

Writing Left: The Emergence of Modernism in English Canadian Literature

by

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The work of this dissertation is dedicated to the memory of
Marshall Landry (1951–2010).

He never stopped believing that
a more just world is possible.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation complicates conventional understandings of the emergence of modernism in Canadian cultural production, proposing instead a multiplicity of modernist practices that emerge through direct engagement with leftist politics. By examining various genres—poetry, fiction, theatre, and reportage—“Writing Left” uncovers a set of organizational principles that frame several modes of modernist production within the interwar period. Steeped in the work of recovery, this project examines critical narratives of modernism and analyzes theoretical approaches that inform a revitalized understanding of modernism in Canada. Furthermore, this dissertation offers a series of strategies for reading the ways in which Canadian modernism and political modernity are deeply intertwined.

Following an introduction that situates the uneven development of Canadian modernism’s emergence in the larger field of transnational modernism, six theoretically linked case studies show the multiplicity of Canadian modernism’s emergence in relation to leftist political organization. While the first case study discusses the modernist experimentations that came out of the largely antimodernist coterie who produced *The Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets* (1928–1930), the second case study explores the particularly modernist tensions between representations of art and collective action in the strike novels of Douglas Durkin and Irene Baird. A re-reading of F.R. Scott’s early poetry in the third case study shows the coextensive emergence of a modernist poetics of institutional critique and the development of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, while the fourth case study examines the modernist theatricality of leftist responses to Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada. The fifth case study looks to the ways in which the Spanish Civil War prompted modernist developments in the journalism and reportage of Norman Bethune, Hazen Sise, Jean Watts, and Ted Allan. Finally, the sixth case study reads across Charles Yale Harrison’s alternative strategies of anti-war modernism, ending with his characterization of the North American leftist imaginary in his fourth novel, *Meet Me on the Barricades* (1938). Together, the six case studies question teleological accounts of the development of modernism in English Canadian Literature.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

CAA	Canadian Authors' Association
CASD	Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CCF	Canadian Commonwealth Federation
CLDL	Canadian Labor Defense League
CPC	Communist Party of Canada
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPUSA	Communist Party of United States of America
FRSF	Francis Reginald Scott Fonds
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
LSR	League for Social Reconstruction
MML SCWC	Marx Memorial Library, Spanish Civil War Collection
OBU	One Big Union
PAC	Progressive Arts Club
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
SRI	Socorro Rojo Internacional
SSHRC	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
TAF	Ted Allan Fonds
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Amid the crash of systems, was Romantic poetry to survive? It would have been a miracle had no literary revolution occurred.
(Scott, “New Poems for Old: I” 297)

... the modernist poet, like the socialist, has thought through present forms to a new and more suitable order.
(Scott, “New Poems for Old: II” 338)

In 1931, F.R. Scott recognized a connection between modernist literature and socialism in “New Poems for Old.” His work, appearing in the *Canadian Forum*, is not a modernist manifesto calling for a revolution, but a two-part literary history that traces the emergence of transnational modernism and the decline of older literary forms, which he humorously relates to “milk-and-honey late-Victorian God-and-Maple-Tree romanticism” (“New Poems for Old: II” 339). He suggested the shift in literature toward modernism—his literary revolution—was concurrent with the disintegration of established pre-war social, economic, religious, political, psychological and technological systems (“New Poems for Old: I” 297). While acknowledging the systemic roots of this transformation, he does not ground the work of modernism in the perpetual breakdown of systems. Rather, he connects the work of modernism to the work of socialism in the project of creating “a new and more suitable order” (“New Poems for Old: II.” 338). Though Scott recognized this connection in his literary history of modernism eighty years ago, his critical insight—along with similar insights of other Canadian modernists—into a connection between modernist literary revolution and

socialism has not always persevered in scholarly narratives of modernism in Canada. This dissertation, “Writing Left: The Emergence of Modernism in English Canadian Literature,” reinvigorates Scott’s observation in order to recover a broader sense of the leftist character of modernist literature as it emerged in Canada between World War I (WWI) and World War II (WWII).

When a critical connection between modernism and socialism *has* found scholarly representation in the Canadian context, it has sometimes come in the form of dismissal and at other moments come in the form of narrow or restrictive ideas about either modernism or socialism. From the interwar period to our own critical moment, one of the foremost problems literary criticism has struggled with is how to work through the relationship between literature and the notion of “commitment.” In the Canadian context, scholars have tended to adopt the dominant critical tradition of evaluative analysis that asks whether or not given texts or forms adequately demonstrate a given programmatic model of politics—that is, does a given text conform to established ideas of a given political party or does this or that text show a commitment to the bourgeois or working class? This critical practice, when applied to leftist literature, has often relied on under-theorized notions of commitment—tending to focus on evaluating the successes or failures of literature in showing political commitment while not explicitly laying bare the institutional and ideological implications of where the line between committed and non-committed is drawn. As a result, some highly nuanced and sophisticated formal experiments have been written off as doggerel or dilettantish or inadequately radical or, worse, propaganda. What is more, this scholarly tradition too often lingers on searching for and considering *direct* manifestations of commitment in literature; under this model the membership card of the poet risks becoming

his or her best-known poem. Michael Denning, in his landmark study *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, suggests that frameworks of commitment tend to get lost in what he calls a “compilation of organizations joined, petitions signed, marches marched in, and benefits attended” (58). In other words, any account of interwar literature that is based on commitment appears to be “a history of letterheads” (57). This act of compilation is recurrent in scholarship that examines the articulation of political subjectivity in Canadian literature from the interwar period. It is a practice that risks outright hagiography on the one hand and injudicious dismissal on the other. I concur with Denning when he suggests that we need “a better sense of the meaning of cultural politics and political art than is offered by the notion of commitment” (58).

E.P. Thompson, that most animated of British historians, weighs in on this conundrum of commitment in his polemic, “Commitment in Poetry,” where he argues that “the term ‘commitment’” is worrisome “because it can slide only too easily into usages which defeat its apparent intention” (332). He points to two stages in this slippage:

In the first stage, commitment appears as an attitude appropriate in a poet, without further relational definition: that is, it finds its definition in terms of the poet’s own sensibility or ego-state—one poet has Fancy, another has Self-concentration, and another has Commitment. In the second stage, “commitment” must be followed by an “in” or “to”: the commitment is a disposition of concern in the poet, but what the poet is committed *to* lies ready-made, over there, outside the poet awaiting appropriation. (332)

It is my contention that the interests of many of the Canadian modernists explored in “Writing Left” lie in the making of a better world, not stumbling over one. If we take heed of

Thompson's distrust, then we must concentrate on developing and maintaining a "relational definition" when we speak about the integrity of Canadian literary production during the interwar period. Because the expressions of political subjectivity in modernism's emergence in Canada are far more complex than static notions of commitment allow, I want to avoid what Denning calls the "melodramas of commitment" (58).¹ Instead, this dissertation goes beyond a lens of individual commitment to look across the varying political strategies and tactics of modernism—rife as they are with platforms and manifestoes, protests and demands. I turn to these political strategies and tactics for insight into concurrent and competing articulations of modernism. It is more productive at this point in the history of modernist studies in Canada, I think, to go looking for the political arrangements and slippages within Canadian modernism rather than for examples of either committed individuals or committed formal strategies.²

A critical analysis of political subjectivity in Canadian modernism must juggle multiple histories at once: the history of the emergence of transnational modernism, the history of the development of Canadian literature, and the history of the formation of leftist movements in Canada. In other words, a critical history of Canadian modernism must negotiate modes of modernist production as well as modes of Canadian literary production that are outside a modernist purview. When these histories are brought together in a critical analysis, it becomes clear that the emergence of modernism in Canada is subject to the conditions of uneven development. Uneven development, taken broadly, relates to differential patterns of growth in the transition from one diminishing mode of production to a different, rising mode of production. Taken from the language of political economy, the term has been adapted into analyses within multiple spheres. I do not use the term to

describe capitalist uneven development, as it is often used, but to describe the conditions under which modernism emerged transnationally.³

In the Anglo-American context, the engagement with the leftist politics of the interwar period was a secondary development upon already established modernist formations. This secondary development—transnational modernism’s second wave—involved a shift from an early modernist formation frequently associated with a penchant for fascism to a body of work aligned in various ways with leftist politics.⁴ This transition did not happen in Canada. It was not until the interwar period that Canada could bear witness to its first concerted efforts to build modernist literary cultures. There *were* previous modernist and proto-modernist experiments and perhaps even proto-modernist movements in Canada, but consistent articulations of modernism did not occur in Canada prior to the interwar period. In other words, that early flourish of transnational modernism that quickly rearranged spheres of cultural production in Europe and the United States failed to have a contemporaneous dramatic and obvious influence in Canada. None of this is to suggest that once Canadian modernism emerged its practitioners remained naïve or indifferent to the developments of transnational modernism. Rather, as we shall see, they were keenly aware of the transnational modernist movements and their own temporal and spatial distance from the cosmopolitan centres of modernism. What is required, then, is a model for examining the emergence of modernism that accounts for the complex conditions of uneven development and that does not attempt to reconstruct a sense of “even development” across a transnational field of literary production. Trying to reconstruct a sense of even development would deny a real literary-historical opportunity to explore the multiple patterns of differentiation and equity of consideration that can exist outside the logic of simple

importation of high-modernist markers of excellence. Instead, the condition of uneven development in Canada allows for a critical apprehension of the ways in which modernism developed largely through a leftist response to a unique set of historical, political, social, artistic, economic and geographical conditions that this dissertation means to explore.

Accounting for this uneven development complicates both traditional accounts of high modernism as well as newer theoretical considerations that have emerged under the rubric of “New Modernist Studies.”⁵ For example, one critical category that seems as though it should have some sway in this particular situation is that of “late modernism” but the critical category turns out not to be terribly useful for talking about the *emergence* of modernism in Canada.⁶ The category of late modernism, which is an otherwise useful and innovative critical approach, relies on the articulation of the time and space in which modernism morphs into postmodernism. In Tyrus Miller’s conceptualization of late modernism he turns the “historiographic telescope the other way round, to focus on modernism from the perspective of its end” (5). For Miller,

[w]hen the history of modernist literature is considered in this way, from the perspective of its latter years, an alternative depiction of modernism becomes possible. [...] [L]ate modernist writing appears a distinctly self-conscious manifestation of the aging and decline of modernism, in both its institutional and ideological dimensions (7).

Miller’s approach is not particularly helpful for tracing the uneven development of modernism’s emergence in the Canadian context because we too have our articulations of just that which he describes—the closing down of modernism’s summer and the departures into postmodernist work.⁷

Though the critical category of late modernism does not aid in theorizing the emergence of modernism in Canada, Miller's work raises an important issue which has implications for this project: he highlights the tensions between transnational modernism of the interwar period and the earlier modernist *avant garde*. The notion that transnational modernism has a particular, peculiar, and much-debated relationship to the *avant garde* is a well-worn critical trajectory, one associated, for the most part, with the early period of modernism—from about 1910 through to 1918. Discussions of modernist *avant gardes* sometimes underestimate the complexity of modernism's many reorganizations.⁸ Contrary to this long-standing trend in scholarship on modernism, I want to emphasize the notion that modernism is not simply a set of competing *avant-garde* proclamations. I am not suggesting that *avant-garde* articulations and formations are not crucial to the study of modernism, but I am suggesting that early *avant-garde* activity is only one slice of the larger modernist pie. The very term—*avant garde*—suggests that there is something coming behind it, that the vanguard is only one part in a larger process. Yes, it is the first part that enacts a productive break, but it is not critically sound to conceptualize the *avant garde* without a relational analysis of what follows that initial activity. The study of modernism has not generally paid enough attention to this larger process and, as a result, much critical work on modernism constructs a discourse of competing *avant gardes*. As noted above, because of the conditions of uneven development Canadian modernism did not take part in this early flurry of transnational *avant-garde* activity. Instead of relying on a model of *avant-garde* movements, this dissertation utilizes a framework in which literary production that has previously been dismissed as inadequately *avant garde* can be integrated into categories of transnational modernism. Though arising after modernism's first wave, there is undoubtedly a body of

Canadian literature that exhibits a set of identifiable modernist characteristics that make it part of an active transnational modernist sphere. If we recognise modernist practice—conceived transnationally—to entail a break from previous literary formations, which the discourse of the avant garde implies, most broadly, Canadian modernism still plays an innovative and transitional role but in the wake of the earlier avant-garde necessity. Canadian modernism relies upon transnational modernism’s productive break with earlier cultural formations but trails the revolutionary modernist avant garde while often espousing a revolutionary literary and political stance within the Canadian context. The Canadian emergence of modernism is in no way benevolent. Canadian modernism has its own battles and retreats; the point is, I contend, that rather than attempting to bring the emergence of modernism in Canada into a model based on succinct avant-garde breaks from previous forms, the emergence of modernism in Canada is better characterized as a long march.

