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**Colonialism's Legacy: Latin America As the "Kinky Other"
in Twentieth-Century, Non-Latino Canadian Poetry**

By
Marc Arellano, B.A. Hons.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
January 14, 1994

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**Colonialism's Legacy: Latin America As the "Kinky Other"
in Twentieth-Century, Non-Latino Canadian Poetry**

**submitted by Marc Arellano, B.A. Hons.
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts**

B. Carr, Thesis Supervisor

Chair, Department of English

**Carleton University
January 14, 1994**

Abstract

This thesis investigates the construction of Latin America as the cultural "other" in the texts of twentieth-century non-Latino Canadian poets. Although non-Latino poets, such as Earle Birney, Al Purdy, Pat Lane, Pat Lowther, Tom Wayman, Eli Mandel and Gary Geddes, among others, profess to be politically conscious of the effects of the legacy of Anglo-European colonialism, they reproduce and perpetuate the discourses and practices of Western imperialism. Sandwiched between foreign colonial oppressors and belonging to a society that has a history of oppressing First Nations people, the non-Latino Canadian poet in this (neo)colonial paradigm faces a crisis of identity construction. Based on their leftist socio-political affiliations and aesthetic concerns, they construct a poetic discourse that extends the Western invention of the Latin American "other" initiated by the colonial process and consolidates their politically progressive self.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without a great deal of help from various people. I thank Professor Larry MacDonald for encouraging my interest in Birney's Latin American poems. In addition, I thank Professor Christopher Levenson for lending me his own books of poetry. Most especially, I thank my thesis supervisor, Professor Brenda Carr, for her invaluable insights, rigorous guidance, patience, and wit.

"After all, as Carlos Fuentes reminds us, a border is more than just the division between two countries; it is also the division between two cultures and two memories."

Guillermo Verdecchia

Fronteras Americanas: American Borders

To my parents and my wife, Natalie, all of whom have supported my every effort in completing this project, but especially to my grandfather, Valerio Arellano, who always spoke highly of the school of hard knocks.

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INTRODUCTION

Ultimately, man finds in things
nothing but what he himself has
imported into them.

- F. Nietzsche

"To the Canadian and québécois imaginations," writes Garry Geddes in the introduction to *Compañeros: An Anthology of Writings About Latin America*, "Latin America has always represented the other and the self, the remote and culturally exotic together with the familiar face of the Americas" (11). Geddes' anthology is a collection of post-WWII writings about Latin America by both Canadian writers and Latin Americans who have immigrated to Canada during the 1970s. The fundamental project of the collection is to uphold the possibility for the social and political universality of heterogeneous cultures: "*Compañeros* is dedicated to Earle Birney, one of our imaginative pioneers to Latin America, whose very first poems of Mexico, Colombia, and Peru held up the hope of brotherhood" (12).

Although Geddes advertises his anthology as the fruition of Birney's initial attempt at unifying the disparate cultures of Latin America and Canada, his introductory comment represents the language and problems implicit in (neo)colonial discourse. What does he mean when he refers to Latin America? Is this a suitable descriptor for the geo-political construct that has at various historical moments also been called America, Spanish America, Pan-Hispanism or South America—all titles which have failed to contain the heterogeneous cultures located in this geo-political region? What is Latin American culture? When Geddes speaks about this area he denotes the existence of a unified,

homogeneous entity. How can such a complex zone of multi-ethnic contact be summated or considered in terms of ethnic purity or degradation? The various name changes of Latin America itself reflects the historical fact that it has been the named, the object, instead of the namer, a subject, the one who occupies a position of power.

My investigation of how and why Latin America plays the "Kinky Other" in twentieth-century Anglo-Canadian poetry takes *Compañeros'* introduction and its collection of poems as a focus because it is a repository for the continuous acts of supposed cultural discovery made by the non-Latino Canadian poets that I seek to problematize. What I propose to question is that these cultural epiphanies indicate an unconscious desire for the construction of their own subjectivity through the use of Latin America as the embodied other. The crisis of identity construction and the ideology of the gaze in Western culture are at the heart of my inquiry because both issues underlie the problems of cultural appropriation as one of colonialism's legacies. By re-situating the works of non-Latino Canadian poets, such as Earle Birney, Al Purdy, Patrick Lane, Pat Lowther, Tom Wayman, Eli Mandel and Gary Geddes, among others, within the framing context of (neo)colonialist uneven power relations, I will underscore the importance of reading for the relation between a writer's socio-historic contexts and textual production. In order to highlight the argument that texts "are not an ideal cosmos of ideally equal monuments" (Said, *World Text Critic*, 53) and that "the imagination if left unexamined, can and does serve the ruling ideas of the time" (Nourbese-Philip 214-15), I will situate my theory within the following critical and cultural frameworks:

- Anti-colonial critiques, such as Edward Said's in *Orientalism*.

- Cultural anthropology's self-reflexive reconsideration of traditional ethnographic practices, such as fieldwork and writing cultures.
- The recent debate over cultural appropriation in Canada.

By contextualizing my inquiry in this manner, my intention is not to vilify or devalue the poets whom I have selected, but to examine the temporal and contextual contingency of cultural production and reception, and the uneven relations of power played out in the economy of signs employed by contemporary non-Latino Canadian poets in their texts relating to Latin America. It may well be that in many instances, over-simplified and romantic transcultural narratives stem from a well-intentioned liberal agenda (Atwood 23).

Identity representation for Latin America has been problematic since European contact. Under Spanish colonial rule, Latin America was known simply as America. With the independence movements of the Republican Creoles, who during the nineteenth-century fought for emancipation from Spain, this area of loose alliances was referred to as Pan-Hispanism. Then with the rise to power of the United States in the western hemisphere, at the juncture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Latin America was referred to as Spanish America. The States, effectively, usurped the title America, a move to demonstrate difference and to mark the regions south of its border as the embodied other. As we can see from this example of re-naming, the construction of identity, especially national or cultural identity, is at once complex and vulnerable, especially within asymmetrical power relations.

The representational problem of Latin America is its propensity to be formulated as a code for non-Latin American agents' ideas about self-other relations. For instance, Louise Pratt believes the invention of Latin America may

be attributed to the nineteenth-century European, "explorer and encyclopaedist," Alexander von Humboldt: "Three images in particular, all canonized Humboldt's *Views*, [they] combined to form the standard metonymic representation of the new continent: superabundant tropical forests...snow-capped mountains...and vast interior plains" (*Imperial Eyes* 125). Latin America has always been under someone's gaze, either that of the colonial administrator, explorer, anthropologist and more recently, the writer-tourist.

As a coded body, Latin America has typically been structured to represent everything and nothing. This construct is particularly evident in Geddes' introductory comment, e.g. "Latin America has always represented the other and the self, the remote and culturally exotic" (11). He uses essentialist language, e.g. "always represented," which attempts to fix an identity to Latin America—what Mike González calls "the notion of historical inevitability" (573). He also employs self-effacing paradoxes, e.g. it is both "other" and "self," and "exotic" and "familiar." One basis for my questioning of Geddes' assertions about Latin America is the problematic of identity representation, whether it be individual or societal representation. For someone such as myself, who is half Bolivian and half *québécois*, but who was predominantly educated in Anglo-Canadian culture, membership to any of these cultural groups is problematic at best. Language, the criterion for group identity in all of these cultures, has left me with ratios of otherness, which are contingent upon the perceptions of each cultural body. If I face a crisis of self-representation, then "how does the Western writer construct a coherent representation out of the strange and (to the writer) often incomprehensible realities confronted in the non-Western world? What are the cultural, ideological, or literary presuppositions upon which such a construct is based" (Spurr 3)?

When I speak for myself, I engage in the formulation and reproduction of speech genres in which my "self" and other selves are constituted. Likewise, when the non-Latino Canadian poet employs the rhetorical strategy of speaking for Latin American culture, that poet is in fact engaged in an act of self-representation rather than a simple act of discovery (Alcoff 10). Is this same issue of self-inscription present when we speak about others? Linda Alcoff explains, "when one is speaking for others one may be describing their situation and thus also speaking about them....Similarly, when one is speaking about others, or simply trying to describe their situation or some aspect of it, one may also be speaking in place of them, that is, speaking for them" (9). Speaking for others and speaking about others, are ultimately parallel acts of self-inscription. To develop this point, then, as David Spurr argues, in *The Rhetoric of Empire*, if "colonialism is a form of self-inscription" (7), we can interpret this "speaking in place of" as a legacy of colonialism. Since this tendency is an eminent characteristic of travel writing our attention, therefore, must include the interrogation of "the social location of the speaker"(Alcoff 14). In turn, this strategy reveals "the full meaning of any speech act" (14). My investigation and selection of the poets found in Geddes' anthology seems vulnerable to this same argument. What are the assumptions that inform my inclusion of these poets and their work? On what basis do I assume that they share common characteristics? I submit, though, that my categorization of these poets stems from a "critical tradition that produces the discourse of colonialism" (Spurr 185) and is a provisional strategy aimed to contextualize the formalizing of culture, which is founded on the rationale of identity. In no way should my selection of these poets and their respective poems be considered as definitive.

As Harvey Maclean argues in his thesis on Birney, *Radical Perceptions: The Influence of Politics On Earle Birney's Early Poetry*, the Canadian critical

establishment tends to neglect the occasion of Birney's poems. Maclean maintains that a critical bias informed by "humanist, idealist discourse and the scantiest evidence, and expressed through recuperative language, work to devalue the imprint of Birney's socialist affiliation on his poetry" (15). This same bias also exists with other poets that I have selected. For example, little critical interest is shown in Purdy's poems that deal with Latin America. At best, they receive a cursory remark or two. Representative selections of his work often exclude these poems, or in Birney's case include one or two in the Can. Lit. canon. Our critical establishment has already marginalized these texts through their silence, or unwillingness to engage work that crosses traditional boundaries. All too often, revolutionary literature, or a narrative that seems to have a theme of revolution, is excluded because it does not "conform to the conventional and canonical criteria of poetic inspiration and composition applied by Western critics and practitioners of poetry" (Harlow 35). It fails to appeal to those literary theorists obsessed with the transcendence or the "pleasure of the text" (35). At the same time, it is important to note that the political poetry of someone like Birney is not the same as that of a Salvadorean FLSN poet, who also writes about his/her revolutionary struggle because of the very life or death dilemma that the FLSN poet faces, which Birney does not. Both types of texts conjure, however, on the mere fact that they do not meet the Western notion of the "sublime," a principle which equates poetry and politics with water and oil—elements that do not mix. To redress the critical silence I have to employ a formal structure dependent on objectification, analysis, and categorizations. My grouping of the poets that I have selected, though an artificial construct, is a provisional requirement for my continuation of Maclean's argument. His analysis links the importance of a poet's political affiliations with his/her textual production; whereas, mine seeks to problematize the

implications of these very associations. Identifying these poets as "non-Latino Canadian" is a temporary necessity and is suspended when I deal with their work on an individual basis.

The poetry that I have selected shares more than just a lack of critical attention. Their authors claim to share the same national identity. The idea of Canadian national identity can itself be ambiguous since Canada is a former British colony and a neighbour of the United States. Perhaps it is this uncertainty that compels these poets to position Latin America as a reflective surface in the formulation of their own subjectivity. It is often easier to construct a subject position through invoking what you are not, then by defining what you are. This practice is not unique to issues of class, gender, race or economic status but occurs, as Gayatri Spivak has demonstrated, in instances where imperialist practices interrupt the identity of colonial subjects:

With respect to the notion of fracture, what I am talking about is obviously the problem of cultural self-representation. The way in which semiotic fields are tapped for cultural self-representation, in fact, always covers over the dislocation between the kinds of axiomatics that are being used, and whatever it is in the "culture" that constitutes the hidden agenda of the suppression of ideological production. Let me say that very broadly-speaking, the fracture goes either in the direction of Utopianism, or in the direction of a golden-age complex ("Problem" 52-53).

The positionality, the being-in-the world, for Anglo-Canadians is split between a colonial past and a postcolonial present, which is characterized by an inability to decolonize and a history of continued oppression of First Nations peoples. Canadians have traditionally associated their collective subjectivity with their "colonial mother," Britain. The fact that our legal, executive, and legislative

systems are based on British models reflects this perception, as well as Canada's half-hearted attempt to repatriate its constitution, and its willingness to remain a constitutional monarchy. (Canada still employs a Governor General, as well as Lieutenant Governors General, whereas Australia is engaged in a serious debate over eliminating colonial icons: the Union Jack on its flag and the Governor General.) With this strategy, Canada has profited from a special status and privilege within the British Commonwealth. As a "domesticated other" (Spivak, "Three Women's Texts," 272), it has positioned itself as an elite postcolonial subject.

Canada's alliance with the United States' model of post-industrial capitalism has led to its re-colonization by American capital and culture. To the liberal-minded, humanist Canadian poet, this positionality poses a serious problem. Although she/he is a member of a postcolonial society and receives special privileges, e.g. access to travel almost anywhere in the world, subscribing to the ideologies of colonialism and American capitalism conflicts with her/his liberal, humanist convictions. Although "other," meaning not-British and not-American, the Canadian subject in the colonial paradigm is postcolonial, but within colonialism's hierarchy, which is based on axioms of race, religion, economics, etc..., a Canadian is considered more elite, relatively speaking, than someone who is from Pakistan or Sri Lanka, what Spivak calls the "Subaltern," "a term borrowed from Gramsci...[to mean] all non-elite colonial subjects" (*Socialist Review* 82). However ambiguous, this Canadian identity, combined with privilege and access, places the non-Latino Canadian poet in a social register separate from various peoples of the world who have shared the experiences of socio-political and economic oppression at the hands of European-based societies.

Within Canada, the non-Latino Canadian poets under discussion, are considered by Native peoples as members of a race and class that has

systematically destroyed and oppressed the First Nations people's of Canada. Sandwiched between foreign colonial oppressors and belonging to a cultural group that has a history of oppression, these Anglo-Canadian poets critically need to align themselves with developing countries like those found in Latin America. This strategy works to give the impression that they distance themselves, socially and politically, from the ideals and actions of their own cultural group. Cultural homogeneity, or brotherhood, as Geddes puts it, is a required commodity for the non-Latino Canadian poet's self-representation, an attempt to validate the practice of "championing the causes of the world's oppressed peoples." It is precisely this point that I want to underscore. Embracing this strategy results in a situation where the "'hierarchy of civilizations' view" is reinscribed (Alcoff 26). This structure then reproduces an arena of asymmetrical power relations, where "the speaker is positioned as authoritative and empowered, as the knowledgeable subject, while the group in the Third World is reduced, merely because of the structure of the speaking practice, to an object and victim that must be championed from afar, thus disempowered" (26). For the non-Latino Canadian poets under discussion, appropriating Latin American culture is an attempt to reconcile their position in a dominant cultural group with their own socio-political convictions, which in turn works to fashion them as virtuous political subjects. Canada's collective portrayal of being "the good guy" on the world's political stage, is also involved in this same kind of strategy. As Bharati Mukherjee once remarked to me about her decision to leave Canada and move to the United States, Canada's image of itself as an accepting, liberal society conflicts with a reality of covert racism, which in turn makes racist practices hard to challenge.

As for the structure of my thesis, I will analyse and situate the theories of colonial discourse analysis by cultural critics like Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak

in my first chapter. Said's interrogation of the West's construction of the Orient to consolidate its own identity parallels my inquiry into the Latino-ization of Latin America by twentieth-century non-Latino Canadian poets.

The ethnographic gaze, a legacy of European colonialism, is the subject of my second chapter. Taking into account the re-examination of cultural anthropology's methods and practices of participant-observation by experimental ethnographer James Clifford, I interrogate the Western gaze as it plays itself out in Western science and cross-cultural narratives. By occupying a similar subject-position to the cultural ethnographer, and by emulating anthropology's methods and practices, the non-Latino Canadian poet engaged with Latin America functions as the traditional ethnographer. Hence, the transcultural poems of the Canadian poet, like the texts of the historical ethnographer, are powerful systems of signs based on the socio-political and philosophical assumptions of the observing subject. Ultimately, these texts are temporally and contextually contingent.

My third chapter, which situates the debate surrounding cultural appropriation as it exists in Canada, examines the standard commodities applied to the indigenous peoples of Canada in the texts and images of non-Native Canadian writers and artists, such as Rudy Wiebe and Emily Carr. For the Latin American indigene, as for Canadian Natives, semiotic control has historically rested in the hands of non-Native agents. Significantly, like the Canadian indigene, the Latin American Native has been constructed to represent the incarnation of the ideological and philosophical notions of the non-Native artist. As examples of cultural corruption and decay, the Canadian and Latin American indigene signify for the Western writer/artist, the humanist notion of humankind's fallen condition and the existence of a previous golden age. Subsequently, the Canadian and Latin American Native becomes the

embodiment for culturally taboo subjects in Western society, such as sex, violence, mysticism and a prehistoric primal order.

In chapter 4, I will investigate the effects of Birney's socio-political affiliations and aesthetic concerns on his imaging of Latin America. In his Latin American poems, Birney recreates a discursive situation resonant with the uneven power relations between colonizer and colonized. He relegates the Latin American indigene to pre-history, as well as equating their climatic conditions with their moral standing, which is predominantly visible in his construction of the Latin American Native woman as the female exotic. His references to revolution and disintegrating social orders are not inherent cultural characteristics of Latin Americans, as he portrays them, but are part of his world view framed by the discourses of socialism, humanism, and a modernist vision shared with poets like W.H. Auden.

