not appear in John A. Macdonald’s “Old Flag” poster. However, the small town is a product of both the Conservative and Liberal national policies. As the narrator guides the reader through the town, he notes that several of the buildings were established around 1880 (14). The detail suggests that Mariposa’s major buildings were erected during the brief economic boom when the Long Depression seemed to be ending and, notably, when valuable mineral deposits were discovered in “nearby” Sudbury (McMillan 40). The town, then, developed to service the traffic running between the city and the frontier. From the perspective of regional urbanization Mariposa has three functions: it acts as a gateway to the frontier, a tourist destination for city dwellers, and produces timber and some agricultural products. However, the citizens of Mariposa only celebrate the former two industries while, as Glenn Willmott notes, denying the presence of timber and agriculture (“The Cost” 63). In the introduction to the small town, the narrator briefly mentions “the long-drawn music of the running saw” that originates from the “big planing factory down beside the lake” (15). But, shortly afterwards, the narrator claims that in the spring Mariposa appears “a fierce, dangerous lumber town, calculated to terrorize the soul of a newcomer who does not understand that this is also only an appearance and that presently the rough-looking shanty-men will change their clothes and turn back again into farmers” (17-18). The lumber industry, which employs seasonal workers and seems prominent enough to necessitate a “big
factory” is only an “illusion.” According to the townies, Mariposa’s real value originates from the transcontinental railways that run through the town but rarely stop. The narrator explains, “The joy of being on the main line lifts the Mariposa people above the level of their neighbours in such places as Tecumseh and Nicholas Corners into the cosmopolitan atmosphere of through traffic and the larger life” (16-17). The narrator attributes the community’s idiosyncratic tendencies and identity to its location and economic function within the region’s urban network. But, sometimes, people do stop in Mariposa such as the miners, surveyors, and financiers that rest in the small town on their way to exploit the riches of the north. They are the more glamorous counterparts to the urbanites who ride “the Mariposa Local,” a short rail line that brings cottagers and tourists from the nearby city. Establishing the cycle’s major theme, Mariposans continually prefer to emphasize their association with the glamour of the cosmopolitan city and the potential riches of the frontier while denying their actual modes of production.

Much of the collection’s humour originates from the discrepancy between the town’s illusionary and real urbanism that Leacock establishes by hyperbolizing how the townies perceive their level of development and importance, and then ironically deflating this self-perception. The narrator’s introduction to the community instructs us on how to properly perceive Mariposa. He warns that “to the careless eye the scene on the Main Street of a summer afternoon is one of deep and unbroken peace” but “in reality, and to those who know it, the place is a perfect hive of activity” (14). We have here the conflict between illusion and reality that Lynch alludes to in which the reader must understand that the stories will focalize a Mariposan perspective. Lynch is correct that both the illusion and reality are true, but he deemphasizes how the irony mocks the small town citizens. The Mariposans believe their spacious Main Street is superior to “the cramped dimensions of Wall Street and Piccadilly.” The town’s big, empty
streets suggest that the community is, in fact, a centre of global commerce. The town is also a telecommunications hub as Main Street is covered with “telegraph poles of cedar of colossal thickness, standing at a variety of angles” that carry “rather more wires than are commonly seen at a transatlantic cable station.” Similarly, every four years the Federal Government’s census pegs the town’s population at 5000, “but it is very generally understood in Mariposa that the census is largely the outcome of malicious jealousy” (16). So, the Mariposan’s gradually inflate their population to 10,000 until the census is once again released and the process starts all over again. The presumed reader, an urbanite, must recognize that “your standard of vision is all astray” and that Mariposa is actually one of the world’s foremost cities, a bustling metropolis.

But live in Mariposa for six months or a year and then you will begin to understand it better; the buildings get higher and higher; the Mariposa House grows more and more luxurious; McCarthy’s block towers to the sky; the buses roar and hum to the station; the trains shriek; the traffic multiplies; the people move faster and faster; a dense crowd swirls to and fro in the post-office and the five and ten cent store. (15)

Mariposa is always bigger and better than whatever one compares it to while, miraculously, avoiding all the problems that are associated with the big city because, after all, Mariposa is just a small town. The introduction’s metafictional elements not only direct the reader’s attention towards the cycle’s irony but they also foreground the cycle’s major theme: the distance between the community’s perceived and “real” urbanity, and the developmental hubris the discrepancy produces.

27 There is the potential to read this scene as a brief satire of Statistics Canada. The joke here being that Mariposa would already be considered an “urban” centre despite its relatively small population of 5000. Around the turn-of-the-century, municipalities frequently inflated their population counts as a means to attract business and immigrants.
Small Town Vice

The town-city dualism that associates the community’s moral defects with the city is undermined by the simple fact that Mariposa was morally corrupt before it began to imitate the city. We see this in the first sketch that explains how Mr. Smith manages to institutionalize his booze-peddling business in a morally conservative small town. When Mr. Smith arrives in Mariposa from the northern frontier sometime during the early 1900s, the town is hostile to his hotel-bar. But he institutes a series of changes that eventually win the Mariposans over. He cleans up the hotel with “an army of charwomen” and brings in design elements from the city so that the members of Mariposa’s lower classes, “the loafers and the shanty men,” would no longer patronize the establishment (14). To attract the “high class trade,” Smith hires a well-dressed bartender and buys himself a wardrobe that could be best described as urban-dandy (15). By “citifying” the bar, Smith indulges the small town’s pretensions and provides them with the feigned urbanism they so desperately desire. One-by-one, he wins over the citizens by needlessly patronizing other local businesses and providing exceedingly generous donations to Mariposa’s political, religious, and social organizations (26). So, while there was “opposition at first” (25) “this opposition had been countered by a wide and sagacious philanthropy” (26). The irony here is that Smith’s philanthropy is actually bribery. Indeed, when he loses his liquor license for accidently locking out the local judge and prosecutor from afterhours drinking, it is exposed during his trial that he was making “donations” to all the city’s institutions, a revelation that further outrages the community as each party abandons Smith for supporting their rivals. Judge Pepperleigh, who heads the local branch of the Conservative Party, “learned that Mr. Smith had subscribed a hundred dollars for the Liberal Party and at once fined him for keeping
open after hours” (27). The vanity, selfishness, and hypocrisy that the remainder of the stories satirize was already present in Mariposa before Smith arrived and it was certainly present before Smith renovates the bar a second time.

To save his business, Mr. Smith connives an alternative means to “bribe” the community and to institutionalize his business within the town’s economic structure. While visiting the city, Smith notices that hotels are now making money from the dining side of the business. So, he turns his small town bar into a decadent urban “caff” (29). He hires a city-architect to redesign the hotel; attaches an underground “Rats’ Cooler”; adds a “‘girls room,’ like what they have in the city hotels”; and hires a “French Chief” and some German waiters to manage the basement bar (31). In addition, he sells all his meals at an extreme loss. One by one, the Mariposans are once again won over as they celebrate the glamour of the urbane café and appreciate the ridiculously low prices. “Take, for example, the editor of the Newspacket. I supposed there wasn’t a greater temperance advocate in town. Yet Alphonse queered him with an Omelette à la License in one meal” (32). The Mariposans are too ignorant to appreciate the subtleties of fine dining—they do not understand the French names given to the dishes. Indeed, it is ambiguous if the food on the menu is actually any different, beyond the French names, as when Alphonse is eventually fired the menu does not change but the names are once again written in English. The multiple names Smith grants his new hotel further emphasize the trend. In Mariposa he advertises it as “Smith’s Summer Pavilion” but in the city he advertises the hotel as “Smith’s Tourists’ Emporium, and Smith’s Northern Health Resort” (29). Furthermore, Smith gets a city-newspaper to write a story about the massive fish to be caught in Lake Wissanotti and a week later “there were men with fishing rods and landing nets pouring in on every train, almost too fast to register.” The hotel creates two opposing illusions: the Mariposans view the hotel as a tribute to the community’s cosmopolitan glamour while the city-dwellers view the hotel as a
backwoods fishing resort. But in reality, the cheap food provides a new means to bribe the community’s leaders and the hotel dramatically improves Mariposa’s economy by attracting hordes of urban tourists (33). Only by satisfying the community’s self-interests and carefully navigating the town’s hypocrisies is Smith able to maintain his business. For socially conservative Mariposa, immoral behaviour is acceptable if it happens to fund the community.

The “citification” of Mariposa—the transformation of Smith’s bar into a decadent, cosmopolitan “caff”—amplifies and exposes the town’s inherent corruption. The sketches do, to a certain degree, rely upon the symbol of the corrupt city, but Leacock significantly complicates the rural-urban dichotomy by collapsing both poles within a single location. Critics rely upon a Mariposa (town)-Plutoria (city) dualism to classify the moral decrepitude within Leacock’s sketches. But the spatial dimensions of the scale are problematic because they exclusively associate corruption with the city. This strikes me as puzzling. In “The Hostelry of Mr. Smith,” the characters and the town veer towards the Plutoria pole as the bar becomes increasingly “citified”. But the corruption Leacock exposes here has very little to do with living in the city. The satire is not directed towards the café’s decadence and we are presented with very little information about the urbanites that come to town. Indeed, we are only provided with passing descriptions of Alphonse and the German waiters who are exploited by Mr. Smith and are quickly dismissed to the city once his license is reinstated. So, we cannot logically claim that the hypocrisy, individualism, and materialism that erupted in Mariposa was the result of the city-folk visiting the small town. Nor can we accurately classify the Mariposans’ behaviour as urbane—they only mimic their urban counterparts and significantly lack the sophistication to understand the full value of their café experience. They certainly make the eatery’s decadence seem ridiculous but this is only because the experience is taken out of its urban context. The sketch’s resolution further complicates the Mariposa-Plutoria axis. As Willmott notes and reaffirms,
“Critics generally agree that Smith plays a central role in the narrative by continually providing some trick or device by which a troubled Mariposa may return—particularly, I might add, in material terms of capital or property—to a prior status quo” (52). Our argument refutes critical consensus because Mariposa does change. Mr. Smith shows the community how to profit from Mariposa being a small town. By attracting the urban fishermen and tourists, “he had done more to boom Mariposa than any ten men in town” (33). The hotel-bar embodies the changes. While Mr. Smith fires the foreign staff and returns all his decorations to the city the second his license is renewed, he does continue operating all the expansions to the hotel. Mariposa does not return to “the status quo” but its economy and business infrastructure have both expanded, and the expansion was not achieved by becoming like the city but by conforming to how urbanites view the small town: a good place to go for a vacation and catch some big fish. The structure and design of Smith’s bar mirrors the Mariposans’ self-perception until they finally accept an “accurate” representation of their community.

Illusionary Urbanity

The second sketch, “The Speculation of Jefferson Thorpe,” despite focusing on the northern mining boom, once again employs the town-city comparison. Leacock begins the story by describing Thorpe’s barbershop. The building has a false-front, “a form of architecture much used in Mariposa and understood to be in keeping with the pretentious and artificial character of modern business” (38). The architecture, which makes the building look like it is three stories tall, is an illusionary copy of downtown buildings that actually have multiple stories with apartments or offices above the ground level retail. The building then, somewhat like Smith’s café, is a form of illusionary citification. Inside the shop there are numerous signs promising
“decadent” services—hot and cold baths, Turkish shampoo, Roman massages—but, of course, Thorpe does not have the facilities to actually provide such luxuries. Thorpe’s business, much like everything in Mariposa, pretends to be much more sophisticated and urbane than it really is. Indeed, the narrator ironically undermines the original description by questioning how Thorpe’s enterprise could even make any money, given that a shave only costs five cents and “in Mariposa, shaving isn’t the hurried, perfunctory thing that it is in the city,” as one could last “anywhere from twenty-five minutes to three-quarters of an hour” (39). The introduction to Thorpe’s business is structurally important because it establishes Thorpe’s inept business practices and it suggests that his family may actually live off the chicken eggs that his wife sells to locals and summer visitors (41). While Thorpe appropriates the image of a successful city barbershop, his business practices are incompetent at best.

If Thorpe struggles to manage something as simple as a barbershop, it shouldn’t be surprising that he utterly fails when he attempts to become a financier. Thorpe talks a big game. His favourite subject while shaving customers is the financial market and the adventures of capitalists like Carnegie and Rockefeller. And when the mining boom hits up north, Jefferson becomes the town’s authority on venture capital. While the town celebrates its “proximity” to the new mineral deposits, which are actually over 200 miles away, they do not mimic the mining communities but rather the city’s financial sector. Two weeks after the discovery of silver in Cobalt, “they put a partition down Robertson’s Coal and Wood Office and opened the Mariposa Mining Exchange” (42). The town’s decision to locate the exchange in the lumber shop, much like the description of the barbershop, foreshadows the town’s ignorance of finance capital; for they place the exchange in the lumber shop merely because it is associated with raw materials, the town’s exchange bank, obviously, would be a more logical location. A retail shop selling coal and lumber has very little to do with the exchanging of stocks. While the town “went wild”
talking about stocks and trading stocks, no one actually knows anything about financial markets or the basic details about the companies they invest in (42).

Their ignorance is eventually exposed when Thorpe and several other Mariposans lose all their money in a fraudulent Cuban agricultural development. The scam blatantly stresses the degree to which the townies cannot distinguish between the imaginary and real geography. Stylistically, the sketch’s humour relies upon hyperbolizing Mariposa’s spatial influence and economic importance. The small town, located half way between the frontier and the city, contradictorily claims knowledge of Bay Street’s inner-workings. The real estate scam satirizes this obscured sense of geography by hyperbolizing the distance between Mariposa, the physical enterprise, and the financial market. “They didn’t hesitate, these Cuban people that wrote to Jeff from Cuba—or from a post-office box in New York—it’s all the same thing, because Cuba being so near to New York that mail is all distributed from there” (48-49). By juxtaposing the mining ventures with the real estate scam, Leacock viciously exposes the town’s greed, vanity, and ignorance. Just as the townies know little about Cuba and New York City, they have no idea what actually goes on in the frontier (Cobalt) or the big city (Toronto).

While the story satirizes Mariposa for its urbane delusions and small-town ignorance, Leacock offers subtle hints that allow the reader to account for the disparity between the town’s real and supposed economy. The majority of the characters explicitly identified as investors do not actually have any capital. Thorpe must sell his wife’s chickens to raise capital to fund his speculations. Jim Eliot mortgages the drug store and “jammed it all into Twin Tamagami” (42). Judge Pepperleigh invests his wife’s money and Lawyer McCartney uses all of his sister’s money. It seems a little odd that Leacock would devote an entire paragraph to noting that the town’s “excess” capital originates from loans or from taking money from the Mariposan women.
The detail has two important functions. Firstly, it suggests how individualism and materialism threaten to destroy the community. Secondly, the fact that the women have managed to save money, while the men have not, seems to be pertinent. It is difficult to make an indisputable reading of this trend, for while we know that Mrs. Thorpe makes money from the chickens, we do not find out how the other women have managed to generate income. But if Mrs. Thorpe’s example is representative of the entire town, as the story about Mr. Thorpe’s investments are, then we have another example of privileging the generation of real capital—the sale of goods and services—over finance capital.  

Indeed, the only person who actually profits from the mining boom is Josh Smith who grew up in the north; he buys potatoes from the farmers and sells them in Cobalt “at profit of five dollars a bag” (43). Smith understands the city and the frontier, and realizes that Mariposa’s economy is reliant upon supplying the frontier’s and the city’s demands for agricultural products and entertainment. The story concludes with Smith realigning the Thorpes with the real economy: he asks Mrs. Thorpe to supply him with seven dozen eggs a day which Smith will use to feed the travelers who relax in his hotel as they transit between the mines and the city. Similarly, Thorpe, whose barbershop is located directly across the street from Smith’s hotel, is able to recover some of his losses by working longer hours servicing “the commercial travellers” who ride the trains (37). Symbolically, Thorpe’s store becomes a form of ironic pastoral, the clacking of the stock market’s ticker-tape is replaced with the cackling of hens. The narrator jokes, “They exult so every morning over the eggs they lay that if you wanted to talk to Rockefeller in the barber shop you couldn’t hear his name for all the cackling” (52). Once again, Mr. Smith shows Mariposa how it can profit by embracing its economic function as a small town.

28 See Leacock’s *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* for the author’s opinions on laissez-faire capitalism.
The Ironic Pastoral

Leacock’s consistent, but subtle, indexing of the community’s economic welfare serves as an ironic indicator. In both sketches, the Mariposans mimic what they perceive to be the city’s glamour, but they lack both the knowledge and capital to sustain either industry. As Mariposa’s economy contracts, the ironic distance between the pretense and the real becomes greater. Smith’s hotel, while in its extra-urbane form, loses money on every meal sold until he abandons the urban façade. Similarly, the Mariposans’ love affair with financial capital proves disastrous. Despite the turmoil, Mariposa’s economy does expand after Mr. Smith shows the community how to profit as a small town: by embracing Mariposa’s “real” function as a tourist destination and as a producer of agricultural goods. While the sketches certainly criticize individualism and materialism, critics have disassociated the immorality from the small town. The Mariposans may be innocent, and ignorant, but they repeatedly reveal their corruption and immorality. In the economic sketches, the immorality originates from the community’s developmental hubris, its unwillingness to accept its role within the metropolitan economy and its envy of the regional city. The placement of the sketches at the beginning of the cycle is noteworthy because Mariposa’s defining characteristics are presented as products of the region’s geography and economy. The sketches primarily satirize the particular form of small-town life produced by the urbanization of Canada, while still, nevertheless, endorsing the government’s project of rapid-industrial urbanization.29

29 The final sketch satirizes the 1911 general election where Mr. Smith runs for the Conservative Party and wins the election. The sketch primarily mocks politicians. Smith is ignorant of the Conservative platform that promised even higher tariffs on imported manufactured goods and to contribute funds to the British Navy. He pledges to do anything the voters ask him to do including to both raise and abolish the tariff. The story does not provide a detailed
The epilogue re-affirms the importance of urbanization but relates the idea to the collection’s structure. “L’Envoi. The Train to Mariposa,” is set in the Mausoleum Club, presumably the same building Leacock satirizes in *Arcadian Adventures of the Idle Rich*, and suggests that the sketches are the product of a conversation between the narrator and a second-person urbanite who recall their youth. By addressing the reader as “you” Leacock presents “L’Envoi” as an allegory of a nation that grew up in the small town but that has forgotten its childhood after “these long years of money-getting in the city” (186). The epilogue reverses the sketches’ ironic structure by invoking the pastoral mode: the two rich urbanites idealize Mariposa as a pure space that has avoided the materialism and individualism they associate with the city. Indeed, the narrator describes an imaginary train ride back to Mariposa, where the train’s technology and the landscape’s level of development regress until he reaches Mariposa—a small town that has not changed in forty years (183). The small town represents 1871 Canada, a time that pre-dates the national policy and when 81% of Canadians lived in municipalities with populations under 1000 citizens. But the narrator’s Mariposa is entirely a product of memory, he and the listener have never returned home and hence the small town remains a nostalgic and melancholic space associated with an imaginary (national) childhood—a qualification that also emphasizes the story’s nostalgic mythos and the impossibility of a physical return to the past. Leacock’s ironic pastoral is an appropriate mode to with which end the story. It reiterates the importance of the illusion vs. reality theme. The final sketch can only be read ironically because the previous sketches contradict the values the narrator associates with the small town—the overview of the Conservatives’ advocacy of the national policy and hence one cannot conclude that the sketch endorses any specific ideology. However, Leacock did vigorously campaign for the Conservatives and explicitly favoured economic-nationalism, but the sketch does not invite such a biocritical reading.
Mariposans prove just as decadent, vain, materialistic, individualistic, and hypocritical as their urban counterparts in *Arcadian Adventures*. But these vices assume a particular form in the small town and they can certainly be differentiated from the rampant corruption we find in Plutoria. By invoking the pastoral mode, Leacock aesthetically stresses that to understand Mariposa is to understand the small town’s relationship to the city. The Mariposans continually compare themselves to Hogtown, always claiming that Mariposa is more modern, more developed, and more important than the regional metropolis. The epilogue reverses this structure by romanticizing Mariposa precisely because it is less modern, less developed, and less corrupt than the metropolis. Both the “small town” and “city” perspectives produce Mariposa through its relationship to the metropolis, but the small town represents two opposing abstractions neither of which mirrors Mariposa’s material conditions.
Chapter 4 The National-Municipal Dialectic: The Crisis of Economic-Nationalism and Douglas Durkin’s *The Magpie*

Douglas Durkin’s representation of the Winnipeg General Strike in *The Magpie* subtly but strategically makes use of Winnipeg’s history of industry-based urbanization to criticize the disparity between the romantic narratives undergirding the national policies and the actual pollution and poisoned class relations found in Canadian cities. By historicizing and close reading *The Magpie*, we appreciate how Durkin aligns his protagonist with a gussied-up form of maple-leaf-forever economics and presents Winnipeg as a municipality that has betrayed the government’s progressive vision for the nation.

Durkin’s characters embody representative ideological perspectives and social positions. On the capitalist side, we have Mr. Lasker Blount, Canada’s most successful moneybags and industrialist. He embodies the vulgarities of laissez-faire capitalism and the upper-class’s insidious, Union-Jack nationalism that perpetuates a rigid class hierarchy that amounts to “little more than a fatuous defence of an arrogant feudализм” (206). Gilbert Nason, Winnipeg’s leading industrialist, embodies a moderate stance that, while denying the workers’ right to collective bargaining, attempts to create a co-operative approach to industry that allows labour representatives to participate in the company’s management. His ideological foil is Amer, a notorious socialist whose politics remain ambiguous but who is, nonetheless, presented as reasonable; he accuses the capital and labour leaders of political opportunism that has sensationalized and trivialized the strike’s core issues. Jeanette Bawden, a war-widow who was formerly a member of the bourgeoisie, represents the Bolshevists and believes that only a bloody revolution will correct matters. Craig Forrester, the protagonist, assumes an impossible middle
position between the capitalists and socialists that seeks reconciliation and advocates collaboration so that all may mutually benefit. His ideological perspective is symbolically represented by an idiosyncratic quirk in which he constantly evaluates his relationship to other characters through geometric shapes, usually triangles. While introducing Forrester, the narrator explains:

While he listened to others talking, he fitted their opinions into a kind of geometric plan that rose instinctively in his mind every time he heard an argument. Logic for him was a kind of symmetry. Truth was a balance of form. He sensed an error in judgment as a carpenter might sense an error in length or breadth or height. His religion was a faith in the order of the world in which he lived. Friendship was an experiment in the harmony of human nature. (4-5)

All the ideological perspectives are organized into balanced triangles with Craig equally distanced from two opposing poles: he finds Blount’s hypocritical Toryism and Bawden’s Bolshevism mutually repulsive, and he is sympathetic to Nason’s and Amer’s reformist stances. However, Craig’s ambivalence results in his isolation from both camps. In a city bitterly fissured by a prolonged and violent general strike, Craig must choose a side, but his unwillingness to do so ends in bankruptcy, divorce, and madness—hence his nickname, The Magpie.