In an attempt to avoid prevailing discourses of individualistic commitment as well as a critical path that would have me claim for Canada yet another, new modernist avant-garde movement, what follows is a series of case studies that are organized around another set of critical insights into the organization of literary production in Canada. While one of the most apparent features of the emergence of modernism in Canada is its largely leftist orientation, modernism also occasioned a major shift in the way cultural politics occurred in terms of how the production of literature was materially organized. There have been assertions about the ways in which modernism ushered in different modes of organizing literary production in the transnational context, but these suggestions have not been taken up as a critical model for understanding modernism in Canada. For example, discussing Andre Breton, Henri Lefebvre uses the language of organization when he suggests that “[a]pplying all the

procedures of traditional political life into the management of the Surrealist group [Breton] was able to lead this clan of young poets as if they formed a party on the fringe of political parties as such” (112). Here Lefebvre maintains a certain distance: the literary movement formed a party “on the fringe of political parties as such” and not in direct contact with emergent or existing political parties. James McFarlane, in “The Mind of Modernism,” suggests:

Not infrequently, writers became infected by a kind of political self-consciousness that led them to organize themselves on the analogy of political parties. They formed groups and alignments; they issued declarations and manifestoes. The virtues of solidarity found new recognition; denunciation of some recognizable “other side” was much practiced. (79)

Again, we have a critical insight into the ways many modernist writers consciously adopt a mode of political organization, but, like Lefebvre, McFarlane keeps some distance from declaring actual organization involving political parties. This dissertation follows the lead of McFarlane and Lefebvre while also taking their assertions further by broadening the scope of political organization beyond just the structures of political parties to include, along with the organizational structures of political parties, two other modes of political organization familiar to the left: collective organization and coalition-based organization. Indeed, this dissertation is structured around these three models. These models are compelling, in part, because they allow me to work through some of the complicated temporal and spatial interplay between the emergence of transnational modernism and the emergence of modernist practice in Canada without having to construct a singular narrative of development—a master narrative. These models do not force a position of looking at

modernism from either end of a telescope—I neither have to prioritize the beginning nor prioritize the decline of transnational modernism. This three-part approach (collective organization, party organization, and coalition-based organization) allows me to put greater emphasis on the intricacies of modernist practice and process in unconventional ways.

From the very beginning of my doctoral studies I have not aimed at writing a dissertation with the model of the proto-book in mind.⁹ For many, a doctoral dissertation is a project that anticipates its own redevelopment into a scholarly monograph. It is not my intention to redevelop this work into a monograph. This alternative mode of composition is an attempt at being responsive to the current state of scholarship around leftist Canadian literature. The fine monographs produced recently by James Doyle and Candida Rifkind have acted to re-instigate interest in leftist Canadian literature through providing important and necessary scholarly surveys. I suggest that another survey-like monograph is not needed at our current critical moment. Instead, for the field to gain strength and momentum I believe scholarly work must take its cues from the important work of critical surveys and then work at the micro level to provide condensed and in-depth critical case studies. In other words, I have taken advantage of this mode of scholarly production—the doctoral dissertation—to explore diverse and divergent conjunctures of leftist formations and literary production. Recognizing the wide breadth of the field and the large number of possible conjunctures, this dissertation presents six case studies of leftist formations and emergent (opposed to late) modernist articulations in the Canadian context. As such, this project departs from the conventions of the dissertation in its adoption of a model that presents a series of theoretically linked case studies, each working within a fairly narrow set of parameters. While conceptually linked, the individual case studies do not build upon each other across a

narrative arc. Instead, they each articulate a different relationship between the left and emergent modernist literary production in Canada.

“Writing Left” is a work of recovery and reconnaissance—a two-pronged project that heeds Raymond Williams’s familiar proposal to “search out and counterpoise an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margin of the century” (*Politics* 35). This project recovers literature (taken broadly to include poetry, fiction, theatre, and journalism) of the interwar left while also reading the literary texts under examination as articulations of an emergent modernism in Canada.¹⁰ In some cases, the texts under consideration have never, to my knowledge, been considered under the rubrics of literary or cultural criticism while others, such as the poems of F.R. Scott, have maintained a steady scholarly readership. When working with texts that have enjoyed sustained scholarly attention, this dissertation seeks to shed new light on the relationships between politics and artistic production. “Writing Left” also recovers modernism’s multiple beginnings in Canada and in doing so recovers an alternative vocabulary for talking about leftist cultural expression. This work of recovery is not naïve: it is undertaken with the knowledge that, as Cary Nelson notes in his introduction to *Repression and Recovery*,

one never actually “recovers” the thing itself. Literary history can never have in view, can never hold within its intellectual grasp or even merely in its gaze, some level of sheer, unmediated textual facticity, let alone any stable system of signification.

History and its artifacts are always reconstructed, mediated, and narrativized. (8)

Further, my critical approach to the act of recovery works from the assumption that all literature has political investments and that political organization always utilizes narrative strategies. Nelson further suggests that “[w]e recover what we are culturally and

psychologically prepared to recover and what we ‘recover’ we necessarily rewrite, giving it meanings that are inescapably contemporary, giving it new discursive light in the present, a life it cannot have had before” (11). Given the implications of dragging recovered texts and narratives into the contemporary critical moment, I have attempted to work with a methodological process that allows me to historicize by laying bare the numerous and often contradictory articulations of cultural politics within leftist production. For, as Nelson suggests, “[t]o be in thrall to a single historical narrative [...] is to miss the benefits that come from juxtaposing multiple competing narratives” (7).

Along with the work of recovery, I adopt a model of reconnaissance. In *Reasoning Otherwise* Ian McKay explains that he uses historiographic “reconnaissance” to get at the “general rules and assumptions, the grammar and syntax, underlying those statements” which are “left behind by the people of a given political formation” (6). Rather than attempting to construct historiography on the premise of a singular, complete narrative that presents absolute certainty and authority, McKay’s methodology offers a means of delving deeper into the complicated construction of the left without falling into tired tropes and unproductive arguments—“to replace the consolations of morality tales and onwards and upwards master narratives with a more intellectually challenging and politically useful methodology” (3). Following Robert Stuart, McKay suggests that “rather than asking ‘Who really spoke?’ and ‘How well and how authentically,’ this approach [of reconnaissance] asks, ‘How did this language of socialism function? Where, how, and for whom did it work?’” (5–6). I have attempted to incorporate McKay’s methodology into my own work by asking similar questions not only about the left but also about the emergence of modernism in Canada. For

McKay's methodology is not proprietary and is not restricted to singular trajectories in the historical narratives it creates; rather,

[t]he point of reconnaissance is to provoke a network of focused investigations. If a work of synthesis (at least in imagination) meant to brood over its landscape for the generations, a reconnaissance knows itself to be but one step in a co-operative struggle to understand a contested terrain, just one step in the struggle to reclaim left history from the "enormous condescension of posterity." (3–4)

McKay, then, does not aim to choose sides, for example, between communism and democratic socialism. Instead, he has an inclusive view of the left and maintains the notion that anybody who shares four key insights can be called a leftist. These are insights into "capitalism's injustice, the possibility of equitable democratic alternatives, the need for social revolution, and the development of the preconditions of this social transformation in the actual world around us" (4). These insights are useful markers for getting away from sectarianism in the production of literary historiography of the left in Canada. Though McKay's final insight may provoke some reservations concerning its applicability to artistic production, I believe that the work of imagination and creative processes are requisite for any "social transformation in the actual world around us" (4). As such, these four insights inform the work of recovery and reconnaissance in this project.

Recovering the literary products of the left has strong precedent. Alan Wald suggests in *Writing from the Left: New Essays on Radical Culture and Politics* that a "reconsideration of US left-wing literature of the 1930s, particularly its relation to the Communist Party, is now proceeding at a faster pace than at any point since the tail end of the McCarthyite anti-radical witch-hunt of the 1950s" (114). In the nearly twenty years since Wald noticed the swift pace

of this reconsideration, the velocity of critics' reconsideration of American leftist literature has only increased as it has been taken up by Rita Barnard, Nancy Berke, James Bloom, Michael Davidson, Michael Denning, Alan Filreis, Barbara Foley, Lee Furey, Joseph Harrington, Walter Kalaidjian, Paul Lauter, Janet Lyon, William Maxwell, Cary Nelson, Paula Rabinowitz, and Michael Thurston, among others. As I sit to write this introduction I have a sizable stack of scholarly monographs and essay collections beside me that are dedicated to the reconsideration of American leftist literary production in the first half of the twentieth century. To my other side, the stack of monographs expressly dedicated to the reconsideration of leftist literary production in Canada during the first half of the twentieth century number just two—James Doyle's *Progressive Heritage: The Evolution of a Politically Radical Tradition in Canada* (2002) and Candida Rifkind's *Comrades and Critics: Women, Literature, and the Left in 1930s Canada* (2009). There are of course other scholarly monographs that are astute in their treatment of aspects of leftist literary production in Canada, such as Dean Irvine's *Editing Modernity: Women and Little Magazine Cultures in Canada, 1916–1956*, and a group of recent articles that are equally as perceptive (many of which will be cited in the ensuing chapters). The forthcoming monograph by Jody Mason as well as the doctoral work of Emily Robins Sharpe and Andrea Hasenbank, will, I am confident, contribute much to the still-fledgling field.¹¹

Structured chronologically and generically, Doyle's *Progressive Heritage* focuses solely on texts that are associated with the Communist Party of Canada. Admirable for the sheer volume of material covered, *Progressive Heritage* accounts for communist literary production throughout the twentieth century but focuses most keenly on the period between the 1920s and the 1960s. As the first full-length scholarly study on the cultural production of the left in

Canada, it will remain a touchstone text for some time to come. “Writing Left” departs from Doyle’s work by not confining the texts under scrutiny to affiliation with communism and by making modernism central to its focus.

Rifkind’s *Comrades and Critics* limits its purview to the 1930s, but it is ambitious in both the scope of material covered and the theoretical complexity brought to bear on that material. Rifkind expands her range beyond affiliation with the Communist Party of Canada and—importantly—focuses on the gendered implications of the left’s cultural production in the 1930s. Much more than Doyle, Rifkind’s survey focuses on the left’s engagement with modernism. Her work utilizes a framework borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu’s theorizations of fields of cultural production. She suggests that “central to this logic of the field is the kind of capital necessary for agents to accumulate in order to assume dominance,” and she relies on Bourdieu’s differentiation between economic, cultural, and social capital (28). Following Imre Szeman, I do not see an easy applicability of Bourdieu’s theorization of cultural capital in the Canadian context. Speaking of the critical use of Bourdieu’s definitions of cultural capital in contemporary scholarship, he suggests that “[w]hen it comes to culture, we still often talk as if we are living in the nineteenth century—and in Europe not the northern part of North America” and that “Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction* would need to be substantially rewritten to make sense of the valences of culture in this place” (4–5). “Writing Left” does not make evaluative balance sheets of the accumulation of capital (cultural or otherwise) central to its understanding of modernism’s emergence in Canada, though it does at moments point to instances when undermining cultural authority facilitates modernist critique.

With a scarcity of monographs devoted to Canada's literary left, I take the opportunity to draw on a diverse range of scholars who have produced work on literature of the interwar period more broadly: the modernist criticism of Dean Irvine, Brian Trehearne, and Glenn Willmott; the literary-historical work of Gwendolyn Davies, Sandra Djwa, and Colin Hill; the theatre criticism of Alan Filewod, the historiography of Larry Hannant and Ian McKay; as well as scholarly work on leftist American modernism produced by critics such as Barbra Foley, Janet Lyon, Cary Nelson, Paula Rabinowitz, and Alan Wald. Together, the work of the above critics constitutes the foundations upon which I build a series of diverse and divergent case studies that explore the conjunctures of leftist formations and the emergence of literary modernism in Canada.