In chapter 5, I will examine the commodity reification by non-Latino Canadian poets of Latin American political and literary figures, as well as their objectification of the Latin American indigene. For poets like Lowther, Wayman and Purdy, political and literary figures, such as Pablo Neruda, Salvador Allende, Ernesto Guevara and Fidel Castro, signify containers for their own socio-political and aesthetic principles. In their poems that deal with these figures, they often locate themselves as the witness and interpreter of the events surrounding these figures. This positionality, in turn, appears to construct the poet's subjectivity in terms of the poetic/Romantic notion of the bardic speaker. Hence, in creating this type of identity, the non-Latino Canadian poet is able to construct an agency which meets the requirements of Birney's idea of the politically conscious subject—the Western politically progressive subject who champions the oppressed "Third World" subject by calling for cultural synthesis. Poets, such as Lane, in imaging the Latin American indigene as a static commodity, formulate a

construct that locates the indigene's subjectivity within pre-defined socio-political and aesthetic parameters, which have, in turn, been subjectively determined. Having established this code, they are then able to inscribe themselves in Latin American Native culture by appropriating Incan history, narratives and symbology.

1

COLONIALISM'S LEGACY:
THE "OTHER" AS MIRROR FOR THE (NEO)COLONIAL SELF

Latin America plays the exotic, kinky Other to
the straight, realist realities of the affluent West.

- M. Nourbese-Philip, "The Disappearing Debate:
Racism and Censorship."

Anti-colonial theory challenges the master narratives of colonial discourse, what Spivak calls stages of development, "a tale of progress through which all of civilization is conceived of as pointing ineluctably toward industrial (or post-industrial) societies" (*Socialist Review* 82-83). Just as the recent deployment of the term "postcolonial" has been used to describe "a crisis managing *ensemble* of cultural explanations" (Spivak 95), I wish to qualify my use of the term "anti-colonial." For the postcolonial agent—meaning both the elite subject as well as the subaltern—formulating a subject position based on the Western construct of "self and other" is an impossible enterprise because of the overlaying of European imperialist identities. Hence, representation for the postcolonial subject lies in the constant re-constitution of the "self" through a heteroglossic discourse that problematizes former colonial assumptions and practices. I therefore employ the term "anti-colonial" as a descriptor for a critical process that re-evaluates the relationship between the postcolonial subject and imperialist ideology. This strategy, colonial discourse analysis, locates the survival and reproduction of imperial practices in the ideas of Western

humanism: the superiority of (European) man, the sovereign subject and the universality of man (or the "everyman" axiom) conjoined in the European colonization of non-European cultures. For example, Mike González argues that Renaissance humanism, during the Spanish conquest, informed the feudal principle, *encomienda* ("Decolonizing" 570). In the New World, this was translated into "the guardianship of Indian souls" (570), which ultimately placed indigenous peoples in peonage. Moreover, the ideas of humanism justified and covered up the axioms of imperialism practiced by Spain and the Roman Catholic church: "As always, racism qualifies colonial plundering as an act of justice. The colonized man is sub-human, capable of superstition, but incapable of religion, capable of folklore, but incapable of culture, capable of craftsmanship, but incapable of art" (Galeano 3). Humanism's tenet of the superiority of (European) man also played an integral role in colonial Spain's discourse of the civilizing mission and racial superiority: "In 1537, the Church admitted that the Indians were endowed with a soul and reason, but it blessed crime and robbery: after all the Indians were subhumans possessed by the Devil, and as such had no rights" (3).

Today, the most prominent legacy of European humanist thought, such as that of Thomas More, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, as it emerges in liberal democracies, is the notion of the "individual freedom of *man*" (Nourbese-Philip 209). What this ideology fails to advertise is that those like John Locke, who "argued for the freedom of man...had no intellectual difficulty accepting that these freedoms could not and should not extend to African slaves. The ideological framework of Western democracies has been erected upon and is supported...by the ideology of racism" (210). Because the non-Latino Canadian poets under discussion align themselves with humanism's liberal tradition, they unwittingly replicate colonial practices and discourses. Their texts, whatever

their intent, differ from the writings of other postcolonial subjects because they have remained as, what Spivak terms, "the domesticated other." In order to establish an investigative apparatus for these premises, my study engages the anti-colonial theory of critics like Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak.

Epistemological re-evaluation of the humanist notion of universality is crucial to the elite postcolonial subject in the process of decolonization. This process for the non-Latino Canadian poets under discussion, however, seems to be neglected, or at least is not important because the idea of universality, entrenched in Western literary theory, intersects with their socialist, humanist ideas. As Said has theorized, "every literary text is in some way burdened with its occasion, with the plain empirical realities from which it emerged" (*World Text Critic* 35). The interrogation of humanism's idea of the universal has led to anti-colonial criticism's re-evaluation of the universality of Western humanism by posing the epistemological question of what constitutes meaning: "Another question posed by post-colonial literatures is... 'could the concept of meaning itself be Eurocentric'" (Ashcroft 301)? In the writing of the non-Latino Canadian poets that I will engage, there seems to be a need for relating some kind of fundamental meaning that transcends the difference between themselves and the cultures they are in contact with (a message which states that in spite of differences they are basically the same). By not allowing for what Donna Haraway calls "partial" or "local" knowledges, their method reflects the Western writer's need to control the meaning of the text, which in turn supposes the plausibility of controlling both the text and the reader, thus effecting closure (597). This hermeneutic struggle has its parallel in the colonial paradigm, argues Chinua Achebe: "to the colonialist mind it was always of the utmost importance to be able to say; 'I know my natives,' a claim which implied two things at once: (a) that the native was really quite simple and (b) that understanding him and

controlling him went hand in hand—understanding being a pre-condition for control and control constituting adequate proof of understanding" (273).

What Achebe's and others' alternate, postcolonial voice means for traditional European theory is an end to its monopoly of constructing aesthetic and philosophical taxonomies. Anti-colonial theory, in its challenge to the traditional concepts of Western theory, unveils the possibility that the association of meaning with universal truth is an ideology which functions to support the prevailing attitudes of Western culture. In literature, for example, this association is used to determine what is excluded from and included in the literary canon by employing essentialist notions of value, i.e. if a text is deemed to have a "universal appeal" it therefore has a degree of "truth value." Anti-colonial theory posits that it is no longer possible to assume that writing is a "thing," which only has meaning if one of its characteristics is fundamentally transcendent: "Post-colonial literatures...have revealed with unequivocal clarity that value, like meaning, is not an intrinsic quality but a relation between the object and certain criteria brought to bear upon it" (Ashcroft 302). This idea then serves to subvert the essentialist notions of "the universal" that dominate Western literary criticism's teleology:

An "intrinsic" value, linked as it is with an "essential" meaning, is crucial to the operation of the Universalist conception of the literary. The intrinsic and essential must, by definition, be universal, and of course the universal is the province of the discourse which imposes its criteria. In the evaluation of post-colonial literatures it is the centre which imposes its criteria as universal, and dictates an order in terms of which the cultural margins must always see themselves as disorder and chaos.(303)

Writing, in anti-colonial theory, is re-evaluated as a heteroglossic space in which voices engage in various conflicting discourses. The ensuing negotiations, of what Said calls "configurations of power," that result from this engagement are then a primary focus.¹ Anti-colonial writing attempts to achieve the ideal relation of "subject engaging subject," as opposed to the traditional Western formula of "subject vs. object," a structure informed by the idea of the sovereign subject: "the insistence of post-colonial critics that writing is a social practice with an indelible social function suggests the possibility that meaning, too, is a social accomplishment characterized by the participation of the writer and reader functions within the 'event' of the particular discourse" (Ashcroft 302). Within this framework, the exploration of the socio-political affiliations of my selected poets and their work is not only prudent but necessary. As demonstrated by anti-colonial theory and writing, no imagination is free because it tends to serve the dominant ideas of the time (Nourbese-Philip 214-215).

Edward Said's *Orientalism* provides a practical example of anti-colonial theory's relevance to examining texts mediated by the Western gaze. He identifies the old colonial powers, "the French and the British—less so the Germans, Russians, Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, and Swiss" as having "had a long tradition of...*Orientalism*, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience" ("Discourse of the Orient" 234). As a discourse, "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (234). An example of this discourse can be seen in the work of Flaubert: "Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman....*He* spoke for and represented her...she was 'typically Oriental'....It fairly stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West, and the discourse about the Orient that it enabled" (238). The ability of one

society to demarcate another society as the other is also evident in Spain's interaction with the New World. Reports about New Spain both celebrate and deride the primitive characteristics of the indigenous cultures. Utopian societies and images of "priests with matted blood in their hair" and "palpitating hearts dripping in the hands of temple attendants" are predominantly emphasized by the commentators of the Spanish conquest of the Americas (González 571). This conflicting depiction of the Latin American indigene is reconstructed in the poems of non-Latin Canadian poets like Lane and particularly Birney. The discourse of the "noble savage" and the "primitive barbarian" are often employed to de-contextualize and therefore universalize various humanist notions, like humankind's fallen condition and the eternal recurrence of "man's" violent nature. These ideas, in turn, have become the focus for succeeding generations of poets, thus perpetuating the image of Latin America as a site for danger, chaos and violence.

Drawing upon Gramsci, Said illustrates the manner in which one culture can construct another for its own self-affirmation:

It is hegemony, or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives Orientalism the durability and the strength I have been speaking about so far. Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying "us" Europeans as against all "those" non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is...the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority. (239)

We can see from Said's use of the Gramscian notion of hegemony the ability of one culture, through its institutions which include literature, to dominate the discourse about another culture by constructing it only in terms of its otherness or exoticness. Lowther's depictions of Pablo Neruda, like Geddes' introductory comments, are involved with this process of domesticating the cultural other to affirm the normative self. A similar project of domination and domestication occurred in the history of Spain's colonization of America. For instance, Spain's conflicting views of the New World indigene as utopian, primitive, and barbarian, demonstrates the ability of one cultural group to dominate and generate the discourse about another society. This technique, in turn, rationalized the imperialist ideology fostered and practiced by Spain's mercantile class and the Roman Catholic church (González 570-571).

Significantly, what has never been questioned in the West's construction of the cultural other is its use of its own identity as the *control group* in its comparative analysis (Said, "Discourse of the Orient," 239). As seen in Europe's relationship with the Orient, this dominant subject positioning, it's "unchallenged centrality," determined "who or what was an Oriental...according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections" (239). Similarly, I submit that it is their dominant subject positioning, which permits non-Latino Canadian poets like Birney, Purdy and Wayman to make selective assumptions about Latin America, based on their own socio-political allegiances and aesthetic concerns. The notion of a unified, socialist world proletariat, which also intersects with the humanist idea of universal humanity, often informs their particular readings of Latin America's socio-historical events.

Unlike stylisticians, such as Michael Riffaterre, who claim "any reduction of a text to its circumstances a fallacy," Said maintains that "texts have ways of

existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society—in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly" (*World Text Critic* 35). "Moreover, all texts," states Said, "essentially dislodge other texts or, more frequently, take the place of something else. As Nietzsche had the perspicacity to see, texts are fundamentally facts of power, not of democratic exchange" (45). Unlike Paul Ricoeur's assumption of equality existing in dialogical exchanges, Said finds that "the discursive situation is more usually like the unequal relation between colonizer and colonized, oppressor and oppressed" (48).

Said's theory, in relation to literary criticism, as he demonstrates in his analysis of Orientalism, emphasizes the direct relationships between the actuality—the being-in-the world—of a writer, text, and critic, as well as the evaluative processes brought to bear upon a text. Following Said, I will put pressure on socio-historic framing contexts in my re-reading of the texts of the non-Latino Canadian poets.

Like Said, Gayatri Spivak investigates the Western practice of reifying the racialized other as a means of consolidating the normative self. Western literature, as a functioning agent in cultural production, is viewed by Spivak as an accomplice in the "worlding" of what is now called "the Third World" ("Three Women's Texts" 262). The consideration of postcolonial, developing nations "as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact literary heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and curricularized in English translation fosters the emergence of 'the Third World' as a signifier that allows us to forget that 'worlding'" (262). The structure of this sign is typically informed by a binary paradigm that alludes to "the romantic notion that the colonized Other is simply the revolutionary mirror-image of the Western Self, that it represents a coherent

and unitary subject-position which speaks with the clear and transparent voice of the oppressed" (*Socialist Review* 83).

This manichean formulation, which inverts the original colonial code of cultural other as primitive/barbarian, still relies on a dialectical construct for demarcating self and other, good and evil. Although the postcolonial subject is reinscribed as good and the elite (post)imperial subject as bad, the discourse still remains about a particular self—the elite subject who occupies the speaking position. This may be the answer to the replication of colonial discourses and practices by elite postcolonial Western writers. It is their "impulse to speak for the masses, to describe the masses" which reinscribes the power relations of the colonizer and the colonized (Spivak, "The Problem of Cultural Self-representation," 56). For someone like Birney, who was notoriously conscious of history, time, place, and class, through his commitment to socialism, his tendency of taking the space of the other in his traveller/observer poems is paradoxical. It may be fair to assume that that very commitment to socialism in some ways influenced his "telling" of Latin American culture, and the socialist project of a unified, socialist world then became, for Birney, the dominant plot for a Latin American backdrop.

This contradiction of a writer sensitive to issues of colonialism, yet reproducing colonial practices is not an aberration. Joseph Conrad, for instance, "was both an anti-imperialist and an imperialist" (Said, "Through Gringo Eyes," 71). *Nostromo*, Conrad's work that deals with Latin America, "foreshadows a gaze—a way of looking at and mediating the 'Third World.' Conrad is a precursor of...the assorted travel writers and filmmakers whose specialty is bringing home the 'Third World' for analysis, for judgement...for the 'exotic'" (70). He may also be attributed with initiating in Western literature the reversed manichean formula for relating the West's relationship with postcolonial

societies: "All Conrad can see is a world dominated by the West, and—of equal importance—a world in which every opposition to the West only confirms its wicked power" (70). And like the non-Latino Canadian poets whom I have selected, Conrad "could not allow himself to believe that all anti-imperialist independence movements were not corrupt and in the pay of puppet masters" (70). A writer's over-simplification and romanticization of a given culture's socio-political forces is not necessarily premeditated, but is informed by a particular world view, of which Conrad serves as a precedent: "works...so indebted to Conrad's anti-imperialist irony in *Nostromo*...locate the source of all significant action and life in the West, whose representatives seem at liberty to visit their fantasies and philanthropies upon a mind-deadened Third World" (72).

In the work of modern writers who reproduce the Conradian anti-imperialist irony, "when there is something indigenous to be described, it is following Conrad, unutterably corrupt, degenerate, irredeemable" (72). For a non-Latino Canadian poet like Birney, then, colonialism's legacy creates a dangerous paradox: the awareness that imperialism is a system produced for purposes of domination does not automatically negate duplicating its practices, especially when imperialist ideas have historically been the privileged discourse within Western literature and have indelibly impacted narrative practices. As David Spurr argues, "colonial discourse is not a matter of a given ideological position, but rather of a series of rhetorical principles that remain constant in their application to the colonial situation regardless of the particular ideology which the writer espouses" (39).

In the work of the Canadian poets that I have chosen, Conrad's manichean formulation is primarily evident in their depictions of political and class struggle between state and ruling class oligarchies and the oppressed.

Elsewhere, this construct can be viewed in the depiction of the non-Latino Canadian poet's absolute reversal of the original colonial code of identity construction, i.e. the Canadian poet's association with a dominant, imperialistic society is equated as "bad," whereas the socially and politically oppressed Latin American people who resist imperialist forces are therefore "good." The frequent use of Latin American political and literary figures, such as Che Guevara and Pablo Neruda, are then reified to express this manichean formula, which in turn superficially heightens the political resonance of the poet's text. What is ultimately revealed by this construction of identity through otherness, is a reflection of the poet's sympathetic subjectivity, as opposed to any significant insight about that culture, which is itself another precarious project. As Spivak maintains, there is a direct correlation between the subject positioning of writers and their work: "What we do toward the texts of the oppressed is very much dependent upon where we are" (57). In terms of the Canadian contradiction of benevolent liberal humanist anti-colonialism, the work of the non-Latino Canadian poets under discussion is not solely anti-colonial in impulse, but rather reflects the practices of European imperialism—domination and domestication.

2

COLONIALISM'S LEGACY:
THE ETHNOGRAPHIC GAZE

Let observation with extensive view,
Survey mankind, from China to Peru;
Remark each anxious toil, each eager
strife,
And watch the busy scenes of crowded
life.

-Samuel Johnson, *The Vanity of Human
Wishes*

One factor governs much of the writing of cross-cultural narratives—travel, journalistic, administrative, or anthropological—the Western gaze. As a particular way of viewing and mediating Latin America, it is also a characteristic endemic to the work of the poets that I have selected. This trait is frequently exhibited in their use of the persona of the self-marginalized, traveler/reporter. The manifestation of this identity may be attributed to the influence of another European project, British empiricism, whose greatest impact is felt in the Western discipline of science, especially the social sciences, sociology and anthropology.

In its strictest sense, empiricism supposes that scientific analysis, in order to be authentic, must be rigorously quantified through a process of "legitimation" (Lyotard 8). Historically, the methodology employed to reach this end is observation, i.e. looking through microscopes, telescopes, or the naked eye. The use of this scientific gaze has always professed having a measure of

objectivity. This discourse is intended to support the scientific technique of participant-observation by distancing the subject from the object. As Donna Haraway explains, "eyes have been used to signify a perverse capacity...to distance the knowing subject from every body and everything in the interests of unfettered power" ("Situated Knowledges" 581). To a large degree the objective, scientific gaze functions in our modern, technocratically influenced culture as an operating principle and dominant ideology. Haraway calls this Christian pan-optic positionality, "the god trick of seeing" (581). In journalistic writing, this gaze "conveys a sense of mastery over the unknown and over what is often perceived by the Western writer as strange and bizarre" (Spurr 15). In Birney's case, this view is evident in poems like "Irapuato" and "Sestina For the Ladies of Tehuántepec."