Winnipeg’s Hypocritical Liberal-Capitalism

Critics have situated The Magpie within the political contexts of post-Great-War Canada. Peter E. Rider, in his introduction to the 1974 reprint, notes that the novel’s tragedy originates
from the failure of Canadians to agree upon whether the government should return to its pre-war political order or implement its utopian wartime promises. He explains, “The time had arrived for the country’s rulers to redeem the sacrifices made during the war. They had promised social justice and they now had to provide it. Tragically there was no consensus on what form it should take. Many people, especially the wealthy and powerful, fearing the threat of communism, felt that innovation was not possible” (x). War and peace certainly provide the impetus for change but the social and political issues have legacies that originate before 1919. Durkin’s representation of Winnipeg is more nuanced than critics have suggested. The two major studies on *The Magpie* (Arnason, Rider) ignore the significance of Winnipeg’s history and, oddly, downplay the novel’s epochal event: the strike. While the Winnipeg General Strike is related to post-war political idealism, it more precisely reflects the city’s history of conflict between the commercial elite and working-class. As James Bercuson explains, “The strike reflected [sic] more than a decade and a half of growing class polarization that had preceeded it. Although it clearly marked a new and higher level of class conflict, it was also one of a long series of events that began before it and continued long after it” (198). Appreciating Winnipeg’s particular political climate is of fundamental importance for understanding *The Magpie*, for Durkin highlights how Winnipeg, as a municipality, flouted the federal government’s extremely mild “social” capitalism.

Winnipeg is the product of aggressive economic-expansionism and the contradictions of laissez-faire capitalism. It was, perhaps, the most classist and ideologically hypocritical municipality of Canada’s modern period. The city owes its material success to its early founders that used the municipality’s finances to provide railway companies with funds and promised to build these firms’ costly bridges in exchange for re-routing the locomotives’ tracks through the middle of Winnipeg (Artibise *Winnipeg: A Social* 24-25). Since Winnipeg’s inception, all of City
Hall’s resources were exclusively devoted to economic intervention to encourage expansion. While the city’s offices were subject to elections, the town’s incorporation assured that the commercial elite would control who won and who lost. In Winnipeg votes represented property not individuals. Until the late 1910s Freeholders were required to demonstrate that they owned at least $100 of property and leaseholders had to demonstrate that they had a net worth of $200 in order to qualify to vote. As Alan J. Artibise quips, “Although this property qualification might not seem too high by today’s standards it did disenfranchise thousands of Winnipeggers. In 1906, for example, when the population was over 100,000 there were only 7,784 registered voters. Clearly the other 92,216 were not all females, under twenty-one, and of non-British citizenship” (38). The democratic inequity was further exacerbated because voters who owned property in multiple wards were entitled to a vote in each ward. The city’s political structure assured that the municipality would essentially function as a democratic plutocracy. Reflecting the concerns of those who were able to vote, Winnipeg’s public resources were solely devoted to preserving their assets and increasing their profits. City Hall viewed “Winnipeg as a community of private money-makers, they expressed little concern with the goal of creating a humane environment for all the city’s citizens. Accordingly, habits of community life, an attention to the sharing of resources, and a willingness to care for all men, were not much in evidence in Winnipeg’s struggle to become a ‘great’ city” (23). Since the working-class was all but denied a role in municipal politics, the workplace became the arena in which the proletariat could initiate change. The primary option available for the majority of citizens to improve their living conditions was collective bargaining and, by extension, The Strike; indeed, the Winnipeg General Strike was preceded by a decade of smaller strikes within the city’s railroad and building industries.
Considering the social and political organization of Winnipeg, it is not surprising that *The Magpie* is overwhelmingly attuned to the characters’ relationships to property. The narrator introduces Craig Forrester by providing a brief history of his family’s relationship to Winnipeg and the land. Old man Forrester emigrated to the west when Winnipeg was being founded, and worked as a Railroad Contractor, who invested his earnings in land, “as an earnest of faith in the country’s future” (6). The land provides old man Forrester enough wealth to establish a family farm, pay for Craig’s university education, and buy his son a seat on The Winnipeg Grain Exchange. When Craig becomes an adult, the two generations embody much of Winnipeg’s moneyed genealogy: they have profited from the northwest extension of the railway, from the downtown and “suburb” realty speculation, from wheat and cattle, and, perhaps most importantly, by gaining the local equivalent of a peerage: a seat at the Grain Exchange.

Craig’s family history contextualizes his relationship with almost all the characters. As one of two characters that actually change classes, Craig is able to empathize with both labour and capital. But Craig’s working-class friendships are, at times, ironically represented. His relationship with Jimmy Dyer—an enlisted man who served under Craig during the war—emphasizes how Winnipeg’s social hierarchy reflects property. They bump into one-another early in the novel when Craig is driving to a dinner party at the house of Winnipeg’s most gilded family: the Nasons. Dyer has recently returned from the Front, but things are not going too well and he is rather bitter about “Bloody Saturday,” where the RCMP charged and fired upon the strikers on 26 June 1919—the event that symbolizes the end of the strike.\(^{30}\) Dyer expresses the

\(^{30}\) This detail demonstrates that Durkin alters the Strike’s chronology. Here, we have characters reacting to Bloody Saturday but later chapters represent the build-up to strike, i.e. the attempt by the metal works industry to join the trade union, that union’s plan to join the national One Big Union, and the formation of the Citizens Committee of 1000.
disillusionment and struggles experienced by many of the war veterans (especially the appeal of armed revolution to a group of trained soldiers who felt abandoned by the government). On a slightly subtler level, the scene is fraught with irony as Forrester lectures that changes will come in time:

The world is looking for something else now. It’s looking for men who will forget class distinctions at home just as they did in the trenches. There were no sects there—there should be at least less of that kind of thing now that the lesson has been learned. There was no Labour and Capital there—they should get together here. There was no high and low in the mud in Flanders—why should we begin to make the distinction as soon as we get back to our own country? (14)

Despite Forrester’s good intentions, he ignores the truth that war made men buddies, yes, but not equals. Forrester, a man with an education and an occupation bought by his father’s money, instantly becomes an officer when he joins the army, whereas lower-class enlisted men, such as Dyer, are only able to advance to the rank of Sergeant Major. Forrester is a Captain—a rank aristocrats may purchase—and Dyer is a Sergeant. On the home front, property once again determines their positions in the social hierarchy. Craig slides back into his bought position on the Grain Exchange, whereas Dyer is left destitute.

Durkin develops the point further by juxtaposing Dyer’s house with a description of the Nason’s “pile.” The Sergeant ironically refers to his home as a “mansion” (16). It is “a little green and white ‘shack’ standing well back from the street in the shadow of two small elms whose branches swept the roof” (16). Dyer’s shack, which he built himself with four years’ worth of savings, is sparsely furnished, boasting cheap chairs and decorations (18). Readers familiar with Winnipeg’s history will recognize that housing costs were artificially inflated due
to rampant realty speculation and the municipality’s zoning regulations. Forrester, whose family has benefited from the city’s plumped-up property market, is partially responsible for the inflated cost of living. Hence the scene subtly suggests how Winnipeg’s record of land wheeling-dealing not only contributed to the city’s class disparities but also perpetuated them by inflating the cost of living well beyond the level of other Canadian cities during the period. The house’s location on the westside of town is also relevant. Forrester picks up Dyer while driving west along Portage and drops his warrior pal off at the edge of town in a new suburban development that, while unnamed in the novel, is St. James. We can say this with certainty, not only because of the geographical details, but due to the fact that Dyer built his house immediately before the outbreak of war precisely during the time that St. James was being developed as a middle-class suburb (Artibise Winnipeg: A Social 170). The neighbourhood was a bedroom-community retreat from the downtown core where housing units were being demolished to create more space for warehouses, factories, and trains. Dyer’s house, then, represents the family’s middle-class aspirations, but its pinched stature and barren interior suggests their stagnation. The truly middle-class resident would rely upon mass transportation to commute to work, but Dyer chooses to walk. The suggestion here is that while Dyer lives among the bourgeoisie, he is actually not of their number. In comparison, the Nason’s house is located in Crescentwood—an area that only Winnipeg’s most affluent could live in because it was not serviced by mass transit lines. Here car ownership was a pre-requisite, and the municipality’s restrictions on subdividing lots assured that only massive “piles” would be built in the neighbourhood (Artibise Winnipeg: A

31 The preface to J.G. Sime’s Our Little Life (1921) documents how the industrialization of Montreal’s core, notably by the railroad companies, resulted in the deterioration of housing conditions. The brief introduction describes the history of a housing block that slowly declines into a decrepit tenement building as the neighbourhood’s space is increasingly appropriated to fulfill the city’s and the nation’s industrial dreams. The novel offers the first sustained representation of an urban slum in Canada. There is a pressing need for a study on the representation of urban slums in modern Canadian fiction.
Social 167). Significantly, Durkin devotes an entire paragraph to describing the house’s “almost majestic” stone porch “which served as a shelter for visitors entering the house from automobiles” and the massive garage that could accommodate three cars (22). The house is not just a home, but a castle. Crescentwood was designed by the municipality and realty corporations to provide exclusive housing for the city’s elite. Only citizens that had access to a car could visit the Nason mansion. Hence, it is unsurprising that Durkin introduces Crescentwood as a neighbourhood inhabited by “men whose belief in the future of the city was as firm as their belief in God, and ten times more profitable” (22). The juxtaposition between Dyer’s and Nason’s houses establishes how the city’s geography embodies its class conflicts. As Artibise concludes his survey of the city’s neighbourhoods, “it is apparent that decisions made by city officials, businessmen, and home builders in one era had a profound effect on future events” and that, more specifically, the neighbourhoods’ homogeneity foreshadowed one of the key characteristics of the Winnipeg general strike: “lack of any willingness to understand the point of view of others” (173). Durkin strategically uses the descriptions of these neighbourhoods to suggest how the social and political tensions questioned in The Magpie are related to the city’s history.

Winnipeg’s unusual municipal structure deformed its culture and society. Social relationships followed class lines and fraternization was a no-no. Inevitably then, the social

32 There is the potential to theorize and map Durkin’s representation of Winnipeg’s urban form. Edward Soja while discussing the urban form of the “competitive industrial city” notes that the industrialization of the cityscape resulted in the creation of homogeneous neighbourhoods. “Rippling out from the Central Business District and employment nucleus was a zoned built environment of residential rings and radial sectors gridded to contain the attenuated daily journeys to work (for the urban proletariat) and the daily journeys to control workers (for the industrial bourgeoisie). The zonation was largely a matter of class, as the antagonistic social structure of competitive industrial capitalism became spatialized in segregated and socially homogenous urban compartments and enclosures” (Postmodern 177). Durkin’s representation of Winnipeg’s geography certainly invites such a reading and the novel could provide a compelling case study on the spatialization of social relationships in the industrial city.
relationships in *The Magpie* mirror property relationships. Durkin articulates the motif through Forrester and Bawden, the only two characters that mingle with members of both the labour and capital classes and, equally importantly, they are the only two characters that experience class mobility. Forrester becomes a member of the city’s financial and social elite when he marries Marion Nason, a union that demands he build friendships with the city’s financial and political leaders. Bawden, whose husband was the Nasons’ lawyer, tumbles down class and social hierarchies when her husband is killed during the war. Bawden’s ideological perspectives strongly reflect the values of her class. When she was blue-blood by marriage, she happily “moved in his circles, played bridge with the wives of his chief clients, sought for ways to help him make his position secure” (98). But after his death, she realizes that she had been in a state of false-consciousness, metaphorically described as a dream, until she woke up and realized that the haute bourgeoisie had exploited her and her husband. She says to Craig, “They took him from me—they did—the Nasons of the world, the kindly intentioned men and women who are kind so long as their sense of security is not disturbed, who are generous so long as they are not asked to return what is not their own, who are considerate so long as their comfort is assured” (167). The epiphany turns Jeannette Bolshevist, and she realizes, “there is only one hope for the world and that is to kill off the kindly intentioned ones and let us get on with the business of making the world over.” Jeannette’s comments occur in a scene when she explains to Craig why she has not visited his and Marion’s house for several months. Jeannette, who worked with Marion at a charitable organization, was exiled from the group and the upper-crust after she defended one of their members whose son had been arrested “for treasonable utterances during the days of the strike” (166). Jeannette and the innocent mother are both subsequently ostracized unless they change their “views on social matters and learned to keep people in their place” (166). Refusing to do so and dismissing Marion’s Tory elitism, Jeannette forges new friendships
with the city’s young immigrants, who are revolutionary socialists, and eventually begins a romantic relationship with Amer. The scene is doubly ironic. Bawden’s history and class mobility, of course, inverse Craig’s and foreshadow his subsequent ouster from the capitalized elite. In addition, Bawden clearly tries to warn Craig about the problems that he will soon encounter due to the incongruity between his ideological beliefs and his admittance within the ranks of the plutocrats. But Forrester still naively and tragically believes that the two sides can be reconciled.

The National-Municipal-Urbanization Dialectic

Durkin uses a related rural-urban dialectic to contain allegorically the threats of class warfare in Winnipeg and present rural space as a symbol for nationalism. Peter E. Rider reads the novel’s use of space moralistically, arguing that the conclusion, where Craig flees the city for his family farm, “reaffirms his traditional values, which stress honesty and simplicity and reject the corruption, callousness, and selfishness of urban life” (xiii). He adds, “by having his hero make this choice, Durkin adopts one of the great themes of Canadian literature and intellectual thought, the agrarian myth.” Rider’s thoughts certainly underline the novel’s moral didacticism, but his comments reduce ideological conflict to a mere moral dilemma. Similarly, James Doyle argues that The Magpie is an example of “what Georg Lukács called ‘romantic anti-capitalism,’ a historical antagonism to industrial capitalism and its social and cultural consequences that can be traced back to the Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century” (47). Both critics read the novel using a version of Frye’s garrison-wilderness division, notably foregrounding how Craig’s choice to return to the farm corresponds to a rejection of the city, slums, mills, and parasitic capitalists. But both critics problematically ignore how the text develops a localized,
indeed nationalistic, thematic statement regarding Canada’s urbanization. Winnipeg is simply the manifestation of a bastardized and corrupted version of Canadian economic-nationalism, one that has exclusively promoted greed, individualism, and, more importantly, class warfare to the point that the city’s vulgarities threaten the entire Canadian nation. The rural periphery, while representing a return to an earlier and nostalgic time, serves as a romantic symbol for a highly idealized version of good economic citizenship. In this sense, Durkin’s use of the rural-urban dialectic has some parallels with Sinclair’s.

Durkin repeats a phrase to distinguish the Forresters’ and the Nasons’ relationship to the city. While describing the Forresters’ farm and connection to the region, Durkin writes, “Old Forrester had been a railroad contractor in the days when the West was still young and had invested some of his money in a section of land as an earnest of faith in the country’s future” (my emph. 6). In contrast, consider the description of the inhabitants of Crescentwood, “Gilbert Nason had been one of the men whose belief in the future of the city was as firm as their belief in God, and ten times more profitable. In fact, while his faith in the Almighty had wavered more than once when he had had trouble with Labour Unions, he could not recall one investment in real estate that had failed to vindicate his faith in the good sense and the vision that had prompted him to make it” (22). The repetition and slight differences between the introductions to the Forresters and the Nasons are of fundamental importance to the novel’s mediation on economic-nationalism. Both sentences rely upon geographical puns that establish not only the families’ political allegiances but also which space symbolically manifests these associations. The Forresters are federalists. They have a faith in the country (the nation), and the country (the rural periphery) symbolizes their ideological belief. The Nasons are what can insufficiently be described as localists. They believe in the city (the municipal government) that is symbolized by Winnipeg. The second sentence qualifying Nason’s “faith” suggests how little separation there
is between the city’s rich and the city’s government. Hence, somewhat ironically, Nason’s faith in the municipality is no different from his “faith” in his own “vision” and “good sense.” As Artibise notes in his history of Winnipeg, until the Winnipeg General Strike the commercial class, the social elite, and the politicos “were indistinguishable; membership in one group was almost always accompanied by membership in the other group” (25). Winnipeg was ruled by men like Nason. The city and the General Strike were the product of their ideological beliefs which produced an inhumane environment rife with warfare between the moneyed and the penny-pincher that threatened to instigate a nation-wide socialist revolution. Thus Durkin makes important distinctions between the country and the city, the rural and the urban, nationalism and localism, to reconcile his narrative with Canadian nationalism.

Durkin’s fictionalization of the Citizens’ Committee of 1000 suggests the degree to which Winnipeg had debased the core beliefs of Canadian nationalism and the nation-state. The Citizens’ Committee was the reincarnation of the Citizens’ Committee of 100 that had been formed to organize volunteer scabs to provide basic city services after the municipal government introduced the “Fowler Amendment” that denied civic employees the right to strike. This act, of course, promptly instigated a protest strike. The conflict erupted in May 1918 and was one of the major preludes to the Winnipeg General Strike (Bercuson 63). The Citizens’ Committee of 1000 was organized by Winnipeg’s prominent businessmen to present a united alternative to the labour movement. The committee served two functions, it would manage and operate essential services in the event of a general strike, and the executive would represent the city and its business interests to the provincial and federal authorities (120-121). Hence the committee does not represent the views or ideals of the nation, but rather the narrow goals of Winnipeg’s commercial elite that, nevertheless, claimed to represent Canada and the British Empire. Lasker Blount, who forms and leads the fictionalized group, delivers a sensational speech declaring all-
out class warfare against unionists, socialists, and Communists. He promises to blacklist and then exile the union leaders, to torture “men who peddled seditious literature” until “they swore allegiance with their last gasp,” and demands that anyone who resisted Canada’s social order should “get to hell out of it” (206)! When the committee invites input from the community, both a little Briton and Amer are kicked out for questioning Blount’s narrow imagining of the Canadian nation and polis. The little man asks, “‘W’at I wants to know is, ‘ose bleedin’ country is this? Is it ‘is?’ He pointed to Blount as he asked the question. ‘Is it yours?’ He waved a thin arm over the men seated at the tables. ‘An’ if it is, ’ow’d you come by it’” (208). The man’s comments mock the committee’s celebration of democracy, pointing out that Blount’s opinions and plans are tyrannical. The Winnipeggers chant “throw him out!” and “God Save the King” until the man is tossed outside. The ironic scene exposes the fundamental hypocrisies within the elite’s self-interested nationalism. They sing “God Save the King!” to celebrate their loyalty to the Empire while banishing two actual Britons from their meeting; similarly, Blount’s anti-labour plans violate the fundamental principles of Canadian democracy that they are supposedly defending. By foregrounding the most disturbing and egregious beliefs informing the elite’s hypocritical, liberal-capitalist ideology, Durkin represents their threatening dedication to class warfare as a local and municipal corruption of Canadian nationalism and the constitutional ideals of the nation-state: peace, order, and good governance. The members of the fictional committee represent little more than their own self-interests despite wrapping themselves in maple leaves and praising the crown.

While *The Magpie* certainly represents the labour movement sympathetically, the text nevertheless rejects radicalism as a viable alternative. Forrester is particularly repulsed by Bolshevism because he believes it is a political system that merely advocates “putting the top on the bottom and the bottom on the top” (168). In three conversations with Jimmie, Jeannette, and
Millie Dyer, Forrester rejects radicalism because it does not address the fundamental issues regarding economic and political inequity; revolution, as he understands it, only perpetuates class friction by inverting the hierarchy. Indeed, the strongest advocates of Bolshevism are the two widows, Jeannette and Millie, and they primarily crave revenge, rather than reform. On the way to the Citizens’ Committee, Forrester and Nason visit the Dyers. But they discover that Jimmy died shortly after Craig’s previous visit a year ago. Millie, mad with rage, rejects their offer of financial assistance and instead lectures them on the upcoming revolution:

They will force the women to make war on those who made war for us. We’ll go out and find the men who sit in upholstered chairs and play the game of politics and business and move the Jimmy Dyers of the world about on the checker board like so many bits of wood. We’ll find them. They killed our men. We’ll kill them. What else have we to do? We’ll dog their steps. We’ll make them afraid to go out unattended. They’ll be afraid to touch food or water for fear of being poisoned. There’ll be ways, and ways—and ways! (197)

By juxtaposing Millie’s speech with Blount’s, Durkin drafts one of the novel’s major ideological triangles. Forrester rejects both positions because they basically promote the same world order that establishes a rigid hierarchy and brutally exploits the masses so that a select few may benefit. Both perspectives ensure class dissension, risk destroying civic unity, and rattle the very foundations of the nation-state.

Durkin also problematizes the two moderate perspectives because, while they seek collaboration, both still insist upon empowering a specific class. Gilbert Nason’s factories are at the heart of the Winnipeg General Strike, especially his “experiment,” a metal works factory that sought co-operative management between labour and capital. The Winnipeg General Strike
resulted from an on-going dispute between several prominent businesses and the Metal Trades Council and The Building Trades Council. The two labour groups wanted to amalgamate all the city’s smaller unions in the metals and building sectors into sub-divisions of the city’s Trades Council; similarly, the larger Trades Council was encouraging its membership to join a nationwide industrial union, what would eventually be called One Big Union. The metal and trade councils had three simple demands: “union recognition, wage parity with the railway shops, and the eight-hour day” (Bercuson 111). Nason’s experimental factory seems to be based upon Vulcan Iron Works, that, in an attempt to abate labour demands, operated an “open shop” where unionized and non-unionized workers elected representatives that participated within the company’s management and, in Nason’s factory, they were provided access to the company’s financial accounts (110). Nason, much like his real counterparts, was willing to allow his employees to bargain collectively, but without the aid of external unions (Durkin 193). Admirably, he operates the company at a massive loss in an attempt to demonstrate that a “contented workman wants no union to stand behind” and provides his employees with generous benefits. For Nason, if the workers can contribute to the company’s management and appreciate their share of the company’s profits then there is no need for outside unions. Durkin, however, also uses Nason’s factory to criticize the moderate socialist perspective. For, Amer secretly convinces the workers to unionize and join the larger Metal Trades Council. Their unwillingness to negotiate honestly escalates into a city-wide conflict that could spark a national crisis.

The impasse eventually instigated the Winnipeg General Strike, for all the city’s workers went on strike in a demonstration of solidarity and to defend their belief that union recognition was an unconditional right. Due to Craig’s association with Winnipeg’s elite, we are only granted limited access to the union meetings and the majority of the information about the labour movements originates from Jeanette’s second-hand accounts. Craig does, however, attend one
meeting in a park where Mr. Tuttle, the labour leader, gives a sensational speech advocating a nationwide general strike. Focalizing Tuttle, the narrator states, “unless the strike were settled and ‘settled right’, there wouldn’t be a wheel turning on any railroad between Halifax and Vancouver, and there wouldn’t be a bushel of wheat moved from an elevator between the Great Lakes and the Rockies. They knew what they could do—the workers knew! They could put out the lights, they could turn off the water, they could produce a milk famine” (252-253). Tuttle and his speech implicitly represent the drive towards forming One Big Union. Notably, the Winnipeg General Strike occurred while Canadian union leaders were advocating the formation of a nationwide union that would represent all of Canada’s workers. As Bercuson explains, Winnipeg’s Trades Council was increasingly encouraging its members to consider amalgamating with the proposed One Big Union: “it demonstrated that many western labour leaders now looked at society through polarized glasses and were leading their followers along the radical paths they deemed appropriate to protect their class interest” (101). He adds that the Trades Council’s decision to consider amalgamation served “notification that labour was moving towards mass organization, general strikes, and continual confrontation with government and business.” Tuttle’s speech, then, paraphrases the key ideas supporting industrial unionism and suggests the degree to which labour was willing to wage a war of attrition against capitalists, the governments, and the citizenship—a negotiation tactic that would, ultimately, reconfigure Canadian politics and society along explicit class lines. Craig, who recognizes labour’s right to organization, finds the working-class mobilization just as repugnant and destructive as the capitalist-front Citizens’ committee.