Each of the following chapters contains two sections—both case studies—and each chapter begins with a short introduction that provides contextual and historical information to situate the case studies.¹² I have attempted to pair case studies in such a way as to represent two sides of the same coin—to show the multiple and divergent organizational processes within which modernism emerged in Canada. By doing so, I respond to McKay's call for "a network of focused investigations" in the process of recovering texts, critical narratives, and multiple entry points for the emergence of modernism in Canada (3).

Chapter Two, "Modernism, Antimodernism, and the Collective," looks to two modes of collective organization—a literary coterie and examples of strike action. The poetry and fiction, as well as the political claims that emerge from this collectivism, respond to widespread post-war anxieties as well as the shifting relations of subjectivity under the weight of advanced industrialization in Canada. Looking through a lens of collective action and organization reveals a preoccupation with articulations of leftism outside of parliamentary

politics. On the one hand, this collective action has structural affiliation to unionism and syndicalism, be it labour unionism or farmers' collectives. On the other, this collective action has structural affiliation with coteries, groups, or schools of literary producers.¹³ This chapter examines both models. The first case study, "Modernism, Antimodernism, and the Song Fishermen," looks to the ways in which a number of poets who were able to use the authority and strength that comes from literary producers banding together in order to write modernist poems, even though the guiding motif of the group was antimodernist cultural production. The focus of this case study is the Song Fishermen, a group of poets who, for the most part, sought to construct a spiritual home for themselves in nostalgic constructions of Nova Scotia. I look to recover the experimental, non-nostalgic modernist poetics of Martha Leslie and Robert Leslie while also examining Joe Wallace's alteration of the poetic subject in modernity.

The second case study in this chapter, "The Art of the Strike: Artistic Practice and Collective Action," continues the examination of the emergence of modernism in the midst of residual forms of literary production. This case study draws on Glenn Willmott's theorization of modernist Canadian fiction arising from within established modes—realism and romance—in Canada's literary marketplace. This section focuses on three strike novels of the interwar period—Douglas Durkin's *The Magpie* (1923), A.M. Stephen's *The Gleaming Archway* (1929), and Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage* (1939)—in which we see a marked interest in the collective militancy of the working class, labour and the unemployed, alongside a rise in class consciousness. Moreover, each novel contains representation of artistic production. Rather than focusing on the primary plot structures or the protagonists of the strike novels, I examine the representation of art and artistic practice to show how authors connected

modernist aesthetic production to leftist political action. Two of the three novels—albeit in different ways—exhibit modernism by training their readers to associate modernism with leftist politics.

Chapter Three, “Organizing the Party,” switches focus from explorations of how an antimodernist literary collective facilitated modernist experimentation and how collective action is represented alongside representations of artistic practice to explorations of cultural production in relation to political parties. This second model of organization is perhaps the most predictable, as it explores the cultural structures put in place in the name of building political parties. On the one hand, we see the rise of a poetics of institutional critique alongside the emergence of the Canadian Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in the early 1930s. On the other hand, we see modernist theatricality applied to building support for the Third Period Communist Party of Canada (CPC). Within the organizational structures explored in Chapter Three we see the rise in manifestoes and platforms more familiar to the study of both modernism and politics. In the first case study of Chapter Three, “F.R. Scott and the Emergence of a Poetics of Institutional Critique,” I trace the development of Scott’s earliest poetry through engagements with different institutions, beginning with an overriding concern with education and the functioning of educational institutions—universities—through Scott’s critique of a national literary institution—the Canadian Authors’ Association—and finally to his participation in the building of a federal socialist political party—the CCF. Counter to the prevailing criticism on Scott, I argue that there need not be a bifurcation of his political and poetic production; that his politics and his poetics were not only structured in similar ways, but that they were often part of the same process.

In the second case study in Chapter Three, “Section 98 and the Theatricality of the Canadian Left,” I examine the ways in which responses to state repression used tactics of modernist theatre in the production of a leftist print culture, which in turn helped gain popular support for the Communist Party of Canada. After giving a history of the legal codification of political repression in the form of Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada, I turn to an examination of the print culture of the Canadian Labor Defense League (CLDL), which published *Not Guilty! The Verdict of the Workers’ Jury* (1932). I then turn to the modernist and legal implications of the production of *Eight Men Speak* (1934), a play written by Oscar Ryan, Ed Cecil-Smith, H. Francis (pseudonym of Frank Love), and Mildred Goldberg. Further, I give a reading of Oscar Ryan’s *The “Sedition” of A.E. Smith* (1934) that further evidences the modernist theatricality used to confront state repression in print form. I end this case study by reading the theatricality of a Communist Party rally at Maple Leaf Gardens and speculate on the failure of the party to turn popular support into parliamentary representation.

Building on the two previous chapters that explore cultural products in relation to collective action and political parties, Chapter Four, “Organizing the Transnational Fight,” explores a model of organization that focuses on political and cultural coalitions. The particular coalition under scrutiny here is the Popular Front, which emerged in the late 1930s as a broad leftist coalition of political organizations across party lines and political philosophies in opposition to fascist and other far-right groups. Writers and politicians saw tactical advantages in coalition building and, as part of the transnational politics of the Popular Front, a formation of cultural politics and aesthetic ideologies arose to become what Michael Denning calls the cultural front, which “referred both to the cultural industries and

apparatuses—a ‘front’ or terrain of cultural struggle—and to the alliance of radical artists and intellectuals who made up the ‘cultural’ part of the Popular Front” (xix). Denning uses this model to explain how common tropes and forms emerged. In this chapter I dwell on one of the most prominent events around which the transnational Popular Front mobilized: the Spanish Civil War (1936–39). The conflict in Spain became one of the key rallying points of Popular Front politics in the late 1930s. In particular, this chapter looks to the Canadian fiction and reportage written by Norman Bethune, Hazen Sise, Jean “Jim” Watts, and Ted Allan, who all travelled to Spain in the late 1930s, as well as the fiction and literary criticism of Charles Yale Harrison who had a long and sometimes fraught relationship with leftist modes of organization. The first case study in Chapter Four, “Reporting Spain: Modernist Journalism and the Politics of Proximity,” adopts critical vocabulary from cultural geography to show the various ways in which Norman Bethune, Hazen Sise, and Jean Watts incorporated modernist tactics into their reportage in order to shift the conceptual space between Spain and Canada. A survey of their work covers radio broadcasts, print narratives, photography, and film. Further, this case study examines the staging of modernist journalism in Ted Allan’s novel *This Time a Better Earth* (1939).

Rather than starting with a discussion of the Spanish Civil War, the second case study in Chapter Four, “Countering and Co-opting Modernism in the Work of Charles Yale Harrison,” begins with World War One and traces Harrison’s relationship to modernist production through various forms to his easily recognizable modernism that deals with function of the Spanish Civil War in the North American leftist imaginary. Fittingly, as the final case study of this project, I examine the multiple modernisms exhibited in Harrison’s four novels of the 1930s—*Generals Die in Bed* (1930), *A Child is Born* (1931), *There are Victories*

(1933), and *Meet Me on the Barricades* (1938)—as they subvert different genres and as Harrison undergoes changes in political affiliation, all the while maintaining an anti-war sentiment. I argue that *Generals Die in Bed*, for which Harrison is best known, adopts a minimalist style that disrupts normative constructions of narrative time, space, and individualist subjectivity in order to represent the soldiering multitude of WWI. In reading *A Child is Born*, which comes in the form of a proletarian tenement novel, I suggest that Harrison participates in what Barbara Foley and others have identified as proletarian modernism. Shifting his relationship to modernist production yet again, I argue that Harrison works to undermine conventions of the Bildungsroman by presenting a proto-feminist anti-Bildungsroman in *There are Victories*. Finally, *Meet Me on the Barricades* adopts the stylistics of high modernism to complicate (but not abandon) his anti-war stance and the machinations of the Popular Front by locating the North American leftist imaginary in Spain.

CHAPTER TWO: MODERNISM, ANTIMODERNISM, AND COLLECTIVE ORGANIZATION

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER TWO.

As argued in the general introduction, modernist practise did not necessarily emerge in Canada through the avant garde's clean breaks from dominant literary modes. Instead, modernism often emerged in Canada from within those literary modes that were firmly established and enjoyed widespread popularity. The two case studies in Chapter Two explore such instances within the framework of collective organization and against the backdrop of the immediate aftermath of the First World War. During this time political debates raged throughout the country about reconstruction of peacetime social, political, and economic structures of the Canadian state. The anxieties spawned by the monumental loss of life during the war and the impossibility of a return to "life-as-usual" ushered in an era of sharply divided allegiances between capital and labour. With labour and the working class often looking to the revolution in Russia as an example of political change, there were real and prolonged fights over the direction in which Canada should head. Syndicalist organizations such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), or the Wobblies, as they were known, and the One Big Union (OBU) were active at this time resisting the capitalist state.¹

Shortly after the war an enormous majority of wage-earning people in Winnipeg, which was then Canada's third-largest city, participated in a general strike that erupted on 15 May 1919 in solidarity with striking construction and metal workers. Lasting six weeks, the

strike became a foundational moment in the historiography of industrial action in Canada. The immediate aftermath of this upheaval is the setting for Douglas Durkin's *The Magpie*. The Winnipeg General Strike has sometimes overshadowed the extent to which labour action spread across the country. As Craig Heron, in his introduction to his edited collection *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917–1925*, suggests,

[i]n the years between 1917 and 1925 working-class defiance swelled up in industrial centres across the country. In major cities like Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, as well as in such unlikely [sic] settings as Amherst, Nova Scotia, and Gananoque, Ontario, workers formed their own organizations, marched off the job in record numbers, engaged in defiant acts of solidarity, and made bold new demands. (4)

Throughout this period and after, the coalfields and steel mills of Nova Scotia became a constant site of labour action. Despite the centrality of public debates around labour and industrial unionism in Nova Scotia at this time, members of the literary collective who called themselves the Song Fishermen banded together to disseminate their nostalgic constructions of Nova Scotia, which were culturally antimodernist and more often than not effaced the conditions and complaints of the working class in the province.

As much as the two following case studies are linked through the examination of the non-avant garde emergence of modernist literature through established literary modes and discourses, they are also linked by a concern with collective organisation. The first case study examines a cultural collective, coterie, or, in Raymond Williams's terms, a cultural formation of collective public manifestation (*Culture* 68). The second case study examines the treatment of political organization—strikes—in three novels. In each case study, I examine the extent

to which these different types of organization—cultural and political—cross over to inform each other. This is accomplished, on the one hand by asking how the structures of a cultural formation, which specialized in cultural antimodernism, might also facilitate alternative or oppositional narratives.² On the other hand, I ask through what modes of literature political organization and action can best find cultural expression in the post-war period.

As we shall see in the first case study in Chapter Two, “Modernism, Antimodernism, and the Song Fishermen,” a small number of the Song Fishermen became actively engaged in modernist critiques of industrial development and capitalist exploitation. They were able to use the collective nature of the literary coterie to gain access to a publication venue from which to launch their alternative critiques. In other words, they were able to use collective organization as a forum for critical, leftist praxis. The second case study in Chapter Two, “The Art of the Strike: Artistic Practice and Collective Action,” examines a mode of collective organization that is perhaps more familiar to the left: the strike. This case study examines strike novels from the post-WWI era but before the onset of the Great Depression—with the exception of Irene Baird’s *Waste Heritage*, which is set at the end of the 1930s. In this case study I examine representations of collective action to show how modernism bleeds into the realist mode through sub-plots and secondary characters. Further, I demonstrate how these novels were able to connect modernism to leftism through transvaluation, that is, by representing modernist artistic production as an amenable adjunct to leftist strike action.

MODERNISM, ANTIMODERNISM, AND THE SONG FISHERMEN

They are a numerous company, these pretenders to simplicity.

—Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (20)

ANTIMODERNISM AND THE NEW MODERNIST STUDIES

Literary modernism did not simply arrive in Canada. It did not alight at Halifax or Montreal from a transatlantic voyage, nor did it cross the forty-ninth parallel as a functioning, consolidated entity. Rather, articulations of literary modernism in Canada emerged through a complex set of material, temporal, and spatial conditions. Traditional scholarship on modernism's "avant-gardist" beginnings has either insisted upon or assumed an immediate and total break from other literary articulations as a constitutive part of modernism. This model often rhetorically projects a break from "older" or "outmoded" traditions despite the healthy persistence of some of those other literary traditions throughout and beyond what we tend to think of as modernism's tenure. While there are certainly instances in which a distinctive break has announced modernism's arrival in a transnational context (the modernist manifesto is perhaps the most ubiquitous tactic used to enact such a break), there are other instances in which the march to modernism has been long, gradual, and interactive with literary forms that seem, at first glance, to be antithetical to a recognizable modernism.