In its strict scientific usage, the maxim of empirical observation and analysis is dependent upon the use of a "control group" in relation to a "test group." This binomial paradigm inherently predicates that meaning, or rather quantified knowledge, is authentic only under the prescribed condition of juxtaposition; analysis of the "test group" is relevant only in comparison with the "control group," which functions as the constant in the relationship.

In anthropology, this prescription frequently translates into an implied comparison of the anthropologist's culture with that of the culture under observation: "The predominant metaphors in anthropological research have been participant-observation, data collection, and cultural description, all of which presuppose a standpoint outside—looking at, objectifying, or, somewhat closer, 'reading' a given reality" (Clifford 11). This kind of subject positioning inherently confers "...on the other a discrete identity, while also providing the knowing observer with a standpoint from which to see without being seen, to read without interruption" (12). For the non-Latino Canadian poets under

discussion, this location is usually implied by a "commanding view—the panoramic vista...[which] offers aesthetic pleasure on one hand, information and authority on the other" (Spurr 15). By occupying a parallel subject-position to the cultural ethnographer, the non-Latino, Anglo-Canadian poet engaged with Latin America has traditionally operated as the historical ethnographer. The poet as amateur ethnographer then replicates the practices of cross-cultural writing by following the processes of "keeping good field notes, making accurate maps, 'writing up' results" (Clifford 2).

In my investigation of the texts of the non-Latino Canadian poets under discussion, what I am attempting to demonstrate, beyond the underlying asymmetrical power relations implicated in the very structure of each poet's speech act, is the temporal and contextual contingency of cultural production and reception. The work of experimental ethnographer James Clifford, which reconsiders the historical practices and assumptions of ethnography/anthropology, provides me with a valuable methodology because, as in my inquiry, he formulates a body of questions that "focus on text making and rhetoric" (2). His analysis "undermines overly transparent modes of authority, and draws attention to the historical predicament of ethnography, the fact that it is always caught up in the invention, not the representation, of cultures" (2). In challenging the practice of writing and interpretation, the cornerstones of traditional cultural anthropology, Clifford seeks to reveal "the persistence of an ideology claiming transparency of representation and immediacy of experience" (2). This persistent ideology has influenced ethnographers in creating economies of truth: "all constructed truths are made possible by powerful 'lies' of exclusion and rhetoric. Even the best ethnographic texts—serious, true fictions—are systems, or economies, of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control" (7). If

professional cultural anthropologists create economies of truth, then by extension, what can be said about the representations of Latin American culture made by the poets under discussion? Are they cultural fictions? For Clifford, the dynamics of "cultural fictions are based on systematic, and contestable, exclusions. These may involve silencing incongruent voices...or deploying a consistent manner of quoting, 'speaking for,' translating the reality of others. Purportedly irrelevant personal or historical circumstances will also be excluded" (7). In traditional ethnographies, polyvocality is either privileged or silenced by "giving to one voice a pervasive authorial function and to others the role of sources, 'informants,' to be quoted or paraphrased" (15). As a similar practice of "restraint and orchestration" (15) is implicitly evident in the texts of the poet's that I have selected, e.g. in Birney's "Sinaloa" or in Lane's "The Children of Bogota," it is obvious that the poet as amateur ethnographer replicates the questionable practices and discourses of traditional cultural anthropology.

If we take a brief excerpt from Joan Anstee's ethnographical account of Bolivia, a Latin American country that is little known in the West, we will observe the traditional characteristics of ethnographic study that Clifford exposes and challenges. She writes, for example:

It is an all too familiar sight to see some unwieldy object, a wardrobe, say, or a heavy table with its legs pointing skywards, staggering up one of the steep streets, apparently under its own propulsion, only to discover on closer inspection that it is roped to the tattered, homespun back of an Indian porter, humped so low that one has to bend almost to pavement level to see his wrinkled face, twisted almost out of human semblance, yet bearing the stamp of all human misery since the world began. (221)

Exhibited in this short passage are the typical characteristics which the Western observer/reporter habitually relates. Here we have the oppressed, almost non-human, peasant-Indian. Through the observer's narration this Indian becomes the humanist "everyman," who eventually is employed as a universal signifier for all suffering humanity throughout history. Less explicit, but no less important, is the narrator's attempt to bestow humanity on the figure, but this proves impossible as the Indian has already been objectified by the narrator's use of leading language: "twisted almost out of human semblance." Her qualification, "almost," then indicates that it is her authorial power that restrains the subject from being completely non-human. The observer/reporter's own subject positioning remains transparent during this process of narrativization through the strategic employment of the pronoun *one*, a marker of the so-called objective observer. Also, she controls the image construction of the Indian, which demonstrates that she is the one in the dominant position.

Excluded from Anstee's text is the fact that in La Paz, the construction of some streets makes it practically impossible to transport goods by truck: some are extremely steep and narrow in the colonial Spanish tradition, and the cobblestones used in their construction, unlike the sidewalks, have been polished through time to a glassy finish. As well, this passage, if decontextualized from the socio-political specificity of Bolivia tends to be misleading. The country's poverty may be associated with a history of destabilization by U.S.-backed military dictatorships, as well as simply corrupt civilian administrations. In a sense, Anstee's depiction of the Indian, fixes and predetermines him to an idea of historical inevitability, an image which undermines the reality of his own ability to choose. Moreover, the reification of the Indian into a representation for all the world's poor, *ad infinitum*, infers that all poor are locked into this kind of historical inevitability. Anstee fails to fully allude to the

fact that many Indians have created, out of their own energy and choice, a sub-economy in response to the ineffectiveness of the country's official economy. In some instances these same Indians have managed to become extremely successful entrepreneurs and leaders in government: one of the largest trucking company's in Bolivia is owned and operated by a female Indian, and one of the three presidential candidates in the recent Bolivian election was an Indian as well. My criticism of Anstee in no way intends to diminish the fact that the poor are exploited; rather it is intended to challenge the un-nuanced cultural fictions created by such a viewpoint, a stance which supposes transparent modes of authority.

The dynamics that operate in Anstee's text are similar to those operating in the body of work by the Canadian poets I will discuss. Regardless of whether or not one is an official ethnographer, or one simulates the practices of ethnography, "'cultures' do not hold still for their portraits. Attempts to make them do so always involve simplification and exclusion, selection of a temporal focus, the construction of a particular self-other relationship, and the imposition or negotiation of a power relationship" (Clifford 10). Any member of a privileged culture, such as Anglo-Canada, must keep in mind Clifford's warning: "Hermeneutic philosophy in its varying styles, from Wilhelm Dilthey and Paul Ricoeur to Heidegger, reminds us that the simplest cultural accounts are intentional creations, that interpreters constantly construct themselves through the others they study" (10). Significantly, the recent reconsideration of ethnographic practices and notions demonstrates "that every version of an 'other,' wherever found, is also the construction of a 'self,'...and the making of ethnographic texts...has always involved a process of 'self-fashioning'....Cultural *poesis*—and politics—is the constant reconstitution of selves and others through specific exclusions, conventions, and discursive practices" (23-24).

3

COLONIALISM'S LEGACY:

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION: A CANADIAN DEBATE

Whether our otherness is embraced by art connoisseurs and contemporary critics, or studied as a science, or collected by archaeologists, otherness supposes cultural hierarchies and exclusionary practices.

-M. Crosby, "Construction of the Imaginary Indian"

Here in Canada there is currently a re-evaluation of the kind of gesture that Geddes' anthology makes. The type of cultural synthesis his book calls for through the term "brotherhood" is now viewed by some critics as an act of transcultural assimilation, an expression not unlike the colonizing discourse of administrative and journalistic writing, which voices the need to bring "together the peoples of the world in the name of a common humanity" (Spurr 32). Through the media exposure of the *Globe and Mail* and CBC radio, the term "cultural appropriation" has seized the Canadian popular imagination.

The misrepresentation and oversimplification of this term has led to either charges of fanaticism on the part of advocates against the practice of cultural appropriation, or the dismissal of the issues dealing with transcultural narratives, altogether. Therefore, in examining the term cultural appropriation it

is necessary to divest and foreground the various locations within which positions have been established. Barbara Godard, for instance, believes that this question of "'appropriation,' or representing the other, that is using the material or preempting the place of another, is how this debate is currently being framed in the cultural institutions over the issue of who may use the representations of specific minority ethnic groups and under what condition" (17). In Godard's questioning of transcultural representation her focus on issues, such as access and responsibility, parallels the questions I pose to the poems that I have selected. Texts, like E.J Pratt's, "Brebeuf and his Brethren," traditionally interpreted as allegorical narratives of the construction of Canadian national identity, are now being re-read as ethnocentric works. This shift, in turn, has excavated and released the lived reality of Native peoples under European colonization. The cultural criticism of those like Maria Crosby, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, Marlene Nourbese-Philip, and Terrie Goldie, informed by recent theories of the sign and post-structuralist theories of interpretation, provides a valuable context for the construction of my own re-reading of these non-Latino Canadian poets that I have selected.

Marlene Nourbese Philip views "'appropriation' to mean the abuse of power by one group in exploiting indiscriminately, *for their own economic advantage*, the cultural resources of other groups" (*Books in Canada* 15). We only have to look for examples of this exploitation in "the appropriation of African aesthetics by the modernist art movement leading to the fame and wealth of artists like Picasso, and the appropriation of African music to form the backbone of the multi-million-dollar industry of rock music" (15).

Godard also places this debate in terms of power and advocates that we must not ignore the power relations that exist in dialogical exchanges of discourse. What often occurs, posits Godard, is that "discursive practices are

oppressive when the group in power exercises a monopoly over the discursive formation and there is no debate or discussion along horizontal axes among differing partial knowledges" (18). What has a tendency to occur in a discursive exchange based upon a "self and other" paradigm, as we have already witnessed with Geddes introductory comments, is that the other becomes "the differentiating unit against which the 'I' affirms its identity...[and incorporates] the other into the same" (18).

The contentiousness of the issues surrounding cultural appropriation is demonstrated in the stratification of the forces arguing against cultural appropriation and those supporting the stance that a writer must have freedom of the imagination. Some Canadian writers, such as Sandra Birdsell, maintain the view that "Writers can and must write whatever they choose to write" ("Whose Voice Is It, Anyway?" 12). Louis Dudek, a Canadian institution in his own right, dismisses the whole question of cultural appropriation outright: "This is a foolish issue....I hope we can find it in us to laugh it off—and relax" ("Whose Voice Is It, Anyway?" 14).

Of the many Native critical voices that question the absolutism of non-native North American proponents of "the free imagination," Beth Brant argues that "the truth is not told in the books of Lynn Andrews, Tony Hillerman, W.P. Kinsella, and the many white writers who use their hundreds of years of colonial supremacy to speak for us" ("Whose Voice Is It, Anyway?" 12). Cultural self-determination is crucial for Brant: "No one can speak for us but us" (12). Or as Nourbese Philip, points out, "The danger with writers carrying their unfettered imaginations into another culture—particularly one like the Native Canadian culture which theirs oppressed and exploited—is that without careful thought, they are likely to perpetuate stereotypical and one-dimensional views of this culture" (215). Today, a plethora of Native Canadian critics questions the

traditional depictions of Native culture found in the body of work created by non-Native artists. In Lenore Keeshig-Tobias' analysis of non-Native representations of aboriginal culture, she interrogates the crisis of identity construction: "while readers [non-Natives] may feel a kinship with Native people because of this literature, they do not recognize it is their own image and reflection they see and love" (175).

Keeshig-Tobias argues that non-Native Canadian writers appropriate Native culture because "the Native experience and Native stories are considered primitive, unused, natural resources like water and trees just waiting for the magic hand of the white man's civilization to make them useful...to sell to the Americans" (175). As Keeshig-Tobias realizes, an other's culture is often commodified by those who attempt to speak for it, but who do not belong to it. What I would hold up for question, however, is the implication that this process of reification is always intentional. I would rather explore this occurrence in terms of a writer's social engagement with his/her own cultural group and the dominant discourses that are privileged within that socius. I believe that investigating differences between specific case analyses would provide a more productive spectrum of inquiry. Keeshig-Tobias astutely allows for the possibility of difference in her analysis of non-Native narratives: "Compare *Halfway Man* to M.T. Kelly's *A Dream Like Mine*. First of all, Kelly's story is not a Native story. It is a Canadian story...set against the backdrop of Native issues and history....Kelly respectfully does not use the Native voice....Why? Because Canadians are staring themselves in the face. Kelly knows this; Waylan Drew and others do not" (177).

In Marcia Crosby's examination of Euro-Canadian interaction with First Nations people, she discovers "a composite, singular 'Imaginary Indian' who functioned as a peripheral but necessary component of Europe's history in North

America—the negative space of the 'positive' force of colonialist hegemony" (269). This binary relationship then composes "a fictive but nevertheless documented historical whole" (269). The historical narrativization of this polarized interplay ultimately emphasizes an idea that supports the West's ability to bestow the redeeming characteristics of European civility: "historically, they [Natives] are inscribed to stand as the West's opposite, imaged and constructed so as to stress their great need to be saved through colonization and civilization" (269).

Crosby also asserts that the imaging of Native peoples is temporally founded in any given "historical moment" (273), and that this phenomenon is supported by the shift in the recent moral consideration of the West's treatment of its Native peoples: "I understand that the ideological dimension of Western discourse has changed to one of self-criticism, in this case it is still about a particular 'self,' and not about First Nations people" (271). The political dimensions of this kind of arbitrary dialectic initially permitted European colonization of North America: "primitive people were in the beginning denied aboriginal rights on the grounds they were too different from Whites....[Today First Nations people are denied] aboriginal rights on the grounds that they have now become too similar to Whites" (289). The fact that no culture or society is static, but is constantly in flux, is utilized by Euro-Canadian society in a questionable fashion. Non-native Canadians have taken it upon themselves to become the guardians of the "remains" of aboriginal culture. Crosby defines this act of self-imposition as the "salvage paradigm" (274). This notion is "predicated on the concept of a dead or dying people whose culture needs to be 'saved', those doing the saving choose what fragments of a culture they will salvage" (274). Thus, the chosen aboriginal culture is ultimately reified: "they [non-natives] become both the owners and interpreters of the artifacts or goods that have

survived from that dying culture, artifacts that become rare and therefore valuable" (274). Crosby argues that "this paradigm has animated Canadian art (that is, art within the Euro-Canadian tradition), ethnography and anthropology for more than a century, and more recently the so-called revival of Northwest Coast 'Indian' art" (274).

The significance of Keeshig-Tobias' and Crosby's analysis for my inquiry, resides in the similarities that exist between Euro-Canadian artists/writers treatment of Native cultures and non-Latino Canadian poets' characterization of Latin American cultures. Just as Euro-Canadian art has become a privileged location for the reproduction of images used to define Native culture, Geddes privileges the work of the non-Latino Canadian poets in his anthology. My assertion is founded on the very nature, or purpose, of an anthology, which is to provide a privileged space for those texts that are interpreted by the anthologizer to be representative of an aesthetic style or epoch. Therefore, the reproduction of images used to define Latin American culture that are collected by Geddes are intended to have some degree of merit or value. In both Native and Latin American cases, it has historically been non-aboriginal and non-Latino agents, who have been permitted to interpret their cultures. For example, Emily Carr's depiction of "actual abandoned villages and rotting poles" denotes "evidence of racial contamination, and cultural and moral deterioration" (Crosby 276). Carr's work, like the texts of the non-Latino Canadian poets under discussion, has more to do with her own cultural identity than the identity of her subjects. Her philosophical suppositions, founded on ideas of racial and cultural purity, or lack thereof, are symbolized in her representations of Native culture. This same type of philosophical foundation informs much of the transcultural writing of the "Third World": "every individual weakness has its political counterpart...social problems in health and

sanitation, unemployment, or population growth come to be associated with individual filth, indolence, and sexual promiscuity...synecdoche and metaphor combine, marking the individual as both cause and emblem of a more general degradation" (Spurr 76).

Even Carr's celebrated "profound understanding" of Canadian aboriginal culture can be challenged on the grounds that "if she did forge a deep bond with an imaginary, homogeneous heritage, it was with something that acted as a container for her Eurocentric beliefs, her search for a Canadian identity and her artistic intentions" (Crosby 277, 278). I submit that this same "deep bond," or "brotherhood" that Geddes asserts between non-Latino Canadian poets and Latin America, results from their ideological positions, a search for Canadian identity and artistic expression in conjunction with the overt pure humanitarian impulse.