The romance plots dramatize the novel’s factory/grain-elevator division. *The Magpie* is divided into three sections: Marion, Martha, and Madness. The structure forms another triangle where Craig chooses between the two women and between two symbolic spaces. Marion clearly
embodies corrupt urbanism. She is vain, classist, materialist, individualistic, and repeatedly indulge in adultery. As Gilbert Nason’s daughter, she is the metonymy of the city’s hypocrisies. Indeed, the novel’s major ironic motif involves Craig misidentifying Marion as western civilization’s hope for a better future, a “creature” of “light and laughter” who was “sent into the world that romance might live and that men might be coaxed to forget their sordid memories and yield to tender allurement” (42). Marion does not offer hope or romance, but as Craig becomes devoted to her, he gradually abandons his commitment to reform; she constantly forbids him from associating with those below their class and censures his political opinions. She demands that Craig conform to her ideology or face divorce. Martha, Craig’s childhood neighbour and former lover, incarnates the “true” hope for change and romantic idealism. Martha also functions as a slightly metafictional character. She left Winnipeg to train as a sculptor in Paris and returns conveying a sort of romantic spirit of modernism. Her statues, which she builds with clay from her father’s farm field, are expressionist, and each shape is intended to incarnate an abstract emotional state. In this sense, her artwork makes the novel’s synecdochic and allegorical use of characters and spaces explicit; and her artwork parallels Craig’s tendency to project abstract ideas onto other people. When visiting Martha’s studio, Marion is infatuated with the pieces of artwork but dismisses the concepts informing the aesthetic: “I don’t see the sense in this futuristic art—or any art that requires so much explaining. This must be explained, for I’m quite sure I don’t understand it” (180). The scene ironically suggests the degree to which Forrester and Marion misunderstand one-another. Marion cannot understand Craig’s and Martha’s tendency to instill people and objects with abstract values. Similarly, Craig continues to wrongly associate Marion with the very romance that Martha embodies.

The city eventually undermines the idealism informing Martha’s artwork. Marion claims to have “discovered” Martha, and with the help of the Blounts, organizes an art gallery in which
to display and sell Martha’s creations. More than a hundred members of the city’s rich attend the exhibit, each one expressing concern about the artwork’s confusing and morally alarming content. Still, these socialites celebrate Martha as a tribute to the city’s achievements. But Blount buys the most impressive piece, for the grossly inflated cost of $5000, and then offers an extended speech about how he will improve Martha’s art by making it useful.

Realizing that we are practical people and that art, if it is to have any real place in our modern life, must have its practical application, I wish to convince Miss Lane of the utmost sincerity of my intentions with regard to her work. I have no intention of placing the figure, much as I prize it personally, in an obscure corner of my own home and leaving it there to be forgotten. I have determined, in short, to do my little part towards making her work known throughout the country. To that end, I have consulted with my good friend, Mr. Nason, and have learned that small replicas of the figure can be made from metal sufficiently inexpensive to justify having a few thousand of them struck off and distributed among the customers of my company for use as paper weight. (301)

By industrializing Martha’s art, Blount trivializes the romantic ideals the sculptures are supposed to manifest and mechanically reproduces the original piece until it becomes nothing more than an “inexpensive” corporate gift. The scene dramatizes how Winnipeg’s robber-baron capitalism manufactures rigid ideological conformity; labour and capital attempt to appropriate every facet of life within their worldview. According to Blount, Martha’s art demonstrates the excellence of rigid social hierarchies. “We can’t all be business men and we can’t all be politicians and we can’t all be artists, but we all have our place and we ought to keep it. If we all filled our place as well as you, Miss Lane, the world would be a very much better place to live” (295). The social elite, here indulging in philistine philanthropy, appropriate the exhibit to reproduce their classist
ideology. Martha’s sculptures are presented as testament to the city’s greatness and the cultural insight of her patrons. Indeed, they hope that Martha’s work will inspire a national artistic awakening. Similarly, Amer arrives late and announces that the labour leaders have rejected his idealist strategies and have opted to call a general strike. By juxtaposing the events, Durkin shows how Winnipeg rejects all idealism in favour a vulgar devotion to “practical” self-interest and ideological rectitude—a form of corruption that causes the idealist to enter a state of “madness.”

The corruption of Martha’s and Amer’s idealism correspondingly represents Winnipeg’s rejection of the notion that art and socialism can create a better world. But what of Craig? Forrester embodies an idealistic form of nationalism that imagined a model of national unity and belonging based upon shared economic growth. As we noted earlier, Forrester embodies Macdonald’s national policy. The senior Forrester contributed to Macdonald’s vision for the country by working on the transcontinental railroad, migrating to the prairies, and nurturing a family farm. Craig, we are told, could serve as the hero in the immigration poster produced by the Laurier government to attract settlers to the west. Imagining such a poster the narrator writes, “In the distance a group of grain elevators would lift their square forms against an aureole of light borrowed from a westering sun, while a railway train of prodigious length would creep over a gilded prairie carrying with it the highly romantic suggestion that ocean is linked to ocean across the measureless reaches of a vast continent” (5). The poster image includes the typical content of immigration propaganda produced by the Ministry of the Interior—the government body responsible for settling the west—and railroad companies that were distributed to Europe and the United States of America to attract immigrants to Canada. Notably, Canada’s romantic images are all associated with a pure agrarian landscape—the nation’s cities are only metonymically suggested by the hyperbolic train. When Craig assumes his seat at the Winnipeg
Grain Exchange, the family symbolically embodies one of the key goals of the national policy, to have rural and urban industries working in harmony to expand the Canadian economy. One generation would work the land, the second would work the market, and together they would develop the nation and feed the world’s people: the Forresters were everyday nation-builders. But, for Craig, his migration to Winnipeg has important symbolic value because he must “don a suit of business grey instead of the toggery of romance” (6). As Craig settles in Winnipeg, his ideals and consequently those of the nation-state are corroded and corrupted. The “toggery of romance” outfits no one well in the city: it’s London suits for the old boys club and rags for the poor.

The National-Policy Pastoral

When Craig, bankrupt and divorced, returns to the region’s rural periphery he basks in the landscape glorified in the immigration poster. Lying on the ground, he is slowly rejuvenated as the sunrise and the earth instill his body with “the fresh new strength of the earth itself” (239). Afterwards, he walks to the Lane farm where he reassumes his position behind the plough until father Lane instructs him to go to the kitchen for a country breakfast made by Martha. Craig’s return to the farm participates within the idealism and nostalgia of the pastoral mode. Durkin summons the Edenic by providing ample images of the majestic sunrise, the abundance of wild animals, and the tranquil farmland. But the concluding scenes do not offer an explicit symbolic statement. Craig certainly escapes the corruption, materialism, and individualism associated with Winnipeg. However, Craig rejects a return to an agrarian mode of production as a solution for Canada and he notes how farmers contribute to the same economic structure as their urban counterparts (182). Farmers, just like traders on the Grain Exchange, participate in a form of
capitalistic gambling that is subject to unpredictable fluctuations in demand, market manipulation, and, of course, weather patterns. Similarly, the history of the Forrester farm demonstrates how federal policies created an economy where rural and urban spaces are economically interdependent. *The Magpie*, then, allegorically uses the rural periphery in a similar manner as Sinclair’s Fort George and the nostalgic Mariposa in Leacock’s “L’Envoi”: the farmland represents a return to an earlier state, one associated with childhood, where the idealism informing Canadian economic-nationalism had yet to be corrupted by practice (i.e. greed, selfishness, and sheer stupidity).

Craig’s migration to the family farm is more complicated than a rejection of individualistic and materialistic values or a didactic lambasting of the destructive repercussions of building factories and building cities. Durkin uses the urban-rural dialectic to promote steadfastly the federal government’s project of fostering national belonging through shared prosperity. Indeed, Durkin portrays the Winnipeg General Strike as a national crisis in which the municipality of Winnipeg’s program of hypocritical, liberal capitalism imperils the nation-state by raising the specter of naked class warfare. Durkin goes to great length to localize the political turmoil and to criticize how the selfish actions of the few risk the wellbeing of the many. The city-country dialectic develops a grand-scale conflict between communal and individualistic values, where Winnipeg, referring here to both the divided population and the municipality, threatens national unity through its excessive commitment to notions of self-interest. Unfortunately, *The Magpie* does not provide a fully developed, alternative form of national belonging or economic development. Amer, while portrayed sympathetically, never articulates a political program beyond a vague form of socialism. Similarly, Craig’s migration to the farm is primarily escapist. He stands by his beliefs, but he fails to imagine a way for labour and capital to unite and his decision to move to the farm removes him from the blood-sport of politics.
Craig and Martha leave the city behind but their union symbolically directs the nation towards a future where idealism is basically magic—not strategic—thinking. Indeed, their romantic union symbolically aligns idealistic nationalism with art, a union that, not coincidentally, describes the thematic project of *The Magpie*. 
In his contribution to the second volume of *uTOpia* (2006)—a collection of essays on “The State of the Arts: Living with Culture in Toronto”—Michael Redhill laments the city’s cultural and architectural amnesia. As a youth, he used to wander the city, taking pictures of decades-old murals, or rather advertisements, which had been painted on the walls of Toronto’s factories, office buildings, and retail shops. But with the onset of gentrification in the early 1990s, these murals—and indeed entire building—were being bulldozed to make room for condos, cafes, and other hipster amenities. He complains, “it seems to me that Toronto is still too young a city to know what to do with its own legacies, and like any adolescent, it’s eager to adapt to fashion at the expense of self. As part of a natural urban process, all cities erase themselves, but there have been times in Toronto’s past when it seemed that there was a will among city fathers to junk the whole thing and start fresh” (“Toronto the dead” 320). His use of the murals as a metaphor for the fading past is astute. The photos he shares—a barely visible cigarette ad covering a two-story brick wall and a five-story Tip Top Tailor ad in the entertainment district—express his belief that the past is still here to be preserved, but its deteriorating state foreshadows the fact that the ads and their history will soon disappear. Redhill’s *Consolation* (2006), even if a failed novel, depicts this sense of nostalgia and encourages its readers to appreciate the value of knowing a city’s history. The present-day characters struggle to recover what they believe to be the first photographs of Toronto, which are
buried under the construction for a sports complex.\textsuperscript{33} If they do not stop the construction or convince the city to impose an archeological dig, the photos will be lost forever.

The developmental process that disturbs Redhill has been granted many names: post-industrialism, deindustrialization, gentrification, and “the creative city.” They are grand-scale terms seeking to document and describe how knowledge-based industry is replacing manufacturing as the dominant sector in advanced-capitalist nations. And the image that symbolizes this shift is the re-purposed factory—the downtown cores of most western nations are filled with abandoned, industrial buildings that new businesses are buying, remodeling, and transforming into office spaces, lofts, and clubs. But what is so unusual about the new urban economy is that artists are the first to redevelop such neighbourhoods. Despite their opposing views on post-industrialism, both Richard Florida and Richard Lloyd maintain that artists are the prophets of gentrification. As Lloyd synopsizes, “Many have noted the role that artists play as the vanguard of a distinctive sort of gentrification, in which underused spaces inherited from a city’s industrial past are reconfigured as live/work spaces and galleries” (16). Attracted by a neighbourhood’s cheap rent and gallery space, artists move in to an area and begin making formerly useless spaces useful. Soon, high-value, human-capital businesses—marketing, finance, high-tech, and production firms—are drawn to the neighbourhood due to its hip vibe. Shortly thereafter, condos begin towering to the sky. Within a decade or two, a dingy, abandoned urban centre becomes a thriving, downtown community populated by well-compensated creatives.

\textsuperscript{33} Redhill’s \textit{Consolation} is much like Michael Ondaatje’s \textit{In the Skin of a Lion} (1988), as both texts recover Toronto’s under-appreciated past.
Since Florida began theorizing the creative city in the early 1990s, municipal
governments across the globe have institutionalized the city guru’s policy recommendations.
Indeed, Canadian cities have been especially enamored with Florida, as Montreal, Toronto,
Hamilton, Calgary, and Vancouver have all “officially” mandated creative growth and hence
have directly tied their city’s prosperity to the arts and gentrification. Redhill’s reservations are
almost unique, for artists across the country have celebrated Florida’s work that testifies to the
arts’ contributions to regional and national economies. Indeed, all three levels of government
and private donors have poured over $1 billion into revitalizing Toronto’s cultural facilities—the
Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Canadian Opera Company, the Royal
Conservatory of Music, the National Ballet School, Roy Thomson Hall, and the Gardiner
Museum (“Creative City Planning Framework” 11). In 2003 alone, Toronto’s “creative sector”
contributed an estimated $9 billion to Canada’s GDP (37). And cities are reaping a windfall
from rising-tide property values, building permits, and zoning “bribes.” As Ute Lehrer and
Thorben Wieditz explain, section 37 of Ontario’s “Planning Act” allows developers to bypass
zoning regulations if they include space for artists or artistic activities within their buildings (and
if they pay the city a fee). From 1998 to 2009, Toronto collected over $35 million in revenue
from section 37 (149). Let us not be naïve: the private and public money pouring into the
marquee arts is economic stimulus masquerading as patronage.

The following three chapters track how authors have been reacting to post-industrialism,
how many have appropriated the creative city as a new image and metaphor for contemporary
national and/or transnational belonging that opposes the politically limiting discourses of
centennial cultural nationalism and multiculturalism. Its archetypal figure is the hipster, the arts-
savvy, counter-cultural bohemian who champions a liminal existence between centre and
margin. But far from merely charting artists’ endorsements of a newfangled urbanism, this
chapter identifies anxieties about the creative city’s class hierarchy and the continual threat that bohemia will be appropriated by the very square (“L7”) forces it loudly resists.

**Hipster Urbanism: Canada’s Urban Revolution**

In a 1999 *Globe and Mail* gossip column, Alexandra Gill demarked a “new breed” of Canadian writers who were due to replace the grey-haired cultural nationalists (“Books Boys” C22). Older authors—i.e. Margaret Atwood, Matt Cohen, Michael Ondaatje, Barry Callaghan, and their contemporaries—wrote maple-tinged narratives that were grounded in Canada’s past and rooted in rural settings, whereas younger writers were cosmopolitan, apolitical, and craved tantalizing “scenes.” In the centennial years, emerging writers founded a literary tradition with substantial help from government grants and radical small presses. The new generation changed the industry by embracing the media’s limelight and seeking any publicity possible to market its work. And for Gill, the leaders of the urbane movement were four young, white, and male Toronto writers—Derek McCormack, Andrew Pyper, Russell Smith, and Evan Solomon—who happened to be pals who haunted Bar Italia, a floridly decadent lounge on Toronto’s College Street. Several months later, Gill identified the female wing, the “Literary Babes,” a cell originating from the revival of *Blood & Aphorisms*. The publisher, Sam Hiyate, marketed the relaunch by selecting 14 young, attractive females to contribute to the issue and to “pose seductively” on the cover—including Ceri Marsh and Leah McLaren who were, at the time, dating Smith and Pyper (“The Case” C3). Hence, Gill created the Book Boys and Book Babes, a cohort of young Toronto writers who sought to overthrow Canada’s anti-Free-Trade literati and their Loonie metaphors.
Critics were not impressed with Gill’s articles and with the soon-rebranded Brat Pack’s mean-spirited criticism of the 1960s Establishment. The dandies became synonymous with the insidious aspects of contemporary book culture: they were, purportedly, crass, materialist, sexist, racist, vain, superficial, curators of the “cool” who were also unabashed self-promoters. Equally disturbing was their tendency to lambaste the core writers and ideals of Canadia...
articles and the Brat Pack’s comments exposed widespread anxieties about Canadian literature’s changing elite.

Oddly, those critical of the Brat Pack have ignored the writers’ reactions to the “Book Boys” and “Literary Babes” stories. McCormack claims Gill sensationalized her coverage, i.e., she based her article on their small talk during a photo shoot, which the authors believed to be “off record,” instead of on the content from the subsequent interview (208). Due to his deriding of Anne Michaels’s acclaimed Holocaust-set novel, *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), customers berated McCormack at his bookstore job and, he claims, some even called the shop demanding that he be fired (209). Indeed, the article resulted in Gill being socially ostracized by both Brat Pack proponents and opponents to the point that, a month later, she wrote a column describing how she was having trouble digging up gossip because she had alienated so many of Toronto’s artsy patrons and bohemians (“When Tongues” C3). The problem is, an article written by a by-line-craving gossip columnist, who seems to have a poor understanding of Canadian literary history and who seems to disregard journalistic ethics, has become the major source for the stories announcing the arrival of a vaguely defined literary movement.

This chapter situates the hipsters within the political and cultural currents of 1990s Canada. In doing so, it encourages critics to think differently about a loosely affiliated cohort of young, urban writers that began publishing early in the decade and became a prominent, if notorious, group of individuals by the millennium. It is their criticisms of “boomer” cultural nationalism and multiculturalism that most strongly supports the notion of approaching the authors as an identifiable group. Indeed, their valorization of the urban topography as the metaphoric basis for a new national mythology has blinkered critics to the quasi-movement’s internal diversity and has garrisoned critical discussions within yet another (overly simplistic)
version of the rural-urban dichotomy. This chapter offers the most comprehensive reading of “hipster” fiction by taking the dichotomy to its theoretical limits; in doing so, it presents a radical re-interpretation of hipsterism and multiculturalism, and demonstrates how authors were turning to the “new” urban geography to imagine new modes of national and transnational belonging.

Dialectical Hipsterism

Despite the volume of scholarship written on our bratty subjects, critics have generally avoided defining “hipster.” Indeed, its meaning is decidedly volatile. For some, the term is slanderous and provides the critic with a too-easy way to dismiss and morally condemn brash cultural proclamations or marketing practices. For others, the hipster embodies counter-cultural and marginal politics, a critical position with a stylized rhetoric that seeks to embarrass and harass society’s supposedly repressive forces. The word also describes a specific type of urban sub-culture that aligns itself with the ever elusive “before now.” Regardless of its competing—indeed contradictory—connotations, hipster is too valuable a critical term to abandon; hence to assure precision we should qualify our critical slang.

Norman Mailer’s The White Negro (1957) is, perhaps, the most notorious embodiment of hip, the early Caucasian adopter of “glamorous” black culture—Jazz, swing dancing, and dope smoking. He co-opted “Negro” politics to symbolize his rejection of America’s culture of conformity. The “white negro” gains his mystical insight from partying in Harlem’s jazz dens and Greenwich Village walk-ups. But, paradoxically, the hipster is also the white, cowboy-protagonist in a Hollywood western who rediscovers romance and adventure that had been destroyed by the mechanization of human life. If mainstream American society is white,
sedentary, rational, monogamous, and routine, the hipster correspondingly becomes “black.”
transient, psychopathic, slutty, and impulsive. But what the hipster labels apocalyptic (in the
original sense of the word) or demonic is, more often than not, arbitrary. The reason is quite
obvious: a hipster privileges a social and cultural construction. If hipsterism has a tradition, it is
primarily an archetypal one because there is little continuity, in terms of values and ideology,
between differing hipster movements; Mailer’s “white negroes” would mock their millennial,
male counterparts for their femininity and “emo” sensitivities. Regardless, such an
understanding of hipsterism allows us to draw two conclusions: firstly, that its ontology is
profundly dualistic if ultimately capricious; and, correspondingly, we must historicize cool so
that we may understand how it reacts to and rhetorically stylizes a particularly moment.

The hipster is not without precedent in Canadian literature. Northrop Frye while
discussing the “revolutionary garrison” argues that Irving Layton, Mordecai Richler, and other
Montreal writers assume a hip position to resist 1960s puritanical forces: “The enemy of the poet
is not the capitalist but the ‘square,’ or representative of repressive morality. The advantage of
this attitude is that it preserves the position of rebellion against society for the poet, without
imposing on him any specific social obligations” (“Conclusion to the First” 335). 36 While
Montreal certainly deserves its “happening” reputation, Amy Lavender Harris plumps for
Toronto’s Yorkville as Canada’s premier hippy-enclave. With the redevelopment of Gerrard
Village—“Toronto’s original bohemian district”—slightly uptown Yorkville became the hub of
English Canada’s music, literary, and activist scene in the mid-1960s (179); and a handful of

36 There is the potential to read the Confederation Group of Poets and the Montreal Poets within the framework of
the hip-square dialectic despite the fact that both groups predate the term’s emergence in the 1950s. Such an
argument would show how both groups tended to disparage the previous generation, and hence create a
“revolutionary break,” while, hypocritically, sharing many affinities with what they claim to resist. Bliss Carman’s
“vagabond” poetry and public persona, in particular, demand a “hip” reassessment.
texts testify the roundness of the neighbourhood’s bohemians: Dorris Heffron’s *A Nice Fire and Some Moonpennies* (1971), Don Lyons’s *Yorkville Diaries* (1984), John Reid’s *The Faithless Mirror* (1976), Anne Denoon’s *Back Flip* (2002), David Lewis Stein’s *Scratch One Dreamer* (1967), and Margaret Atwood’s *Cat’s Eye* (1988). These earlier hippies encourage us to move beyond the archetype because the conditions in Montreal’s “Main” and Toronto’s “Village” during the 1960s are, needless to say, different than those found in 1990s loft-and-club cities.

There is a parallel demand to distinguish our urban advocates from their successors: the millennial hipsters. Today, hipsterdom refers to post-9/11 youth culture that has become almost universally rebuffed; and its representative figure is the nihilistic, urban twenty-something who adorns skinny jeans, a trucker hat, wayfarer sunglasses, and a plaid shirt. John Leland argues the millennial hipster can more accurately be understood as post-hip because the “hip process,” whereby the younger generation claims a “revolutionary” status by dismissing the older generation as “square,” has accelerated to the point that “for all its forward thrust it never actually gets anywhere, because it always starts anew from the same place” (340). In this sense, post-hip describes a contemporary crisis in which creativity has been fetishized and commodified to the point that the difference between avant-garde and passé, independent and mainstream, radical and conservative, and original and copy have become disturbingly unstable. In a 2008 polemic, *Adbusters* slaged nihilistic, narcissistic, Facebook-addicted, party-hearty youths as representing the exhaustion of Western culture: “An artificial appropriation of different styles from different eras, the hipster represents the end of Western civilization—a culture lost in the superficiality of its past and unable to create any new meaning” (Haddow). *Adbusters* repeats a common criticism of hipsterdom’s tendency to appropriate images of others’ cultures while abandoning the important political meaning attached to the practices—Mailer’s “white negro” being a classic, retro-example. For Leland, who is much more sympathetic to the hipster’s
dilemma, the crisis originates from the speed in which the marketplace and the media are able to appropriate “cool” and thus by definition render it four-sided (341). The situation has become so dire that arts-savvy urbanites now predominately use “hipster” to slander late-adopters or “yuppies” that confuse clever marketing with the underground (e.g., mistaking Starbucks for an independent, bohemian café). Hence the famous Onion satire: “Two Hipsters Angrily Call Each Other ‘Hipster.’” The authors we discuss in this chapter are too old to be theorized in such a context. Indeed, Russell Smith and Leah McLaren wrote several columns condemning millennial youths for their garish aesthetic practices and, ironically, naïve cultural proclamations. It is conceptually important to distinguish between what we label the postmodern hipster and the post-hip moment because our subjects have now become the repressive, grey-haired moralists they so bitterly despised two decades earlier—when they thought they were “hip.”