When attempting to trace diverse narratives of the emergence of modernist literature in Canada (or at least in select corners of Canada), while at the same time retooling how modernism gets categorized, it is necessary to engage with the discourse of cultural antimodernism. While the critical concept of antimodernism is fairly well established under an historical or cultural-studies rubric—often a concept employed by critics to point to the commodification of “tradition” and “authenticity”—recent scholarship points to different modes through which antimodernism functions. Jackson Lears, for example, sees antimodernism as “the recoil from an ‘overcivilised’ modern existence to more intense forms of physical or spiritual existence” (xv). Lynda Jessup suggests the term “describes what was in effect a critique of the modern, a perceived lack in the present manifesting itself not only in a sense of alienation, but also in a longing for the types of physical or spiritual experience embodied in utopian futures and imagined pasts” (3). Robin Kelley notices that terms such as “folk,” “authentic,” and “traditional” are the bread and butter of antimodernism and “are socially constructed categories that have something to do with the reproduction of race, class, and gender hierarchies and the policing of the boundaries of modernism” (1402). However, it is Ian McKay’s rendering of antimodernism that is most useful for the following examination of the tensions between literary modernism and nostalgic constructions of Nova Scotia found within the *Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets*, as McKay’s work is focused on antimodernism as an operative mode of cultural and social production in Nova Scotia.

In *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, McKay argues that, in the interwar period, rural Nova Scotia tended to be represented by the urban middle class as “a subset of persons set apart, the Folk, characterized by their own distinctive culture and isolated from the modern society around them” (9). Not

surprisingly, “innocence” was a dominant motif. Cultural producers in interwar Nova Scotia, he suggests, worked very hard to portray the region as “essentially innocent of the complications and anxieties of twentieth-century modernity” (30). It is important to note the classed assumptions behind this mode of antimodernist cultural production. “Innocence,” McKay writes, “denotes the local development of antimodernist conceptions of history and society through a network of words and things diffused by the urban middle class and corresponding, in a complex, indirect, and general sense, to its social and cultural interests” (31). In other words, in the case of interwar Nova Scotia, the urban middle class deploys tropes of innocence that contribute to the construction of a Folk mythology. The middle class, in turn, claims that Folk mythology as its own historicity and satisfies a sense of belonging.³ More recently, McKay and Robin Bates suggest in *The Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* that a “semiotic alchemy of antimodernism” was used to “convert [Nova Scotia’s] position within the Empire into misty pseudo-Gaelic nostalgia” (378). Indeed, this case study means to interrogate a rather foggy construction of “fishermen” as it gets deployed by a group of literary producers.

For McKay, critical engagement with the discourse of antimodernism—the words and things—must be careful and self-aware. In “Helen Creighton and the Politics of Antimodernism,” McKay elaborates:

Cultural historians of interwar Nova Scotia (and perhaps Atlantic Canada more generally) must place this peculiar variant of antimodernism at the center of their analysis. To do so is both diverting and dangerous. The “debunking” of the “invented traditions” originating in the interwar period [...] is easy and entertaining. But “exposing” such brazen inventions and easy targets is not the key challenge. The

more daunting task facing the cultural historian is to reconstruct the more subtle *politics of cultural selection* and to understand the ways in which contingent and partial readings attain the status of obvious truths. (3, emphasis in original)

Part of the “more daunting task” must also be to re-read and recover narratives within antimodern cultural formations that are counter to dominant strategies of conservative and commercial antimodernism. This type of analysis, I think, should also tease out where those counter-narratives can be located within a broad range of political, social, and economic conditions of cultural production. When taken out of the vast category of “cultural history” and placed within a literary-historical approach, the task becomes increasingly daunting as the literary historian attempts to contend with McKay’s conception of antimodernism alongside the recognized rubrics and revamped articulations of literary modernism, which has its own definitional histories of what gets to be called modernist.

If a critical account of the emergence of modernism in Canada clings to the disciplinarity of a strictly literary-critical or literary-historical trajectory (if there are such strict things), the concept of antimodernism may easily come into conflict with recent developments in the “New Modernist Studies.”⁴ Recent modernist-studies scholarship has generally worked against reinforcing the ascendancy or sovereignty of the “high modernism” of the Anglo-American kind (such as the Pound-Eliot-Joyce nexus). Instead, as the argument goes, the very principles upon which we categorize modernism need to be rethought and expanded to include articulations that have come from outside the cultural authority of high modernism. In recent years we have seen the expansion of modernist categorizations rather than the creation of new literary categories that risk being segregated into their own disciplinarity. Part of the reasoning against creating new disciplinaries comes out of the

realization that even Anglo-American high modernism is deeply responsive and reactive to, as well as interactive with, literary formations which have been excluded from the modernist canon. By refusing to consolidate oppositional categories that take high modernism as their opposite, under the rubric of the New Modernist Studies scholars have had success in opening up enquiry into multiple modernisms: competing and coextensive discourses of modernism that find articulation through being situated in multiple subjectivities.

A slight problem arises when a critical practice that is indebted to the expansion of the received ideas about modernism's structuring logic looks towards an operative category such as antimodernism. While it may be tempting to gloss the antithetical character of the term "*antimodernism*," it is important to note that the term is not a direct response to *literary* modernism. Rather, the term (much like literary modernism) is a scholarly categorization of specific strategic responses to particular conditions or problems of modernity. While antimodernist conceptual desires have close connections to desires to preserve "traditional" literary forms and subjects, antimodernist cultural production is not categorically counter to literary modernism. Antimodernism is a reactionary, classed projection of a supposedly simplified version of the past into an uncomplicated utopian present and, sometimes, future. That projection emerges as a strategy for dealing with the displacements and shifting alignments (spatial, temporal, social, economic) of modernity. Literary modernism emerges, at least in large part, from those same changing conditions of existence within transnational modernity.

What follows, then, is a reading that takes divergent and alternative literary experiments—modernist experiments—as interactive with cultural antimodernism in a dialectical process. This dialectical process is enabled by the diverse set of cultural and social

conditions that occasioned multiple avenues for articulating Maritime subjectivity in the 1920s.⁵ I read the texts of the literary coterie who identified themselves as the Song Fishermen and focus on the modernist experimentations that work both with and against the dominantly antimodernist tenor of their periodical—*The Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*—as a way into a discussion of the transitional and alternative literary project of literary modernism in Canada. Within the coterie, the poetry of Martha Ann Leslie, Virginia Clay Hamilton, and Robert Leslie exhibits identifiable formal modernist qualities. The poetry of Joe Wallace, which hardly seems modernist when compared to the poems of Eliot and Pound (or those of Dorothy Livesay and F.R. Scott for that matter) because it does not reveal modernist ingenuity through formal experimentation, does reveal tentative steps towards a refiguring of the Maritime poetic subject in modernity without recourse to antimodernist renderings of the Folk. By reading the work of these four poets in addition to reading a larger set of poetic responses to a collective project (a poetry competition) held by the Song Fishermen, an oppositional, modernist poetics of critique can be discerned and held up against the larger coterie's project of cultural selection that is recognizable through its sustained antimodernist strategies and sentiments.

THE SONG FISHERMEN

The genesis of the Song Fishermen has been skilfully documented by Gwendolyn Davies in “The Song Fishermen: A Regional Poetry Celebration,” where she enumerates the multiple

social and literary conditions that led to their formation in the 1920s. The literary coterie, she tells us,

organized lectures and recitals in Nova Scotia, produced illustrated poetry broadsheets, kept in touch with Maritime writers living outside the region, fostered emerging talent (like that of Charles Bruce), published a memorial to Bliss Carman upon his death, and between 1928 and 1930 channelled their energies into the creation of a poetry publication entitled *The Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*. (138)

While the group had both formal and informal gatherings throughout the 1920s, “by October of 1928,” Davies writes, “the group had evolved a dramatic image of themselves as ‘Fishers of Song,’ a loosely-connected fellowship of literary fisher-folk who culled from the wind, the sea, and the traditional life style of Nova Scotia the poetic catches that defined their province” (141). Alexander Kizuk, in “Molly Beresford and the Song Fishermen of Halifax: Cultural Production, Canon and Desire in 1920s Canadian Poetry,” highlights both the “*joie de vivre*” and “*jouissance*” of the group (176–77). Indeed, an editorial announcement in the fifteenth issue of their periodical (which came out “ever so often”) states: “We have been writing for fun, and for our own fun” (1). In the interests of writing for fun, the Song Fishermen coterie came together through social gatherings at the home of Andrew and Tully Merkel. Indeed, much has been made of the specific socio-economic location of the Song Fisherman’s social production in Halifax’s South End, at 50 South Park Street.⁶ From the autumn of 1928 on, not only were Andrew and Tully Merkel the literary hosts of the group, Andrew also became the curator of the Song Fishermen’s literary output through two forms of publication. First was a series of broadsheets called *Nova Scotia Catches* that were published by Abenaki Press.⁷ The other publication was a periodical, *The Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*,

which Davies describes as “a series of nondescript but serviceable sheets run off on a mimeograph machine in [Andrew Merkel’s] Halifax office of the Canadian Press” (142).

Aside from publishing the member’s poems,

the *Song Fishermen’s Sheets* also became a vehicle for members’ correspondence after the first few issues, affording Bliss Carman, Robert Norwood, Charles G.D. Roberts, and the other non-residents an opportunity to maintain contact with the main Halifax group, as well as to know what was happening to the other members of the coterie scattered from Glace Bay to New York. (142)

Both the poetry and the social news adopted and sustained ocean-going metaphors and figures of speech as an antimodernist, nostalgic strategy for dealing with the changing economic and social conditions of the Maritimes. The Song Fishermen enacted these tropes of the Folk in order to “represent a Nova Scotian voice in poetry at the very same time when rural values and the oral tradition were being eroded by out-migration, a changing economy, and the impact of modern media” (138). In this turn to the Folk, the Song Fishermen employed idealized ocean-going subjects as well as objects related to the sea such as dulse, clams, boats, tides, and Demerara rum, among other things, in order to project and celebrate a pre-industrial, largely fabricated age of classless innocence. While often constructing Nova Scotia as a post-pubescent never-never land (“Canada’s Ocean Playground,” as it became known),⁸ they were also able to use the idealized Folk for their own class-crossing identifications: while sitting comfortably in the South End of Halifax, they could imagine themselves at home in the smelt shacks of rural Nova Scotia. Despite the poetic construction of rural innocence, the poetic imaginary that the coterie created for themselves was constructed with cosmopolitan knowledge, for, as Davies tells us, as “attuned to the

developments in modern poetry as were their colleagues in London, Paris, New York or Montreal, the Song Fishermen nonetheless turned to traditional ballads, old sea chanteys, and even Gaelic literary forms in an attempt to evoke what they saw as the essence of Nova Scotia” (138). The cosmopolitan awareness that was present but seemingly omitted in the Song Fishermen’s construction of a nostalgic, Folk-driven past presents literary historians with a complicated relationship to unpack vis-à-vis the rising tide of transnational developments in literary modernism.