In Canada, Native imagery is "a container for the Canadian imagination and a metaphor for the abstract ideals of Western ideology" (287). Latin America, likewise, functions as a "container" for the imagination and ideals of the non-Latino Canadian poets under discussion. The images in their work, such as Lane's and Mandel's, tends to primarily reflect both their own identity and that of their culture. The socio-religious beliefs and values of the Incas, Aztecs, and Mayans, among others, are often imported as decorative ornaments intended to evoke an effect in the poet's text. The poet's privileging of the Romantic notion of the epiphanic moment reveals the positionality of the poet as bard/speaker. In some instances, as with Lowther, this self-fashioning as bard/speaker precipitates the mis-use of cultural aspects of the Latin American indigene. In Lowther's "Chacabuco, The Pit," for instance, she appropriates a Mayan prayer, "*I shall speak to the Lord of Heaven where he sits asleep*" (16), to situate and structure her poem. The danger when a writer comes from outside the culture he or she

wishes to engage is that they often "simplify and sentimentalize it" or confuse "the textures and vocabulary and symbolism" (Atwood 23). In Lowther's case, she took a Mayan cultural intertext and grafted it onto her poem about a particular political event in contemporary Chilean history. An analogy for Lowther's incorporation of the Mayan prayer is a non-Native, Canadian writer who uses an Apache legend to inform a political event in British Columbia, which affects Native peoples in Clayoquot Sound. Lowther's homogenizing view suggests a disregard for "local" or "partial" knowledges of the Latin American indigene. The implicit and sometimes explicit commodification of Latin American culture by these poets reveals Latin America as a palimpsest upon which successive Canadian poets write. In both instances, non-Native and non-Latino representations of Native and Latin American culture, we must find the courage to "ask if the [benevolent] intention redeems the results of these endeavours—results such as the entrenching of stereotypes, the continuance of patronage and the representation and objectification of the other" (Crosby 287).

The ultimate evidence of the commodification of aboriginal peoples' culture in Canada is poignantly, but ironically, illustrated by the former Canadian two-dollar bill: "[Joseph] Idlout, like Nanook, represented the heroic myth of the pristine Arctic and its original inhabitants (the idyllic scene on the back of Canada's two-dollar bill was engraved from a photograph of Idlout and his family)" (Flaherty 49). Recently, this image was replaced by a reproduction of robins. What is excluded from the engraving on the former bill is any reference to Idlout's lived reality: the marginalization and demise of Idlout and his family, and his eventual suicide. Here, the discrepancy between experience and experience represented is strikingly clear.

In "Semiotic Control: Native Peoples In Canadian Literature In English," Terry Goldie focuses on the textual equivalents of Idlout's commodification on

the two-dollar bill. As in my own inquiry, he interrogates the discrepancies between the sign and the lived reality of its referent. "IF THE IMAGE of Native peoples in Canadian literature is analyzed in semiotic terms," posits Goldie, "the signifier, the literary image, does not lead back to the implied signified, the racial group usually termed Indian or Amerindian, but rather to other images" (110). In the case of the images of Latin American culture produced by the non-Latino Canadian poets under discussion, a parallel phenomenon occurs. Birney's representation of the Cartagenians, for instance, is dependent on the textual images of Hispanic writers, who have, in turn, adopted the colonial discourse of Spain and Europe.

An image, according to Goldie, who cites John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, is "detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and [is] preserved—for a few moments or a few centuries" (110). Thus "each signifier can refer only to another signifier. Any implied signified is unreachable" (110). This means for Goldie that "each representation of the indigene is a signifier for which there is no signified except the image. The referent has little purpose in the equation" (110-111). As opposed to looking at what ethnographic texts say, Goldie's analysis concentrates on how they mean by reading for, in Pierre Macherey's terms, the "'ideological horizon'...the concealed but omnipresent ideology controlling the text" (111).

The "standard commodities" (114) that Goldie sees operating in Euro-Canadian representations of Canadian Native peoples, are also deployed through the images of Latin American cultures created by the non-Latino Canadian poets under discussion: "sex and violence" (114), "mysticism" (118) and a "temporal split," which fashions "the indigene into a historical artifact" (119). This method of depicting the indigene as a static commodity relegated to pre-history effectively deflects the possibility of viewing Natives as a cultural group in the

process of transition, a characteristic usually reserved for modern, technologically advanced societies (119). As was the case with Emily Carr, we talk about what they have lost, or who they once were in relation to our own subject positioning, which is typically expressed in a "golden age" versus "contemporary decadence" dialectic—Crosby's "salvage paradigm" (274).

These commodities encode the indigene as "Other because the white perceives them as such and also because their own perception is so clearly that of Other" (Goldie 119). Ultimately, "through [these] commodities the white acquires Indian—'acquires,' not 'becomes.' To 'become Indian' is an absurdity or even madness" (120). A similar tendency to reification occurs in the poetry of the writers that I have chosen. The jungle, for example, becomes a signifier for sex and violence, chaos and order. The Latin American indigene becomes an emblem of a systemic degradation. In other words, Latin America becomes the "kinky Other," a site of fallen mystical cultures based on oral traditions. The costs of the humanitarian acts of the industrialized world are not free, but are recuperated "on the level of representation, where the Third World is symbolically constructed as the site of filth and contamination" (Spurr 88). This assertion is particularly evident in Birney's depiction of the Cartagenians in "Cartagena De Indias." The representation of the other—for Said the Oriental other, for Goldie the Native other, and for my study, the Latin American other—"is of interest only to the extent that it comments on the self" (Goldie 113), a self historically constructed in terms of Anglo-Eurocentrism.

4

EARLE BIRNEY: "THE PIONEER"

The problem of political subjectivity is not going to be solved by romanticizing the subaltern. All of the complications of "subject production" apply to us. It doesn't apply to them. When we talk about them, they become unified subjects.

-Gayatri Spivak, *Socialist Review*

I love the whole starved cheating
poetry-reading lot of you most of all
for throwing me the shoes of deadman Luis
to walk me back into your brotherhood.

-from E. Birney's "Cartagena De Indias"

In this chapter I will investigate the effects of Birney's socio-political affiliations and aesthetic concerns on his imaging of Latin America. In his poems, "Irapuato," "Sestina For the Ladies of Tehuán-tepec," "Sinaló-a," "Letter To A Cuzco Priest" and "Cartagena De Indias," Birney recreates a discursive situation that resembles the unequal power relations of the colonial paradigm. He relegates the Latin American indigene to pre-history, as well as equating their climatic conditions with their moral standing, which is predominantly manifest in his construction of the Latin American Native woman as the female exotic. His references to revolution and disintegrating social orders are not inherent cultural characteristics of Latin Americans, as he portrays them, but are part of his world view framed by the discourses of socialism, humanism, and the high modernism of a poet like W.H. Auden.

As Geddes indicates in the introduction to his anthology, Birney is recognized as an interpreter of Latin America for successive generations of poets.

His Latin American poems therefore provide a logical point of departure for my analysis. Similar to Conrad's contradictory relationship to the imperial project, modernist poet W.H. Auden's use of the wanderer/traveller voice serves as an antecedent for the type of voice found later in the texts of Birney. The convergence of Auden's aesthetic development and pre-1940s socio-political philosophy—informed by post-Freudian psychoanalysis, Marxism, socialism and liberal humanism—structures the wanderer/traveller persona found in his poems written prior to World War II.

Auden's social and political convictions between 1925 and 1945 can be divided into various stages: from 1928 to 1937, his ideology was strongly Marxian; from 1936 to 1939, he adopted a humanistic ideology that called for global class struggle and revolution (Beach 231-232). These Marxist, humanist beliefs effected in Auden an impulse to "speak for" the world's proletariat, which he attempted to actualize by traveling to Spain and China. When preparing to go to Spain in 1937 as part of the International Brigade, Auden wrote E.R. Dodd:

I feel I can speak with authority about *la condition humaine*
of only a small clan of English intellectuals...the time has come to
gamble on something bigger.

I shall probably be a bloody bad soldier but how can I speak
to/for them without becoming one? (Mendelson XVIII)

Once in Spain, Auden soon realized his role would only be as a mouthpiece for left-wing propaganda. Auden's initial romantic idea, informed by his pro-Marxist, humanist philosophy, continues in his trip with Christopher Isherwood to China in 1938, during the Sino-Japanese war: "his visit to China...took shape as a vision of mankind at length summoning its collective will to the struggle against fascism, and determined, in a spirit of secular humanism, to 'construct at last a human justice' upon the earth" (Beach 248).

The aesthetics of high modernism, as well as Marxist, humanist ideologies, influenced Auden's poetry, as is evident in "Consider this and in our time," where the Eliotic inspection of cultural decay is expressed in Auden's observation of a wasteland of "silted harbours, derelict works," "diseased youngsters," and "ruined boys" (Auden 47). For Auden, the modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and thematic preoccupation with cultural decay intersected with the humanist notion of humankind's fallen condition and the goal to re-attain an earthly utopic state. Although Auden, prior to the 1940s, was on the opposing side of the political spectrum from Eliot and Yeats, the three poets shared a similar universal theme: the corruption of modern society and the need for a new social order. Their ideas converge in a modernist discourse, "whereby heteroglossic social groups struggle to establish their intellectual, cultural, and moral influence" (Zavala 9).

In Auden's attempt to circumvent the reality of European fascism during the 1930s, by travelling to an imagined utopic location—"For Europe is absent. This is an island and therefore / Unreal" (203)—he formulates a philosophical stance akin to the Yeatsian concept of Tragic joy, which presupposes a degree of historical inevitability in the universal suffering and injustice that underlies the human condition: "Tears fall in all rivers" (204). The maturation of this humanistic idea is ultimately expressed in "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," where Auden comments on humankind's eternal suffering: "And the poor have the suffering to which they are fairly accustomed" (242).

Regardless of whether or not Auden later became an advocate of Catholicism and Conservatism, his poetry before World War II clearly exhibits the socio-political axioms of his generation. But always enduring throughout his development as the "court-poet of the left" during the 1930s is the voice of the wanderer/traveller. In turn, this device was also influenced by the tradition of

English literature, i.e. modernism and Shelley's Romantic notion that the poet is the "unacknowledged legislator of the world." It fairly stands that the convergence of Auden's socio-political beliefs and aesthetics precipitated the type of work he created prior to World War II. His poetry which attempts to speak for the masses, the proletariat, expounds the virtues of a unified world. Initially informed by socialist ideology, his world view later became more humanist in character, but remaining constant was his use of the traveller persona.

For Birney, Auden is an interesting parallel figure. Harvey Maclean argues that Birney's early poetry was "significantly shaped by a socialist world view" (29). Thus, "Birney's earlier active commitment to Trotsky's revolutionary vision endures in the form of a generalized political sympathy for the eradication of class exploitation and leads to a poetry that describes oppression and urges the need for a politically conscious proletariat" (51). This particular reading of his work has escaped the attention of critics who have previously engaged and produced the Birney canon. As Maclean maintains:

An evaluative review of contemporary responses to the political influence on Birney's first four volumes of poetry reveals, then, a fundamental bias in critical methodology and terminology. These approaches, supported by humanist, idealist discourse and the scantiest evidence, and expressed through recuperative language, work to devalue the imprint of Birney's socialist affiliation on his poetry.

When one moves from contemporary reviews to more considered evaluations from the sixties on, the critical bias persists. (15)

If nothing else, Maclean's analysis supports Said's contention that critics "are subject to and producers of circumstances" (*World* 35), and it also illustrates the need to acknowledge Spivak's argument that "textual criticism cannot just be a

judgement on the basis of disinterested readings by a presumed community" ("Problem" 50).

Birney's use of the traveller voice, in his early poetry, like Auden, may be attributed to his socio-political affiliations with Marxism:

By mid-1940, following the seven years he had devoted to Trotskyism (1932-1939), Birney's Marxist perspective might be most accurately characterized as that of a 'fellow traveller,' a term coined by Trotsky to describe intellectuals or writers no longer politically active but nonetheless loyal and sympathetic to the traditional Marxist cause of revolutionary international socialism. (Maclean 52)

In view of this similarity to Auden's use of the traveller voice, it is fair to assume that Birney was a participant in a literary tradition that not only reaches back to Conrad, but is located in the intersection of the socio-political and aesthetic ideals between the two great wars. Hence, Birney's socio-political commitments, like Auden's, influenced his verse. And similar to Auden, although his texts condemn the social and political injustices of the world perpetrated by imperialist agents, they reproduce colonial discourses and practices. Birney is an inheritor of a modernism which "monitors an imaginary 'representation' of social relations based on a collectivity in solidarity with its values and its collective project" (Zavala 14).

In "Irapuato" Birney surveys the history of Irapuato, Mexico. His ironic depiction of Irapuato as "a favourite / nook / for massacre", suggests that this has been the historical inevitability of its people (Birney 62). The litany of socio-political forces from pre-European contact to modern U.S. corporate imperialism is intended to support Birney's assumption:

Toltex by Mixtex Mixtex by Aztex
 Aztex by Spanishtex Spanishtex by Mexitex
 by Mexitex by Mexitex by Texaco by Pemex (62).

Irapuato, for Birney, was and is, predetermined to a state of violence because violence itself is transcendental: "For reason any / brigadier / could tell" (62) [emphasis is mine]. Thus, in making this assertion, Irapuato signifies his metaphysical assumption that violence is an inherent characteristic of the human condition, humankind's innate tragic flaw. The non-specific reference to the farmer, "So any farmer can see" (62), in the latter half of the poem, seems to support the impression of the universality of Birney's observation.

The final reference to the strawberries that come from the region

but why
 when arranged
 under the market flies
 do they look like small clotting hearts (62)

invokes the sacrificial, religious beliefs, and practices of Mexico's ancient peoples. This temporal focus effectively supports Birney's observation that violence is an eternal component of humanity. What is contentious about Birney's employment of Irapuato for his humanist beliefs is that Irapuato and its people have become, for Birney, a universal signifier for euro-centric ideals. In the monological style of the traveller/reporter, Birney is able to confer a discrete identity upon Irapuato, while maintaining a transparent mode of authority for himself, which in turn creates the impression of immediacy of experience. This representation then negates the possibility of viewing Irapuato's past, present and future as anything but an existence caught in the inevitable forces of

imperialism, foreign or internal. As well, he decontextualizes the notion of violence.

This is where the question of responsible representation comes into effect. In commodifying Irapuato, by portraying it as a semiotic embodiment of generic violence, Birney has created an economy of signs that excludes Irapuato's other cultural aspects—namely, its artistic heritage:

the Mixtecs were the most famous craftspeople in Late Postclassic Mesoamerica. Metallurgy, which had spread throughout Mesoamerica by this time, was one Mixtec Specialty; polychrome pottery was another....Finally, the Mixtecs were expert in the recording of history and genealogy in pictographic manuscripts, some of which have survived to the present. (Culbert 77)

Another cultural group of Irapuato, the Toltecs, to which Birney refers, were renowned for their "legendary accomplishments as artists, craftspeople, and rulers" (73). The exclusion of the complex history and cultural practices of these peoples suggests that this poem is not so much about Irapuato, but is about Birney's own cultural identity. In playing the role of the traveller poet, Birney unwittingly occupies the subject position of Achebe's all-knowing colonizer. As in journalistic writing this location offers aesthetic pleasure, information and authority.

Birney's self-fashioning as an all-knowing subject is recast in the tradition of the bardic speaker in "Pachucan Miners." His choice of the exploitation of Mexican miners is an obvious expression of his own socio-political beliefs because of the Pachucan mines' notoriety; as a site of labour unrest at the end of the eighteenth century. The worker's oppression and resistance to it serve as a pretext for Birney's socialist vision. By focusing on the miners' aboriginal past, as descendants of the Toltec civilization, Birney contrasts their primitive past, e.g.

"precortesian priests" (62), and their neo-feudalistic present. In turn, this formulation creates a manichean view of the miners, who are exploited, and the "Olympian gringos," who signify foreign imperial forces.

An examination of the description of the miners reveals that they are consciously portrayed by Birney to emphasize this manichean paradigm. At the beginning of the poem they are situated down in the mines: "in a night of birth blast / bend they have deepened the dark search" (62). This subservient positioning of the miners is continued in town where they are "below the white Olympus of the gringos" (63). Their social and economic marginalization is further suggested by their powerlessness of controlling the sale and material benefit of their mineral resources: "Only the ore has risen / ...to sorceries beyond their vision" (62). Their socio-economic impotency is further emphasized by Birney's general descriptions of their life. For instance, the miners "turn without rancour from the guarded gate" (63) of their foreign employers/owners. Then Birney compares these noble, oppressed people to a "defeated army" (63), who occupy a "tree-abandoned valley" (63). This imaging of the miners and their environment suggests a deliberate attempt by Birney to illustrate his view of the oppression of the Indian-descended miners by modern Western imperial agents, who only appear to continue the project of the Spanish colonialists.

Finally, in the last stanza of the poem, Birney deploys a male-machismo discourse in an attempt to re-masculate the emasculated miners, a metaphor for their de-humanization by the gringos which allows Birney's attempt to re-humanize them:

In the cantinas helmets roll
backs fling upright O now legs are male
are braced each knotty pair to hold
up song and hurl it at the night. (63)

Here, we are presented with a portrait of a unified group of men who resist their oppressive state and thus Western imperialism. Could this be the incarnation of the socialist ideal of a unified (male) proletariat? If so, then the miners signify for Birney his socialist convictions of the possibility of a homogeneous socialist world, Auden's "singular vision." But another possible reading of the last stanza may be located in the pronounced presence of references to the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and the Toltec myth of the Plumed Serpent.