37 A new Starbucks that was built on the corner of Dupont and Christie in Toronto took over an abandoned dentist office. To make the store seem gentrified, the company tore down the all-glass front and replaced it with bricks and columns so that the space now looks like a repurposed bank. Hence, while the store is an example of gentrification, it is ironic that the designers had to fake the “grit as glamour” aesthetic that characterizes post-industrial neighbourhoods.

38 In “So Quirky, so Clever and so Irritating,” Smith criticizes what he labels “the post-modern hipster” for being unable to create anything new. “There is something defeatist and basically not brave about hipster postmodernism—and this goes for the domains of visual art and literature too. If you claim to believe that there is no possibility of original art in the age of reference, you are cleverly avoiding the nauseating stress of being original. It’s too easy” (R1). In “The hip game of mocking the hipsters,” he explains that he despises hipsters because they try so hard to look unfashionable and hence affirm their counter-cultural credentials that they hypocritically participate within the same “cool” process that they claim to reject. “The hipster pose is of someone who rejects fashion, who is wearing second-hand clothes because she is poor and refusing to buy into consumer culture, who makes fun of sensual subcultures such as Goths and dandies, and yet the outfits she invariably concocts are so odd they cross the line into flamboyance” (R1). For further Smith commentary on the millennial hipsters, see “The Sexy lies,” “Spare me,” “If this music is hip,” “Unlocking the secrets,” “Men and the art,” “Hats off (literally),” “Take that tuque off,” and the “Ask Russell Smith” columns for Oct. 9, 2010, Aug. 20, 2011, and Nov. 26, 2011. Contrastingly, Leah McLaren views the young hipsters as cute but misguided. See her “From hipster to hip replacement,” “From police state to boho capital,” and “So hipster it hurts.”
Marginal Anxieties

The stormy cultural and political climate of the late 1980s to the millennium contextualizes some of hipster urbanism’s idiosyncratic preoccupations. Confederation was in turmoil. In 1982, Pierre Trudeau patriated the constitution, but his amendments to the British North America Act (1867) required provincial negotiation. Trudeau garnered support from all the provinces but Quebec, whose National Assembly refused to ratify the Constitution Act (1982). While the new act became the law of the land, it was not signed by Quebec and hence the province excluded itself symbolically from the nation. Brian Mulroney’s Meech Lake Accord (1987) originally secured unanimous provincial support, and promised to win Quebec’s adherence to confederation. But Manitoba and Newfoundland did not ratify the agreement by the July, 1990 deadline, and the accord’s failure was interpreted in Quebec as a rejection of its specificity. He tried again in 1992 with the Charlottetown Accord that, aiming to circumvent provincial opposition, called a national referendum. A slight “No” majority won. The constitutional battles refueled Quebec separatism as many English-Canadians rejected the amendment because it granted Quebec special status as a “distinct society”. The constitutional crises provoked a resurgence of regionalism with the 1993 electoral achievements of the Reform Party and the Bloc Québécois; the Progressive Conservative majority was reduced to two seats and the federal party never recovered. The crisis of federation pinnacled in 1995 when a paper-thin majority of Quebecers, 50.58%, rejected separation. The political climate brought the “old

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39 Russell Smith correlates the English-Canadian rejection of the “distinct status” clause with homophobia in *Noise*. Buck, a University of Toronto Kinesiology student, introduces himself by proudly declaring that he is a “homophile” and then proceeds to complain about the “fucking frogs,” that were “looking for special treatment” again (69-70). The scene is doubly ironic because Buck is unaware that his girlfriend’s roommate, De Courcy, is French and gay—a character that Buck hypocritically likes. The scene is worth briefly noticing because critics rarely acknowledge the hipsters’ tolerance and acceptance of difference. While Andrew Moodie’s *Riot* (1997) was published when *Noise* was in press, the play nevertheless includes a similar scene that correlates homophobia with racism.
questions” back to the fore: did Canada have a national culture or was the nation made up of competing, indeed separatist, regional and ethnic factions?

The two influential cultural nationalist narratives of the time, postmodernism and multiculturalism, sought to include regional and minority voices within a broader transCanadian identity. We have, for example, Linda Hutcheon’s use of the centre-margin dichotomy, in which the margin becomes a paradoxical metaphor for the nation’s ex-centric, regional forces and Canada’s peripheral relationship to the United States of America. After an impressive display of metaphoric and logical yoga, Hutcheon concludes, “Canada can in some ways be defined as a country whose articulation of its national identity has sprung from regionalist impulses” (4). Separatisms, both Albertan and Quebecois, become metaphorically equivalent with anti-American nationalism because provincialism and federalism both resist a more powerful centre. As Alexander MacLeod argues, “English-Canadian postmodern fiction that dominates the canon today, has been shaped most directly not by the apocalyptic, paradigm-shifting, post-humanist, metaphysical critique put forward by Derrida and the other leading contributors to international postmodernism but rather … literary regionalism” (128). MacLeod, a devoted provincial, endorses Hutcheon’s model, but her postmodern, Canadian identity can, in some ways, be seen as an attempt to recognize the legitimacy of regionalism while simultaneously emasculating it by transforming dissent into a national habit.

has been dubbed “identity politics”’’ (xii). In her first edition, Kamboureli argues ambivalently that the anthology challenges “the concept of minority” (xix). She explains that all its writers are or were “by virtue of race and ethnicity” relegated to the margins of Canada by dominant society, but she concludes that it is “impossible” to define marginalization “in any stable way” (xix). For Kamboureli, “marginal” and “minority” do not describe a text’s canonical status but expresses a sense of difference in relation to mainstream English-Canadian culture (xx). Hence, Michael Ondaatje, who, by all accounts, is a major writer, can still be considered “marginal” because difference is “always a matter of intensity, and is weighed differently in given historical moments.” Kamboureli’s introduction explicitly places multiculturalism within “the binary structure of ‘centre’ and ‘margins’” to show how it contributes to long-unresolved historical and cultural negotiations but also to theorize a form of multiculturalism that opposes government actions, such as the constitutional negotiations, that attempt to impose and maintain “the unified image of Canada” (xvii). Indeed, marginal multiculturalism demonstrates that “the unity of Canadian identity is a cultural myth that can be sustained only by eclipsing the identities of others.” By adopting an ex-centric politics, Kamboureli’s difference questions older, singular cultural nationalist legends that deny multiplicity.

The centre-margin dichotomies articulated by Hutcheon and Kamboureli proved radically unstable. As Sylvia Söderlind shows, the dualism became ineffectual for two reasons. Firstly, because marginal is exclusively used metaphorically, the word remains semantically ambiguous; and secondly, because as the academy adopted the politics of the margin, it paradoxically became mainstream (99). With the rapid rise of postmodern and multicultural discourse, the periphery was emasculated because so many concepts became synonymous with marginal that a variety of disjunctive experiences were magically rendered equivalent (101). She explains, “Metaphor is predicated on difference, of course, and there is indeed a sublime irony in the fact
that this trope has so effectively allowed the effacing of difference in the illicit exchange that goes on under the umbrella of the ‘margin’ (103). Indeed, W.H. New recognizes that the emergence of affective identities and their competitive, critical positioning characterizes 1990s Canadian literature. Writers and critics “occasionally claimed the ‘margin’ as the only respectable social position from which to speak,” adding that, “inevitably, some claims upon the validity of the margin became competitive—as though whoever was most disenfranchised was most worthy, as though degrees of discrimination could be objectively tallied” (*A History* 322). Suggesting how comical he believes the discourse to be, New explains that terms as varied as “Christian, Jewish, Ukrainian, Italian, Black, Asian, gay, lesbian, female, male, worker, urban, Maritime, Northern” became “active markers of identity.” Söderlind’s problematic originates from the critical currency that the “margin” acquired, a notion Donna Bennett seconds when she argues that government policy, and hence funding, encourages authors and critics alike to substitute the “two solitudes” thesis with an “other solitudes” thesis (“Getting Beyond” 11). Simplistic articulations of multiculturalism define “otherness” through its opposition to the mainstream, a gesture that assures minorities remain “outside” the polis. Ironically, “our official attempts to legislate more complexity into Canadian culture collapse back into the Us-Them dialectic these policies sought to escape.” This is precisely the issue that troubles Söderlind, but she is aware that the difference between the two poles had collapsed: “Marginality is becoming the password for the admission of texts and authors into the curriculum, hence paradoxically into the centre, because within existing structures, the curriculum cannot help but create the mainstream” (100). We could say that, in the 1990s, it was hip to be marginal.

If we bring these ideas together, we notice certain parallels. The hip and margin rely upon us-them dialectics that place a privileged minority against a homogenous mainstream. Both articulate difference to challenge the centre. But, of course, what distinguishes the two is
that marginality, generally, describes a group that is disadvantaged or isolated due to race or ethnicity, whereas hipsterism is a moral and cultural state of being that is deemed deviant and hence repressed (or celebrated and hence commodified) by dominant society. The postmodern-hipster critics launched a double-barreled rampage on centennial cultural nationalism by synthesizing the margin and hip. As a group of predominately white writers, they argue that the timing of their births politically, financially, and culturally handicaps their generation. They obsessively tally ageist grievances to prove that they too are victims of discrimination—a strategy that allows them to participate in the serious but semi-faddish parlance of the margin. Similarly, they present their hip urbanity as an identity. The strategy, on the one hand, enables them to transform hip into a highly unusual parallel to ethnicity while, on the other hand, further exaggerating their repression due to Canadian culture’s (perceived) rural-centricism. Hipsters articulate legitimate and insightful protests but they insensitively appropriate the margin to market themselves and secure a permanent place within the canon—a strategy that negates ethnic and regional difference as well as affluent white supremacy.

**Hipsters at the Gate**

Hipsterdom embodies and aestheticizes an ideology. It takes a set of beliefs, dresses them in an appropriately eccentric wardrobe, and drops the incarnation into a public arena to duke it out with often-unsuspecting victims. The key to understanding hipsterdom is to conceptually isolate politics from spectacle, to look past the clunky glasses and ask: what are these “ofay cats” really talking about? The absurdities of the hipster’s self-fashioning are a rhetorical ploy designed to provoke hip-jerk reactions that focus entirely on form as opposed to content. The academy has happily taken its cheese, sprung the trap, and seems unaware that its
neck is firmly clamped between metal and wood. J. A. Wainwright accuses hipsters of swilling to market forces and attempting to institutionalize an “instant literature” by besieging the ivory tower’s canonical authority. He explains, “there is the self-promotion of a generation gap (or more than one) by Gen-xy columnists and radio/TV hosts who spout off weekly about what is hip and what is not and about the damage done to writers and readers by the fogies of Canadian culture (i.e., anyone who became literate before 1970)” (247). Wainwright is, of course, referring to the Brat Pack: Russell Smith’s two Globe and Mail columns and Evan Solomon’s burgeoning career at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He doesn’t provide an example to support his claim and hence neglects to engage the substance of their critiques. What precisely do the pundits label “hip”? What “damage” have the “fogies of Canadian culture” done? How does mass media affect literary discourse? Wainwright’s article refuses to engage these issues and he seems content to rock his chair and angrily wave his fist at the gentrifying philistines. It is precisely such attacks on slick rhetoric that allows the dandies to evidence their repression.

Responding to Wainwright, Andrew Pyper writes:

> The Canadian critical mainstream is currently suffering from anxieties over the work of our younger writers, particularly those who don’t show obvious derivative links to its Honoured Pioneers. The result is a backlash against such diverse and ill-defined bogeythings as ‘postmodernism,’ ‘urban,’ ‘edgy,’ and ‘trendy,’ where these terms stand not for studied concepts but for straw men imagined by fearful, if stodgy, minds. (“High Anxiety” 88)

Pyper proceeds to catalogue examples in which critics beleaguer writers due to their age, urbanity, occupations, and lifestyles; none of the examples actually quote any hipster fiction and, hence, Pyper “proves” the prejudicial dismissal of contemporary re-imaginings of Canadianness
by those who are more likely to break their hips than acknowledge the legitimacy of “hip” writing.

The mudslinging originates from a battle between what we can insufficiently call “Generation-X” and “Baby-boomers.”

The hipsters began writing in the early 1990s during a recession that hit Canada particularly hard due to the government’s large debt-to-GDP ratio. The economic turmoil disproportionately affected young people. The Chrétien government’s mantra of fiscal restraint and the deterioration of the manufacturing base due to the Free Trade agreements exacerbated the recession’s effects as social services were cut and reductions in government spending caused job losses. Young people struggled to enter the workforce and those that did manage to secure a position were paid significantly less than their older counterparts, and wages for Generation Xers decreased while those “with longer employment histories continued to enjoy real wage gains” (Cheung 3). To make matters worse, young people were disproportionately laid off, “in the recession from 1990 to 1992, those that moved into the age group of 25 to 34 again had the highest permanent layoff rate, 10.5 percent compared to 7.9 percent for those aged 45 to 52. Those aged 18 to 25 had the second highest layoff rate of 10.2 percent” (3). When the economy improved in the second half of the decade, young people

40 There is no scholarly consensus on whom we may accurately label a member of the Baby Boomers and Generation X. Generally, the Baby Boomers were born between 1945 and the early 1960s—a period in which the birth rate dramatically increased; Generation Xers were born between the mid 1960s and the early 1980s—a period in which the birth rate began to sharply decline. For a more extensive discussion of these cohorts and how they may be broken down into smaller groups see “Bennett, Craig, and Rademacher.” The hipsters use of generational terms is fairly arbitrary; they tend to label anyone who contributes to cultural nationalism between 1960 and 1990 a “boomer”; while a “young” or “Generation X” writer describes anyone who is near or under thirty in the 1990s. Hence, we should be critical of the looseness of these terms and note how they often gain a pejorative connotation.

41 The situation was even worse in America. As Geoffery T. Holtz argues in Welcome to the Jungle (1995), “In the new disposable worker economy, the last in are the first out. Evidence of this phenomenon can be seen in the 1.45 million jobs lost nationally in the recent recession between March 1990 and March 1991. Although sixteen- to twenty-four-year-olds comprised only 17 percent of all workers, according to one Northeastern University
were once again left behind. As Myrna Kostash explains in *The Next Canada* (2000), “Thanks to the ‘turnaround’ in public finances with the elimination of government deficit, the next generation of workers would enter a ‘friendlier’ job market than the fiercely competitive one in which Generation X had been forced to support itself during the grim era of downsizing. Never mind that, of the 302,000 new jobs created in the first eleven months of 1997, only 15,000 went to people under 25” (19). The recession disenfranchised millions of Generation Xers. They were aware that not only were permanent jobs going to be harder to secure, but that they would be denied the security and generous pensions (from both corporations and governments) that their predecessors were promised. In *Generation X* (1991), Douglas Coupland dubbed the phenomena “Boomer Envy: Envy of material wealth and long-range material security accrued by older members of the baby boom generation by virtue of fortunate birth” (21). The inequity, needless to say, encouraged generational conflict.

These broader social problems influenced Canada’s literary scene. Niedzviecki’s *Concrete Forest*, an anthology of “new urban writing,” argues that Canada’s publishing industry is fiscally geared towards revving boomer consumption. He explains his decision to collect and edit the anthology originates from “the recognition that younger generations, people without cars and mortgages, also read books—in fact, they wouldn’t mind reading books about themselves. Until now, such books have not been widely available, largely because the literati and the publishing establishment have been reluctant to usher in this new urban writing” (xiv-xv). Why does the institution stifle the new literature? “Because, to paraphrase what a small-press editor economist, this age group suffered 65 percent of the employment loss. Young workers bore *four times* the burden of other age groups” (148).
recently pointed out to me, publishing books specifically geared towards younger generations of Canadians can be financially dangerous: ‘They aren’t the boomers. They don’t have any money’” (xv). While Niedzviecki’s argument is anecdotal it does, nevertheless, express a widespread perception that market forces discourage the emergence of “new voices” in Canadian literature. The statistical data supports Niedzviecki’s premise that younger Canadians, while numerous, were not as wealthy as other population groups and hence were probably disregarded by publishers (as both poor and disinterested). Indeed, Smith claims that it is not his championing of the city’s glamour that is his greatest contribution to Canadian literature, but that the successes of his two small-press novels, How Insensitive (1994) and Noise (1998), played a role “in opening publishers’ eyes to the possibility that first novels may be financially viable, and that a non-boomer generation of writers may have something to offer” (“Interview with Michelle Berry” 365). While we do not have the appropriate statistical data on the publishing industry to confirm or deny the economic arguments outlined here, they do, nevertheless, demonstrate that some writers believe that a double whammy of financial and demographic naturalism censored “hip” sensibilities.

A more modish line of attack claims that the old guard incarcerates urbane prose due to its immoral content. Andrew Pyper, for example, correlates the backlash against bohemianism with a conspiracy to defend Canadian literature’s good name and gilded morality.42 He complains, “The thinking seems to be that, if the gates aren’t buttressed now, they may soon be

42 Pyper’s argument paraphrases the plot of his earlier, nationalist short story “If You Lived Here You’d Be Home by Now” that valorizes Toronto’s ecstasy popping bohemians—or, at least, those who pretend to be artists—as an “honest” representation of the country’s arts scene. Hemmingway’s, the narrator’s, gritty-but-true lifestyle is juxtaposed with his father’s newfound Christianity that he feigns so that he may seduce a lady unto lawful, wedded intercourse. Hence, Pyper’s “High Anxiety” is the formal counterpart to his earlier literary anthem. For a brief discussion of the story in relationship to Canadian identity, see Edwards (Gothic 67-90).
battered down altogether by the hordes of young literary barbarians gathering outside them, armed with sex, recreational pharmaceuticals, and pop cultural references” (“High Anxiety” 89). What disturbs Pyper is his belief that the boomer border guard denigrates “swinging” literature due to its content and refuses to assess its aesthetic contributions. If an aspiring author does not conform to the pre-existing conceptualization of what CanLit should be—“nice, harmless, and decidedly grey-haired”—he would find himself exiled to the unCanadian city.43 His essay identifies a “grey-haired bias” in the 1999 long lists for the Giller Prize and the Governor General’s Awards in which only two nominees were under the age of 47. Bonnie Burnard’s A Good House, which won the Giller, particularly outrages Pyper. The press celebrated the victory as evidence that Canadian literature had successfully repelled the challenge posed by “powerful hipsters who ‘ignored’ the book on the ground that it was too ‘unfashionable’” (90). He shows how pundits exhibit Burnard to display how good, morally exemplary fiction was being omitted from literary discussions despite the fact the novel was on best-selling lists for over a year and that she won the Giller; indeed, Pyper claims he found 246 articles written about A Good House while Russell Smith’s Young Men only scored 28 (91).44 While we should be skeptical of Pyper’s tallies because he does not provide a bibliography to support his argument, he does have a point. 1999 was a “classic” year for hipster fiction. To name a few of its gems: Smith’s Young Men, Gartner’s All the Anxious Girls on Earth, Pyper’s Lost Girls, Michael Winter’s One Last Good Look, Michael Turner’s The Pornographer’s Poem, Natalee Caple’s The Plight of Happy

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43 Pyper seems unaware that older writers produced novels with similar content, Morley Callaghan’s Strange Fugitive (1928), John Glassco’s pornography, Stephen Vizinczey’s In Praise of Older Women (1965), and Leonard Cohen’s Beautiful Losers (1966) immediately come to mind, and hence misses the opportunity to claim solidarity with a tradition of naughty writing or, alternatively, to disparage older writers for hypocritically abandoning their hip ways.

44 Ironically, Pyper contributed to Burnard’s tally by consistently lambasting the book. In addition to “High Anxiety in the Bush Gardens,” he also takes potshots at A Good House in a Quill & Quire profile of Michelle Berry; see “A Fine Balance.”
People in an Ordinary World, Niedzviecki’s Lurvy, and McCormack’s Wish Book. Burnard’s victory, in hindsight, was probably undeserved, and many of these other texts have found their way onto Canadian literature courses and have generated scholarly debate, whereas A Good House has been all but relegated to footnote status. It is difficult to believe the novel’s aesthetic excellence compelled the judges; hence there is a degree of legitimacy to the hipsters’ outrage and conspiracy theories.

Pyper’s article sensationalizes and hyperbolizes a generational experience of victimization that originates from the conservative establishment’s attempt to preserve its literary tradition and national identity. Russell Smith, quoting a fictitious professor he lampoons in Muriella Pent (2005), explains, “‘The peak is over.’ And this is often echoed by academic critics. The peak was a peak of cultural nationalism that reached a crescendo sometime around 1980 and has now been dissolved into this miasma of trivial hipness and Toronto-dominated, American-dominated” writing (“In Conversation” 50). His comments seem to refer to the introduction to Linda Hutcheon’s The Canadian Postmodern that begins by claiming, “The 1960s are generally accepted as the years that saw the flowering of Canadian fiction” (1). Hutcheon’s “introduction” delineates a postmodern, Canadian identity that is predicated upon anti-Americanism, anti-modernism, and anti-urbanism; indeed, she suggests that it was the

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45 Alberto Manguel, Judith Mappin, and Nino Ricci served as jurors for the 1999 Giller Prize. The youngest juror, Ricci, was 40 in 1999. So, there is an argument to be made that the panel may have been biased against younger writers.

46 The conclusion to Muriella Pent satirizes a Professor who has just won a grant to write a monograph on “Canadian literature. When it was at its peak. …Beginning with some early settler novels, you know, Moodie and Grove and people like that, and it goes right up to very modern names, Munro and so on” (340-341). His thesis defends Canada against the Americanization of its culture by critiquing “this new kind of urban crap that’s so dominant now, you know, the Torontocentrism that’s just so commercial and so dominates the publishing world. Since the whole industry seems to be based here now, I mean no offence, but the regional voices that so really define this literature have been silenced” (341).
young writers of the 1960s and 1970s that managed to achieve what their predecessors failed to do: they created a “distinctly Canadian” literary movement. Smith astutely suggests how anti-urban, cultural nationalism was still a strong force in the 1990s and how the hipsters’ Americansque content threatened Canada’s hard-earned, centennial identity. Seconding Pyper, he argues academics and government granting agencies are unwilling to reward new stories that fail to reaffirm the values symbolized by Canada’s nostalgic, rural past. Smith quips, “It seems as if many critics believe that the present is ‘superficial’—they often use that word—or ‘trendy,’ ‘Trendy’ equals trivial; ‘Hip’ equals trivial; ‘Fashionable’ equals trivial; ‘Contemporary’ equals trivial. The only worthy subject is the past” (49). For Smith, the “man” had to return to “his” small town, farming adolescences because the nation’s millennial, urban reality no longer mirrored “his” values and experiences. The predominance and rewarding of historical narratives is related to the boomers’ desire to maintain their image of Canada and the nation’s cultural ties to a romanticized past.