When putting the Song Fishermen under the scrutiny of literary history, it is important to look through multiple lenses: in this case it is important to differentiate between the symbolic power of the Song Fishermen and the actual material production of the Song Fishermen as an organized movement. According to McKay, the Song Fishermen were the “only really organized movement” of antimodernist cultural producers outside of the local tourism state in Nova Scotia, but that it was “more a light-hearted, whimsical South End literary salon than a disciplined movement,” which nonetheless says something serious about class and leisure in interwar Nova Scotia (*Quest* 227). Despite the lack of discipline and “[d]espite the dulce, Demerara, picnics and poetry,” Kizuk tells us, “the Song Fishermen society had a definite organization and structure” (178). In an astute definitional move that accounts for the social and textual make up of the coterie, Kizuk suggests that, “[b]roadly speaking, all of the contributors and subscribers, taken together, comprise the Song Fishermen” (178). As a riposte to his own definition, Kizuk suggests that there was a special, symbolic sub-group made up of Andrew Merkel, Charles G.D. Roberts, Bliss Carman, Robert Norwood, Kenneth Leslie, and Charles Bruce.⁹ Kizuk calls the symbolic sub-group “Song Fisher *Poets* (legitimizing signatories and titular laurel-bearers)” (178). This group is

largely symbolic because they—apart from Merkel’s editorial functions and the regular contributions from the young Bruce who lived in Halifax—had very little to do with the actual material production of the *Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets*. They were non-resident cultural figures who had already gained some celebrity both nationally and transnationally. Kizuk goes on to suggest that “the *real* Song Fishermen” or what he problematically terms the “Song Fisher *Folk*” were Merkel, Bruce, Robert Leslie, Molly Beresford, Ethel H. Butler, Joe Wallace, and Stuart McCawley (178). For reasons forthcoming, I would certainly add Martha Ann Leslie to this list. Kizuk calls these poets the “Song Fisher *Folk*” because they were the “Haligonians living in Halifax and enthusiastically throwing themselves into the project, not forgetting Stuart McCawley [who lived in Glace Bay]” (178).¹⁰ In deeming the poets who took more active roles in the material production of the group the “Song Fisher *Folk*,” Kizuk aligns them with the Folk subjects deployed in the coterie’s writing. As a result, he lessens the sense of cultural power that the poets living in Nova Scotia had in shaping non-nostalgic, alternative local poetic subjects. Whether we focus on the symbolic heads of the group or on the material, everyday conditions of the group’s literary output matters significantly for the way poetry might get taken up in Canadian literary history. Poets who lived in Nova Scotia wrote the modernist poems that I focus on here.

Davies suggests “much that has been said about Canadian writing in the 1920s” uses modernism as a “yardstick of literary excellence” (137), and it is for this reason that “a small but distinctly romantic group of Nova Scotian poets” have gone without notice in “standard discussions of Canadian literary history” (138). In order to mount a strong case for the Song Fishermen as important to discussions of Canadian literary history, Davies chooses to highlight the romantic and elide the modernist experimentations that took place within the

Song Fisherman group instead of looking for ways in which the “yardstick” might be reconfigured away from evaluative or defensive measurement and towards a reading of how antimodernist and modernist writing in 1920s Canada was often coextensive within publication venues.¹¹ To be clear, this is not a fault of Davies’s scholarship. Rather, it is representative of the critical moment in which the scholarship was produced, before a large-scale critical shift within modernist studies towards the legitimization of enquiry into marginal or spurned modernisms. In other words, the modernist experimentations in the *Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets* do not fit easily into a traditional disciplinary rubric of high modernism, so the case was rightly made for the “romantic” character of the group. Kizuk’s attempt to recover the Song Fishermen for Canadian literary history takes a slightly different tack than does Davies. He suggests:

The Song Fishermen publications are only a footnote in Canadian literary history, yet these sorts of footnotes are like tiny scars obtained in the struggle of cultures for self-determination. And this event, the literary moment of the Song Fishermen milieu and their sheets, is the mark of an exclusion. Canons, like cultures, define themselves by what they deny as part of themselves; all ideologies can be surprised at any time by re-emergences of what has been excluded, what could have been said. (176)

Kizuk sees the potential for a different narrative of Canadian literary history to emerge through reading the moment of the Song Fishermen coterie and in that (re)emergence, he sees the opportunity to challenge the ideological implications of the Canadian literary canon. Taking the act of recovery one step further, I want to tease out some poetic experimentations found in the *Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets* that might tell a different story about the larger emergence of modernism in Canada. In order to do so, it is crucial *not* to

dismiss the cultural antimodernist or formally residual poetic expressions within the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, but to recognize that the more daring poetic experimentations in the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* were enabled by the antimodernist cultural authority of what Kizuk calls the “legitimizing signatories and titular laurel-bearers,” even when those experimentations were often poking fun at the very authority of those symbolic ringleaders (178). Rather than modernist articulations emerging only from radical movements (e.g., student politics at McGill, antifascist solidarity, among other sites of modernist rupture that distanced themselves from established literary movements in Canada), in this case producers of modernist literature utilized the clout of mostly non-resident, cosmopolitan poets and cultural producers (Roberts, Carman, Norwood, and Logan) who had already established wide networks of publishers and audiences for their work previous to the transnational modernist turn in poetry and who, in the waning years of their careers, turned to nostalgic constructions of the rural homeland of their youth.

THE SONG FISHERMEN AND MODERNISM

Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* takes the “city” and the “country” as oppositional and coextensive social, geographic, and material spaces that enabled the production of a vast amount of British literature. Following the examples of McKay's critique of the construction of the Folk in Nova Scotia and Williams's enquiry into the spaces which governed the production of pastoral and counter-pastoral poetry, I want to consider

how the Song Fishermen, as a cultural formation that contributed much to the construction of the Maritime Folk, can be read as complicit in fostering their own counter-tradition. While the overriding motif of the Song Fisherman is one of playful antimodernism focused not on the hills and valleys of traditional pastoral poetry as much as the peaks and troughs of the ocean, the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* also include instances of sophisticated modernist experimentation. While Kizuk focuses on the non-modernist figure of Molly Beresford in order to draw out the implications of interactions between the more prominent members of the group and an “unmarried woman, recent immigrant, [and] amateur poet” (180), I want to focus on examples of strategic literary experimentations that present alternatives to the dominant critical narrative of antimodernism as the only sustained trope among the sheets of the Song Fishermen. I begin with a strong example of modernist composition: the sixth issue of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, dated 6 December 1928, headlines Martha Ann Leslie's concrete poem, “Poor Bob,” which is worthy of inclusion here in its entirety:

The sink's full of
Three days'
Dirty Dishes
Scales
Of fish
Float in the
Scummy
Fry-pan
On the floors are
Crumbs
But the
Broom
Is upstairs
There's
Dried
Fried
Eg
g
On page

36 of the
Buck
In the
Snow
Which is
Propped open
With a wet
Rag and a can of
Chipso
And
Hell
The fire
Is
Out
That's where
I'm going. (1)

As the poem moves down a single page from left to right and back to the left side of the page again, it explores the contradictory ground of poetry in domestic space. The poem enacts an ironic form of lament; more pity than lament, really. The non-gendered speaking subject's inventory of domestic failure begins with the informal, apostrophized contraction of the fist line, accompanied by lines that indicate a lapse in traditional performance of efficient domesticity. While the culinary remnants—fish scales floating in a scummy frying pan—invoke the *Song Fishermen's* prevailing subject of fishermen and the sea, all that is left of the coterie's celebrated, masculine act of fishing are the dregs. This fosters a gendered implication that it is the activity of men, and not women, around which the coterie's predominant poetic subject is formed. To push the analysis further, the poem's domestic subject undermines the coterie's sustained gendered figuration of fishermen that is incorporated into the body politic of the "fishers of song," those male poets who dominate the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* in number and certainly in cultural authority.

The domestic begins to make incursions into the poetic sphere with the poem's structural and figural volta, where dried egg appears on page thirty-six of Edna St. Vincent Millay's *The Buck in the Snow and Other Poems*, which was published in the same year Leslie composed her poem. Within Leslie's poem, Millay's book of poems is propped open with a wet rag, but the rag is wet from washing neither dishes nor floors. The book is also propped open with a can of "Chipso." This incursion of a commercial product (a brand of laundry soap) into the domestic space of the poem suggests that neither the rhetorical situation nor poetry itself is outside of the banalities of modern branding, commercialism, and domestic necessity. The poem ends with a deep sense of frustration: the final six lines of the poem begin with what appears to be an exclamatory expletive, "Hell," which can be initially read as the speaker's reaction to the fire being out. Upon reaching the final two lines, though, it becomes apparent that the fire being out is subordinate to the "Hell" to which the speaker is self-condemned, one presumes, due to the inadequate domestic performance of either the speaker or another, unnamed person.

An analysis of Leslie's experimentation with spatial form and reversal of the gendered expectations of the Song Fishermen coterie can be pushed further. The page of *The Buck in the Snow* to which Leslie refers (thirty-six) contains a single, four-line poem entitled "To Those Without Pity." Millay's rhyming couplets consider the value of poetry in others' eyes:

Cruel of heart, lay down my song.
Your reading eyes have done me wrong.
Not for you was the pen bitten,
And the mind wrung, and the song written. (1-4)

Taken up by Martha Ann Leslie and placed within a domestic *mise-en-scène*, the citation of Millay's book and the specific poem (which is obviously not textually reproduced for Leslie's audience) is somewhat ambiguous. We could read the speaking subject of Leslie's poem as a generalized reader of Millay's poem, Millay's very specific addressee, or, alternatively, someone who is able to manifest the pity Millay's addressees lack. The new addressees-once-removed of Leslie's poem—the addressees who have only been referentially acknowledged as the unpitying readers of Millay's poem—could find their parallel in the "Bob" of the poem's title, that is, if Bob is not the speaker of the poem, but the very experimentation with spatial form and publication in *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* suggests, to me, a more complex construction of an implied reader of Leslie's poem.¹²

In the first edition of *The Buck in the Snow* both page thirty-six and its facing page are dominated by blank space (the facing page—recto—announces only "PART THREE" in the upper left of the page). It is on this blank field that Leslie allows both egg and poetry to intermingle as she metaphorically writes her own poem into the gendered space that Millay's poetic clout opens up for her. Delving deeper into Leslie's generative appropriation of Millay's book, poetic subject, and voice, we notice that Leslie's poem likewise takes the shape of a propped-open book. Remembering the rag that props open *The Buck in the Snow* is not wet from washing dishes or floors and accounting for the poem's already deep engagement with print and book culture, we can access a more mischievous reading of the poem. This experimentation with spatial form accomplishes the figuration of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* themselves as the rag (as periodicals are sometimes called)—soaked as the pages are in masculine imaginings of innocent oceangoing spaces of physical and spiritual existence—that props open her own poem. Read through this lens, Leslie's poem becomes a critique of the

coterie's local bourgeois antimodernism and their gendering of cultural authority. The domestic space of Leslie's poem becomes at once local and cosmopolitan as it incorporates cultural and commercial products into the local present instead of distilling an overwhelmingly imagined local past.

Martha Ann Leslie published another poem in the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, this time co-authored with Virginia Clay Hamilton, which explicitly brings desire into culinary space. "Freud en Cuisine," published in the eighth issue of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, is a free verse poem that takes an angel food cake as its blank canvas which the speaker longs to "sully" and "Ruthlessly to thrust / The realities upon it" (11-13). I suspect their poem is, in part, a response to Charles G.D. Roberts's "Pan and the Rose," his single poem contributed to the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, which appeared in the previous issue. Kizuk holds Roberts's "sexual allegory" as emblematic of the Song Fishermen's literary milieu for which "male human desire was the very root of poetry" (193-94). Further, he suggests that the Song Fishermen "paid homage to the phallic mystery and its power as a drive within a Lacanian and Kristevian Symbolic to engender not only discourse but language itself" (194). For a literary critic so attuned to the psychoanalytic implications of the Song Fishermen's modes of nostalgic, masculine cultural selection, it is curious that Kizuk declines to comment on what may be the most obvious counter-example:

Bland and vapid,
Coldly virginal,
Its sleek white surface
Disdainful
Of licentious reds

And
Purples—
How it inflames me!
Smugly smirking,
Ignorant of life. (1–10)

Following “Poor Bob,” Leslie’s poem written with Hamilton can also be read as an explicit desire to poke fun at, while pushing the boundaries of, the illusory gendered vision of the Song Fishermen themselves. If we read the pages of the *Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets* as the (as yet) unidentified “Bland and vapid” canvas or container with its “sleek white surface” and “maiden blankness” (1, 3, 11), we can read the projection of desire into culinary space in the pages of an otherwise overtly masculine, antimodern publication, as an undermining of the ineffectual masculinity presented by the sexualized pretenders of an innocent homeland (the post-pubescent never-never land), of which (according to Kizuk) “Pan and the Rose” is emblematic. The speaking subject of “Freud en Cuisine” does not actually announce that the canvas is a cake upon which the sullyng desire is projected until the post-climax, end of the poem:

Drooping and humble,
It shrinks
Quiescent before me;
Its virtue spotted---
The angel-food cake. (28–32)

This post-climax finale figures a flaccid penis—signaled, in part, by the triple hyphen’s erasure that might complete the utterance of another culinary creation—the infamous British

pudding, spotted dick. The poem does not clearly project female desire onto the pages of *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* through a rapturous maneuver. It is less about sex and more about seizure of symbolic cultural authority as well as the elevation of the domestic as something worth reifying in poetry. Given the contradictory reversal of gendered expectations of who gets to pretend innocence in a traditional past invented through masculine cultural authority, Leslie and Hamilton have out-manned the men by seizing the Song Fishermen's desiring authority and using it for both provocation and humiliation in the realm of poetic production.