The Orpheus and Eurydice myth recounts Orpheus' attempt to reclaim his wife Eurydice from Hades, who had died from a snake bite. Orpheus fails to do so because he transgresses the Olympian gods' commandment that he should not look back to see if Eurydice was following him until he reached the surface of the earth. This story provides the poem with a mythic parallel for the power of life and death that the "Olympian gringos" possess over the Mexican miners: "Orphic and helmeted" (62). But when Birney combines this myth with that of the Plumed Serpent, the last stanza takes on a different significance:

deep in her torchy den
snakes Toltecan looping in her ears
her crucifix agleam above the sheet
Eurydice lies and hears
the wild guitars and daily waits
the nightly rescue of her silver me (63)

The Mesoamerican myth of the Serpent is derived from and supported by the cult of the Jaguar. Together they symbolize procreation/fertility and water/rain (Davies 1982). Consequently, the coupling of this Toltec myth with the passive image of Eurydice suggests a sexual encounter which fulfills the previous male-machismo discourse of the initial part of this stanza. Birney privileges a patriarchal discourse—woman as passive object. This structure is

necessary to complete the machismo discourse of the beginning of the stanza because it is only through the female figure that the miners can be re-masculated. This figure, then, can be interpreted as a Maude Gonne type of signifier or as the representational female figure found in Eugène Delacroix's *Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi* or in *La Liberté Guidant Le Peuple*. In both works, revolutionary struggle is enabled by a female figure. As it stands in the poem, though, the men are only able to fleetingly achieve this state each night: "nightly rescue" (63). To transcend this partial revolutionary state, Birney aligns himself with the miners through his definition of brotherhood, which he formulates the notion that the male miners are his poetic/orphic brothers: "silver men" (63). By grafting the Greek myth of Orpheus, the poet, onto the Peruvian miners through diction associated with the Western tradition of the bard/shaman, e.g. "mysteries," "sorceries," "dream" and "wild"(62-63), Birney structures the Peruvians as his orphic brothers: "Orphic and helmeted" (62). His gesture not only domesticates the Pachucan men (while excluding the women), but it creates what Louise Pratt calls a cultural "contact zone" where he consolidates his bardic self: the rhetorical significance of the apostrophe, "O now legs are male" (63), "frames the description it makes possible" which then liberates a former oppressive space while foregrounding the voice of its author (De Man 60). This positionality then invokes the impression that Birney is the redeemer of the Peruvian miners by making them all poets who participate in "mysteries" and "dreams" (62 and 63).

Ultimately, Birney's text is a construct that refers to other texts and discourses, and is not actually about the Pachucan miners. What he accomplishes in this poem is an intricate weave of Western mythology, patriarchal and socialist-proletariat discourse, which levels and masks issues dealing with gender, class, and privilege. The poem's narrative perspective of the omniscient observer enables Birney to play the role of the bard/speaker. The poem then

and secret as the orchids," and a noble past, "stately still," which has been corrupted not only by former imperial agents: "Dictator Porfirio Diaz" but by present "ogling busloads (*Greyhound*)" of tourists (64). Birney intentionally creates, with Tehuantepec, a polarized view of the "commanding beauty of its Indian women" (64) and its present corrupted and inglorious state: "flaking palace of old Diaz" (64). Consequently, the *Tehuana*s remain in Birney's text, a commodity that represents a "matriarchal" (64) past, which possibly threatens revolution:

whose eyes from fires more stubborn than under hot springs
flash out a thousand Mayan years before a Diaz...

O dance and hurl flamboya till the cobbled earth quakes.

(64-65)

Birney only views the *Tehuana*s in terms of their aboriginal past, their "stone music," and their sexual-destructive potential (64). This image, in turn, gives the impression that the *Tehuana*s can redeem their emasculated male partners. What is intriguing is his play on a metaphor that associates the being of the women with trees:

Their furtive men (*unfamed*) who snare iguanas
sliding on tree-limbs olive smooth as are their women's
have fallen out of peonage to landlord Diaz. (64)

This metaphor suggests that just as the trees are natural objects, so too are the women. Therefore, their potential for destruction is an intrinsic value: "classic women / dance (*v. marimbas*) their ancient therapy" (64). This idea then supports a social imaginary subtext which asserts that disintegrating social structures—the flaking "square of Diaz" (64)—are subject to a threatening, resurgent order. This assertion seems peculiar in view of the fact that this poem

employs a medieval verse form, the Sestina, which relies on a predetermined order for the last word of each line in each stanza. Hence, the repetition of the tourist diction located in the first stanza throughout the poem owes to the structural requirements of the Sestina.

By playing on the connotations of "their isthmus" (64), a covert reference to the women's genitalia, Birney finally suggests the importance of the *Tehuana*s in achieving his envisioned revolutionary, social order:

toss your soaring sunflower plumes sunflowering women!
Hold for all men yet your supple blossoming isthmus
lest we be noosed consumed with all iguanas. (65)

As in the machismo discourse of "Pachucan Miners," Birney, in this instance, suggests that it is only through the *Tehuana*s that their larger society can be fully re-emasculated socially and politically. The Yeatsian last stanza completes Birney's apocalyptic discourse by rhetorically prophesying that some sort of revolution is yet to come; either another despot, like Diaz, or a liberal egalitarian society will emerge born of women: "Is there a green isthmus walking yet in women" (65).

Birney's emphasis of the *Tehuana*'s matriarchal social structure is intended to signify an alternate social order to the one of imperialism. Their importance is not so much in themselves, but in their appearance as a contrasting element to the fascist structure represented by Diaz. In the textual construction of the *Tehuana*s and their culture, Birney presents images which appear as petrified as their stone music, or as superficial as the tourist discourse he sets up to subvert. Ultimately, the women are rarified commodities in a male-machismo discourse which prophesizes apocalyptic social change, a dominant text in both modernist aesthetics and Marxist/socialist ideology. In reconstructing the female as exotic and mapping himself onto the imaginary socio-political

liberation of the *Tehuano*s: "lest we be noosed," Birney reproduces the imperialist project of domesticating the other to consolidate the normative self (emphasis mine 65).

In "Sinalóa," Birney appears to subvert Western, capitalist society's myth of infallible industrial progress and development. The persona in this instance, unlike the traveller/observer voice in "Sestina For the Ladies of Tehuántepic," does not feign speaking for another cultural group, but actually supposes that it "is" a member of the society in question. This particular lyric perspective creates a kind of cultural ventriloquism and is suspect in view of Clifford's reconsideration of traditional ethnographic practices. Here, Birney masquerades as the other, in a confessional mode, while constructing a dialectical paradigm where he debates the merits of a utopic versus industrial existence. This debate is then framed within a dramatic monologue, which is supposed to position the poet/speaker as the addressee.

The poem's reliance on an ironic discursive strategy creates a juxtaposition between common touristic images:

Si señor, is halligators here, your guidebook say it,
 si, jaguar in the montañas, maybe helephants, quién sabe?
 You like, dose palmas in the sunset? Certamente very nice, (65)

and the industrial gagetry of post-industrialized, Western, capitalist economies:

Mira my fren, wat dis town need is muy big breakwater
 ...you give me one grand bulldozer, hey?
 ...send us helevator for w'eat

Sinalóa want ten sousand mile irrigation canals. (65-66)

From this positioning, Birney creates his own economy of signs which rely on and perpetuate a derogatory image; the broken-english speaking Latin American, who naively desires the material benefits of a modern, privileged society. This

"Ricky Riccardo" discourse is relevant only in terms of the poem's fundamental statement, a comment which recalls the Marxian notion of the rupture caused by capitalist economies on the organic unity of workers with their environment and their products.

In Birney's own semiotic economy, Sinalóa represents a negative presence for the Western self. Sinalóa is therefore only comprehensible and valuable, on the basis of difference, his otherness. In bringing Sinalóa home to Canada for judgement, Birney frames the grounds of what is sayable, an either/or scenario that excludes any possibility that the area could achieve sustainable growth. By constructing the poem to appear as if the reader engages the actual referent itself, a resident of Sinalóa, Birney surreptitiously defers the poem's occasion.

Initially, "Sinalóa" leads us to believe in Birney's sympathy for a people in crisis. But what may be more significant is his failure in perception; Sinalóa is a culture in transition, not a hapless society threatened by Western capitalism. This misreading rests on the assumption that cultural transition is only applicable to "developed" Western societies. In "Sinalóa" what initially appears to be a comment on capitalist ideology, actually is an example of a capitalist practice. By appropriating the voice of his subject, Birney executes a takeover in the full corporate sense of the term's meaning. Based on a dominant positioning, he gains control of his subject in order to achieve a visible profit. The profit in this case is Birney's construction of his own identity, a portrait of a politically conscious subject.

In "Letter To A Cuzco Priest," written much later (early 1960s) than the previous poems, a more pronounced humanist overtone is detectable. But the idea of the inevitability of the poor's social condition, a notion similar to Auden's pithy statement in "In Memory To W.B. Yeats," is continued in this text. "Letter To A Cuzco Priest" begins as an homage to a Cuzco Priest who was

branded as a communist subversive for preaching equality to his *Campesino* (peasant-Indian) congregation. Acting on his sermons, informed by liberation theology, the *Campesinos* protest for better social conditions and are therefore killed or imprisoned:

Father the guilt is not yours
 though words that blazed last week
 from your pulpit lettered their placards

The two who bore them are dead. (102)

This text, however, develops into a forum for Birney's humanist prescriptions, signalled by his capitalization of man:

Father forgive all men if you must
 but only in despite of god
 and in Man's name...

Father honour your Man. (104)

These directions accomplish more in terms of revealing Birney's own subjectivity, his belief in secular humanism, than in providing a reading of the *Campesinos'* resistance or the priest's liberation theology:

Pray to yourself above all for men like me
 that we do not quench
 the Man
 in each of us. (105)

Birney not only claims to be an authority on the solutions needed to effect socio-political change for the *Campesinos*, a discourse usually reserved for the World Bank, but he constructs himself as a representative of what can be ideally achieved.

It is clear how Birney portrays himself in this poem, but how does he cast the other players in his morality play? The images of the "Quechuanos" (102), the *Campesinos*, for instance, are informed with a language usually reserved for their goats: "horny feet" and "silent ragged" (102). Birney then adds an image which strengthens the previous metonymic equation of the *Campesinos* with their livestock: "as many boneknobbly goats" (102). Birney's linkage of the condition of the *Campesinos* with the condition of their goats thus denotes their de-humanization and poverty. The images of their physical environment appear to support Birney's description. Playing on the conditions of the Andes—"ravaged slopes," "thin winds," and "denuded terraces" (102)—Birney invokes the socio-political situation of the peasant farmers, which seems as bleak as their surrounding landscape. This description then contrasts the glories of their Inca past, signalled by the reference to the "Moon's Temple" (102).

Here, Birney has created a manichean view of the *Campesinos*, who are controlled by and struggle against a hegemony of Peruvian and foreign imperialist forces:

A local watchman for the Lima agent
for the American banker
for the Peruvian landowner
living in Madrid. (103)

What is then significant is Birney's assertion that all relevant action occurs outside, beyond the *Campesinos'* immediate existence:

Father the guilt begins
in the other pulpits and all the places
where no one will say your words. (103)

Through the construction of contrasting images in this poem, we learn how Birney mediates the world. His view is largely comprised of a system of

binary opposites: Western world versus other worlds, rich versus poor, religious faith versus secular humanism. What is of further question is the fact that his rationale claims its validity from a concept of historical inevitability. This strategy is particularly evident in the reference to the "Cuzco kids / (dressed like Inca Princlings... / to be shot" (102), which recalls the Inca brothers, Huàscar and Atahualpa, who conducted a Civil war for the title of Inca, and Francisco Pizarro's violent subjugation of the Inca empire. As in "Irapuato," Birney again relegates the *Campesinos* to pre-history by foregrounding their cultural ancestry, which in turn de-temporalizes and therefore universalizes the idea that humankind is tragically flawed.

The validity of Birney's socio-political concerns for the Peruvian proletariat is unquestionably central to the ideological project of this poem, but what must be closely examined is the manner in which it is developed. From the imaging of the *Campesinos* and the humanist discourse informing this poem, Birney's gaze ultimately leads back to himself. It is precisely his awareness of his self-reflexivity that compels him, almost neurotically, to differentiate his tourist/observer position from the typical North American *tourista* invoked by "enchanted ears of travellers" (102). By juxtaposing himself against the other tourists, through this metonymic association, Birney implies that he, as poet/speaker, is superiorly politically conscious: "I am not deceived" (105).

As opposed to being a text that engages the socio-political predicament and complexity of an oppressed people, "Letter To A Cuzco Priest" appears, under close scrutiny, to be a manifesto of Birney's rejection of bourgeois ideals and his assertion of secular humanist ideology. References to the *Campesinos*, the priest, and the imperial forces, both foreign and internal, can be characterized as signifiers which are orchestrated by Birney to enact his own manichean view of the world. In retrospect the begged question in this poem is why the priest could

not read Birney's text, as is indicated at the outset of the poem. In view of Birney's socialist sympathies, this remaining question concerning access is a troubling paradox in the reading of his work.

When Birney does approach this kind of question, he only engages it in terms of the material difference between North America and Latin America, as is seen in "Cartagena De Indias." He supposes that the reconciliation of dissimilarity can be achieved by a process of owning up, or becoming politically conscious: "guiltily wakeful" (115). But in order to downplay the appearance of privilege that comes with being a tourist, Birney wears the mantle of the bardic speaker. From this subject-position, he then supports his "cultural epiphanies" by incorporating into his poem the humanist, Romantic texts of Latino poets, José Maria Heredia and Louis Lopez. This rhetorical strategy, in turn, activates the twinned practices of colonialism's legacy: the ethnographic gaze and cultural appropriation.

From the outset of the poem, Birney exhibits his awareness of the duality of existence: "Each face its own phantom / its own formula of breed and shade" (112). This ontological enquiry then initiates a comparison between the Cartagenians and himself. For instance, the Columbians are depicted as corrupted and Americanized, "desperate tarantula youths" (112), who sell U.S. commodities, "Old Golds" (112), or as a "conga drum-man in jeans" (112), who flashes "Swiss watches" (112) and "whispers in husky Texan" (112). If they are not converted agents of Western imperialism, then they act as a signifier for suffering humanity, as is the case with the "mestiza girl" who "levels Christ's hands... / under a dangling goiter" (113). We are presented with a city, whose inhabitants are threatening, repulsive, and sexually dangerous "glazed-eyed screamers of dulces:"

a poxed and slit-eyed savage

pouts an obscenity
 offering a sister
 as he would spit me
 a dart from a blowpipe. (113)

As such, they are commodities in Birney's notion of the tragedy of human life. As he himself asserts, they are the "noisy always poor" (116).

The romanticization of the Columbians' present existence by referring to their colonial past seems to complement their fallen condition: "This arthritic street / where Drake's men and Cole's ran / swung cutlasses where wine and sweet blood / snaked in the cobble's joints" (112). Their exploitation by the former colonial powers of Spain, England, and France is glorified by these romanticized adventures of swashbuckling buccaneers, yet Birney signals the Columbians neo-colonial condition by invoking Simon Bolivar's struggle for independence ("bankrupt Bolivar") and his Republican revolution's ensuing failure:

Out of the heaving womb of independence
 Bolivar rode and over the bloody afterbirth
 into coffee and standard oil
 from inquisitional baroque
 to armed forces corbusier. (114)

However, in the final lines of the poem, Birney returns to the Cartagenaian's romanticized depiction by modelling them as the "noble savage:" "Descendant's of pirates grandees / galley-slaves and cannibals" (117). Significantly, this imaging indicates Birney's ability to control the presentation of the lived reality of the Cartagenaians. What must be noted, though, is that each depiction serves to totalize their being, which then furthers Birney's project—the universality of human existence.

The ability to adopt shifting and contradictory perspectives underlies Birney's own identity construction. For example, Birney calls his position as a tourist "hidalgo" (113), a term used to describe colonial noblemen, and he mentions his own "invasion" (112), a tongue-in-cheek reference to his positionality as an outsider. But then in the "Indio Market" (113) Birney reports that he finds respite from the corrupted world, a momentary suspension of his Western being: "I am granted uneasy truce" (113). Curiously, his focus on the Indians' cultural characteristics, framed by their ancient, mystical past, provides his relief: "the ritual braidings of hair / the magical arrangements of fish"(113). In this scene, Birney has noticeably abandoned his previous diction, which denotes the Indian's present fallen state. Instead of images of "arthritic" streets, "blackened" altars and "Indian silver...scratched away" (112), we are presented with an alternate image of a people who are ritualistic and magical. Although heightening the Indians' depiction by emphasizing their indigenous, ancestral past, Birney consciously notices that he cannot penetrate this temporal split: "I cast a shadow of silence" (113) and returns the focus back to his tourist status: "spotlit me" (114).

Ultimately, Birney cannot separate his material being from his humanist desire for the Cartagenians' "human acceptance" (114). His material privilege is noticeable in his "bright shoes," "the cut of...[his] glasses," his "unnatural stride" and "life expectation" (114). The only site for common existence left for Birney is in literary texts, a perception he bases on the misguided notion that the Cartagenian's are a "poetry-reading lot" (117). Birney is led to believe this because he privileges a bookstore owner's interpretation of Lopez and his famous shoe metaphor which equates the Cartagenians with an old pair of shoes:

Si señor Luis Lopez el poeta

Here is his book

Unamuno praised it *si si*
 You have seen *los zapatos*? Ah?
 But they are us, *señor*
 It was about us he wrote. (116)

What Birney fails to understand is that poetry may come to the people orally and not by the printed word. Therefore, Birney's assumption that the Cartagenerians are a "poetry-reading lot" (117) is meant to deride his own privileged society by contrasting the poetry-appreciating, materially disadvantaged Columbians with his own advanced culture, who fail to read poetry, or at least Birney's poetry. Within this context Birney's and Lopez's shoes become an obvious signifier for Birney's desire for cultural homogeneity. He wishes to be part of a culture like the Columbians' because he interprets their oral tradition as being the incarnation of the Romantic notion that "primitive" or peasant peoples are uniquely sensitive to the poetic sensibility of humankind. For Birney, what is the use of playing the bardic speaker when no one (such as Canadians) listens?