R. M. Vaughan argues the boomer Bogarting of national culture has, contradictorily, burned into a conservative squareness. In his interview for the notebooks (2002)—an anthology that testifies the flourishing of young, Canadian writing (Caple and Berry 1)—he explains, “all the people I know who are currently writing the equivalent of the experimental book that you wrote in the seventies will never never get near the Governor General’s Awards, or the Gillers, or the Griffin” (446). Vaughan, who demonstrates a stronger understanding of literary history than many of his contemporaries, recognizes that major awards have tended to shift their priorities as the boomers aged. Decorations previously recognized new writers and experimentalism but, by the 1990s, jury panels only seemed to endorse older, established artists
whose style had become cliché. He complains, “It’s like the generation, with a few exceptions, got in and then slammed the gates shut. Of course, that’s the history of the boomers in all fields, that’s their economic survival strategy. Even though it’s not fashionable to talk about it anymore, we’re still fighting an intergenerational war with them.” While still working within the hip-square dualism, Vaughan presents what is perhaps one of the more compelling critiques of 1990s literary culture; that governments and endowments rewarded youthful, radical, and experimental—dare we say hipster—writing a generation earlier, but its contemporary parallel was contradictorily suppressed. The conservative Northrop Frye embraced Atwood and her hippy peers, so, Vaughan asks, when will the boomers pass the torch?

Clear Cutting the Bush Gardens

The hipsters mapped a related rural/past-urban/present dialectic to allegorize their marginality and to propose an alternative allegory for Canadian identity. Indeed, when critics discuss the hipsters favourably they, sometimes grudgingly, credit the metropolitan-pioneers with “urbanizing” the nation’s culture (Kröller 5). Their problematic was dual-wielding: with one hand, they raze the cultural landscape by flaming older, wooden national myths, with the other they erect new, urban “myths” that “more accurately” mirror contemporary Canada’s

47 While many authors that could be productively included within the hipster pantheon were nominated for Governor-General Awards—such as Barbara Gowdy, Lynn Crosbie, Russell Smith, and Derek McCormack—all were defeated in the 1990s by older, more established writers.

48 This section offers a partial answer to Kit Dobson’s request for a more compelling analysis of the shift from rural- to urban-centricism that seems to have occurred in Canadian thought. He writes, “the movement of writing in Canada from survival against nature and the other to the disruption of the garrison mentality in urban writing is not clear-cut. Canadian writing can still, however, be understood in a less linear manner through those common narratives as writers question the spaces in which they find themselves” (xiv).
material conditions. However, as we will see, their re-imagining of the literary topography is reactionary and produces a “marginal” identity that is not predicated upon ethnicity, but rather a shared human geography. If this sounds like Atwood’s *Survival* thesis, it should. The hipsters’ post-industrial imagery relies upon the very same national-referential assumptions that have historically informed agrarian cultural nationalism but they turn to repurposed factories and all-night-burger-joints to build an inclusive, city on a hill.

Some Atlantic Canadian writers presented a parallel critique that contends Maritime fiction is only taken seriously if it represents the region’s rural, working-class past. Lynn Coady’s *Victory Meat: New Fiction from Atlantic Canada* (2003) is, to a certain degree, the eastern equivalent to Niedzviecki’s *Concrete Forest*. While some Atlantic writers have historically enjoyed a prominent place within the Canadian cultural imaginary, younger writers reject the area’s canon that demands representations of coal-mining, lobster-trapping Maritimers. Atlantic culture had become a massive, insidious stereotype. She laments, “You’ve got your *Road to Avonlea*, your ‘traditional’ music (these days just as bland and overproduced as anything you’d hear on a Top 40 radio station), an expectation of ‘simplicity’ which is actually more often than not an expectation of poverty and ignorance” (1). Greener artists, while recognizing that east-coast writing was not marginalized, feel that their literary tradition is defined by “sell outs” that profit by conforming to clichés that satisfy a patronizing tourist gaze. Vaughan complains their literature is all about “loggers and miners, and all dem down-home boys, how dey don’t have no money to be gettin’ their smokes and their drinks” (439).49 Adding that it is the “worst

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49 As we will see in the following two sections, many hipster critics—especially Gartner, Pyper, Smith, and Vaughan—suggest implicitly that Canadian literature does not appropriately reflect the nation’s class structure. Some argue that the canon appropriates and romanticizes working-class stories but their solution is to demand the representation of higher-paying, more “realistic” creative city occupations. It is this muted elitism and classism that most strongly challenges the notion of approaching the hipsters as a unified movement.
sort of class tourism” where “Atlantic Canadians are the colorful peasantry of the nation.”

Members of the Burning Rock Collective—a writing group based in St. John’s Newfoundland—sound similar alarms after Annie Proulx’s *The Shipping News* (1993) became an international hit and blockbuster movie starring Tom Hanks. Michael Winter’s *This All Happened* (2000) includes a scene in which local writers express their anger about Proulx’s sensational representation of Newfoundland. Similarly, Lisa Moore—during an interview between *The New Quarterly* and the founding members of the Collective—complains that Proulx made it “impossible not to be self-conscious when mentioning Newfoundland in fiction these days. How not to play the exotic card after *The Shipping News*” (“Where” 47). While the Atlantic coast laments arise out of a different literary and cultural context then the other, mostly Torontonian, writers we have discussed, they nevertheless share many similarities. Coady, for example, argues that Atlantic culture has “matured” to the point that the region’s identity no longer matches its contemporary reality. She jokes, “Atlantic Canadians, and Atlantic Canadian writers, have grown up right alongside of the rest of the Western world,” however, “it might have taken some of us a bit longer to shed our mullets” (3). She adds, “The point is, we exist in the here and now, no matter how unfashionable our hairdos.” Like their Hollywood North associates, Coady argues that younger, Atlantic Canadians want a literature that reflects their urban, cosmopolitan, and contemporary experiences.

Coady, however, outlines a different generational conflict. While she believes that newer writers are producing a literature of the “here and now,” she isolates the government’s granting policies and the region’s reliance on tourism as invidious. The amalgamation of Nova Scotia’s formerly independent Arts Council within “the rubric of ‘Tourism and Culture’” forces artists to create literary topographies that photocopy the “haunting” landscape of sightseer brochures (2). And with typical humour, she complains the region tends to celebrate a nostalgic, Celtic heritage
that has little to do with its contemporary ethnic makeup. Paralleling the federal government’s perceived devotion to multiculturalism, Atlantic provinces bribe writers to glorify a photoshopped ethnic identity. But hipsters can’t rave to that square-dance. With typical wit she comments, “After a while the kilt starts to chafe. You start to feel silly. *This isn’t me*” (author’s emph. 2-3). Hipster exiles, both regional and national, refuse to prostitute themselves to Toronto the Good and Green Gables propaganda.

The hipsters’ privileging of the contemporary milieu necessarily recovers the theoretical relevance of representational fidelity, in which a critic evaluates a text based upon how accurately it verifies “one’s sense of community and place” (Lecker *Making* 4). As Robert Lecker argues, “In this view, literature becomes a medium that refers us to the connection between writing, culture, and nation. Implicit in this view is the assumption that valuable writing underwrites a national-referential aesthetic.” He explains that the thesis informs the majority of English-Canadian criticism and that the theory was the driving force behind canon formation. The hipster problematic adopts the “national-referential ideal,” but criticizes its earlier proponents for creating and maintaining myths that do not “truthfully” represent Canada. Lisa Moore argues in *The Walrus* that it is not only local writers who have a moral responsibility to faithfully represent the community, but also outsiders writing about Newfoundland must respect the island’s particularities. Moore acknowledges that an author’s intent is typically to make a piece of artwork, and that Proulx’s novel is certainly well-written, but that writers should not exploit the people they write about. Moore concludes, “We expect literary fiction to be universal and particular at the same time, and accurate in particularities” (91). Moore describes a common literary belief in Newfoundland and Tasmania—two islands at the edge of continents that have increasingly fascinated national and international audiences due to their wild ways and exotic landscapes—in which locals feel that all authors, both insiders and outsiders, have to “get it
right” when they portray a real place. Moore voices the fundamental idea common to all postmodern hipsterism: the institution rewards authors that represent Canada as a place, but texts that do garner fame and fortune are referentially dishonest.

In response, the hipsters develop the landscape in their own image. We see this, for example, in Niedzviecki’s introduction to The Concrete Forest, in which he explicitly presents the anthology as a contemporary reworking of the dominant themes of Canadian literature and culture. He offers the most reconciliatory thoughts regarding the battle between young and old. Notably, he suggests the new generation adapts the old myths to the nation’s metropolitan realities. Niedzviecki presents Concrete Forest as the contemporary, youthful, and urban offspring of Margaret Atwood’s Survival. He writes, “Up here in my apartment, the stories in the anthology appear a mirror image, a prism reflection of what this country looks like. I press my nose to the cold glass and see the new Canada, country of cities, country of whispering voices lost in the crowded distance between our self-same dreams” (xiii). He alludes to Atwood’s mirror metaphor in Survival that describe the need for a national literature that articulates a communal sense of place and space. Atwood writes:

A piece of art, as well as being a creation to be enjoyed, can also be (as Germaine Warkentin suggests) a mirror. The reader looks at the mirror and sees not the writer but himself; and behind his own image in the foreground, a reflection of the world he lives in. If a country or a culture lacks such mirrors, it has no way of knowing what it looks like; it must travel blind. If, as has long been the case in this country, the viewer is given a mirror that reflects not him but someone else, and told at the same time that the reflection he sees is himself, he will get a very distorted idea of what he is really like. (15-16)
Niedzviecki suggests subtly and ironically that hipsters now face the same problem as centennial cultural nationalists. They are told that Canadian literature is a mirror that reflects their experiences but the image they see is not of themselves but a “very distorted” and outdated picture of the country. Hence, Niedzviecki offers a new mimetic allegory, the view from his apartment window at Toronto’s Ossington and Dundas, to express his desire for a literature that includes his and his contemporaries’ experiences. Coady’s *Victory Meat* produces a similar allegory to voice her desire for fiction that echoes the region’s contemporary urbanity. She names the anthology after a Fredericton butcher—a modern building with a large neon sign: “Victory Meat Market is of a more recent vintage, with an impertinent, gritty sort of toughness that has yet to be buffed over by the well-meaning architects of nostalgia and sentiment who have always wielded such power in the Atlantic provinces” (5). While Coady’s comments certainly describe the building, they more accurately allegorize the characteristics she associates with the new fiction of Atlantic Canada: it is urban, gritty, contemporary, young, and realistic.

It is when we consider thehipster vision for Canadian literature that we begin to understand that their criticism is not revolutionary, but decidedly reactionary. The hipster advocates, just like their cultural nationalists ancestors, approach literature as a conceptual tool in which to imagine a form of national belonging based upon geographic continuity as opposed to historical or ethnic tradition. But unlike earlier cultural nationalists that produce an identity based upon the landscape, the hipsters turn to Canada’s built environment to imagine a common, national experience. Niedzviecki’s “Welcome to the *Concrete Forest* Population 30 Million” is, perhaps, the most explicitly flag-waving article penned by a hipster. The introduction’s title clearly states his national-referential assumptions, for it becomes a metaphor that welcomes the reader not to Canada but a new fictional representation of the nation and its people. Indeed, Niedzviecki explains that the *Concrete Forest* is a form of “population analysis” that “tells us
about our communities and our lives” (xix). Of course, Niedzviecki’s use of the first person plural motivates us to ask, who is he speaking for?

When we consider the rosters of the three hipster anthologies—Concrete Forest, the notebooks, and Victory Meat—we notice that the writers can only be thematically unified. The 52 writers are multiethnic, represent all of Canada’s regions, and not all of them are as young as the editors suggest. Niedzviecki is aware of this problematic and qualifies his thesis by arguing a unique consciousness unifies his authors.

In the concrete forest, you will find many such familiar and haunting places; decaying inner cities, tedious suburbs, labyrinthine subways, and straight-ahead highways all have a home here. And yet, despite this disparate scenery, these stories all suggest an emerging movement of new urban writing which reflects a Canada that is something more than a multiplicity of self-contained regions and ethnic groups. Native writer Richard Van Camp’s testosterone-infused account of a house party in a small town in the

50 The fifty two writers are Andre Alexis, Grant Buday, Carol Bruneau, Catherine Bush, Eliza Clark, George Elliott Clarke, Lynn Coady, Christy Ann Conlin, Kelly Cooper, Libby Creelman, Lynn Crosbie, Michael Crummey, France Daigle, Julie Doucet, M.A.C. Farrant, Matthew Firth, Golda Fried, Jonathan Goldstein, Steven Heighton, Mark Anthony Jarman, Daniel Jones, Crad Kilodney, Dany Laferriere, Elise Levine, Larry Lynch, Rabindranath Maharaj, Yann Martel, Derek McCormack, Leo McKay Jr., Lisa Moore, Hal Niedzviecki, Peter Norman, Andrew Pyper, Michael Redhill, Daniel Richler, Eden Robinson, Russell Smith, Stuart Ross, Esta Spalding, Peter Stinson, Ken Sparling, Karen Smythe, Cordelia Strube, Vern Smith, Lee D. Thompson, Michael Turner, Richard van Camp, R.M. Vaughan, Dianne Warren, Natasha Waxman, Michael Winter, Marnie Woodrow. It also should be noted that several writers—McCormack, Moore, Turner, Vaughan, and Winter—are included in multiple anthologies.
Northwest Territories suggests the same festivities I once held in my parents’ suburban living room thousands of kilometers from the Arctic. (xii-xiii)

Here, we find the most controversial characteristic of hipster rhetoric: in a period when cultural politics was overwhelmingly concerned with expressing difference, we find white writers attempting to construct a new, nationalistic paradigm for Canadian literature, one that valorizes a vague cityscape as an allegory for national belonging—a focus that strategically deemphasizes ethnic affiliation and retrieves a Canadian identity based on the topography. Anyone who has an appropriately youthful demeanor and who has attended a house party becomes a contributor to the “new urban writing.” The urban-as-nation allegory recognizes Canada’s multiethnicity and is certainly more inclusive than its centennial, rural predecessors that tended to privilege Anglo-Canadian experiences. But the Concrete Forest and Victory Meat seek to identify and mythologize the similarities that coalesce disparate populations.

The Politics of Postmodern Hipsterism

The noise of revolutionary decrees and sensational libeling mute a highly complex and contradictory problematic. As others have noted, the buzzwords of the “long-decade” were marginality, postmodernism, and multiculturalism. These intersecting but at times competing narratives—with their own histories, warring factions, and unresolved debates—were unified by their privileging of difference. What the backlash against hipsters shows us is that not all differences are equal. Carol Toller, for example, penned an editorial dismissing the “book boys” for their sexism. She attacks the “boys” for suggesting that only pugnacious males can reshape the canon—a claim that the dandies and Gill never make—and proceeds to libelously emasculate
the “Brat Pack” including a rather funny, but inappropriate, series of jokes questioning the size of their genitalia (“Writing” C1). For Toller, “writing has no sex;” and she contends that masculinity is not a worthy literary subject whereas a feminist tinted critique of the “boy’s” manliness is. The editorial, it must be noted, was published prior to the “Book Babes” scandal so we can only speculate on how Toller reacted to the second portrayal of ultra-urban fashionistas who embraced stereotypical, but glamorous, gender roles. Indeed, while both groups criticize Canadian literature’s (alleged) prudery their comments are not prescriptive.

This is precisely what is so unsettling about the postmodern hipsters. In much the same fashion as Söderlind describes, they appropriate the margin and attempt to present a generational urbanity as an identity that is similar to categories we’re (presumably) more familiar and comfortable with such as African-Canadian or Ukrainian-Canadian. They ask why must a marginal identity be predicated upon ethnicity? The question, of course, circumvents the politics of difference. It effaces Canada’s liberal ideology that Kambouerli’s and others’ scholarship so persuasively critiques: the nation’s history of colonialism, liberalism, and racism that the margin attempts to address. Hence, the notion of the marginalized hipster is insensitive because it blurs the distinction between those who have been historically erased from cultural narratives due to racism and colonialism with young, often white, people who were only momentarily disadvantaged due to demographics and market forces.

What are the politics of postmodern hipsterism? Well, their musings on Canadian literature express a sense of difference—via age, geography, and sensibility—but they do account for diversity. George Elliott Clarke’s theorization of African-Canadian writing can help resolve our dilemma. While outlining the ideologies informing his delineation of African-Canadian literature, he explains that he adopts an unusual blend of George Grant’s progressive
conservatism and Pierre Trudeau’s liberalism, a politics that, correspondingly, defends “local cultures” while also recognizing individualism and diversity within the community (“Embarkation” 13). Grant’s romantic Lament for a Nation, which defines Canada primarily through its difference from the United States of America, provides a model for “thinking about cultural particularity,” while Trudeau’s championing of “equality of individuals—but also of some communities (anglophones vis-à-vis francophones)” allows Clarke to stress that African-Canadian culture is equal to its French and British counterparts. Clarke acknowledges what many cultural theorists refuse to do, that “all assertions of cultural difference are conservative, though grounded in myth (the literary version of essentialism)” (14). The hipsters certainly endorse Clarke’s and Trudeau’s liberalism—they consistently argue that all cultures and all ethnicities are equal. But they are unwilling to embrace the conservatism that allows for and protects difference. Hence their liberalism may seem problematic because they regularly question the newfound marketability of marginal voices, a trend they correlate with government funding practices. Kamboureli has been the most outspoken critic of the apparent “hipness” of minority fiction, not because the texts don’t deserve financial and honoured rewards, but because the liberalization and commercialization of Canadian literature “may render the construct of minority writing obsolete, but it also reveals the instrumentality attributed to it” (xiv). The visibility of indigenous and diasporic writers on awards and best-selling lists sedates literary discourse because, she contends, such success “both acknowledges and circumvents the distant and recent past. It reveals what it holds back, it lets us get a glimpse of what it represses, but it also displaces the politics of race and difference and eludes any direct confrontation with its historical consciousness” (xiv-xv). One of the most consistent objections we find in hipster advocacy is that the marketability of the margin results in tokenism in which trauma, ethnicity, and atrocities become “hot commodities.” The government exploits arts funding to promote
Canada’s mythic civility, while the heavily subsidized publishing industry re-asserts such myths to secure precious funding and to capitalize on the readerships’ desire to see the nation’s progressiveness confirmed (Coleman, *White* 7). Hence, we find Andrew Pyper suggesting that arts funding is propagandistic, and that grants should be “hands off” because “when bureaucrats, or well-meaning politicians, attempt to define what they want *vis-à-vis* culture, and then set about creating policies to bring that about, that’s when we get into trouble” (“The nature” 290). His solution is that texts should be evaluated upon aesthetics, a remedy that, of course, circumvents issues relating to ethnicity and marginality. Pyper’s prescription is utopian because how can granting agencies evaluate the “aesthetic” merits of a text that had yet to be written? Similarly, “aesthetic excellence” is an elusive idea and, if we accept one of postmodernism’s major interventions, “aesthetics” are ideological.
Russell Smith criticism is decked out in the passé garb of last decade’s literary fashion. It lags behind the author/columnist’s cultural pronouncements. Hear, for instance, Lisa Salem-Wiseman who argues that James Willing, the protagonist in *Noise*, is the contemporary rehashing of Robert Kroetsch’s figure of the frustrated artist and that the dandies, Smith and Willing, map Canada via the rural/urban dichotomy but, unlike their predecessors, they champion the glamorous, corrupt pole (143). See also Aaron Schneider who, while deploring the author and his characters’ mutual misogyny, continues to applaud Smith’s work as a “welcome alternative to the various Canadian regionalisms that remain preoccupied with the rural in what is now an urban country” (31). Canuck critics have good reason to situate Smith in such a context, for, as we just learned, he was the most vocal critic of regurgitated, down-on-the-farm cultural nationalism. But Salem-Wiseman and Schneider seem unaware that Canada’s postmodern hipster renounced the urban-rural dichotomy in 2004. He realized that his use of the dualism was allegorical, that it was not small towns and farming villages he despised, but what they represented. He says as much in an interview with Derek Czajkowski: “To me the important thing is not so much the setting, whether the setting is urban or rural, as whether or not a book shows a sense of humour, is sensual rather than prudish, sophisticated rather than provincial—those are the values which I don’t think can be simplified into merely a question of urban and rural” (49). He continues to praise Alice Munro, Atwood, and Mordecai Richler alongside the

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51 Both articles were published in 2005, a year after Smith’s interview. Hence it is possible that the lag between the submission and publication of their essays accounts for the oversight.
much younger Gowdy. And concludes, “So I’m backing off those earlier statements that I made about all Can Lit having this earnest farm setting because it’s not really accurate. I was angrier then. And there are so many exceptions. But we do still tend to reward the earnest more than the urbane” (49-50). Smith was now showing his age. In February 2004, he was forty-years old and understood that much of his brash, hipster criticism was inaccurate, sensational, and poorly thought out. How embarrassing.

The disconnect between Smith’s evolving career and its criticism is symptomatic of literary branding. In the 1990s, Smith and others synthesized urban, marginal, and hipster to push their fiction. The strategy was astoundingly successful. It cemented Smith’s, McLaren’s, and Gartner’s journalistic careers; and it certainly helped institutionalize their fiction. Indeed, Pyper, Niedzviecki, and Smith continue to tally citations mainly due to their generational, urban decrees; and scholarship rarely considers the writers outside of the confines of the rural-urban dichotomy. There is, of course, nothing wrong with this trajectory, but it only gets us so far and it ironically ignores the hipsters’ repeated demands for “serious” criticism. By looking at two individual hipster texts—Smith’s Noise and Dionne Brand’s What We All Long For—we will refine and question our discoveries from the previous section. We must distinguish between what we label “hipster criticism”—the authors’ twofold critique of the literary institution via the hip-square and urban-rural dialectics—and “hipster urbanisms”—the various imaginings and representations of hipsterism as a way of urban life. In doing so, we expose ruptures within the

52 The continual focus on the urban/rural dichotomy in Smith’s fiction may also result from some critics’ desire to undertake a parallel critique of Canadian literary criticism’s alleged privileging of rural and wilderness spaces. This certainly seems to be Justin D. Edwards and Douglas Ivison’s goal in Downtown Canada (2005), but such maneuvers are prone to the very defects Smith admits in his own, abortive war against rural space.
cohort and explore the possibility of extending our theorization of hipsterism beyond the movement’s core pundits.