Indeed, "Freud en Cuisine" began a conversation in the pages of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*. In the very next issue, King Hazen published a response in sonnet form. "Aux Cuisinieres" replies to Leslie and Hamilton with overburdened, nostalgic poetic language and conventional rhyme:

Oh, Virginia Clay and Martha Ann,
You write with cold sophistication,
Of things beyond the ken of man,
Albeit full of sweet suggestion.... (1-4)

Choosing not to respond using formal experimentation akin to "Freud en Cuisine," Hazen inadvertently recognizes sophistication in Leslie and Hamilton's free verse. At the same time, though, he codes their poetic dexterity as cold and "beyond the ken of man" (3). Using the plural pronouns "our" and "we," he keeps his poem and the universalized man out of the feminized culinary domain:

Subsequent, with persistence,
Our thoughts return, with glad surmise,

To those delights so evanescent,
And with regret we realize,
With souls that are far from complacent,
That Time alone prevents us woo
More Angel Cake and have it too. (8–14)

More proving the point of “Freud en Cuisine” than “rising” to its challenge, King Hazen responds by presenting a universalized, male speaking subject who has failed to address Leslie and Hamilton’s representation of the *Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets* as “Bland and vapid.” Instead of taking their point about desire in poetry existing within the commonplace language of domestic space, he further mythologizes desire through proverbial reference. The conversation continues in the next issue, number ten, when Martha Ann writes in prose: “Tell King Hazen that if he’ll come to the farm sometime I’ll attempt to make him a lascivious looking and lovely Angel Cake, and give him plenty of time to woo it, and a tin box to keep it in afterward” (6). I read the offer of a “tin box to keep it in” is a sarcastic quip aimed at deflating his too literal reading of the sublimated implications of “Freud en Cuisine.” Desire and poetry, for Leslie and Hamilton, are not things to be put in a “tin box” to be kept culturally stagnant or universal. Instead, desire and poetry commingle in the everyday poetic subject made more accessible by poetic innovation and experimentation.

While Martha Ann Leslie, with the help of Virginia Clay Hamilton, did much in the two poems above to disrupt the construction of a Folk space through her modernist critiques, her husband, Robert Leslie, also published poems in the *Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets* that disrupt an overwhelmingly dominant antimodernist cultural moment through modernist experimentation. His work is unique for its easy employment of antimodernist nostalgia in

some poems and experimental modernist critiques of capitalist and environmental exploitation in others. For example, he published two poems in the eleventh issue—one above the other—that are very different poetic engagements: “Ghosts” and “Marginal Note, March 26/29.” Made up of two stanzas with an irregular rhyme scheme, “Ghosts” takes up the seafaring motif so ubiquitous to the group. The opening stanza signals the disappearance of the age of sail:

Ghosts of the ships
That furled their sails
At sailing ships?
Eternal quay,
Still haunt the night
And ride the gales
That blow the coasts
Of Acadie (1–8)

While recognizing that wooden sailing ships have neared the end of their economic and technological usefulness, Leslie gives them an eternal presence, an ahistorical location that intimates a universal presence and an erasure of the local colonial and classed implications of the technology of ocean-going modes of transportation and labour. What is more, he constructs the ahistoricity of the sailing ships in the tempestuous and gothic nighttime, suggesting that these ships haunt the modernizing world of the Maritimes because of modernization’s very existence. Rhetorical situation firmly in place, the second stanza incorporates the “Ghosts of the men / who drove the ships” into that imagined Acadian past (9–10). Those ghostly men

Still walk the decks

When the night tide rips—

Uneasy eyes

On Acadie. (13–16)

While positioning the ships and the men who drove them in an ahistorical night, Leslie subtly suggests that the disappearance of sailing ships is determined by a confluence of forces, figured in the rip of the night tide. The ships and the men who can no longer actively sail them are afloat and on deck (as opposed to being aloft in the rigging), without agency to navigate around or through the rough forces of the gothic night tide as it creates a large disturbance whereby the outflow of water meets prevailing ocean winds, waves, and currents (a tidal rip). The men look with uneasy eyes on a receding shore as though they continually confront the Promethean predicament of being whisked away each night from “Acadie,” an imagined homeland always on the verge of being lost (not a new trope for Acadia, methinks). Leslie’s Acadie is one more akin to Arcadian rural ideals than to an Acadian region suffering under the weight of uneven capitalist development.

While Leslie successfully employs an antimodernist idiom to lament the loss of cultural and social tradition in “Ghosts,” the nostalgic versification of a receding way of life is simply not present in “Marginal Note, March 26/29”:

Atlas, Arno, Aconda

Bathurst, Bedford, Bidgood

Capital Rouyn, Cambro

Nipissing, Nickle, Noranda,

Pawnee Kirkland, Ribago,

Tough-Oaks, Treadwell, Towagamac,

Flin-Flon, Flintoba, Malartic,

Falconbridge, Mandy, Osiko,

Eureka, Bonanza, Swastika,

Hollinger, Hilltop, Howe Sound,

Yesterday: Moneta!

Today: Holes in the Ground. (1–12)

The first ten lines of the poem, rife with alliteration and assonance, enumerate mining developments through a decidedly unsentimental composition. Leslie's poetic inventory makes plain the scope of the project of capitalist resource extraction. It is with the final couplet that Leslie discloses the contradiction: in the poem's constructed past these mining developments symbolize the cheerful accumulation of capital. Moneta, aside from being an Ontario-based mining development company established in 1910, means "currency" in Italian and originated from the name of the Roman goddess Moneta. While Moneta is the protector of funds, she also plays a role in warning of financial instability ("Juno" n. pag.). Included in the use of the signifier Moneta is a suggestion that the mining developers themselves should have heeded the inbuilt warnings of hasty industrialization. The final line, in the poem's present moment, strips the mining of any sense of development: no longer are the mines the utopian conveyors of capital; they are now unproductive gaping holes. While the development of resource extraction on an industrial scale ushered in a form of capitalist modernity to diverse regions of North America, Nova Scotia included, an eventual decline in the pace of resource extraction left industrial workers, who had shifted from agrarian to industrial existence, without recourse to sustainable livelihoods.

The fate of these workers would inspire Andrew Merkel, in the eighth issue, to write that the “distress in many of the communities” subject to industrial models of mining in Cape Breton “has become a hardy perennial” (8). That distress over the living and working conditions of the working class in Nova Scotia was the primary concern of the socialist poet Joe Wallace in the 1920s, though no direct poetic manifestation of that distress appeared in the *Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets*. Probably the most unrepresentative member of the Song Fishermen coterie, Wallace joined the *Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets* mailing list with the fifth issue (21 November 1928) and remained involved until the periodical’s dissolution.¹³ Though the wider range of Wallace’s overtly anti-capitalist poetic production of the 1920s deserves closer attention for its negotiation of shifting poetic subjectivity in modernity, his poems appearing outside of the *Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets*—mostly in the *Worker*—are beyond the scope of this study. He contributed six poems to the *Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets*, three of which critically engage with antimodernist tropes: “A Little Boat Puts Out,” “How the Clams Came to Fundy” (written with his second wife, Grace), and—discussed further along in this case study—“The Giant out of a Job.”¹⁴

Utilizing the common antimodernist figuration of ocean-going vessels, “A Little Boat Puts Out” tells of a small boat, the “Drowsy Head,” which sets sail “beyond the harbouring arms / Of homey things” (2–3), loaded with

A store of wondrous merchandise,
Of fairycraft, and sun-spun gold,
With visions shaped in curious guise,
Dreams and ideals crowd her hold. (9–12)

In his employment of the coterie's customary antimodernist vessel, Wallace sets up the boat, like antimodernist poetry, as a container of the fantastic and of dreams and ideals more generally, but recognizes (though laments) that loading boats, like poetry, with "visions shaped in curious guise" prepares for a voyage away from a home space where the real encounter with a new age must take place:

When sunset strikes her wistful sails,
Verging and merging in the sky,
The dimmed eye of affection fails--
Little, and loved, and lost . . . [.] goodbye. (17–20)

The "fairycraft" that acts as the cargo is, though loved, something to be given up, much like the sustained subjects that the Song Fishermen coterie have overburdened and that must be cast away.

"How the Clams Came to Fundy" also dismisses from active poetic service an oft-treated subject of the Song Fishermen when Wallace suggests, in the opening lines of the poem, that "You've heard enough of Murphy's dulse / In solemn word and jest" (1–2). Wallace does not replace dulse with clams in a one-to-one ratio. Rather, clams are the subordinate subjects of the framed narrative poem. The poem's rhetorical situation consists of an elderly man—Ezra—who is telling the fantastic story of stranded whales morphing into clams in the Bay of Fundy. The narrating voice takes on the subjectivity of a collector of Folk stories who supplies Ezra with rum in order to gain access to his story. The final stanza steps back from the constructed scene to narrate a double bind:

The tale is done; the rum is gone;
In ashes die its fires:

And you know why Fundy, on both sides,

Is famous for big liars. (70–74)

Aside from the actual geography of the Bay of Fundy, Wallace's poem subtly suggests that both Ezra and the story's recipient—"both sides"—are liars and that something has been lost because of their transaction. Wallace recognizes the uneven power relations between the subject who is gaining access to the story as a Folk commodity and the subjectivity of the teller of the tale.

Unlike his poems in the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* that criticize the coterie's antimodernism by deploying the expected antimodernist tropes and scenes only to construct a reversal, "The Workingclass to Saccho and Vanzetti" is unique among the poems of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*. Wallace's poem, published in the tenth number, was so alien to the urban middle-class antimodernism of the Song Fishermen that Davies positions his work as symptom of the demise of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*:

it was probably inevitable that the *Song Fishermen's Sheets* would someday change in tone as the 'old things' of Merkel's romanticized Nova Scotia altered, and shades of this had already appeared in the *Sheets* with the publication of Wallace's 'The Working Class to Saccho and Vanzetti' [sic] (13 April 1929) and 'The Giant out of a Job' (23 June 1929). (145)

Indeed, Wallace's poem has nothing to do with the antimodernist construction of Nova Scotia as a Folk space. Somewhat surprisingly, the Song Fishermen allowed and supported the publication of a poem that responds to a transnational debate around the arrest and execution of two Italian-American anarchists, Ferdinando Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo

Vanzetti.¹⁵ Rather than writing a personal lament, Wallace makes the whole of the working class his singular speaking subject:

I brought them forth
With my deepest pains,
I nourished them
From my dearest veins.
I cradled them
With my sweetest breath,
And I walked with them
As the[y] went to death...
As I went to death. (1–9)

Wallace constructs the working class as a parent figure who has physically sustained the two men and then accompanied them to their death. Unlike the dead men, the declarative working class will “never rest / Till I break the shackles / Of the world’s oppressed,” and then the working class identifies itself as “the world’s oppressed” (24–27). The poem is not overly complex or innovative in its use of language. What is significant is that it participates in a transnational outpouring of leftist literary support for the plight of the two men and brings that support to the pages of the antimodernist *Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets*. Remembering that antimodernist cultural production is a classed set of strategies that project a supposedly simplified version of the past into an uncomplicated, innocent present, we can see Wallace’s poem breaking new ground for poetry’s contemporary engagements within the space of the *Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets* as the transnational working class infiltrates the middle-class space of Folk innocence. Wallace could not have published the poem without

some degree of support from the middle-class editor. More than just support from the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* editor, in the eleventh issue Kenneth Leslie (who would himself turn increasingly to modernist experimentation as well as to the left) writes that Wallace's poem "is an arrow in the throat of despair. He has spoken the burden of those who suffer when justice bows to power – he has spoken directly, bravely, beautifully" (1). In a coterie dominated by a cultural climate of jolly antimodernism, Wallace was able to shift the poetic subject away from constructions of nostalgic innocence. Indeed, Wallace's work—using conventional rhyming verse to develop alternative subjects in modernity—helps to open up the possibilities for modernism: his fellow poets, such as Kenneth Leslie, may have been less prone to resisting experimentations with form and diction when they were less determined to write about an imagined past.