In dealing with the shoe metaphor, a closer interrogation of the intertextual epigraph from Heredia is necessary to demonstrate the relation between Birney's desire for cultural synthesis—"Somewhere there must be another bridge / from my stupid wish / to their human acceptance" (114)—and the Romantic/humanist discourse signalled by the intertextual resonances with the poetry of Heredia, Lopez, and Unamuno. Birney's epigraph, "*Ciudad triste, ayer reina de la mar*" (112), is taken from nineteenth-century poet José Maria Heredia's "A une ville morte" from his volume of poetry *Les Trophées* and is dedicated to Cartagena de Indias. *Les Trophées* is critically characterized as a work that is "the splendid culmination of a line of poetic development which...begins with the first wave of Romantic poets at the beginning of the century [19th] and the Victor Hugo of *Les Orientales*" (Ince 3). What is interesting to note is that this

sonnet is part of a section, "Les Conquerants," which recalls and celebrates the colonial actions of Spain, England, and France through the imperialist discourse of bravery, exploration, and conquest (Ince 1979). The narrative thrust of the poem, itself, centres on the tragic sense of humanity, its temporality. The poem's structural foundation, then, is derived from the continuity between past and present (153).

Heredia is also known for his philosophy of humanism: peace, liberty, justice, rational order and progress, the tenets of Western European culture (Anderson, Imbert 264). Heredia is one of the many subjects of a complex cultural "contact zone" created by European colonization of Latin America. As a creole, his identity is split between a Spanish father, French mother, his birth in Cuba and his indoctrination in Continental European culture. Although you may find his work today in *Castellano*, he originally wrote and published in French. This conscious choice may be indicative of Heredia's identification with European culture. It may be that he is one of a group that Louise Pratt identifies as "elite liberal creoles," who "sought esthetic and ideological grounding as white Americans" (175). The ideological and political project of this group, suggests Pratt, "involved founding an independent, decolonized [Latin] American society and culture, while retaining European values and white supremacy" (175).

Louis Lopez and Miguel de Unamuno, on the other hand, are a bit more straight forward. Lopez, although from Cartagena, can be characterized as being predominantly from the former Spanish colonial class of Columbia. Politically and poetically, Lopez is known for his *espíritu romántico*, his rebellious nature and his attention to everyday things and events, an aesthetic stance akin to Eliot's prescription that the poet should make the personal, universal. The epigram for Lopez's sonnet, "A mi ciudad nativa," is also the first line from Heredia's "A une ville morte." Lopez's poem, like Heredia's, juxtaposes

Cartagena's romantic past as a place for trade and the adventures of swashbuckling buccaneers with its present dilapidated condition. This irony is further developed by the poem's form; a sonnet is traditionally reserved for a love poem. What differentiates Lopez's poem with Heredia's is his final image of unconditional love, *agape*, for the Cartagenians, which is expressed through the metaphor of a pair of old shoes. Lopez suggests that the historical and cultural plurality of Cartagena can be unified by the idea that they are all caught in the same human condition, an idea that resurfaces in Birney's poem.

Birney's inclusion of the bookstore owner's reference to Miguel de Unamuno: "Unamuno praised it [Lopez's book]" (116), is intended to further add to this Romantic/humanist subtext. Unamuno, a famous humanist figure in Spanish literature was known for his "tragic sense of life" (also the title of one of his most significant works). He maintained that writing "is the creative appropriation of another's voice and the creative unfolding of the self" (Zavala 146). A comparable figure in English literature would be Bernard Shaw. Like Shaw, Unamuno was a great public advocate of humanism and its ideals, but also like Shaw he was difficult to deal with in individual human interaction. Birney's reference to Unamuno's critical acceptance of Lopez's work can be explained in light of the fact that Unamuno, a Spaniard, was familiar with the colonial discourse implicit in his texts, which reconfirmed Unamuno's culture's dominant subject-position. What is evident in the texts of Heredia, Lopez, and Birney, is what Gayatri Spivak calls the imperial project of "soul making" ("Three Women's Texts" 266), which is intended to create "a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self" (272).

The Romantic/humanist connotations of Birney's literary signifiers are clearly obvious in this case, but the complete significance of Lopez is not fully realized until we engage the problem that confronts Birney in his use of Lopez's

metaphor. We must remember that Birney acknowledges difference between his shoes and the Cartagenians lack of that material advantage: "young sink in pellagra / as I clump unmaimed / in the bright shoes" (114). So how is it that Birney is able to receive "the shoes of deadman Luis," which he claims take him into their "brotherhood" (117)?

In Lopez's use of the old shoes metaphor, the Cartagenians are unified when he speaks of his unconditional love for them: "Today, with your sadness and disarray, you can inspire a love that one has for one's old shoes" (my own translation) (Anderson, Imbert 225). With Birney, however, this programmatic cultural prescription is problematic in that he must extend this metaphor to include his own subjectivity, which he confesses is materially different. Finally, it is only by replicating Lopez's act of unconditional love that Birney seems to locate a plausible shared space for the synthesis of their cultural dissimilarities:

Discarded queen I thought I love you too
 Full of rancid disarray
 city like any city
 full of the stench of human indignity
 and disarray of the human proportion
 full of the noisy always poor
 and the precocious dying...

I love the whole starved cheating
 poetry-reading lot of you. (116-117)

It is precisely because of Birney's difference that he cannot completely rely on Lopez's original metaphor and that he must therefore make an expression of unconditional love, a gesture not unlike Coleridge's Romantic figure, the Ancient Mariner. In Birney's case, the albatross is his own North American

identity, which only falls off when he blesses all. This privileged epiphany is not as autonomous as it seems, but is inextricably bound with the Romantic/humanist discourse of the poem's intertextuality. This relation becomes particularly evident in Birney's reference to Wordsworth: "happier than Wordsworth" (116), which supports and suggests Birney's attempt to achieve the Romantic status of "unacknowledged legislator." We must not forget that he reports the Columbian bookseller as saying that the poet has a special privilege in society: "it is for a poet to say these things" (116). In this poem, the metaphorical bridge which he attempts to locate to overcome living difference as both self and other is ultimately found in literature—the work of Luis Lopez. But this revelation, found in an epiphanic moment—"in the hour of siesta / at last a message / to a pair of shoes / in a circle of baked mud" (115)—is only intended for his understanding. This Romantic project then becomes the basis for his belief in the possibility of a shared brotherhood between the Columbians and himself. Lopez's book, then, symbolically functions for Birney, in the same manner that *An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship*, gauges reality and comprehension for Conrad's Marlow.² It acts as a guide through the complex and strange realities presented by Columbian culture.

In view of Birney's Romantic/humanist desire, "somewhere there must be another bridge / from my stupid wish / to their human acceptance," his complaint, "I who am seldom read by my townsmen," becomes glaringly suspicious (114 and 117). It seems that this failure compels Birney to travel to Latin America and also initiates his desire for cultural homogeneity. He creates a positionality that permits a critique of Canadian society.

In "Cartagenia De Indias" what appears as a laudable expression of cross-cultural understanding is in fact an elaborate text of unfulfilled desire. In this instance it is Birney's lack of fulfillment that occupies our attention. He deploys

transcultural literary figures, such as Wordsworth, Heredia, Lopez and Unamuno as signifiers for his own Romantic/humanist convictions; they provide a pre-packaged significance that his poem alone fails to achieve. Furthermore, Heredia and Lopez are part of a tradition into which Birney attempts to write himself. This shared tradition is then, for Birney, a dominant means for constructing poetic authority. By relying on their texts, though, Birney unwittingly recalls and lends to his own work, their imperialist voices/texts and acts of appropriation. This manifestation is seen in the poem's structural construction of a temporal split between the Cartagenians past and present, and the privileging of the Romantic device of the epiphanic moment, which illustrates Birney's belief in the unquestioned authority of the observing, sovereign subject. In deconstructing "Cartagenia De Indias," it is evident that the poem is not what it claims to be, an introspective reflection on the desire to transcend the tourist-subject, but its *dasein* (to borrow from Heidegger), its being-in-the-world, is dependent upon other texts, which it attempts to join and eventually to supplant.

5

IN BIRNEY'S FOOTSTEPS

-and him I envy
I who am seldom read by my
townsmen

Cartagena de Indias
Earle Birney

Y en el fondo del agua magna,
como el circulo de la tierra
esta la gigante anconda
cubierta de barro rituales,
devoradora y religiosa

Algunas Bestias
Pablo Neruda

(These two quotations are from Pat
Lane's dedicatory page for *Unborn
Things*)

In this chapter I will examine the non-Latino Canadian poets' commodification of Latin American political and literary figures, as well as their objectification of the Latin American indigene. For poets like Lowther, Wayman and Purdy, political and literary figures, such as Pablo Neruda, Salvador Allende, Ernesto Guevara and Fidel Castro, signify containers for their own socio-political and aesthetic principles. In their poems that deal with these figures, they often locate themselves as the witness to and interpreter of the events surrounding these figures. This positionality, in turn, appears to construct the poet's subjectivity in terms of the poetic/Romantic notion of the bardic speaker. Hence, in creating this type of identity, the non-Latino Canadian poet is able to construct an agency which meets the requirements of Birney's idea of the politically conscious subject—the Western politically progressive subject who champions

the oppressed "Third World" subject by calling for cultural synthesis. Poets, such as Lane, in imaging the Latin American indigene as a static commodity, formulate a construct that locates the indigene's subjectivity within pre-defined socio-political and aesthetic parameters.

i. False Idols: Poets and Revolutionaries

Pablo Neruda

Much of the intertextuality of Pat Lowther's series of Pablo Neruda poems, depends on the formulation of Neruda as a contrastive element to North American, imperialist forces. In the Conradian anti-imperialist construct, the figure of Neruda, as employed by Lowther, signifies the romanticized "Third World" subject who speaks with the clear and unified voice of the oppressed. Lowther's "Letter to Pablo" poems, because of their epistolary nature, configure Neruda as a literary guide/saint. This code is then translated into a political framework where Neruda comes to represent the resistance struggle against North American imperialism. It is his connection to literature that permits, and as much supports, Lowther's use of Neruda as a political, as well as aesthetic, symbol. As she herself writes in "Last Letter To Pablo," "you are changing, Pablo, / becoming an element" (58). Unlike natural elements such as "quartz" (58), which are prone to organic transformations, Neruda's metamorphosis into a political signifier for the North American, liberal, humanist left, is informed by a

"battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections" (Said 239). My following inquiry focuses on what this new element is.

Before we even engage Lowther's Neruda poems, an examination of their titles is in order. A key to a possible understanding of these texts is the interpretation of the linguistic play fostered by the numbered sequencing following each title (e.g. "Letter to Pablo I"). Obviously, each number is placed by Lowther to demonstrate the position of the poem in the series. But if we read the titles as "letter to the second Pablo," "letter to the third Pablo," etc..., a more ontologically based suggestion becomes apparent. Her poems are as involved with Western philosophical notions of subject production, as they are with issues of aesthetics and politics. As she herself postulates in "Letter to Pablo 4," "It isn't easy / to keep moving thru / the perpetual motion / of surfaces" (55). Within this interpretation, it is possible to suggest that Neruda, for Lowther, is a constantly shifting signifier for her inquiry into the production of the self. It is through Neruda, ultimately, that she is able to construct a poetic identity, which, as suggested by the titles of her poems, is informed by a sense of fracture. These split identities, in turn, are intended to reflect her own different modes of being. In view of her philosophical inquiry, it is perplexing to see her rely on the same dialectical construct of the civilizing narratives created by the commentators of the Spanish conquest. The only difference with her image structure is that she reverses the polarities of the original manichean code used to describe the relationship of Latin America with the rest of the Western world.

The binomial paradigm of North versus South commences in Lowther's first poem addressed to Neruda, "Anniversary Letter to Pablo." The anniversary that Lowther refers to in this poem is the U.S. astronauts' lunar landing. As depicted in the first two stanzas, the American colonization of the moon is contrasted with a depiction of Neruda as a benevolent figure, who "warmed the

moon / in a loving cup" (52). In order to universalize her anti-imperialist beliefs, this depiction is then contextualized in a larger historic frame. In the last stanza, she cites the imperial practices of colonization as the cause for the material exploitation of nature. The "Custodians of footsteps / and magnets" is a reference to former colonial explorers, who commodified the natural resources of their respective colonies: "you take mineral glitter / in the cup / of your hand, / it becomes veins" (52). But in order to draw out this analogy, Lowther relies on her own interpretation of Neruda, whom she calls "the man who kisses stone" (52), an overt expression of her own sympathies and an attempt to situate Neruda as an earthy figure. Neruda, like Lowther's reference to the astronauts/explorers' footprints/footsteps, functions as a contrasting metaphor in her dialectically structured poem.

Lowther not only depicts Neruda as a benevolent, humanistic figure, but also imagines him as "more lustrous / than flowers" ("Letter To Pablo 3" 54), a "Buddha....Still even in motion" ("Letter To Pablo 4" 55), "a plateau city" ("Last Letter To Pablo" 56), "a blue electric wind" and ultimately a guiding figure: "generations of fire and dirt / before you broke from us / a whole branch flowering" (56). As with Birney's commodification of Latin American political and literary figures, such as Lopez and the Cartagenians, Lowther attempts to strike a counterpoise between her romantic depictions of Neruda and his positionality within a contaminated culture, what she refers to as the "dung and debris of generations" (56). She leads us to believe that it is his unique poetic sensibility which permits him to be sensitive enough to inhabit this location, as is the case with the "clamshell middens" ("Letter To Pablo 2" 53) or as in "Last Letter to Pablo":

We are weary of atrocities;
the manure of blood

you said grows
 something so frightful
 only you could look (57).

What must not be overlooked is that it is Lowther who has maintained control over the imaging and placement of Neruda within these "refuse heaps." Lowther's different swings of the identity pendulum, configure Neruda as a vulgar, common human being: "old man licking oil / off your thumbs and belching" ("Letter To Pablo 3" 54), and a benevolent, humanistic giant in the world of poetry: "you smoothing wounds / we shudder from" ("Last Letter To Pablo" 57). This ambivalent representation then suspends Neruda's significance "between the edges / of the elements" ("Letter To Pablo 2" 53), a type of intertidal life that is neither here nor there. It is precisely this suspension that allows Lowther to employ Neruda as a universal sign for her own socio-political and aesthetic requirements, the "stigmata" ("Letter To Pablo 4" 55) she has craved for all her life. By constructing Neruda as a poetic guide/saint through the diction associated with saintly phenomena, e.g. "bones," and "miracles" ("Last Letter To Pablo" 57), she places him in the position that she desires to occupy—the ordained interpreter/speaker of life's mysteries.

In terms of her own poetics, we can see in "Last Letter To Pablo" and "Regard to Neruda," her alignment with the Romantic idea of the poet as "unacknowledged legislator of the world." In the first text, Lowther implies by reiterating Neruda's view, e.g. "the manure of blood / you said grows / something so frightful / only you could look" that it is the privileged position of the poet which permits the poet to view and relate to the rest of the world humankind's atrocities (57). In interpreting Neruda, Lowther accomplishes two goals: she gives the impression that she aligns herself with a poetics of witness which Neruda represents, and through this, she justifies her use of Neruda as a

poetic signifier. This is based on the argument of the special status of the poet, a position analogous to Birney's statement in "Cartagena De Indias": "it is for a poet to say these things."

Lowther's socio-political and aesthetic declaration is continued in "Regard to Neruda," where again we witness the intensifying of Neruda into a political and poetic figure through Lowther's process of mythologization. Being "the world's greatest poet" (364), Lowther finds it suitable to describe Neruda through his own textual signifiers, his own "human song" (364): he is "rivers, harps of forests, / metallic skies of cities" (364), all of which are textual images unrelated to his lived reality. The reason for Neruda's mythologization becomes apparent in the second stanza. In posing the question, "Could I see with his high vision" (364), Lowther signals her desire for her own "campaign / to be prime minister" (364-365), her own preparedness "to learn politics" (365). Neruda functions as the differentiating agent against which Lowther constructs her self-representation, both socio-politically and aesthetically. As in the poem's first stanza, Neruda represents Lowther's view that the only significance of Latin American and North American relations is the difference between the two cultures. Lowther's Neruda poems are not so much about the person Neftali Reyes ("Pablo Neruda" was Reyes' *nom de plume*) or his culture, but rather are concerned with her own dilemma of self-representation, either social, political, or aesthetic. Unlike Neruda, whom Lowther claims is able to "move past the image" ("Letter To Pablo 3" 54), Lowther is enmeshed in and unable to escape the web of surfaces. She is unable to get beyond Reyes' construction of himself as the persona, Pablo Neruda. Further, she is not able to get beyond her construction of the construct, Pablo Neruda. She has entered the proverbial Chinese lacquered box.

Neruda's emergence as a socio-political and aesthetic icon for the liberal left of the West, following his death, is not so much a natural, mystical

development, as Lowther leads us to believe, but is explainable in terms of the socio-political and aesthetic agendas of Western, liberal intellectuals.

In Tom Wayman's *Chilean Elegies*, we again see the deployment of Neruda and his culture as a contrastive element to North American, imperialist forces. The same dialectical template created by the Conradian anti-imperialist irony found in the texts of previously discussed poets is also evident in Wayman's Chilean poems. His poems, which are intended to display his reverence for those like Pablo Neruda or Salvador Allende employ the elegy form. According to *The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*, this form initially based on the idea of the poet's lament for a sad or tragic event is also intended to explore the contemplation of some permanent principle. Following this poetic tradition, Wayman constructs the socio-political persons and episodes of Chile as transcendent signifiers for his own political and aesthetic interpretive systems. Wayman's *Elegies* signal a significant departure from the texts of other poets under discussion because of his attempt to contextualize the socio-political dynamics of Neruda and his culture by prefacing certain poems with short prose narratives describing the poem's intertextual references to socio-political persons and events. Having said this, I must add however, that his attempts to situate Chilean politics are only partially successful. The brief prose passages that introduce various elegies are undoubtedly informed by Wayman's socio-political affiliations and desires. They show signs of restraint and orchestration on the part of their author.