Creative City vs. Neo-Bohemia

Smith’s ambivalent review of *Concrete Forest* endorses the anthology for proclaiming the arrival of a new, urban movement within Canadian literature, but Niedzviecki’s gloomy representation of the city disappoints. Smith sanctions the collection because it confirms the presence and signals the institutionalization of the urban revolution he was documenting in his own journalism and fiction. But the anthology disheartens Smith because it does not celebrate city living and hence reaffirms the “older” myths about the corrupt city:

> There is something paradoxically oldfashioned about presenting the city as a place of evil. Niedzviecki’s dysphoric collection has the unintentional effect of being strangely admonitory: Like Quebecois Catholic novels of the early century, it warns of the city’s moral dangers. Where is the vision of the city that drew us all here—the city as *glamorous*? The city I know bristles with wry academics and hip television producers and sexy dancers. It is a place of excitement, of fun. (author’s emph. “CanLit” D10)

Smith articulates the precise problem with labeling a diverse group of writers a movement. While he nevertheless considers himself a denizen of Niedzviecki’s “concrete forest,” he is disappointed that it neglects to mirror “the city I know.” He acknowledges that *Concrete Forest* deserves praise and dutifully provides it, but proceeds to express reservations about the anthology’s successes because it does not reflect what he considers to be the *proper* image of urban Canada—Niedzviecki is, in other words, looking out the wrong window. Indeed, Smith’s
complaint regarding the absence of specific occupations, and hence classes, suggests what most strongly distinguishes his vision of the city from his contemporaries.

Richard Florida controversially dubbed the real-life equivalents to Smith’s glamorous citizens the “creative class.” The economic geographer argues that, with the decline of manufacturing in advanced-capitalist nations, “creativity has become the principal driving force in the growth and development of cities, regions, and nations” (Cities 1). His research tracks how the shift from a manufacturing-based to a knowledge-based economy impinges upon urban development and human life. To emphasize the degree to which society was transforming, he states, “Globally, a third of the workers in advanced-industrial nations are employed in the creative sector, engaged in science and engineering, research and development, and the technology-based industries, in arts, music, culture, and aesthetic and design work, or in the knowledge-based professions of health care, finance, and law” (3). What differentiates these occupations from their earlier industrial counterparts is that they do not really “manufacture” a product but rather create wealth by producing knowledge and by providing services. What people now trade is value-adding ingenuity.

Florida argues that a very specific type of geography attracts the “creative class” and its industries. By analyzing successful centres of innovation, Florida discovers that such areas share certain characteristics: knowledge-based industries amalgamate in hip neighbourhoods—a vibrant arts scene and nearby high-density housing are like agar for the petri dish of creative cultures. Indeed, Florida invents a statistical indicator to measure a neighbourhood’s hipness: “The Bohemian Index” (Cities 114). In deadpan sociological speak that betrays its subject, he explains, “Statistical research deriving from this measure reveals the relationships between geographic concentrations of bohemians, talents, and high-technology industry concentration.
The results show that the presence and concentration of bohemians in an area creates an environment or milieu that attracts other types of talented or high human-capital individuals. 53 To paraphrase: the more hipsters in your district, the more big-buck jobs there will be, thanks to creative fat-cats loving to slum it up there off-hours. Florida’s statistics confirm David Brook’s argument in Bobos in Paradise (2000) that suggests, “the traditional distinction between the bourgeois and bohemia has given way to a new blending he calls the bohemian-bourgeois—bobos for short” (114). While Florida draws our attention to how the “creative class” highly privileges “lifestyle,” his study problematically only represents the opinions of high-tech workers and does not include the “pulls” that motivate artists, minimum-wage “baristas,” or retail-store owners. Hence the arguments regarding the bourgeois-bohemian synthesis essentializes the opinions of the sector’s salaried geeks as synecdochic for all creative workers.

The most controversial aspect of Florida’s thesis is that governments should encourage creative growth or risk economic apocalypse. What do creatives demand according to Florida? Sex, entertainment, and amenities. He provides this list:

- Large numbers of visibly attractive young people
- Easy access to a wide range of outdoor activities
- A vibrant music and performance scene with a wide range of live-music opportunities
- A wide range of night-life experiences, including many options without alcohol
- A clean, healthy environment and commitment to preserving natural resources for

53 As someone born and raised during Ottawa’s high-tech boom, I can assure readers that Florida problematically universalizes his research. Nortel, the now bankrupt high-tech giant, was surrounded by a forest, a highway, and (by the late 1990s) a subdivision. Offshoot industries tended to locate in industrial parks. And the “industry” did not concentrate in one given area but was spread out across Ottawa’s periphery—indeed many of the businesses were not located in “Ottawa” until the regional municipalities were forcefully politically amalgamated.
enjoyment and recreation

- A lifestyle that is youth-friendly and supportive of diversity. (83-84)

To account for the strong demand for “happening” neighbourhoods, he explains that creative jobs are extremely “stressful” and adds “young creative workers say that long working hours give them little time to enjoy themselves, so that when they do something it has to be good.” Citing a small focus group he conducted at Carnegie Mellon University comprised of high-tech employees, he contends that municipal governments must turn their downtown cores into playgrounds and consumption zones for upper-middle-class scenesters. Florida’s tautological argument is shocking. Who doesn’t want their free time to be good? Who doesn’t believe they work too hard? Who doesn’t want their neighbourhood to cater to their needs? We find here the elitism and classism that Florida’s critics have lampooned—that government resources and policies should terraform a downtown that satisfies the desires of a select and privileged group of high-income workers, the “gentry” of gentrification.

Richard Lloyd’s *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City* (2006, 2010) is the hip opposite of Florida’s bourgeois urbanism. Lloyd combines the disciplinary practices of geography and ethnography to study Chicago’s Wicker Park, one of the 1990s more infamous hipster enclaves. His “street level” theorization of post-industrialism resists Florida’s policy-orientated research, and the second edition of *Neo-Bohemia* laments how the original study had been “co-opted in sometimes disturbing ways by urban planners, keen to glean a recipe from its pages for encouraging new ‘neo-bohemias’ in stagnant neighbourhoods as a revitalization tool” (xii). Central to Lloyd’s objection is that urban planners ignore his class critique and his corresponding contention that “neo-bohemias” tend to dislocate and exploit the very people—artists, musicians, commercial entrepreneurs, and “colourful,” often “ethnic,”
working-class locals—its proponents argue instigate economic growth. He elaborates: “The neo-bohemian neighbourhood is shown to be a privileged space within new urban economies, but I also strive to show the limits of this privilege, and the price exacted from a host of local actors, from displaced minority populations to the legions of frustrated artists and other underemployed creative workers” (260). Lloyd provides ample statistical and anecdotal evidence that the influx of “creative” capital into bohemian neighbourhoods transforms the landscape defined by abandoned factories, ethnic-minority shop fronts, and low-rent artist dwellings into a commercially multicultural space dominated by middle- and upper-middle-class professionals and the lofts that house them, the businesses that “employ” them, and the stores that feed their consumption—Florida’s creative paradise.

Indeed, gentrification creates an environment ripe for the exploitation of artists and cultural workers. As Lloyd explains, despite the alleged celebration of the arts that revitalization supposedly evidences, it actually triply exploits artists. Firstly, bohemians gain a newfound cultural capital: businesses, especially retail shops, need to evidence their “hipness” to attract hipster and yuppie money. While stores hire aspiring artists, service industry jobs tend to pay minimum wage. Secondly, businesses will host cultural events—concerts, literary readings, theatre, etc—but artists rarely receive compensation for their labour (162-170). Hence while “creativity” is the product being marketed, landowners and capitalists benefit from the pool of excess and, at times, free labour. Artists certainly achieve a new level of social and cultural capital (i.e. “visibility”), but such status rarely transforms into tangible cash. Finally, gentrification causes a sharp spike in the cost-of-living due to higher residential and commercial rents levels. Often, the very people that make the neighbourhood “cool” are forced to relocate due to an over-heated, realty market. Indeed, this is precisely the economic, social, and cultural conflict that so disturbs Smith’s protagonist in *Noise*. 
The Contradictions of the Creative Class: Philistinism and Inaccessible Decadence

If we consider the plots of Smith’s first two novels, *How Sensitive* and *Noise*, we may begin to question the author and his characters’ hip credentials. In *How Insensitive*, Ted Owen moves to Toronto and tries to secure a job within the city’s print industry. He meets an ultra-hip club-owner/publisher on his train ride to the metropolis and spends the majority of the novel trying to reacquaint himself with the ever elusive capitalist. Notably, the story concludes with a job offer for Owen to contribute to the most avant-garde publication Canada has ever seen. It’s all there on the dust jacket, which helpfully synopsizes: “Toronto on the brink of the 1990s is reeling from its post-boom economic hangover. Adrift in its gossipy, grant-driven cultural scene, a coterie of overeducated, underemployed young people stab at vaguely artistic projects and scramble after the opportunities that seem tantalizing within reach—if you know the right people.” Not that we should allow copy-writing to dictate our critical inquiries, but the publisher clearly feels that *How Insensitive* is a jaded text about hunting jobs and gritty-glamourous “babes.” *Noise* is similarly materialistic. The over-worked and impoverished writer, James Willing, laboriously pecks away at hack journalism, while dreaming of bigger paycheques and the possibility of authoring “serious” cultural articles. After roughly 250 pages of occupational ambivalence, he demands a column and a raise, and, just like Smith, he gets both. We are, of course, being reductionist, but it is a little shocking that critics have all-but ignored Smith’s documentation of the politics of creative industry and its class disparities, especially his protagonists’ desires to secure bourgeois comforts by establishing themselves within Toronto’s cultural marketplace.

When we place *Noise* in dialogue with creative-city scholarship, we begin to notice that
the novel may very well be the fictional counter-part to Lloyd’s *Neo-Bohemia*. The setting and urban geography certainly support the notion. The neighbourhoods that characters inhabit are being gentrified; rich, white developers are buying up—once—“minority” occupied land. Buildings are crashing to the ground to make way for more expensive, residential mid-rises. Willing reviews the absurdly stylized and priced restaurants that are proliferating to satisfy high-class gastronomy. And the novel’s femme fatale, the tantalizingly named Nicola Lickson, is one of the era’s “urban pioneers,” a member of the first wave of settlers of abandoned-factories-turned-lofts in the neighbourhoods located on the Queen Street West tram line: Liberty Village and Parkdale. James encounters marketers, TV personalities, models, actors, C.E.Os of high-tech start-ups, and other creative-industry synecdoches. And he is all too willing to shill for philistinism as long as he earns enough lucre to abate his disgust and cultural elitism.

Smith doesn’t waste any time in introducing Willing’s conflict. In the opening scene, we find him madly rushing to finish a restaurant review while the neighbourhood’s noise—produced by competing groups of out-of-school teenage boys and girls—plus the summer’s stifling heat—prevent him from concentrating on his work. The scene establishes the novel’s central conflicts: (1) that the city’s noise, representing the downtown’s diversity and glamour, paradoxically inspires James but distracts him from producing “art” (Salem-Wiseman 147-148); and (2) that James desperately wants to become a member of the creative class, but his low-salaried freelance work does not provide him enough income to savour bobo decadence. The descriptions of James’s apartment evidence his poverty. He lacks coin to afford a home in a quieter, whiter, and richer neighbourhood or air conditioning to challenge the heat’s tyranny (Schneider 40-41). But it is Willing’s prose that subtly introduces the novel’s meditation on the creative class. His readers are the young, hip members of the inspired elite, those who a few years ago were overeducated and underemployed, who are now overemployed and undereducated. Terms from
critical social theory become decorative adjectives for overpriced, overaestheticized food. Willing writes, “and Kazimoto Stockwell, a design team best known for their faintly proletarian industrial-gothic fancies, notably the dazzling but brutal Control (Ritchie LeBlanc’s first brief but memorable indulgence). The new Chimera combines a fin-de-siècle eclecticism with a frankly nostalgic discomfort: a Victorian rethinking of a grunge-youth’s playroom or large sports arena restroom” (2). It is doubtful that the patrons understand Willing’s theoretical commentary, but they, nevertheless, love the jargon from their undergraduate courses. The brief passage outlines the cultural contradiction that Willing struggles to reconcile. He points out the aesthetic echoes between millennial Toronto and turn-of-the-century Paris, in which the harbingers of modernism began celebrating artistic decadence—vice for art’s sake. But, ironically, Willing also suggests playfully the contemporary “fin-de-siècle eclecticism” is intellectually hollow by alluding to how it gained a negative connotation as the century progressed. Hence, he highlights the irony in using proletarian aesthetics to decorate an elitist palace of haute gastronomy. The issue here does not regard cultural appropriation, but rather that Torontonians are too stupid to understand the décor’s artistic philosophy and clever irony. What irritates the critic is that the patrons desperately crave the avant-garde, but they do not know that the aesthetic is decidedly old-hat. When finally getting around to describing the food, he writes, “I suspect that this city’s rather suddenly torrid affair with young ginger may be drawing to a close. When the Holiday Inn’s brunch menu includes this ingredient, you can be sure that LeBlanc’s and Buhr’s downtown coterie will be eagerly seeking new terrains for exploration” (10). Here, Willing gets to the heart of the matter. His readers are willing to pay a premium to evidence their hipness, as long as their entertainment is newfangled and, exclusive to the moneyed and the chic, they are satisfied. The ideas informing the façade are unimportant.

What irks Smith is that the people who actually understand the ideas and history
informing hip culture are financially excluded from indulging. James and Piers De Courcy must, symbolically and literally, prostitute themselves to penetrate the tight circle that constitutes Toronto’s glamorous water holes. When Willing is eventually evicted from his apartment, because the building is being torn down to make way for a mid-rise, James seeks refuge in De Courcy’s two bedroom that he shares with Fiona—a potty-mouthed, herring-choker. The new digs are located somewhere off Dundas Street in the vaguely defined Little Portugal. The juxtaposition between the neighbourhood’s gritty exterior and De Courcy’s extravagant room symbolizes the disparity between his miniscule bank account and ample cultural capital. He decorates his room with eighteenth-century “Japanned papier-mâché,” a “Regency dining-room chair,” and an “Arts and Crafts sofa” among other decadent furnishings (48). In addition, he possesses an elegant assortment of rare and famous wines. De Courcy can afford such luxury items because he had assumed his deceased brother’s role as a rich, European’s Ganymede. As De Courcy’s explains his wealthy appearance, “All I have to do is visit him twice a year. That’s where I go every Christmas. I tell everyone I’m in Montreal, but I’m not. And I don’t go to any cottage in Muskoka” (51). And the narrator adds, “he shivered slightly.” James does not pickup on the sexual and monetary undertones and ironically says, “That’s not bad, then, eh? Free trip to the beach every year? Must be a blast” (51). And De Courcy replies, “No. Actually. It’s not.” He took three large gulps of wine” (52). The scene’s irony and chronological location in the text are important. At this point in the narrative, James is oblivious to his friend’s sexual exploitation and does not realize that he too prostitutes himself, but only intellectually, to gain access to high-end, hipster Toronto.

54 There is the potential to reader De Courcy as an allusion to Thomas de Quincey’s Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1821) that suggests Smith’s characters are “addicted” to upper-class culture.
Scenesters: The Haute Bourgeoisie

When Willing visits the appropriately named Mirage, he begins to question his occupation and the decadence of nouveau-riche creatives. The restaurant is the newest and most chic idea of the fictional Ritchie LeBlanc—Toronto’s premier, avant-garde chef. When James enters the joint, the greeter refuses to acknowledge his presence, hoping that the visibly déclassé James will leave. When he finally does get a seat, by occupying an empty one, he is moved to the “worst table, in the shadow of the steel staircase that rose, apparently unsupported, three stories in the centre of the room” (109). Once seated, the waitresses—“the genetically engineered Alpha Babes” (107)—ignore James and Nicola for bigger tips from “the thirty tablefuls of computer animators, talk-show hosts, senior publicists and CEOs of small software companies” (111). The patrons are vile. Next to them, a twenty-something yells into her cell, chastising her employer—some form of media company—for overworking her; and then, mid-conversation, answers another call and proceeds to cuss-out her cellular service provider. Smith writes: “She was at the next table, alone, except for a laptop and her phone and three different sizes of bottled water” (105). Smith’s class hierarchy is important for, as we will see, James considers Nicola—who lives in a loft—to be wealthy and the other patrons “didn’t just live in buildings like the Bomb Factory but actually owned them” (108). The scene satirizes, but does not condemn, the vanity and vulgarities of the scenester-elite. Indeed, it is not the crass materialism that ruins the evening but LeBlanc, who, uncontrollably “high” on cocaine, abruptly chases his sous-chef out of the restaurant by beating her with a half-cooked leg of bird, and then is promptly locked in the fridge by the slightly more sober staff (111-112). Because James is reviewing Mirage and his magazine will cover their bill, Nicola binge drinks, becoming too
plastered to taste or appreciate the food. Only James, of course, acts with any civility and he, Smith implies, is the only person who can appreciate the subtleties and ironies of LeBlanc’s masterful creation. Notably, LeBlanc is the only other person in the room that looks like James, their facial piercings symbolize a vague sort of artistic equivalence between those who produce and understand the avant-garde, as opposed to the herd-minded patrons who merely pay to consume and get seated to be seen.

The Petite Bourgeois at the Cultural Trough

Despite Smith’s satire of moneyed creatives, James indulges their antics. The scene lacks explicit moral judgment and Willing finds the evening amusing rather than repulsive. Indeed, the restaurant satire is muted compared to Willing’s unreserved disgust for the writers, editors, and photographers that yield to and hence promote hip without truly understanding it. Smith’s critique is two-fold: he attacks Canada’s grant-driven cultural scene that perpetuates outdated government propaganda and goes whoring after funding; similarly, he condemns the industry for rewarding faddish scenesters, those who intuitively know what is “cool” but can’t—and don’t care to—explain why. Smith distinguishes James from the editors that employ him and, most importantly, from Nicola, his occupational counterpart who makes significantly more money. By presenting James as enlightened, Smith attempts to articulate an unjust contradiction in which superficiality, not knowledge, is valued.

Smith’s unreserved assault on rural-centric cultural nationalism is well documented but his associated anxieties about arts capital and class have been downplayed if not simply overlooked. James’s two stories on Ludwig Boben—the prairie poet and national hero who has
not written anything since the 1970s—advance the journalist’s career but also provide Smith with ample satirical fodder. Despite Boben’s legendary status, Raymond Cottager, the editor of Reams & Reams—a vaguely disguised Quill & Quire—confesses to have never heard of the CanLit icon but nevertheless wants to profile the author to secure a Canada Council grant. He explains, “Caroline has some inside knowledge on the Council juries this round, and she says the gay-coming-out-in-an-immigrant community stuff is all over, even child abuse is wearing thin, believe it or not, and she doesn’t know what the next big thing is, but the West and the First Nations are always safe, so we have to go with that” (16). The conversation reveals the degree to which the federal government financially encourages the arts industry to focus on identity politics—an economic relationship that causes publications to chase “the next big thing” without particularly caring about the actual issue. While the scene has provided pro-urban critics with ample ammunition, it also supplies the novel’s sustained bombarding of philistinism. The editor, reading the publisher’s press release, informs James that Boben has won the “Responsible Fiction Award” from Prairie Afternoon—the satiric manifestation of the Manitoban literary journal Prairie Fire. Cottager assures James the award is “a big deal” but James is aware that the prize is only worth $500 and suggests the jury panel consists of Boben’s close friends (15). The satire is twofold: it lampoons the institutional effort to maintain the relevancy of outdated cultural nationalist myths, but it also mocks the owners and editors of Reams & Reams—“Canada’s Largest Publishing Journal”—for knowing very little about what they profess to analyze. Paralleling the foody satire, Willing is once again the only character that seems to know anything about Canadian literature and its history of praising the beaver. But unlike LeBlanc’s wealthy patrons, Cottager is the boss, and hence higher than James on the economic hierarchy, despite his ignorance of the country’s letters.
Nicola Lickson embodies superficial hipness. Her over-sexed body allegorizes the seductiveness of bohemian-chic, but her ditsy disposition undermines its charm and hence reduces “hip” to the fashionable. As Salem-Wiseman notes, Lickson intuitively forecasts Toronto’s cultural systems but she is unable to articulate why she believes something is cool (151). Indeed, everything about Lickson is shallow. Her wardrobe, for instance, continually appropriates styles from underground- or counter- culture but she rejects the ideas informing the fashion. For example, she shows up to the restaurant review in a gothic outfit. Smith writes, “Her legs were bare, but the ankles were crossed with black velvet ribbons, part of the clunky platform shoes with their driving arches. They were almost like pointed shoes, turning her feet into flying buttresses. Next to them, on the floor, was her purse: a hard box, covered in black velvet, in the shape of a coffin, shoulder strap attached, a cross embroidered on its lid” (108). Impressed, James asks if she’s into goth. “She almost choked on the soup. ‘Oh god no.’” And adds, “Oh, you mean my purse? I just thought it was cute.” Despite dressing like a goth-girl, Nicola’s reaction to the question suggests she views gothic as something worthy of embarrassment. She appropriates its style, but condescendingly dismisses the culture.

The creative industry relishes Nicola’s cosmetic talents; she not only earns more money than James but she is ascending the creative hierarchy. While there are numerous examples that symbolize the differences between the two cultural workers, Nicola’s loft is, perhaps, the most noteworthy because the scenes involving the Bomb Factory are juxtaposed with their shared labour. To seduce Nicola, James asks her to shoot the photographs for a story he’s writing for *Glitter*—a New York City magazine that covers fashion, pop culture, and celebrities. The gig

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55 It is tempting to read Nicola Lickson’s given name as a combination of “Nikon” and “Coca Cola.”
solidifies their careers because the American endorsement validates their value to Canadian audiences and, if their collaboration is successful, promises future freelance work within the southern city’s high-paying publishing industry. The article profiles Boben, whose best-selling novel that romanticizes sexual relationships between Western explorers and northern natives has been adapted into a major motion picture. James is hired due to his geographical proximity to the writer and his supposed knowledge of Canadian literature. Nicola, however, proves unprofessional because she forgets to develop the photographs. They miss the deadline and James relentlessly calls Nicola and hunts her favourite haunts hoping to track her down. He only finally manages to reach her after scaling the walls of the Bomb Factory and sneaking onto her balcony. James attempts repeatedly to gain entrance to the Bomb Factory, but he continually remains on its periphery: the action symbolizes his inability to embrace the fashionable and his corresponding vulnerability to economic suffering. Indeed, Nicola gives him the proofs, but notably does not invite him inside the loft because she is entertaining a second lover; James develops the photos himself and forwards their overdue work to New York. Ironically, the editors praise Nicola’s images—the pictures are so good they decide to use the Boben article as the cover story—but criticize James’s writing for being overly intellectual, literary, and focused on Canadian content that will alienate American readers. Glitter adds Nicola to their freelance roster while politely dismissing James. And maintaining Smith’s primarily allegorical use of the femme fatale, James’s romantic infatuation with the photographer ends, as he now considers her rude, self-indulgent, unprofessional, and intellectually vulgar (but still super-sexy).

The Bread-Stroking Suburbs
Toronto’s satellite communities temporarily serve as an allegorical alternative to cool urbanism. James’s knowledge and appreciation of classical culture originates from his suburban childhood in which he pursued a career as a violinist. But while his brief visit to his parents’ home contextualizes his expertise and devotion to aestheticism, the suburbanites are yet dismissed as phonies. The violin motif criticizes the “educated middle-class” (59-60). The skilled-and-economically-comfortable class encourages their children to study music to evidence their elitism and sophistication. But, the parents are unaware that the songs are about socialism and sex. James explains, “You know, they often start you out now with Stravinsky or Hindemith easy pieces, just because they’re easy, not because of the socialist theory behind it. They don’t tell you that” (57). Adding, that parents “couldn’t really have been listening to it, because they wouldn’t approve of it. I mean Kabalevsky was a genuine Stalinist, for Christ’s sake.”