While the poems of Martha Ann Leslie reveal that the *Song Fishermen* allowed for poetic experimentation and alternative, gendered constructions of the modern poetic subject, the juxtaposition of Robert Leslie's poems shows that the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* acted as a literary space where contributors could present both antimodernist cultural tropes as well as non-traditional poetic experimentations that enact critiques of capitalist modernity. Wallace's participation in the *Song Fishermen* coterie gives a unique counter-example to bourgeois antimodernism even though his poetic practice does not necessarily engage in modernist formal experimentation. Though these examples look to individual author's overall engagement with the ocean-going discourse constructed around the *Song Fishermen* as a literary collective, another way to critically engage with the ways in which the antimodernist coterie was complicit in fostering its own counter tradition of modernist experimentation is by looking at the many responses to an inclusive poetry contest they held

towards the end of the publication's run, for which each member was asked to respond to a single subject. While the literary competition that emerged at Lake Geneva in 1816 and produced such influential works as Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) is slightly more legendary than is the Song Fishermen's literary competition that was announced in the eleventh issue of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, they provide, in a literary historical context, telling examples of how the divergent products can arise from a single evocation. In the case of the Song Fishermen, the members of the coterie were asked to write a poem about the already mythologized "Cape Breton Giant," Angus MacAskill.

THE BOAT EXPLOIT

The editors of the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets* took their cue for the contest from the closing lines of the eighteenth chapter of *The Cape Breton Giant* (1926) by James D. Gillis.¹⁶ The last paragraph of the chapter is reproduced in the eleventh issue, directly below Robert Leslie's "Ghosts" and "Marginal Note, March 26/29," under the heading "ALL HANDS ON DECK: Announcement Extraordinary": "The boat exploit would be a very choice subject for a poem. Possibly the day will arrive when one of our poets will weave a wreath of poesy about that boat, a large, lettered wreath so worded as to spell the immortal name, Angus MacAskill" (8). With the reproduction of Gillis's entreaty in the eleventh issue, poems were solicited—recalling tropes of masculine physical prowess—from each of the "able-bodied fishermen" but the contest was also open to poets outside the group (8). Each contestant

was required to use a *nom de plume* and to submit his or her entry to the Abanaki Press in Halifax. According to the editorial particulars, the contest was a way for the Song Fishermen to “make a worthy contribution to the festivities in course of preparation for the annual meeting of the Canadian Author’s Association at Halifax, June 25–28” (8).

After enumerating the rules of the contest, Merkel reprints the whole of the “The Fishing Boat Exploit” from *The Cape Breton Giant*, wherein Gillis explains that there are “either two versions of the same exploit, or there are two sister exploits,” but that “it differs nothing, as one thing is certain, viz., ‘something was attempted, something was done’ and that something was prodigious in the extreme” (59). Both stories involve MacAskill helping to haul a boat ashore and other men playing a trick on him by either pulling the boat in the opposite direction or attempting to pull the boat farther out of the water than MacAskill preferred, at which time MacAskill pulled the boat in two, separating prow from stern. In his mythologizing of MacAskill as a Folk-hero, Gillis also figures super-human violence as a potential characteristic of “our hero” as, in one version, he has MacAskill throwing a man “disdainfully up in the air, where he described an arch or semi-circle, landing twenty feet away, more dead than alive with fear and pain” (59). Further, Gillis asks: “What would an ordinary citizen be in his vice-like grasp?” (60). While attempting to make MacAskill a larger-than-life synecdochic symbol of the Cape Breton Folk, Gillis makes a somewhat contradictory assertion of the super-human feats and intimidations needed to construct him as a demigod-like Folk-hero, a construction that relies on the protagonist being both physically and mythologically set apart from the everyday Folk.¹⁷

The results of the contest were published in the fourteenth number of the *Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets*, skipping over the thirteenth number, which is a memorial to Bliss

Carman in pamphlet form. The fourteenth issue, the “Convention Edition,” is dated 23 June 1929, in time for the CAA’s annual meeting. While Davies is correct to suggest that the Song Fishermen arranged for Gillis himself to “judge the anonymous entries,” he did not necessarily have the task of picking the winner (146). His judgement took the form of critical comment following each printed poem (with the exception of Molly Beresford’s poem which was received too late to be sent on to Cape Breton). It is clear that there were at least two judges whose opinions were as disparate as the poems entered into the contest. The editorial announcement suggests that the “brilliance of the contributors has been the confusion of the judges. They differed so widely in their choice, that to bring their views into any sort of agreement was conceived an utter (or stark) impossibility by those editorially involved in this hazardous (not to say foolish) undertaking” (1). The frustration expressed in the opening editorial is reflective of the incongruent poetic responses to Gillis. The editorial goes on to summarize the entries:

The local grasp and tang of Stuart McCawley, the magnificent balladry of Effie Barns, the profundity of Andrew Merkel, the superb Celticism of Michael Curry, the Miltonic vision of Ethel Butler, the apocalyptic scope of Joe Wallace, even the destructive poison-gas of Bob Leslie,—all these witness the peculiar inspiration inherent in James Gillis’[s] succinct description of this simple yet strong (or heroic) incident. (1)

There were, in fact, nine contest entries printed in the fourteenth issue.¹⁸ Stuart McCawley (of Glace Bay) was announced as the winner and awarded a crown of dulse. Ethel H. Butler’s “The Fishing Boat Exploit: A Ghost Song of The Cape Breton Giant,” Michael Curry’s “Euchd A Bhat Lascaich,” Effie MacDonald Barnes’s “Big John MacAskill,” and the winner

of the contest, Stuart McCawley's "You Can't Take Your Fun Off Of Angus" all actively maintain and support antimodernist cultural tropes through traditional modes of versification. Four of the nine contestants took Gillis very seriously when he called for a "lettered wreath so worded as to spell the immortal name, Angus MacAskill," by submitting acrostic poems (60). Katherine F. MacDonald's "Laureation: That Fishing Boat Exploit," Molly Beresford's "Song of the Boat," and Andrew Merkel's "The Fishing Boat Exploit" all utilize the convenience of the fourteen letters of the "Giant's" name to write sonnets. While MacDonald's sonnet exhibits uncomplicated construction aside from a healthy amount of hyperbole to plead that our "praises" continue to "ring to biceps so pliant" (14), Merkel's sonnet makes MacAskill himself the addressee:

Angus, such feats are gone, and done, methinks.

Sadly the world admits a slow decay.

Keelsons are kindling-wood and kings are kinks.

Idly the weak remain to greet the day.

Lifting is left to cranes.--And no one drinks.--

Let everything, O Giant, be cast away. (9-14)

Unlike many of the constructions of the Folk whereby a mythologized past is constructed in the poem's present, Merkel writes a lament that positions modernity as a slow decay, though the presence of cranes would suggest technological and logistical progress. Merkel's reference to abstaining from alcohol is a direct response to the ninth chapter of *The Cape Breton Giant*, "MacAskill Would Take a Glass," wherein Gillis provides an sober apology for the fact that MacAskill "took a glass of rum, brandy, or whiskey occasionally" but had "our hero been of the present day," Gillis writes, "we may be sure that he'd be an advocate of total abstinence"

(36). Unlike Gillis's far-fetched hagiography of MacAskill and deep moralizing about the folly of alcohol consumption, Molly Beresford, in "Song of the Boat," demonizes MacAskill by turning the boat that he ripped asunder into the speaking subject of the poem:

Know you he marred me, tossed me broken on the shore,

I can go seaward never, never more,

Left useless, helpless, where the salt tide never strays.

Lord, do Thou judge him who...his friend...betrays! (11–14)

While maintaining the antimodernist, ocean-going conceit of the group, Beresford's poem is unique for its discharge of Angus MacAskill from active service in the construction of an idealized innocent Folk figure, hero or not.

The two poems that present the biggest challenge to the antimodernist construction of the Folk and that help to create a modernist counter-tradition are Robert Leslie's "The Boat Exploit (A Very Choice Subject for a Poem)" and Joe Wallace's "The Giant Out of a Job." While Robert Leslie used a poetic inventory to document and critique capitalist development in "Marginal Note, March 26/29" by listing mining developments around North America and then de-developing mines in a poetic turn from past to present, Leslie's "The Boat Exploit (A Very Choice Subject for a Poem)" consists of an alternative inventory, or collage, composed of words and phrases found throughout James D. Gillis's *The Cape Breton Giant*. There is no doubt that the language of Gillis's book is bombastic, grandiloquent, and at moments, ridiculous. In other words, he is an easy target for mockery. For example, in his Introduction to *The Cape Breton Giant*, Gillis writes:

The fact that, as a rule, only one exploit is portrayed in each chapter makes the reading of this book far from tiresome. The memory is not overtaxed, and at the

close thereof “all draw long breaths and hope that another rapid is near.” The above quotation is from the illustrious writer, Principal Grant. It is used in a metonymical sense, of course. (x)

Leslie incorporates this and many other choice words and phrases into his poem. To extend the above example, the sixth stanza of Leslie’s poem explains that “One exploit is picked for portrayal, / Thus not overtaxing the memory. / You’ll “all draw long breaths” at the finish— / (The quotation’s of course metonymical)” (18–21). Ian McKay suggests that Gillis became a sort of object for display for the urban middle class who were “content to pat the head of a decontextualized Cape Breton barbarian” (*Quest* 236). Indeed, I concur with McKay’s assessment of the Halifax cultural producers’ adoption of Gillis as “a sort of mascot” but I do not believe that is what is happening in Leslie’s poem. Whatever the “cultural context” or “logic behind Gillis’s use of language” or literary production, his diction and form become culturally dislocated at a site of urban reception—the book was published by T.C. Allan and Co. in Halifax (236). Leslie takes Gillis to task for his mythologizing of MacAskill, and by extension the other Song Fishermen who follow suit. Leslie, I think, is unique for his exposure of the insincerity of his colleagues. The poem’s reproachful satire conveys the emptiness and inappropriateness of the antimodern subject and idiom in modernity. His poem ends without actually relating any of MacAskill’s story:

The details need not be imparted
For details are often forgotten.
Another method is chosen
(But not at all as a substitute)
And how the boat exploit transpired

May be left to the reader's conjecture. (53–58)

Leslie, in the end, does not participate in mythologizing the action of the “Boat Exploit” because, as it turns out, it is *not* a “very choice subject for a poem” (Gillis 60). Further, Leslie has caught on to the fact that *The Cape Breton Giant* has failed to construct Angus MacAskill as the protagonist of his own life. Rather, Gillis has situated himself—with or without intention—at the centre of his own narrative as the grandiloquent narrator and, as a result, the stereotypical Folk figure.

Unlike Leslie's poem, Wallace's mythologizes, to be sure, but the poem constructs the poetic subject differently than does the majority of poems in the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*. “The Giant Out of a Job” has three constructed moments: a mythologized past, an industrial present, and a socialist future.¹⁹ The first three of the eight stanzas construct an all-encompassing past:

Time was the tribe, the gens, the clan
Gave birth to the brotherhood of man --
Those were the days when king meant can.

Time was the stream with a rocky rush
Shattered the mountain wre[s]tler's crush --
To spend its strength through plains of plush.

Time was the bard, like mountain spray,
Mirrored the deeds of a mighty day --
Singer and subject pass away. (1–9)

Wallace fabricates a mythic time-space in which kinship and nature shape the active world. The juxtaposition of a “brotherhood of man” with geological time distils and slows human action to the universal. He follows this comparison with a simile that conflates the Celtic-inflected bard with “mountain spray” (7), the product of the stream’s “rocky rush” (4). His bard is a mirror of the merged human and natural world, but the subject—the antimodern poetic subject—and its mirror have become outmoded. The fourth stanza introduces the present moment: “Time is. To other gods we kneel: / Man gives his speed to the flying wheel, / His outworn strength to the tireless steel” (10–12). This present moment is an industrial moment that stores human capacity for speed in a flywheel and capacity for strength in steel. It is in this industrial, “alien age” that the giant “comes to belated birth” (13–14). In Wallace’s poem the actual boat exploit is not a heroic deed, rather, “in a burst of fitful rage, / He rips a boat from its anchorage, / Then sinks resigned to the altered age” (19–21). In other words, Angus MacAskill was not projected back into an antimodernist past, but exists in the industrial, capitalist present as an unemployed worker. The potential heroic deed is projected into a possible future, one contingent on the waking of the sleeping giant: “But what if he wake from sleep to find / A task for his brain and brawn combined -- / Freedom to win and a world to unbind?” (22–24). This socialist second coming is consistent with leftist tropes of the early twentieth century that combat oppression with critical praxis—“brain and brawn combined” (23).²⁰ Because Wallace does not reintroduce the reflective bard who mirrors the “deeds of a mighty day” into the poem’s other constructed moments, he intimates a different role for the poet in both the present and a possible future. Just as the giant who could arise to unbind the world through critical praxis, Wallace’s subject position as poet in an “altered age” (21) must not be imitative or reflective as is a mirror, but must be

projective and expectant in the reformation of the poetic, antimodern subject who has “pass[ed] away” (9). There is a role for heroics in Wallace’s poetry, but it is not the distillation of an imagined innocent past. Wallace’s hero inspires future deeds.