For instance, Wayman begins his elegies with a poem, not about Neruda, but the assassinated, socialist president of Chile, Salvador Allende. This point of departure for Wayman, I believe, demonstrates his conscious effort to historicize and contextualize Chile's, and therefore Neruda's, lived reality. Unfortunately, what becomes evident upon reading the prose passage preceding, "The Chilean

Elegies: 1. Salvador Allende" is the extent to which Wayman orchestrates generalities to represent specific local Canadian experiences. He is able to confer a discrete identity upon Latin America by writing about the military junta that deposed Allende: "The new regime quickly imposed the customary brutalities of a Latin-American military dictatorship" (119). What does he mean by customary brutalities? Does he mean the practices of political assassination, interrogation and government de-stabilization taught by North American military and para-military agents? The ideological horizon of Wayman's work is clearly evident in this one passage. The overthrow of Allende in Chile, is for Wayman, a universal emblem of the effects of Western imperialist capitalism: "the human race suffered a setback when the elected government of Salvador Allende in Chile was overthrown" (119). This emblematic significance, fostered by the humanist discourse of universality, then becomes for Wayman a means for the construction of his own identity, the politically conscious subject. As he himself admits, "I wrote five elegies...to touch also on the conditions of our own life" (119). Oppression is then universalised in this humanist understanding of the linkage of military dictatorship and capitalist bosses.

In Wayman's first "Chilean Elegy," Allende is a signifier for Marxist, socialist ideals and Western imperialism's attempt to destroy them. Through the use of a dust metaphor, i.e. factory dust, "Dust has settled onto the battered wood" and the decay of the human body following death, "Now he [Allende] is dead another layer of dust," Wayman unifies the factory workers' reality and the socialist ideal that Allende represents (120). As Wayman declares, "Allende's dust / is falling into every factory in the world" and "Allende is with us in the dust of the concrete floor" (120). This kind of rhetorical investment in the resurrection of Allende as a socialist political icon is part of an agenda to relate the socialist idea of the universal worker unified in a classless society. This

project is ultimately fulfilled in an imaginary form in the poems, "The Chilean Elegies: 4. Larry Tetlock" and "The Chilean Elegies: 5. The Interior."

In his fourth elegy, Wayman reverses the speaking position of his previous poems by focusing on the lived reality of Canadian workers, who are represented by the characters Larry Tetlock and Ernie. This new positioning proves more effective than Wayman's previous speech location because he is talking about the dynamics of his own culture. The degree of detail in the first three stanzas indicates Wayman's success. Instead of using a generic representation of Chilean workers' experience to depict the lives of the working class in general, Wayman employs the reality with which he is most familiar, his own.

Wayman continues his rhetorical stance of the universality of human experience in his fifth elegy. The ambiguity of the title, "The Chilean Elegies: 5. The Interior," which creates the impression of the interchangeability of the Chilean interior and the British Columbian interior, reflects Wayman's persistent belief in the humanist/socialist idea of the universal applicability of a proletarian everyman's experience. As indicated in the poem's title, ambiguity is the prevailing device employed in this text. We are presented with generic images of "the man" (129), "shapeless trousers" (129), "hands that clutch" (129) and "the young teacher" (129) who wages a tireless war to improve the material conditions of his indigenous pupils. Contrasted with these signifiers for the oppressed masses are images of the hegemony that exists between imperialist governments: "expensive aviation gasoline / is pumped into certain jet fighters donated by another government / existing thousands of miles away" (130). Wayman's ideology, as that of the other poets under discussion, reflects the Conradian anti-imperialist irony, where all governments, especially Western capitalist ones, but excluding socialist ones, are inherently "bad:"

On the Thompson River, or in Parral

the government is not the government of the Indians,
not of the young teacher, not of the townspeople,
not of the lover, the carpenter, the man who digs
potatoes in his yard. (130)

This effect is further compounded by a sense of historical inevitability for non-elite postcolonial subjects, which he includes himself among: "all over the world another sorrow is confirmed / in the lives of the poor. Once again / we are made less" (131). In this text, Wayman creates a reified image of some generic poor into which the world's proletariat are then factored.

This logic is particularly evident in Wayman's reification of Pablo Neruda. Although, he is aware of the process of commodity reification, which he attempts to circumvent by situating Neruda's positionality within Chilean literature and politics, his introductory statement about Neruda only partially engages Neruda's commitment to Communism and its ensuing effects on his verse:

he was an orthodox Communist...and took no stand counter
to Russia's treatment of its dissenting writers.

In his poems Neruda speaks of the poor and working
people of Chile...their main concern is humanity. (121)

In order to ally himself, politically and poetically, with a figure such as Neruda, Wayman has excluded the significance of the Russian Communist's policies and Neruda's silence. What Wayman will not say is that Neruda's stance was, in effect, a form of collusion with the Communist Party's imprisonment, torture, exile, and censorship of its dissenting members, all the things which Wayman points to as being the sole domain of Latin American dictatorships. So Wayman's silence about Neruda's collusion, is part of the

problem caused by too close an adherence to political doctrine. It fairly stands to say that this kind of unquestioning alliance with one particular ideology creates a dogmatic, naive, and ultimately, a manichean view of the dynamics of world politics.

This outlook also contributes to Wayman's commodification of Reyes/Neruda in his second elegy, in spite of his consciousness of the lived reality of the person, Neftali Reyes. Political, as well as, aesthetic movements need their icons. Wayman's subscription to a world view, not unlike Conrad's, engenders the construction of a binomial paradigm, where Western and non-Western cultures are seen as contrasting halves of a supposed historical whole. This is why poems, such as Wayman's "The Return" attempt to grant an identity and significance to a subject which has little to do with aspects of that subject's lived reality. Here in this instance, Neruda, as the literary signifier, "the poet" (135), does not lead back to the supporter of Communist "treatment" of dissenting members. Instead, we are presented with images of a heroic and humane poet, the champion of the world's oppressed. Then in another poem, "The Chilean Elegies: 3. Pablo Neruda," we are presented with a purely aesthetic depiction of the persona, Neruda, along with an imitation of Neruda's style and one of his most typical symbols, the rose: "And it is the rose that will stay / in my heart forever" (125).

If we are to read Wayman's "Chilean Elegies," then we must not only read them as allegorical tales of the socialist vision of a unified world proletariat, but we must also engage them as cultural poesis involved in a process of self-fashioning, which is achieved through various orchestrations and discursive methods.

Ernesto Che Guevara and Fidel Castro

In an article on Al Purdy in *Saturday Night*, "Purdy's Search," Robert Fulford describes Purdy as a "poet-reporter" who "covers" (8) events which he later relates. Fulford's invocation of journalistic discourse to describe Purdy's style illustrates the unchallenged tradition in the West of the speaking structure of a writer/poet who adopts the persona and view point of a journalist or anthropologist, positions which claim unmediated objectivity. Subsequently, this subject position, which imparts the impression of the authoritative, knowledgeable and sovereign subject, underlies and legitimizes Purdy's imaging of Ernesto Che Guevara and Fidel Castro as the stereotypical and consummate Latin American revolutionary figures.

For instance in "Hombre," although Purdy voices a humanist desire for the possibility of universal unity—"a million people holding hands and singing"—by portraying this event in the context of a meeting with Guevara during "Fidel's speech," Purdy's real search is for an explanation of why this kind of desire cannot be fulfilled in his own home, Canada: "strange to think of this in Canada" (*Compañeros* 94-95). Like Birney's "Cartagena De Indias" Purdy's "Hombre" is a narrative of unfulfilled political desire.

Like Latin America itself, Guevara has been reified as a revolutionary signifier for the philanthropies and ideas of a whole host of writers, artists and intellectuals. In attempting to establish his own affiliations with the liberal, intellectual left, Purdy has unwittingly bought into an idea of Che that is prominently visible in the arena of graphic design: "Graphic designers have converted Che's image into a symbolic icon representing struggle against

oppression throughout the Third World. Che's image has been reduced to a depersonalized stereotype" (Meggs 467). In Purdy's own text, Che is only referred to in terms of other images. Initially, he is described as a "service station attendant" (94). Then he is portrayed by his media-generated trademark characteristics, "drab fatigues and beret" and "beard and black cigar," and finally he is presented as an "Argentine doctor and freedom fighter" (94). The lived reality of Ernesto Guevara is nowhere to be found in Purdy's text. Even these limited images of Che in black beret and smoking a cigar are finally concluded by the image of Che as a student "in Paris on a Guggenheim" (95). The fact that Purdy's characterization of Guevara only refers to prior images is not surprising. This commodification of Guevara is part of a colonial discourse that relies on temporally and culturally produced images.

Purdy's imagination structures the revolutionary episodes of Latin America into a symbolic order, as easily as his memory recalls the "structural details of Cuban girls" (94). Ultimately, the struggle for autonomous statehood by Latin American countries is reified by Purdy into a romanticized image of freedom fighters prowling the jungles of Latin America. This image, in turn, is at once dangerous and sexy: "men crawling under hundred-foot trees / where giant snakes mate in masses of roots / and men with infected wounds moan for water" (95). Purdy's concept of the struggle for power in these Latin American countries, such as Cuba and Bolivia, is dogmatic and uni-dimensional and excludes "debate along horizontal axes among differing partial knowledges" (Godard 18).

For instance, when Purdy refers to Castro and Guevara's power struggle following the ousting of Batista, he deflates this episode by couching it in the "ho-hum" language of everyday events: "and there were rumours of quarrels" (94). What Purdy refuses to engage is the fact that political power plays are made

in instances where political self-representation is configured in a structure of dominance and subservience. The struggle between Stalin and Trotsky following Lenin's death is a good example of what I seek to explain. Castro had to exclude Guevara once the Cuban revolution succeeded, in order to portray himself as the leader of that revolution. This is an often neglected explanation for why Guevara left Cuba and went to Bolivia. It was not because of altruistic ideals, but rather because Guevara had lost his political tussle with Castro and, therefore, needed a new willing peasantry for his socialist ideals to be fulfilled.

It is not only Purdy who misreads a culture other than his own; Guevara misread the Bolivian peasants and it cost him his life. What he failed to take into account was that he was 17 years too late to commence a Bolivian proletarian uprising. The Bolivian Revolution of 1952 had already established agrarian land reform for Bolivian peasants. So when Guevara attempted to indoctrinate these subjects, a majority of them interpreted him as an imperialist threat to their already legalized agrarian gains, which were guaranteed in the revised Bolivian constitution. It was the very peasantry that Guevara sought to convert who, in the end, repeatedly revealed his location to Bolivian/CIA forces. Another possible factor of Guevara's capture and defeat in Bolivia, but minorly influential, was that he was an Argentinean. His national identity is significant because many Bolivians had a residual feeling of mistrust of Argentina, especially after it had brokered the terms of agreement for the cessation of the Chaco War, where Bolivia received less than favourable conditions for war reparation to Paraguay (the peace treaty of July 21, 1938, gave Paraguay clear title to approximately 90,000 square miles of the Bolivian Chaco Boreal [Encyclopedia Britannica 229]).

In "Hombre," Purdy has opted for a naive and romanticized version of contemporary Latin American history and political figures. History functions as

his symbolic order and figures, such as Che and Castro, operate as the signifiers for his version of history. While this text seems to appear as a celebration of a great humanist figure, suggested by its title, "Hombre" ("man" in English), it is, in fact, a series of subjective projections, investments and orchestrations, informed by a manichean world view.

Purdy repeats this same symbolic and semiotic structure in "Fidel Castro In Revolutionary Square." In this instance, the narrative position reflects a transparent and omnipotent view of Castro's speech to the Cuban people: "He begins to speak... / (a million people listening)... / a million voices and bodies / sway back and forth in the sunlight" (*Collected Poems* 69 - 70). Within this temporal frame, Purdy then interweaves his own subjective interpretation of the events leading up to and informing the Cuban revolution:

I wonder about that young student
and speculate the exact moment
he sprang to his feet....
The fragile intention flees
from face to face like fever
becomes a condition of existence....
Ten years and three hours
later in 1964
the long speech ends. (69)

This clever technique—the lyric "I"—gives the impression that Purdy's narrative is as much a part of the actual events themselves, as Castro's speech. The prominence of Purdy's lyric "I" is toned down because of this speech structure. In this manner, Purdy constructs a binomial paradigm, which is composed of an ideal image of Castro, the student, and Castro the hardened, experienced revolutionary: "And a stranger sits down then / shaken and

sweating / not the same young student / not the same man" (69). Significantly, this imaging of Castro reflects the control that Purdy exerts in depicting his ideal revolutionary leader, while detemporalizing two contrasting images of Castro intended to evoke the implausible possibility of someone being youthfully idealistic yet experientially astute.

In turn, the image of the Cuban people "joining hands and singing together" (69) has symbolic importance for Purdy in that it represents his humanist idea of the possibility for a universal, homogenized humanity, or as he says, they "make some remark about being human" (70). It is precisely at this moment in his narration where we see him graft himself onto the experience of the Cuban people. He projects that this phenomenon, which he witnesses is:

spoken to no imperialist
 snarled at no invader
 as natural as eating supper
 that it is able to touch the future
 and fills an emptiness. (70)

Castro's semiotic importance to Purdy's symbolic formulation of the Cuban revolution reveals itself through these projections and investments. Purdy reads the Cuban revolution as a symbol of the incarnation of his humanist desire, the "filling of an emptiness," for the synthesis of human difference. Purdy seeks social as well as political closure. By objectifying Castro as "something to lift us from ourselves / a thing we touch" (70) Purdy infuses the Cuban political leader with a new universal and transcendental significance, which is only understood by examining the reference to "Batista's old car" (70):

And back at the shining Cadillac
 we came in (Batista's old car)
 under the side where I hadn't

noticed before the body
of a small dead animal. (70)

Fulgencio Batista, Cuba's puppet leader for the United States until his overthrow by leftist forces headed by Castro and Guevara, functions as a contrastive signifier to the signifier of Castro. Similar to Birney's use of Diaz and Diaz's square in "Sestina For the Ladies of Tehuántepec," Batista and his car represent a former imperial structure that has lost its dominant position to some new alternative power. And like Birney's poem, Purdy's "Fidel Castro In Revolutionary Square" ends on the same kind of Yeatsian, rhetorical open-ended gesture, e.g. "I hadn't / noticed before the body / of a small dead animal" (70).

In their dominant subject positions, Birney and those who have followed in his footsteps, have developed a particular discourse about Latin America, which exists as a hegemony of images and ideas reproduced by successive generations of non-Latino Canadian poets. The more recent texts of George Elliott Clarke and Kim Morrissey continue this project in the same manner that Lowther, Wayman and Purdy did. In Clarke's *Whylah Falls*, Neruda simply becomes a name for a character and a signifier for his own aesthetics: "Pablo, your words are rain I run through / Grass I sleep in" (79). Kim Morrissey's brief employment of Guevara, in *Batoche*—"Riel) air-brushed triumphant/ our own Che Guevara/ resurrected" (69)—is an attempt to heighten a political significance in her text that it alone cannot fully achieve. This discourse of Latin America has produced a recurring template for the appropriation of Latin American literary and political figures. In Patrick White's *Hommage to Victor Jara*, the Chilean poet/folksinger killed during Pinochet's takeover, functions as a contrastive element to White's concept of "human imperialism" (57), through the metaphor/synecdoche of Jara's amputated hands: "I perceived in this life the

proportions of a Christ-Orpheus figure, and, in his death and dismemberment, a symbolic nexus where my own social, spiritual, and artistic concerns met and were unified" (iii). Lake Sagaris, in *Exile Home*, heightens and objectifies the assassinated and soon-to-be assassinated members of the Chilean, leftist labour movement. In her rhetorical account of the death of Carmen Gloria, Sagaris interprets and inscribes herself onto this event:

We raise up your blood's flag
 Water death's red bloom
 Running together through perilous streets
 your memory sharpened in our hands
 we prepare ourselves
 to cut fear's throat. ("Carmen Gloria" 17)

The implicit reason for these poems, as she herself inadvertently confesses, is to foreground her journalistic positionality within, and her sympathies for, the left-wing opponents of the Pinochet regime: "I have walked head bowed.../ I have fled with the victims.../ I have flown too close to the sun" ("The Journalist" 47). In another poem, "All," Sagaris again foregrounds her positionality:

All the nights of eyes and questions
 have carried **me** to this moment....
 All the plains bragging of their wheat
 have brought **me** and put **me** down
 here....
 All the spontaneous tongues curled around a hope forge
 with **me** a weapon aimed
 at injustice
 All the sadness, all the hunger, all the rain
 breaking mud walls, piercing tin roofs

All the desperate songs of ragged children
 begging for pride on city corners
 have plunged a sword through me, will carve
 the faces of victory. (emphasis is mine 9)

Like the Romantic idea of the ordained bardic speaker, Sagaris configures herself as the spokesperson for all the displaced and oppressed persons of Chile, an act which participates in a humanist agenda. My intention here is not to argue that all acts of advocacy journalism are condemnable, but rather that the conjunction of the Western lyric tradition with witness often positions the "Third World" as victim, and the speaker as authoritative and empowered. Linda Diebel, reporter for the *Toronto Star* in Haiti, writes articles of witness as well. However, her relation to the event is subordinate to the contextualization and reporting of the event itself. As Guillermo Verdecchia has remarked about the North American media portrayal of Latinos: "we can't win a revolution without gringos, we can't build the pyramids at Chichén Itzá without the help from space aliens...instead we sing, dance" (47). What most North American readers do not realize, is that the texts of these poets reproduce configurations of power that have as much to do with their commodified images of Latin America, as they do with their ideological commitments.

ii. Standard Commodities

Sex and Violence

The Latin American jungle tends to be a frequent signifier for the commodities of sex and violence, found in the texts of the non-Latino Canadian poets under discussion. In Pat Lane's "At the Edge of the Jungle" from his book

of Latin American poems *Unborn things*, sex and brutality are located on the fringes of civilization, the "edge of the jungle" (35). This site is "where orchids gape / like the vulvas of hanged women," where a dog must "bury his head / in the mud" to gain relief from swarms of flies (35). Here, everyday things take on a new significance through Lane's use of violent and sexual diction: "a broken melon bleeds a pestilence" and "Diseased clouds... / throw down roots of fire" (35). Like Dante, Lane has lead us into a psycho-sexual and violent underworld where "Everything is a madness" (35). From this position, Lane is able to write from a surrealistic vantage point, which further distances himself from the persona that he has created: "I no longer believe / the sight I have been given / and live inside the eyes of a rooster" (35). From here, Lane engages in magic realist images: "The bird drags sound from its skin" (35). The discourse in this text is not so much about the people who live at this so-called edge, but it is about a subject, Pat Lane, who believes that "compassion is only the beginning / of suffering. Everything deceives" (35). The Amazonian inhabitants and their environment are structured by Lane's diction and syntax to reflect his particular psychological and philosophical perceptions, which in turn inform his aesthetic notions. The edge to which he refers in this instance is really a border—cultural, psychological, aesthetic, political, philosophical—from which he writes. Self-marginalized and therefore transparent, Lane can make whatever investments he desires, which is not surprising since this poem was originally published as "July" and "reflected a British Columbia locale" ("Acknowledgments," *Unborn Things*). By making a few name changes, Lane's imaging of Latin America as a dangerous savage place extends Darwin and Conrad's narrative "of the savage landscape as a metaphor for modern anxiety and the unconscious" (Spurr 94). As he himself noted, these poems "reflect the state of my mind when I returned" ("Acknowledgments," *Unborn Things*), a notion similar to Wordsworth's idea

of poetry as "powerful emotion recollected in tranquility." Although not literary texts, Lane's psychedelic drawings, which punctuate *Unborn Things*, demonstrate this same kind of displacement of Latin America into a personal interiorized landscape.