Contrasting their downtown counterparts, bedroom communities value cultural conservatism but they are largely ignorant of the history and philosophy of older, high-brow music. Learning to play an instrument becomes merely an exercise in acquiring skills and cultural capital. (It’s a discipline if never a living.)

James, however, is momentarily tempted by the easy comforts of the pastoral suburb. Smith develops the motif with yet-another allegorical female: Alison, a former musical colleague who is now a single mother. He runs into her while attempting to rent a video and the two agree to catch up. While describing his unsatisfactory and low-wage work in the city, he recognizes writing is “just a skill” comparable to any other trade (173-174). The epiphany prods James to start imagining a more comfortable life in the suburbs with Alison and her child. If his career is going to be intellectually mundane, why not sell-out to middle-class luxury? The novel’s structural irony establishes the gap between James’s nostalgia and the suburban geography. He
imagines his new life during his brother’s graduation dinner at a bland hotel chain. Describing the logic behind the family’s celebratory choice, Smith writes:

Hans Willing didn’t care for restaurants much, he often said; he didn’t see the point in wasting all that time and money, and it was so much easier and cheaper to eat what your wife cooked for you at home. Furthermore, you always got what you wanted there, what you needed, nothing fancy or too spicy, and you always knew what you were getting. It was for this reason that when occasions such as weddings, graduations or funerals required a restaurant outing—as they required uncomfortable shirts and ties and the endurance of speeches—Mr Willing relied on a place he at least knew, a place where no surprises would be pulled on you, the Passages Dining Room at the Howard Johnson’s. (Even when he was travelling, he would drive some miles out of his way to the security of a Howard Johnson’s; although the names of the dining rooms varied—from Signatures and the Harmony Lounge in the big ones to Alfie Q’s and the Greenhouse Café in the university towns—you could always rely on them he said, though he never made it exactly clear for what.) (184)

The hotel-restaurant is a synecdoche for suburban geography and culture. No matter where you go, the food and experience will be safely the same. Significantly, the adjectives Smith uses to describe the restaurant also describe what the protagonist associates with middle-class life. It is safe, white, comfortable, and there are “no surprises.” James imagines patronizing the restaurant “every fourth Friday” with Alison, “his curler girl” (186). The sudden appeal of suburban life is directly correlated with creative industry. In the city, James is emasculated. He considers Nicola his economic and sexual superior. Conversely, New Munich is a place where a man’s wife, as expected, really does cook dinner every night. Symbolically, James “turned back to the bar,
suddenly wanting an old-fashioned drink, something with a Cary Grant sound to it, something this guy would know how to mix perfectly, something you had to shake, something you would call a *cocktail*. A martini, a manhattan, a Tom Collins. He wasn’t exactly sure what a manhattan was, but the sound was right. He wanted something manly” (186). Notably, all the drinks are named after men, include “man” in their titles, or refer to male genitalia. Even the *highball* he eventually orders. Indeed, Alison is attracted to James because she associates him with the very same characteristics he projects onto Nicola: edgy, glamorous, and successful. The suburbs offer the hack journalist a feeling of intellectual and male superiority. James, of course, rejects ultimately the comforts of bedroom communities, partially because Alison moves to Toronto and attempts to become a hipster but more importantly because New Munich’s monotony is irreconcilable with his urbane disposition.

The Hip-Intellectual Synthesis

Smith concludes *Noise* by synthesizing the two geographies. As Schneider notes, James uses his glittery money to rent an apartment in a white, upscale neighbourhood that is free from the noisy disruptions of Little Portugal: “James equates the uniform whiteness of both the apartment’s walls and the neighbourhood’s residents with affluence, respectability, civility, and most significantly, unbroken silence. Here, in this refuge, he will be alone, undisturbed and able to write” (41). Schneider argues that the apartment represents the rejection of immigrants and their culture, but his analysis problematically ignores the truth that James defends his former neighbours when his roommates, Fiona and Piers, complain about the noise. Rather, the scene seems to be mostly about class. The description of the new apartment is reminiscent of New Munich’s homogeneity and bland silence. Indeed, as James moves into his new dwelling, he is
interrupted by a phone call from Julian, one of Toronto’s magazine editors, who offers James, who is now a “star” journalist, a monthly column and a salary. Unwilling to continue producing hack journalism, James demands that the column be about ideas. James says: “Here’s how its going to work: I write an essay every issue—not a service piece, not a news piece, not an article, but an essay—on some trend, some idea I’ve had about music” (263). The juxtaposition between the apartment’s description and James’s promotion symbolizes his newfound financial security. But, eventually, James finds the apartment’s silence unbearable and plays industrial music by the ominously named Hostilator X to fill the room with electronic sounds and other urban-ambient noise. Schneider contends that the CD’s black jewel case serves as a “substitute for the racialized foreign other” (42), but such a reading is overly speculative. Given the artist’s name, the jewel case’s styling, and its sound, the music is probably an example of German electronica that is notorious for ambient, industrial soundscapes and dark themes.56 The samples recall not solely the racket produced by his Portuguese neighbours, but also the screams from Acton—the radical performance artist that lives above De Courcy—and the beats, bangs, and bleeps of the entire city: the trains, cars, nightclubs, and the pay-per-use fax machines he relies upon to submit his stories. Indeed, the music is appropriately created by synthesizers. The concluding scene, then, paralleling the music, blends what James considers to be desirable within a single environment. His new column, like the apartment, combines his hip sensibilities with his classical education and promises to upbraid Toronto’s glamorous philistines.

Despite the novel’s sustained analysis of the contradictions of the creative class, its conclusion aborts a meaningful critique. Indeed, Willing reaffirms that the elite are, to borrow a

56 If we accept this reading, then we could say that the German electronica is also an allusion to New Munich, and hence represents a musical synthesis of both suburban and urban space.
phrase from Hon. David Dingwall, “entitled to their entitlements.” Despite dismissing Nicola as vain and unintelligent, Willing acknowledges that her work is excellent and that she deserves her success (258). Smith’s complaint has to do with access, namely that Willing is too poor to enjoy bourgeois comforts, however that “problematic,” if we can call it one, is reconciled when he gets his raise. His higher standard of living palliates his disgust with the publishing industry because he now earns the moolah he believes he merits. The ending does, however, indulge in romanticism as Willing becomes a romantic journalist who will “enlighten” the masses about their culture; hence the new column provides an opportunity to educate Toronto’s hipsters about the convoluted overlaps between classical and contemporary aesthetics. But even this trajectory is partially undermined by an unintentional irony: that Willing’s “genius,” his knowledge of Canadian and classical culture, is not as authoritative as he believes it to be. Willing’s cultural pronouncements on Canadian literature are sensational and inaccurate; he is just as ignorant as the other characters he so harshly criticizes. Hence, Smith’s “solution” to philistinism is hypocritical, his critique of rural-cultural nationalism, while humourous, is unconvincing. Indeed, there is a sublime irony that so many commentators refer to *Noise* to evidence the shift from a rural to urban consciousness in Canada, for the novel fails to provide a compelling critique of cultural nationalism, nor does it imagine an alternative. Rather, we are only offered the anxieties, sexism, and petty insecurities of a food-and-fashion journalist, who meets his Waterloo, so to speak, in New Munich.

*Noise* is representative of the broader postmodern-hipster “movement’s” failure to articulate a new vision for national belonging and Canadian literature. While their desire to update Canada’s cultural imagery and symbolism is a worthy one, their literature privileges very specific urban sub-cultures. See for instance, Smith’s creatives, Gartner’s “anxious girls,” Niedzviecki’s down-and-out Torontonians, and Michael Winter’s St. John’s-set artists. Many
hipster texts are classic examples of city writing, in which the author documents a real-but-fictionalized local. However, this referential impulse produces geographies that are too localized to serve as national metaphors. *Noise* is a perfect example. The delights of the creative city are financially inaccessible for the majority of Torontonians and Canadians, nor are Willing’s experiences representative of everyday, Canadian life. Indeed, Smith’s defence of the creative-class hierarchy is more likely to repel rather than appeal to many audiences. The disconnect between the postmodern hipsters’ polemics and their fiction suggests their heroic defence of the downtown citadel is a false-front disguising a rather pedestrian demand that their generational experiences should merit inclusion within the literary canon.
Chapter 7 Hipster Cosmopolitanism: Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For*

While serving as Toronto’s poet laureate, one of Dionne Brand’s major initiatives has been Poetry is Public—a project that seeks to “transform Toronto’s public realm into an illuminating forum for the written word.” Brand heads the advisory council, which includes a strong roster of Toronto cultural contributors: Leslie Sanders—a York University professor who specializes in African-Canadian literature—, Lillian Necakov-Avalos—a poet—, Paul Vermeersch—a poet, editor, and publisher,—Janice Saurez-Mason—a representative from Toronto Public Library—, and Lillie Zendel—the municipality’s Senior Cultural Affairs Officer who is responsible for promoting the creative city agenda. While “Poetry is Public” seeks to build communities and identities through art, the presence of Zendel on the Advisory Board suggests that the initiative may be camouflaged, economic stimulus. Indeed, Brand was appointed poet laureate in 2008, the very same year that Mayor David Miller released the *Creative City Planning Framework* that begins with an epigraph from Miller declaring, “We must put creativity at the heart of Toronto’s economic development strategy.” And the second sentence is just as notable: “The Mayor’s vision of creativity as an economic engine; Richard Florida’s arrival in Toronto: two prominent indications of the importance of creativity at this moment in the city’s history.” Miller’s *Creative City Planning Framework* outlines a ten-year plan that, drawing upon Florida’s controversial thesis in *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), argues that fostering a vibrant arts community and a “groovy” downtown core are essential for stimulating growth in Toronto. Miller, perhaps more than any other Mayor in the city’s history, supported the arts, but his cultural cheerleading was economically motivated. And once Brand, who is known for her radicalism and socialism, became poet laureate she immediately became
co-opted to Miller’s quest to rebuild Toronto’s downtown by encouraging artists to live in “hip”
eighbourhoods that would, consequently, attract creative industries and their high-salaried
employees.

Brand’s relationship with the creative city predates her reign as poet laureate. Tuyen, her
protagonist in *What We All Long For* (2005), embodies the “pulls” that draw creative capital. To
measure a neighbourhood’s ability to attract creative industry, Florida formulated the
“bohemian” and “gay” indexes to measure an area’s “hipality,” tolerance, and diversity. As a
gay, Vietnamese-Canadian, avant-garde artist, living in low-rent squalor, Tuyen is a walking-
talking confirmation of downtown west’s ability to lure moneyed bobos, the prototypical
bohemian that Toronto, Hamilton, Montreal, New York City, Vancouver, and London were
officially competing to enlist to attract creative capitalists. Brand’s subsequent and official
involvement with Toronto’s creative city agenda makes her representation of bohemians,
gentrification, race, and downtown west all the more significant.

*What We All Long For* garnered instant canonicity—winning the Toronto Book Award
and inspiring over a dozen critical articles. Indeed, the novel is quickly becoming the
representative text for transnational and diaspora studies in Canada, as many scholars have noted
it provides new imaginings of multiculturalism and (trans)national belonging, as the text
romanticizes the adventures of the young, multiethnic inhabitants of Kensington Market, but still
criticizes institutional and “polite” racism; and represents Canada as a “refuge” for migrants.
However, Brand refuses to erase the traumatizing history of migration and the equally unsettling
racism that awaits refugees in Canada. If we were to perpetuate the incorrect, clichéd reading of
Hugh MacLennan’s famous metaphor, we could say that *What We All Long For* presents an
ambivalent, contemporary rehashing of the two solitudes thesis in which the young and old are
alienated from one another, in which ethnic minorities remain isolated from white, mainstream Canada. Despite including scenes that romanticize Toronto’s diversity and multiethnicity, the novel’s ending, in which Quy—who survived as an abandoned child in several Asian refugee camps—is beaten, perhaps potentially murdered, in suburban Toronto because the local African Canadians mistake him for a “rich mother f**ker” who must be punished, demonstrates that Toronto is, for Quy, “worse than any of the refugee camps he survived” and destroys the illusion that “racism might end with the unanglicized city” (Rosenthal 256). There is an ambivalence here that recognizes the complexities of identity formation in a multiethnic, but class-divided city.

The critical consensus is clear. Brand re-imagines Toronto’s geography as an ambivalent metaphor for a new form of cosmopolitan, transnational identity that is intended to replace a multiculturalism predicated upon static ethnic and oppositional ontologies, a new form of belonging that is not limited to Toronto or Canada but one that is relevant to any global city. 57 Caroline Rosenthal argues that Brand uses Hogtown’s geography to challenge the erasure of black subjectivities from the city’s identity and discussions on Toronto literature (215). Brand displays how the black city has been negated and how artists can imagine, and hence render visible, the black city’s past and present. Michael Buma demonstrates that Brand’s use of Korea Town and South Korea’s 2002 World Cup soccer championship suggests that while Toronto’s citizens are able to identify with other ethnic groups, by joining the post-game street party that shut down Bloor Street between Bathurst and Christie, the event paradoxically reaffirms the borders or boundaries erected by ethnicity and nationality—a scene, Buma contends, several

57 Brand’s representation of Toronto merits comparison to Pico Iyer’s portrayal of the city in The Global Soul (2000). While What We All Long For includes many scenes that are comparable to Iyer’s largely celebratory narrative, her representation of Quy and the racism experienced by the older generation balances her narrative.
critics have latched onto to evidence Brand’s endorsement of “Canadian multiculturalism rather than the cosmopolitan, urban, post-national, and highly globalized move beyond the ‘crumbling ideas of nation and state’ that Brand seems to have intended” (22). Similarly, Kit Dobson argues that What We All Long For “represents a generational shift in the politics of being in Canadian space” (Transnational 179) and that cities such as Toronto are “providing alternative grounds for thinking through concepts of subjectivity and being, against earlier models of belonging” (180). Adding that “Brand’s urban space is but one of any number of grounds upon which understandings of selfhood are being articulated as the nation-state is rethought in the context of global capitalism.” Needless to say, Brand’s use of urban space and place has particularly infatuated critics.

Square Multiculturalism

Despite the critical obsession with Brand’s representation of urban space, global capitalism, and (trans)national identity, scholars have yet to consider the text’s relationship to the creative city. Indeed, if the novel is about migration, transnationalism, and capitalism, it is a little puzzling why critics have yet to draw upon the City of Toronto’s developmental strategies and policies to contextualize Brand’s narrative and its politics, or the plethora of urban studies research on Toronto, gentrification, and the creative city that have focused on downtown west. Scholars have emphasized that Brand’s narrative goes out of its way to ignore, euphemize, or downplay the historical importance of “white” industry in Toronto. As Emily Johansen argues, Brand omits strategically the “traditional (white) power centres of Toronto—Bay Street, Queen’s Park, and City Hall” and that “the sites of corporate power are strikingly absent” (51). The major scenes in Kensington Market, Korea Town, and Richmond Hill privilege ethnic spaces,
recall the obscured presence of minorities, and inscribe their existence within the city’s real and imaginary landscape.

As tantalizing as this narrative may be, it ignores that Kensington Market is, well, a market and that it contributes to the city’s broader economy, especially as a tourist attraction. Laura Levin and Kim Solga, criticizing Toronto’s creative city agenda from a Marxist perspective, argue that Kensington Market is “the city’s most iconic Boho village” (47), that by 2002, the year in which Brand’s novel is set, the neighbourhood had become a battle-ground between the minority-owned businesses—the grocers, bakeries, and fruit stands that make the neighbourhood a market—and invasive hipsters. The older businesses were being economically pushed out of the neighbourhood due to the pedestrian-friendly policies that prevented their clients, who drove to the market for their weekly groceries, from patronizing their businesses. The urbane Marxists explain,

Far from realizing a fresh and inclusive neighborhood space, in Kensington Market pedestrianization threatens to mythologize the ‘community’ as ‘counter-cultural,’ easily skipping over—and in some cases discounting altogether—the diverse histories and contributions of existing residents both to that community and to the Market’s larger public good(s). It similarly risks homogenizing that community as being opposed to a certain kind of capital (‘canned foods and toilet paper’[129])—that which area activists deem too commercial or not trendy enough. (authors’ emph., 48)

Levin and Solga’s comments remind us that Kensington Market is not a pastoral space that is magically isolated from corporate power and capitalism, but rather that it is a diverse neighbourhood with different groups that prefer different kinds of urban development and retail space. Indeed, while ethnicity is certainly an issue here, the conflict primarily originates from
class differences—the grocers, cafe-owners, and hipsters are all multiethnic groups, but they have divergent priorities.

In Brand’s *What We All Long For*, we witness a parallel conflict between the neighbourhood’s capitalist class and the newer creatives, and Brand develops the theme using the archetypal structure of the hip-square dialectic. Tuyen’s parents own and operate a restaurant in Kensington Market; Oku’s mother travels there once a week to do her grocery shopping, as does Carla’s stepmother Nadine; and Jackie’s parents, aging hipsters, used to patronize the neighbourhood’s “underground” dance halls after they migrated to Toronto in 1980 from Halifax. The commonality amongst the older generation is that their relationships with the neighbourhood are determined by race and ethnicity.

Brand uses Tuan and Cam’s Vietnamese restaurant to criticize what Stanley Fish labeled “boutique multiculturalism”—“the multiculturalism of ethnic restaurants, weekend festivals, and high-profile flirtations with the other” that is “characterized by its superficial or cosmetic relationship to the objects of its affection” (378). Fish draws attention to how tourism co-opted multiculturalism—a critique that can certainly be applied to Kensington Market. Tuan, an engineer, and Cam, a doctor, are unable to find employment in their chosen occupations because Canadian businesses and governments refuse to recognize their credentials. Eventually, they open the Saigon Pearl and, as business blossoms, they become wealthy. But Brand’s narrators, who consistently editorialize the content, explain, “They were being defined by the city” (66).  

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58 Critical discussions of Brand’s *What We All Long For* have, like this chapter, have been overwhelmingly thematic and obsessed with identity politics. While the text certainly invites such a focus, Brand’s narrative structure is unusual. Like a social realist text, it wavers back and forth between creating the illusion of objectivity and heavy-handed didacticism. A single narrator seems to “tell” the overarching stories, but individual chapters are narrated in the first person while others use centre-of-consciousness. Hence, there is an article to be written that analyzes her form of romantic realism and how it relates to the novel’s explicit political content.
He or she writes, “it was easy to see themselves the way the city saw them: Vietnamese food. Neither Cam nor Tuan cooked very well, but how would their customers know? Eager Anglos ready to taste the fare of their multicultural city wouldn’t know the differences” (67). While it is clear that Brand challenges the multicultural gaze, it is noteworthy that the passage presents “the city” and “eager Anglos” as synonymous. The subtle substitution emphasizes the degree to which Brand associates Toronto, the city, and its institutions with the hegemonic Anglos; indeed, the device approaches the two distinct ideas as if they were metonymic, part of a single whole. Critics have galleried the scene to display Brand’s critique of multiculturalism and the text’s “remapping of the Anglicized city” (Rosenthal 217), but scholars have been less interested in the scenes that complicate the narrator’s didacticism, such as the later chapter in which Tuyen recalls her youth working in the restaurant catering to the city’s multiethnic population. Tuyen, “only felt exposed in the restaurant when European clientele were present, and when the customers were Vietnamese or Korean or African or South Asian, she hated, then, the sense of sameness or else ease she was supposed to feel with them” (129-130). Tuyen’s anxieties originate from the us-them dialectic imposed on identity politics by official multiculturalism, from the awareness that she is not white but also from her rejection of marginal solidarity. All the customers are dismissed as “sell-outs” who conform to official or boutique multiculturalism. And Tuan and Cam’s motivations are entirely pragmatic; they do not care about identity politics, but rather simply wish to make some money to ensure the family’s upward economic mobility.

For the other parents, Kensington Market provides the potential to maintain an ethnic identity. Nadine, Carla’s stepmother, visits every Saturday to purchase Caribbean fruits, fish, and spices so that she can make Jamaican dishes for her husband Derek. But the neighbourhood repulses Carla who is forced to join the weekly pilgrimage. Unlike Nadine, Carla “stood waiting, her nose rejecting the smells, her throat gagging on rotten fish and rotten vegetables, her
face turning away from the appalling blood stains on butchers’ aprons at European Meats, her whole being wishing to be elsewhere. Carla hated Nadine’s exotica. She was uneasy among the pawpaws, soursops, plantains, goat, fish, gizadas, cans of ackees” (130). The descriptors Brand uses to describe the ingredients for the Jamaican food are clearly negative: “rejecting,” “gagging,” “turning away,” “appalling,” “hated,” and “uneasy.” Carla’s rejection of the food expresses her second-generation anxiety, namely that she does not identify with her father’s dietary culture. Indeed, she finds his attachment to his former nation exotic, “foreign,” and “embarrassing” (131) to such an extreme that, as a youth, she vows to never come back to Kensington Market again. While the critique of the patronizing, white gaze dissipates, the passage seems to offer a second critique of ethnic groups that attempt to maintain a static, nostalgic identity in a new city and country.

The chapter about Jackie’s parents’ love-affair with the Paramount—a blind pig located in the same spot as the Market’s contemporary LCBO that uses Chinese design motifs—demonstrates that Brand’s critique is not solely limited to immigrant communities but rather relates to diasporas. The Africans that congress at the Paramount have migrated to Toronto from around the world, and Jackie’s Africadian parents have trouble getting along with their Caribbean counterparts. Unabashed hipsters, they strut into Toronto wearing the previous decade’s psychedelic clothes: Indian tops, velvet pants, and feathered hats (94-95). The Paramount—an unlicensed dance hall and underground casino—serves as a “refuge” for hip blacks. The narrator explains, “They knew about the Paramount from Cape Breton to Vancouver, they being a select group. Black people and a few, very few, hip whites—whites who were connected” (95). A type of place “people went to feel in their own skin, in their own life. Because when a city gets finished with you in the daytime, you don’t know if you’re coming or going.” In other words, the Paramount becomes like a “church” where blacks may
congress and escape the city’s racism for a couple of hours, until they walk home drunk in the early morning and try to avoid the neighbourhood’s beat police officers. While Brand romanticizes the club’s glamour, even comparing it to a 1920s speakeasy, she associates the Paramount with the crime, drug abuse, violence, and neglectful parenting that haunt contemporary, inner-city communities. The “Scotian” parents frequently get into fistfights with the Caribbean blacks, and their extravagant drinking and the father’s gambling ensure the family remains impoverished. When the club is shut down and no other business services black taste, the parents find themselves severed from their racial community and isolated within the city. The section, then, adds an important contrast to the Saigon Pearl because it shows, paradoxically, that some desirable, glamorous intangibles are lost when an ethnic or racial community is not able to successfully integrate within Toronto’s multicultural real estate and entertainment economy. Some communities, particularly black communities, are unable to maintain a storefront and cultural presence within the free market—the legal clubs that open up to replace the Paramount go out of business and the “underground” haunts are eventually shut down by the authorities. Capitalism and institutionalized racism assure the foreclosure of black space. Hence the Paramount becomes an alluring, destructive, racialized, and failed alternative to the “boutique multiculturalism” model that Tuyen’s parents fiscally embrace.

Hip Cosmopolitanism

The four, young Torontonians are linked by their aloof hipness. Brand suggests this state of being spawns from their inability and unwillingness to accept an imposed ethnic identity, like their parents, or attempt to blend in with mainstream Canadian society—an impossible task due the ongoing phenomenon of racialization. As the narrator explains, “This is what drew them
together. They each had the hip quietness of having seen; the feeling of living in two dimensions, the look of being on the brink, at the doorway listening for everything” (20). The narrator continues, “They all, Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie, felt as if they inhabited two countries—their parents’ and their own—when they sat dutifully at their kitchen tables being regaled with how life used to be ‘back home,’ and when they listened to inspired descriptions of other houses, other landscapes, other skies, other trees, they were bored” (20). The repetition of “other” and especially its connection to foreign places reveals that the twenty-somethings are unable to relate to their parents’ cultures because they originate and are sustained by geographies (and one would also assume peoples) that are distant and alien to Canada. Numerous critics have discussed how diaspora and ethnicity place the second-generation characters in a liminal position but why, why would Brand use “hip” to describe their state of being?

According to Norman Mailer, the hipster’s definitive characteristic is his unwillingness to conform to the existing ontology of American life, that one is “doomed willy-nilly to conform if one is to succeed” (3). The younger generation’s hipsterism stems from their rejection of the categories being offered by boutique multiculturalism. They may either join white, mainstream Canadian society or they may embrace a nostalgic, cliché ethnic identity. The implication is that multiculturalism had become so entrenched within Canadian society that a mosaic identity had also become hegemonic. Brand’s invocation of the hip-square dialectic is multifaceted; it dismisses both the “centre” and “margin” as square, as modes of being that demand conformity. As Kit Dobson explains,

_What We All Long For_, then, proposes through these characters that communities existing in resistance to racism, nationalism, and oppression need not be formed on a strictly oppositional basis or seek acknowledgement and inclusion. Instead, the lives of Tuyen,
Carla, Oku, and Jackie suggest in various ways that transgressing against borders, while maintaining an openness towards difference and the future, might enable new webs of social relations. (*Transnational* 195)

To date, scholars have focused on the characters’ mobility throughout the city to evidence how their movements—particularly their trajectories associating unexpected places and spaces—serve as metaphors for transnational being. In this sense, because the characters are always moving, always transgressing borders, they do not become entirely associated with a single place or identity. We shall see that the characters’ hipsterism and bohemianism also contribute to the novel’s major thematic statement, but we shall also consider how hip cosmopolitanism threatens to contain the characters within yet-another static category due their association with creative city economics.

Brand uses Ornette Coleman’s “The Jungle Is a Skyscraper” as a metaphor for the protagonists’ relationships with the city and their parents. The short chapter depicts one of the novel’s most romantic scenes. As Tuyen, Oku, and Jackie listen to free jazz saxophonist Coleman, each one experiences an epiphany. In turn, they all realize that truth is complicated and disorganized. Tuyen: “My father would never understand that … Order and practicality is all he sees. It’s like anything that’s complicated they see as waste” (231). Oku: “Not Mine. Mine would see it, right, but he’d ignore it. He’d say ‘Boy, that can’t feed you.’ And he’s the one who turned me on to Ornette Coleman.” Carla: “While I’m listening to the music, I can hear it. It’s like a puzzle. It makes us seem understandable. Like why Jamal is in jail and everything.” In this scene, we find Brand’s most explicit message to her readers: that truth originates from battling complexity. The twenty-somethings, like Jazz, long for and celebrate “dissonance” (228). They reject the false and categorical world-view of their parents and,
instead, embrace liminal space. The notion retrieves Mailer’s rejection of the conventional, his argument that hipsterism “sees every answer as posing immediately a new alternative, a new question, its emphasis is on complexity rather than simplicity” (14). The hipster seems psychopathic compared to the square because his existence is continually ambivalent and dialectic, he inhabits a state of “absolute relativity.” The song, then, does not simply express Brand’s rejection of limiting categories, but also an awareness that her alternative, while liberating, is not an easy model—existence becomes a “puzzle” that provides enlightenment but, paradoxically, never ceases to spawn new problematics. Hence, when the songs ends, all three want it “to last longer” so that they may sustain a “hysteria that was infectious” (229). It is this focus on existential ecstasy that, perhaps, most strongly aligns Brand’s and Mailer’s hipsterism.

According to Mailer’s theory, the hipster seeks to become a psychopath because the psychopath, unlike the psychotic, is able to will and control madness. He explains, “the decision is to encourage the psychopath in oneself, to explore that domain of experience where security is boredom and therefore sickness, and one exists in the present, in that enormous present which is without past or future” (2-3). This is a prominent theme in Brand’s novel. Take, for example, Tuyen’s apartment; it testifies to her attempt to embrace the unpractical: she “would become a Dadaist making everything useful useless and vice versa in her chaotic apartment” (68). Her bachelor constantly changes as she tears down walls to make more room for her artwork—a not so subtle metaphor glamorizing the power of art to transcend boundaries and the primacy of the present over the past. Indeed, Tuyen’s Dadaism contrasts with her parents’ trauma. Unable to overcome the loss of Quy while fleeing the Communists, they impose an extreme, sanitary order onto the household. Cam “laminates” everything in the suburban mansion. The narrator explains, “If she could wrap everything in plastic or laminate it, Tuyen felt, she would. Which is why the carpeting in their spacious house had a path of plastic running over regularly travelled
And the chairs and couches were not only Scotchgardened but covered in protective plastic that made sitting the most uncomfortable act” (63). Cam’s behaviour is compulsive and it originates from her trauma. For Brand juxtaposes the “laminating” of the house with Cam’s preoccupation with duplicating and laminating “birth certificates, identity cards, immigration papers, and citizenship papers and cards.” The comparison suggests that Cam’s mania is a result of her traumatizing migration and that the “laminating” is a mad attempt to impose order onto the world, but the items become plastic-ghosts because they constantly remind the parents of their lost child. In contrasts, Tuyen’s Dadaism and her decision to live in Kensington Market are conscious choices that express her rejection of her parent’s worldview. For Tuyen, “Familiarity was not what she wanted or what would make her feel as if she were in the world. It was the opposite. The alien touch of sidewalks, the hooded looks of crowds. She loved the unfriendliness, the coolness. It was warmer than the warmth of her family in Richmond Hill” (62). The city’s anonymity, its ahistoricism, becomes for Tuyen a refuge, a place in which she can negotiate her being and escape the overzealous propriety and stability of Richmond Hill. But it is also a decision that aligns Tuyen with the neighbourhood’s burgeoning hipster population that was imposing its counter-culture ethos onto the Market’s social fabric.

It is doubtful that any other neighbourhood in Toronto could so thoroughly complement Brand’s aesthetic and thematic project. Spadina, Dundas Street West, Bathurst, and College form the boundaries of Kensington Market. The neighbourhood is a geographic allegory that expresses Brand’s desire to move away from a tourist-friendly multiculturalism to a multiethnic, transnational being. Chinatown’s core rests along Spadina between College and Dundas, with a small outshoot that travels east along Dundas. Hence, Chinatown is a part of Kensington Market but also provides a powerful contrast to the rest of the neighbourhood’s multiethnic character. The area west of Spadina is multiethnic and still contains storefronts and populations that
evidence the presence of different immigrant groups that historically settled in the
eighbourhood—especially Africans, Jews, Chinese, and, more recently, Latinos. The Saigon
Pearl is located in Chinatown whereas Tuyen lives on College Street (and close to the Bathurst
border), which places her second home within the Market’s multiethnic as opposed to
“multicultural” or “enclave” geography. Secondly, the topography contributes to the novel’s
realism. Kensington Market offers low-rent but often-decrepit apartments. Hence, Carla and
Tuyen could afford to move into their bachelors right out of high school. Related to this point is
Kensington Market’s reputation as a bohemian and counter-cultural neighbourhood. It is located
adjacent to the University of Toronto and the Ontario College of Art and Design—the
neighbourhood houses students and aspiring artists such as Tuyen. Indeed, Brand introduces the
apartments as a bohemian hub, a “refuge” for artists and hipsters, “Tuyen’s and Carla’s
apartments became places of refuge, not just for their immediate circle but for all the people they
picked up along the way to their twenties. Like the Graffiti Boys across the alleyway, Tuyen’s
friends from the gay ghetto, a few hip-hop poets, two girls who made jewellery and knit hats, and
an assortment of twenty-somethings who did various things like music and waitering” (23). In
ture bohemian spirit, Tuyen throws days-long parties that are fueled by artistic conversations and
a grab bag of recreational drugs. The apartments, then, also manifest Brand’s brand of
hipsterism that she offers as an alternative to square, mainstream Toronto.

The Evasion of Creative Economics and Brand’s Romanticism

In What We All Long For, we find another geographical allegory that not necessarily
idealizes but romanticizes Tuyen’s apartment. For it is not solely the novel’s contrapuntal
structure that encourages us to reach this conclusion, but also the degree to which Brand attempts
to sever the space from capital. Simply put, Tuyen does not work and she avoids, as much as possible, earning income. With the exception of Jackie’s second-hand store, Brand criticizes explicitly every form of capitalism in the novel, especially the businesses of Tuyen’s family members. This trend relates not only to Brand’s desire to isolate artistic production from capital, but also to distance the characters from the creative city—to avoid having her own artistic vision and that of her characters appropriated by Toronto’s commoditization and institutionalization of the arts as an economic development strategy. When we read What We All Long For from such a perspective, Kensington Market gains yet another importance as it is an “artistic neighbourhood,” but it has largely avoided the intense gentrification or “creative city” development that has occurred in Toronto’s other arts districts. In an article tracking the relationship between artists, gentrification, and identity formation, Allison L. Bain offers “a crude sketch of the territorial extent of the Toronto art scene” (308). Neighbourhoods like Parkdale, Queen Street West, Trinity Bellwoods, King Street West, Riverdale, and Leslieville offer artists low-income housing and a sense of marginality. She explains, for local artists “the ‘margins’ continue to be celebrated as mythical spaces of acceptance, where difference and diversity can be effectively expressed” and, importantly, where artists feel they are spatially marginal in relation to bourgeois society (311). But Bain ignores the city of Toronto’s creative agenda and one of its major contradictions: that the very neighbourhoods that allegedly oppose the centre have become the privileged sites of the city’s economic development strategy. As Lehrer and Wieditz explain, the areas immediately east and west of Toronto’s business district—that blank white space in the middle of Bain’s map—were targeted by city planners, realtors, and the upper-middle-class for a massive wave of gentrification that, it was hoped, would fuel the entire region’s economic development. Starting in 1994 with Mayor Barbara Hall and intensifying with the city’s official adoption of Florida’s creative thesis in 2003, the “two
industrial areas east and west of Toronto’s Central business District—King and Spadina as well as King and Parliament—were rezoned to allow mixed uses” (145). These neighbourhoods’ expanding arts scenes became essential elements for making the downtown suitable for gentrification. Discussing Toronto’s Culture Plan for the Creative City (2003), Lehrer concludes, “It shows how culture, arts, heritage, as well as ethnic diversity are being absorbed and commodified under neoliberal conditions, into a marketing strategy that strives to demonstrate Toronto’s uniqueness to the world while, ironically, replicating and following the entrepreneurial strategies of other urban governments around the world” (148). What is notable about the two articles is that neither one of them identifies Kensington Market as an “artistic” or “creative” neighbourhood.

Brand anticipates the creative city’s potential to appropriate her narrative and attempts to disassociate her artist figure from gentrification. Tuyen’s art, for example, is not commercial; while she displays her works in underground galleries she does not, however, sell it. Similarly, Jackie’s used-clothing store is located outside of Kensington Market’s borders, but she does, however, hope to eventually benefit from gentrification. Brand writes, “Ab and Zu advertised itself as selling post-bourgeois clothing. The store was just on the border where Toronto’s trendy met Toronto’s seedy. The rent was cheap, and Jackie had had the foresight to think that the trendy section would slowly creep toward Ab and Zu and sweep the store into money” (99). The neighbourhood, probably Parkdale, is ripe for gentrification as entrepreneurial anarchists mingle with “the working class, the poor, the desperate.” Indeed, Brand seems to ally Jackie with the creative city’s obsession with “gritty glamour” and feigned marginality, the sense that its inhabitants are “post-bourgeois” because they reject middle-class culture despite collecting bourgeois salaries (i.e. living in a factory-turned loft somehow evidences one’s affinity with the urban poor). We’re in Russell Smith territory here, but unlike the dandy, Brand, oddly, avoids
underlining Jackie’s contradictions. These details distinguish Tuyen’s artwork from Jackie’s capitalism, and Kensington Market from Queen Street West. Namely, that Jackie and Queen West participate within the city’s creative agenda whereas Tuyen and Kensington Market remain aloof.

It is tempting, then, to label Tuyen’s apartment a pastoral space; but despite Pan’s presence it is not associated with a return to childhood or a former state of being. The apartment and her lubaio—a high-concept riff on an ancient Chinese-Korean signpost—seem to represent Brand’s intention to transcend her family’s traumatizing past. A more appropriate term for Tuyen is romanticism, as she turns away from the marketplace and the world of capital, and struggles to create pure, idealized art. As we have seen, Brand spatially distinguishes Tuyen and her apartment from the institutions of “boutique multiculturalism” and the “creative city,” she adopts neither a marginal or a central identity but remains situated relative to, but not within, these discourses. For all the other characters’ relationships with the city are in one way or another corrupted. Jackie is a Queen West scenester. Oku wants to join the academy. And Carla works for a Bay Street courier company. Indeed, Tuyen, through her artwork, becomes a romantic hero. As Dobson explains, “the exclusions of the city and global capitalism are not to be reversed through the formation of merely oppositional counter-movements or a reliance upon narrow conceptions of community. Instead, hope lies, for them, in the opportunities that they create to reconstruct urban space” (195). The most notably reconstruction, of course, is Tuyen’s lubaio, her never-ending installation piece that records the “longings” of Toronto’s citizens—an installation that is simultaneously individual but collective, one that is not predicated upon nationality but rather a heterogeneous geography. And, of course, it is an artist who—like Brand—attempts to show the polis how they can belong, while accepting difference and without imposing a totalizing narrative upon the city’s peoples. We have here a form of
cosmopolitanism that, like cultural nationalism, turns to a shared geography to imagine collective being but a cosmopolitanism that avoids alliances with any institution—a dialectic that seeks perpetual liminality without ever achieving synthesis. It is, in short, a revitalization of the Hippy (Haight-Ashbury), Age of Aquarius dream: creativity sans capitalism; sharing rather than consumption. Tuyen is a one-woman Paris-May-68, living out Herbert Marcuse’s sentimental, liberal-Marxist “theory of liberation.”
Conclusion to “Canadian Literary Urbanism”

In one of the most shamefully ignored passages in Hugh MacLennan’s *Two Solitudes*, Kathleen Tallard visits Montreal to buy her family a new house. For Kathleen, a child of Irish immigrants who grew up in Montreal, the return to the city has important symbolic value. In Saint-Marc, she could not be herself because the inhabitants consider her an outsider and the community resents her beauty as it provokes the men to have sinful thoughts. Standing naked in her hotel room, she looks out the window and takes in the cityscape. As she does so, “Her old sense of the city’s wholeness returned to her; it gripped her feelings and imagination the way she remembered it from girlhood. … She smiled. It was good to be peaceful again, to be one’s self; it was wonderful to be unknown in the crowd” (148). The passage provides a tantalizing narrative for a new Canadian mythology: our urbanity, like Kathleen’s sexuality, has been repressed. If only we renounced our contrived rural-ways and embraced the city, we could finally be ourselves, we could gain that ever-elusive sense of “wholeness” that other nations seem to enjoy. However, such a mythic migration poses a new problem: it risks rendering Canada yet another “unknown in the crowd.” In other words, our myth, or perhaps more accurately the geography that allegorizes Canadianness, would become indistinguishable from those of other modern nations. Perhaps it is for this very reason that the urban has been so consistently repressed in Canadian consciousness.

One of the major thematic statements that *Two Solitudes* communicates is the notion that Canada will not become a great nation until it accepts, indeed mythologizes, its urbanity. At the beginning of the final section, Paul Tallard—the novel’s romantic hero who writes the “Great Canadian Novel”—experiences an epiphany while wandering around Athens. While gazing at
the ancient landscape and pondering how to represent the mass hysteria of the late 1930s, he realizes that all great dramas begin in cities. MacLennan writes, “Below Paul lay the city. Athens could be London, New York, Paris, Berlin or any other great city. This was where it had started. In the city. Any city” (422). The revelation leads Paul to set his epic in Montreal. By 1939, Canada was a modern, industrial nation—even pastoral Saint-Marc had developed into a factory town—and the country was ready to take its place alongside the world’s imperial powers. But, Paul understands it is up to the artist to awaken Canada’s urban consciousness, and to introduce his homeland to Canadians and the world.

There are, however, two ironies here that merit unpacking. Firstly, MacLennan’s epic, *Two Solitudes*, does not “turn to the city” per se but rather valorizes urbanism. The title of the novel, after all, refers not only to the two “founding” races but also rural and urban communities. And it is not MacLennan’s intention to privilege one over the other but to demand that they “embrace.” He concludes his “epic” opening by describing Montreal’s metropolitan geography: “Two races and religions meet here and live their separate legends, side by side. If this sprawling half-continent has a heart, here it is. Its pulse throbs out along the rivers and railroads; slow, reluctant and rarely simple, a double beat, a self-moving reciprocation” (5). While MacLennan clearly shares Kathleen and Paul’s infatuation with Montreal, his central metaphor is dialectical; it describes how the two solitudes are entwined. What he privileges is not the city but rather Canada’s rivers and railroads, the “arteries” that connect disparate regions and peoples. The second irony regards the role of criticism. We could say that critics share a similar responsibility as the artist to awaken national consciousness. MacLennan published his metropolitan romance in 1945 but critics have failed to identify and translate his important message. We need scholars like Paul or, perhaps, MacLennan, who appreciate that for us to truly know Canada, we need to expand our understanding of the urban. This is precisely what
“Canadian Literary Urbanism” achieves: it delineates a narrative that connects the past and present, the rural and the urban, frontier and metropolis; by building a scholarly railroad, so to speak, it provides a route that links the various moments of urban awakening in Canada.

It is ambiguous if Paul actually finishes his “Great Canadian Novel” before he joins the army to battle the Germans. The ending is appropriate because it suggests that philosophizing the city is a never-ending project. This is precisely the point that Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For* emphasizes. Tuyen’s *lub aio* perpetually grows; it becomes ever bigger and more complicated as she chisels the city’s soul into the wood, adds more and more portraits of Toronto’s citizens, and records the polis’s longings. As she does so, she tears down the walls of her apartment and, eventually, decides that she needs a bigger space to contain the old and new longings she amalgamates. While Tuyen discovers a form that she believes can represent the global city, she “wasn’t quite certain what she was making; she knew she would find out only once the installation was done. Then, some grain, some elements she had been circling, but had been unable to pin down, would emerge” (308). The critical consensus is that Tuyen will never complete her installation because her subject is too complicated, heterogeneous, and dynamic. Understanding the urban is an ongoing project. Indeed, Brand begins the novel by reminding her readers that the city contains not only millions of stories but also that, “Lives in the city are doubled, tripled, conjugated—women and men all trying to handle their own chain of events, trying to keep the story straight in their own heads. … In this city, like everywhere, people work, they eat, they drink, they have sex, but it’s hard not to wake up here without the certainty of misapprehension” (5). “Canadian Literary Urbanism” is comparable to Tuyen’s *lub aio*; both strive to craft a structure that will render the urban intelligible, or perhaps legible, while simultaneously acknowledging that no single narrative can possibly achieve this goal. This conclusion is not really a conclusion; it is, more accurately, a second introduction to the
problematics presented by the Canadian urban. Rather than curtaining this dissertation with a lie outlining the study’s tidy resolutions, let us instead consider what Brand poetically describes as “the certainty of misapprehension.”

One of the major interventions articulated by this study is the notion that we must literalize critical discourse because metaphoric formulations have impaired literary knowledge; by placing the allegorical and “real” in dialogue we create a matrix that allows us to better understand criticism and the urban. Richard Cavell raises a parallel problematic for Canadian postcolonial studies in his playful essay “Where is Frye? Or, Theorizing Postcolonial Space.” He draws upon postmodern geographical and architectural theory to propose “a direction for post-colonial theory that deprivileges literature as the sole site of critique, it being important to recognize that the forces which a postcolonial reading discerns in literature are also active in architecture, mapping, and the academy” (111). Central to Cavell’s argument is that Canadian postcolonialists have primarily read the landscape metaphorically in an attempt to discover a unique Canadian identity that resists British and/or American imperialism. But such a focus has deemphasized “that the enterprise of colonialism has a fundamentally spatial aspect: the seizing of territories, the mapping of sites, the farming of landscapes, the construction of buildings, the displacement of people.” If nation building is city building, then we need a study that, following Cavell’s proposal, literalizes the metropolitan metaphors that saturate postcolonial conversations. Such a project should draw upon historical, geographical, and literary scholarship to track how colonialism and, later, Canadian imperialism structured the country’s borders and topography, and introduce a spatial-historical perspective that complicates the hegemonic narratives regarding the “imaginary” geography.
Our theory of Canadian literary urbanism troubles the national-regional dialectic because it reveals that the two perspectives have imposed unnecessary and indeed artificial borders onto the conceptual landscape. While this dissertation problematizes regionalism it does not, however, disavow its theoretical legitimacy. The conflict between nation and region originates from Canada’s colonial history and the structure imposed on Canadian politics by Confederation. However, the British North America Act (1867) outlines three levels of government and the role of the municipality has been completely ignored in Canadian literary scholarship. At the dawn of the new millennium, several Canadian mayors represent larger populations than some of their premier counterparts. By 2011, the City of Toronto’s population was 2,615,060, a tally larger than the combined populations of Saskatchewan and Manitoba (1,293,900) or Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nanavut (2,433,300). These numbers suggest blatantly the need for a new theoretical paradigm that reflects the actual political and demographic realities of Canada, and that will recover the municipality’s neglected role in the production of the arts.

There is a parallel need for a comprehensive study of the rise of “creative city” economic development strategies in Canada. The majority of Canada’s great cities have adopted and implemented Richard Florida’s policy recommendations. Because the neo-liberal ideology that informs Florida’s work has become hegemonic, we need to consider the effect it is having on Canadian cities and the arts. While municipalities have a newfound interest in the arts, we do not know if the funding is actually benefitting artists. Similarly, government programs demand that bohemains write about the local milieu, hence there is the possibility that we are witnessing a profound shift in Canadian literary history in which the city and the municipality have (potentially) become influential players in Canadian culture. Is creative city literature propagandistic? Has the creative economy co-opted the arts in a manner similar to the tourist
industry in Atlantic Canada? Or has the new fiscal landscape helped Canadian literature transcend its historical dependency on federal funding? Have creative cities helped foster a transnational consciousness?
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