The exploration of Latin America within a psychological landscape is continued in Lane's "The Children of Bogota." As with Birney's native informant in "Sinalóá," the plight of Bogota's street kids, is told in the voice of "Manuel" (30). In this text, a re-telling of a supposed conversation between Lane and a resident of Bogota, structures the narration of the children's dehumanization: "Manuel says, / ...they're not children. Don't start feeling / sorry for them" (30). What is revealed to us, and simultaneously Lane, is that there is no hope for the future amelioration of these kids' lives: "In five years they'll be men and tired of killing / dogs" (30). This traditional anthropological practice of using a native informant marks the power relations implicit in Lane's text. By giving the impression that the narration is solely Manuel's, Lane creates a sense of immediacy of experience for the reader. He also distances himself from the ideology that underlies the discourse, i.e. the children are not human and their disposal is the best thing for society, which in turn is intended to support the authenticity of Manuel's ideas. Manuel is intended by Lane to represent the attitudes towards the displaced children by a majority of Columbians.

By framing the story of Bogota's street kids in a verbal structure, Lane attempts to produce the psychological authenticity of another subject. His ability to control the meaning of the text grants a discrete identity to the residents of Bogota, while removing his own from our view. As in Anstee's reification of the Bolivian Indian, Lane reproduces a similar speaking structure to that of the cultural ethnographer, which in turn fixes the other with a historical inevitability from which there seems no escape. What we do not get in this text,

as in Anstee's, is the socio-political and economic context of a country's existence, which would contribute to a more complex understanding of the country's poverty and resulting social problems.

Another site for the imaging of Latin America as an inherently violent space, is located in contexts of political oppression. This may be, as Patrick White remarks, because home is a safe place: "the government tends its flower-beds" (23). Therefore, the romantic sense of danger or excitement that the non-Latino Canadian poet attempts to achieve in their work is sought in a semi-controlled environment. Latin America, and its history of political oppression, functions as an amusement park, where the non-Latino Canadian poet can get injections of danger, while always knowing that they have a ticket out. As Verdecchia's Hispanic character Wideload ponders, in *Fronteras Americanas: American Borders*: "what I really want to do is get a big chunk of toxic wasteland up on de Trans-Canada highway and make like a third-world theme park...with guards carrying sub-machine guns...a swamp wif poor people selling tortillas....I figure it would do great- you people love dat kinda shit" (25).

For a poet such as Patrick White, the violent treatment of Jara by Pinochet forces confirms his ideas of the universal suffering of humankind: "I.../ live with the outrage of an act against / my humanity against / poets and singers against / good men" (19). Images of Jara's chopped hands, "two bloody starfish" (3), ultimately come to signify White's desire for an experience he cannot achieve in Canada: "I want waves / tears and laughter / the vivid terror of your death / no aesthetic distance" (35). In order to reach this goal, White attempts to synthesize Jara's position as a poet with his own: "we climb the Indigo mountain together looking / for stars and poetry" (29). In this structure, White holds the position of power, he becomes the namer: "I bring names for the things / your shadow fell upon" (31). His privileged, dominant position reveals his text to be a

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Romantic celebration of himself and a narrative of his process of writing up the Chilean poet/folksinger, Victor Jara. As White constantly foregrounds throughout his text, "I wrote about your hands" (5), a sentiment which contradicts his assumption that the universal and transcendental categories of "love and truth/ have made" Jara "their own" (71) because it is White who constructs Jara as a signifier for the universal suffering of humankind, not these Western categories.

This same kind of universalization of a violent Latin American political event is seen in Eli Mandel's "The Madwomen of the Plaza de Mayo." Here, the story of the mothers of the *desaparecidos*, the political dissenters who disappeared during Argentina's "Dirty War," is introduced and represented through transcultural images of political unrest:

I have seen their faces elsewhere:
in Ereceira, fishermen's wives
walking in dark processions
to the sea, its roaring,
women of Ireland
wearing their dark scarves
hearing the echo of guns, bombs. (233)

Las madres de la plaza de Mayo, as they are referred to by Argentineans, are reduced to their physical appearance: "They wear white scarves and shawls / They carry pictures on strings" (233). The tactics of the military junta, who bombed, kidnapped, tortured and murdered anyone who opposed them, is compressed and aestheticized into a generic image of "A soldier.../ A fence, a spike / A nail in somebody's eyes" (234). The mothers of the disappeared, the actual referents, are never engaged by Mandel's text; instead he opts for an ironic appropriation of the junta's discourse on the mothers of the disappeared, which

is an attempt to subvert the junta's official explanation for the disappeared Argentinesans.³

Although the intent of this poem is to give a voice to the disempowered mothers—"tell the families of the living.../ tell the families of the dead"—his depiction of them only leads to non-engaged images in a self-reflective narrative (234). What he tells us about the Argentinean mothers is no more than what can be gleaned from a newspaper article. On the other hand, his text is able to tell us a great deal about Mandel: he has a manichean world view, depicted by the use of the mothers and the junta as oppositional forces, which is further informed by an idea of universality; the mothers are simply part of "the rhythm of loss" (234), the same cosmic order of the fishermen's wives and Irish women. All these different women are reduced to a meaning that signifies some importance in Mandel's symbolic ordering of the world. In appropriating the experience of another culture, for his own ideological and philosophical purposes, Mandel has reproduced the colonial power relations of the disempowered "Third World" subject, who must be championed from afar by an authoritative, empowered, and knowledgeable subject. The dynamics of Argentina's "Dirty War," are much more complex than they appear here, as imprisoned Montonero leader Mario Firmenich explains:

The resistance to the military dictatorship was part not just of a 7-year war from 1976 to 1983 but of an intermittent 150-year war that is still inconclusive. However you interpret the so-called 'dirty war,' it was part of a larger struggle between the Argentine people on one side and the oligarchy supported by foreign interests on the other, a virtual civil war that began as early as 1828 with the struggle between Unitarians and

Federalists over the control of our country's destiny. (Hodges 289)

As we have seen in the texts of the poets under discussion, sex and violence play complimentary roles in their objectification of Latin American culture. As commodities, sex and violence signal the "attempt to trade on the look, the feel, de [sic] surface of things Latin" (Verdecchia 47) without having to engage the complexities and history of Latin America, itself.

Mysticism and the Temporal Split

As we have already seen with Birney's imaging of the Latin American indigene, in poems such as "Cartagena De Indias" and "Pachucan Miners," the indigene is often used as a commodity to represent both a former utopian mystical order and/or contemporary corruption and cultural decay. This binomial construct, in turn, is employed by the poet to support his/her own aesthetic or philosophical assumptions. The myths of the Latin American indigene are also viewed by non-Latino Canadian poets as a means to reach the noumenal existence of phenomena: the poet communicates with the primal order, the same ability and privileged position of the ancient shaman.

For instance, Pat Lane begins his Inca sequence—"Macchu Picchu," "The Virgins of the Sun" and "Manco Capac-Last Inca"—with a Quechuan quotation, which highlights the importance of the "Father Messenger, bearer of Signs" (8). What is also important to note, is that the trilogy is dedicated to both Birney and Neruda, previous poets who have appropriated the images and myths of the Latin American indigene.

In the three poems, Lane attempts to retell the stories and cultural events of the Incas, thereby positioning himself as a prophetic/shamanesque speaker, an idea that parallels the Romantic notion of the poet as speaker/witness. Like Birney, Lane attempts to differentiate himself from the other tourists, a strategy to exemplify his unique sensitivity to Inca culture: "Strangers walk through the ruins. / They talk of where they come from.../ They stoned a snake" ("Macchu Picchu" 9). He even depicts himself as an interpreter of events, the traditional role of the bard, by relocating himself, both literally and figuratively, away from the other tourists: "I pick up our blanket and find a place / To sleep in the Temple of the Sun" (9). Lane subsequently interprets the earlier death of the snake, a common religious symbol, as the reason why the sun "has hidden his face" (9). This privileged moment then evokes Lane's visionary communion with the city's former inhabitants: "I imagine women moving with their men. / They surround us with eyes / Here in the high Andes" (9). Ultimately, Lane appropriates Inca mythology on the basis of being a poet/speaker: it was originally the bard/shaman who functioned as the Inca's storyteller, so his retelling of their myths invokes a reconfiguration of himself within their culture.

In Lane's poems, "The Virgins of the Sun" and "Manco Capac-Last Inca," he completely dispenses with the representation of present-day Latin American Natives. In both texts, he focuses on the twilight years of the Inca empire: "Manco Capac / And his Incas dead. / The empire fallen" ("The Virgins of the Sun" 10). Spain's conquest of the Inca empire is appropriated by Lane as a retelling of the expulsion from Eden story of the Old Testament: "The golden rod that was planted in / The beginning was removed" ("Manco Capac-Last Inca" 11). Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo, his sister, were the first Incas created on the Isle of the Sun in Lake Titicaca by the Sun God. The god then instructed them to

take the golden staff that it had given them, and throw it into the ground. Wherever it would completely sink would then be the fertile location, upon which a city could be built.

In Lane's texts, the Incas' fall from an idyllic state represents the humanist idea of humankind's fallen condition. In this symbolic order, Inca culture signifies a desire to return to a former utopian existence, which predates European contact and records—"Let the city grow back to jungle. / Back to the speechless things" ("The Virgins of the Sun" 10). Inca culture also signifies the eternal recurrence of human events through language: the original creation story told by "Pachacutec" is retold by Capac and then Lane's poem is a continuation of their words, signalled by the ambiguity of the speaker in the line, "The words of Pachacutec are my words" ("Manco Capac-Last Inca" 11).

The fact that there are no present Peruvian Indians in either of Lane's texts, but only reified images of their ancestral past, is directly related to his co-opting of Inca culture. It is only in the mythology of the Inca culture and its existence prior to European contact that he can find a justification for his own rewriting of an other culture's narratives and the freedom to play out a golden age principle. It is not until we read a poem, such as "Farmers," that we see Lane's depiction of contemporary Peruvian Indians which, like the other poets under discussion, situates their being in a foreboding, contaminated existence: "Below black lines of stone / where bits of earth have clung / like flesh to bone the peasants / break this land to seed" (33). With diction, such as "clamorous," "ripped" and "pitiful" (33), Lane confers an identity onto the Indian peasants that fixes their being-in-the world as nothing more than a "slow perceptible sorrow," a humanist notion that supposedly supports his assumption that these farmers are eternally indentured to a life of "scraping their lives from stone" (33). Having framed their identity within his philosophical beliefs, the Indian farmers are a

universal sign in Lane's narrative of humanity's fallen condition. The social complexity of these *ayllus* is never engaged in Lane's text.

For Lane, the mysticism and orality of Incan mythology, and its importance as a transformative event, provide a pre-packaged aesthetic and philosophical significance that he attempts to reproduce in his texts. By appropriating Incan myths and attempting to inscribe himself within its discourse, Lane has continued a process of speaking for the indigenous peoples of Latin America, initiated by the commentators of the Spanish conquest and rationalized by the ideology and aesthetics of those like Birney and Neruda. The poets under discussion have positioned themselves as the inheritors of the remains of Latin American, Native culture, a similar move to Emily Carr's use of Native Canadian culture as her aesthetic and philosophical subject. This focus, on what is considered to be the remains of an indigenous culture, refracts the indigene's subjectivity through a temporal split. In result, the indigene is encoded as a historical artifact of a former mystical society.

Conclusion

As I have maintained throughout my thesis, the depictions of Latin American culture by non-Latino Canadian poets are informed by the ideological, literary, and cultural assumptions of each respective poet. Their repetitive construction of Latin American literary and political figures, and indigenous peoples as static commodities of sex and violence, mysticism, and the prehistoric primal order, indicates the legacy of a hegemonic discourse and field of images initiated by the Spanish conquest of the New World.

In many respects, the humanist and socialist projects of Canadian poets like Birney, Purdy and Lane, reproduce similar results to the outcome of the *encomienda*. There are obvious instances in their work where their intentions are to return humanity to the oppressed peoples of Latin America which conjures up the civilizing project of European colonialism. In these instances, where they take guardianship over the souls of the oppressed by locating themselves in their struggle for liberation, these poets re-enact the uneven power relations of imperial Spain and Latin America. From a framework of (neo)colonial asymmetrical power relations the Canadian poet speaks for and interprets the Latin American subject, a project which parallels the Spanish commentators' interpretation of the complex socio-political, religious ideals and practices, and history of Latin America's ancient peoples. In this dominant positioning, the non-Latino Canadian poet then recreates similar images to the Spanish commentators: civilization versus barbarianism, order versus chaos, and good versus evil. Related to these depictions, two

conflicting yet co-existing discourses reside in the texts of the poets that I have discussed. Latin America is at once the embodiment of chaos, and, in its opposition to Western imperialism, it is constructed as morally and politically good. What may explain this paradoxical arrangement is that both constructs rely on a manichean formulation of self-other relations. For example, in Birney's "Sinalóa" or Wayman's "Elegies," the Latin American subject is domesticated to consolidate the poets' normative self. Similar to traditional ethnography, the non-Latino Canadian poet's identity is the comparative yardstick against which Latin American culture is interpreted.

When we read the Latin American poems of Earle Birney, Al Purdy, Patrick Lane, Pat Lowther, Tom Wayman and Eli Mandel, then, we must be careful not to read them as narratives of the socialist or humanist vision of a unified world proletariat or a utopic universal humanity. Instead, we must engage them as a cultural poesis involved in a process of self-representation, which is characterized by subjective exclusions, inclusions, investments and discursive methods. Although these poets claim to be part of an aesthetic and political group that privileges a poetics and philosophy of witness, their texts suggest an indelible investment in English Romanticism and modernism. Their ensuing self-representation as bardic speakers/interpreters is presented by these poets as the point of connection with Latin America's ancient cultures, an idea furthered by the assumption that "primitive" peoples are especially in tune with poetry's primal sensibilities. In turn, their assertions of commonality, "brotherhood," with Latin America fulfills their desire to be recognized as contemporary counterparts to Orpheus. The deep bond that Geddes claims to exist between non-Latino Canadian and Latin American poets, results

from the non-Latino Canadian poet's ideological position, a search for Canadian identity and artistic expression in conjunction with the overt pure humanitarian impulse.

Endnotes

1. See Edward Said's, "Discourse of the Orient." He maintains that "ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power...the Orient was created—or, as I call it, 'Orientalized'" (237).

2. David Spurr astutely observes that Marlow's book is employed as a strategy to mediate his subjective disorientation by reference to a text: "These texts...perform the same symbolic function as *An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship*, the book that Conrad's Marlow comes across in the midst of the jungle and which, unlike his actual surroundings, gives him 'a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real'" (147).

3. Mother of a disappeared person, Aida de Suárez, recounts for Jo Fisher, in *Mothers of the Disappeared*, how the Argentine military *junta* attempted to cover-up their acts of state terrorism: "They started to call us *las locas* [the madwomen]. When the foreign embassies began to ask questions about the disappearances, because they didn't only take Argentines they took all nationalities, and the foreign journalists began to ask about us, they used to say 'Don't take any notice of those old women, they're all mad.' Of course they called us mad" (60).

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