The members of the Song Fishermen coterie were given a single subject and the majority of the responses maintained the conventions of cultural antimodernism and residual literary form but the poems of Wallace and Robert Leslie (and Andrew Merkel to some extent) are examples of poems which used the opportunity of the contest to challenge the hegemonic antimodernism of the Song Fishermen’s literary project as a whole. Their poems—alongside other poems from across the periodical’s run that have been discussed in this case study—confront gendered and classed antimodernist articulations and cultural authority of their moment. A close look at the *Song Fishermen’s Song Sheets* also expose some operative assumptions within our own critical moment. Accounting for the emergence of modernism in Canada must confront dominant critical narratives by searching out ways in which modernism is intensely conscious of, and reactive to, antimodernist cultural authority and residual literary formations. This type of critical recovery also exposes organizational structures—in this case a collective of literary producers who had “been writing for fun” (1)—and reveals how configurations of power and authority within those organizations both enable and hinder the production of a modernist poetic sphere.

THE ART OF THE STRIKE: ARTISTIC PRACTICE AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

This book of mine is to be more than just another
book, it's to be a...a kind of a social document.

—Kenny Hughes (Baird 171)

While the previous case study examined ways in which a modernist poetic practice emerged out of a largely antimodernist literary coterie, this case study examines ways in which artistic practice is represented alongside representations of collective political action. Rather than looking toward the material ways in which the literary clout of symbolic pre-modernist figureheads was able to facilitate modernist poetic experimentation, this case study investigates divergent ways in which modernism emerged from within strike novels of the interwar period. By looking at how the role of artistic practice is positioned alongside social activism and collective struggle in fiction, this case study seeks to adapt some of the prevailing literary critical trajectories that have framed one type of leftist Canadian novel. After briefly outlining some of the generic negotiations involved in such an investigation, I turn to Douglas Durkin's *The Magpie* (1923) to explore the complex construction of artistic practice that aids the protagonist in resisting incorporation into bourgeois subjectivity. Next, A.M. Stephen's *The Gleaming Archway* (1929) is presented as a succinct counter-example—one in which artistic practice is figured as separate from the work of social and political activism—that impedes the possibilities of modernism. Finally, Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage*

(1939) explores the generic complexities involved in writing about collective social action through the character of Kenneth Hughes, who obsessively attempts to write a realist novel about the strikes in which he participates.

The three novels explored here are unique in Canadian literature from the interwar period for their double concern with the political action of labour and the unemployed and with representations of artistic practice. As strike novels, they are part of a literary-critical tradition that gained most notoriety in the United States in the early 1930s with novels written about the Gastonia strike.²¹ Furthermore, Michael Denning suggests that in the American context

[t]hese novelizations of current events are usually written by professional writers, particularly journalists, and they rarely last beyond the immediate topicality. This is also true of the series of novels written about the Harlan County coal strikes; the lumber strikes in Aberdeen, Washington; the Scottsboro case; and the sit-down strikes of 1937. In most cases, the books were written from the outside, as documentaries, competing with non-fictional accounts of the events. (235–36)

For Denning, Upton Sinclair was the “grand master” of this tradition of strike novels (236). Julian Markels, in *The Marxian Imagination: Representing Class in Literature*, suggests that the strike in literature “calls irresistible attention to class” through “the temporary and partial breakdown of capitalism signalled by a strike” (53). A strike also presents “the chance to represent, in addition to the class process they already know about, the strikers’ new experience of solidarity that is a foretaste of the experience of classlessness” (53). What is remarkable about the three novels under consideration here is the breadth of leftist political philosophy that each novelist instils in the development of their respective plots—from

liberal humanism to revolutionary communism and all stops in between. In other words, while representing class antagonisms, Durkin, Stephen, and Baird do not oversimplify the political philosophies that inform the debates around political organization and action. The novels of Durkin, Stephen, and Baird are unlike other Canadian strike novels of the period—such as Ralph Connor’s *To Him That Hath* (1921) and Frederick Philip Grove’s *The Master of the Mill* (1944)—due to their treatment of artistic practice.

Apart from the strike novel, one generic connection that might be made when examining novels that represent artistic practice is the *Künstlerroman* or artist-novel; however the novels examined here are not artist-novels because the protagonists—perhaps with the exception of Craig Maitland in *The Gleaming Archway*—are not the characters involved in artistic production.²² These strike novels move away from the artist-protagonist to a presentation of art and the artist through secondary and tertiary figures. Though all three novels taken up in this case study explore strike action and contain representations of artistic practice, they also have histories within different literary-critical traditions. *The Magpie* is a novel most often associated with urban prairie realism, while it is also a post-war novel that could be productively compared with the work of Charles Yale Harrison.²³ *The Gleaming Archway* is of a more romantic-realist tradition that oscillates between a concern with backwoods isolation and urban labour issues of Vancouver’s waterfront. *Waste Heritage*, which has received heightened critical attention in recent years, has been associated with many generic conventions, but most forcibly with urban realism.

While not spurning the above literary-critical categorizations, I will argue for an alternative reading of the use of a realist mode in these three novels following Glenn Willmott’s thesis in *Unreal Country: Modernity in the Canadian Novel in English* that modernism

often emerges through the backdoor in the context of Canadian fiction—from within the established popular modes of realism and romance. He suggests that “the old antinomy that had loomed above the work of fiction for modern Canadian writers—the titanic contest of realism and romance—is not an antinomy at all, but a superficial image, a screen through which we may see their necessary (if antagonistic) interaction and transfiguration relative to an obscured, third term” which, disguised “behind these inverted shells of romance and realism alike, belongs to modernism” (5). Furthermore, he notes that during the interwar period fiction in Canada continued to circulate within a dispersed, yet established market hostile to the experimentations of high art and that

the *break* that marks modernism as a transnational artistic practice is not immediately visible in Canada as a break toward a new genre (hence new market), but rather a break within [...] existing Canadian nineteenth-century genres (and markets), toward another kind of practice that is self-fractured, radically incomplete, and experimental in the best modernist tradition. (6)

Rather than giving modernism the cultural authority to attack the production and reception of fiction in the Canadian context in order that it might swallow the audience of realism and romance whole, Willmott sees the emergence of modernism as something nearer to an “excessive elasticization of form, deliberately to the point of some instructive incoherence, at which point its reader is forced to concede new textual principles for its comprehension. It is the attempt to develop, to create, rather than address, the reader of a modernist text” (8). I argue that this emergence of modernism also values modernism as a leftist practise. In order to uncover the embedded cross-linkage between leftist ideals and modernism within the realism of *Waste Heritage* and *The Magpie* that might help to construct in Canada “the reader of a

modernist text,” this case study does not prioritize a reading of the main plots or protagonists of the novels in question (8). Rather, it looks specifically to the novels’ sub-plots and secondary characters in relation to artistic practise. That said, a focus on sub-plots and secondary characters in texts that are already seldom read requires a significant amount of synopsis and contextualization in order to present a coherent literary-critical argument.

Willmott’s theorization of the emergence of modernism in the midst of more established modes allows for an analysis concomitant with that of the previous chapter, which saw modernist experimentation emerge out of a more established organizational structure of literary production that was built on the collective cultural authority of Andrew Merkel, Charles G.D. Roberts, Bliss Carman, Robert Norwood, Kenneth Leslie, and Charles Bruce. These strike novels do not guide Willmott’s modernist audience through appeal to the collective cultural authority of a group of individuals but through the cultural authority of the realist narratives that deliberately negotiate modernist practice through depictions of leftist collective action so that modernism is transvalued as a leftist practice.

DOUGLAS DURKIN’S *THE MAGPIE* AND MODERNIST SCULPTURE

Durkin’s novel opens in July of 1919 with the protagonist, Craig Forrester, writing a journal entry on the eve of his thirtieth birthday.²⁴ In this short excerpt the protagonist—ironically nicknamed “The Magpie” due to his reluctance to voice his opinions—sets the scene of the cultural, social, and political problematic that persists throughout the book: the post-war

world is “shaking” and caught between hope that the war was fought in order to usher in a better world and the conflicting efforts of the capitalist class to reconstruct pre-war social, political, and economic stratification (1). As a result, class antagonisms become increasingly pronounced. Having come to the city from a rural farm childhood to take a job at the Winnipeg Grain Exchange shortly before his deployment to Europe, Craig is seemingly able to travel across class lines, though not without some discomfort. The first thing the reader learns about Craig, other than his impending birthday, is his discomfort when, on the previous day he offered a drive to the artist figure Dick Nason, his bourgeois, soon-to-be brother-in-law:

Yesterday I picked up young Dick Nason and drove him home. Dick is just twenty. I confess I felt a little uncomfortable with Dick. I always do. Dick doesn't know there has been a war. He insists that life is pretty rotten and that nothing really counts. Dickie says that we need a few Oscar Wildes and a few Shelleys to bring the world back to form. He thinks the world ought to be psychoanalysed. [...] Dickie talks a great deal about—mostly about talk.... (1)

Ironically, Dick fails to grapple with the social and political implications contained in the work of the writers who he exalts. The awkwardness of Craig's interactions with Dick who, as James Doyle notes, “takes refuge from reality in a dilettantish aestheticism” stems from the latter's disengagement from social and political matters through an approach to life as artistic performance—that is, an art for art's sake performance (46). While Craig's level of comfort with Dick does not grow throughout the course of the novel, he consistently attempts to engage with the young man while other members of the bourgeois Nason family and their group of industrialist-class acquaintances pay him no heed.

As Durkin presents more information about the novel's protagonist, he uses a sustained metaphor of artistic production to highlight and undermine strict divisions between urban and rural identity in representational codes of Canadian subjectivity: "If traditions were followed to the letter, Craig Forrester should be painted as a man in shirt sleeves, guiding a plow across a field at the other end of which a blood-red sun sinks in a sky of pale amber" (5). Instead of representing Craig as the archetypal masculine Canadian who might also "take the form of a sturdy figure hewing his way through giant forests" or be pictured "guiding a frail canoe on its perilous course down a treacherous river with walls of granite on either side," Durkin presents Forrester as an modern amalgam of the urban and the rural (5-6). Durkin suggests that Craig "might have sat for any of the above posters-portraits and done credit to the subject. It was old man Forrester, Craig's father, who had ordained that his son should don a suit of business grey instead of the toggery of romance" (6). The decision made by Craig's father was not made out of a desire for his son's upward mobility, but as an idealistic extension of his own work on the farm: he told his son to go to the city "and learn the business of bringing the wheat to the people of other lands that can't grow it the way we can" (6).²⁵ In positioning Craig as a practitioner of both rural and urban life, Durkin undermines the nostalgic tendencies of early-twentieth-century representational codes of Canadian masculine subjectivity that are firmly planted in the country soil. Instead, Craig is painted into a complex characterization of modern Canada, accompanied by the contradictions and anxieties that such a position implies.

Within the first few pages of the novel, then, Durkin begins his catalogue of artistic subjectivities that he rejects in the characterization of his protagonist, and by extension, his own prose: Durkin constructs neither a totalizing anti-modern, nostalgic portrait of rural

Canada nor a comfortable identification with the artistic solipsism embodied by the performative urbanity of Dick, the bourgeois young man who attempts to shock and spurn his family by adopting the role of an aesthete. These opening pages foreshadow a continued search for an artistic mode of production to match Craig's growing social and political convictions in response to not only global political instability but also localized social and political crises. "Besides using the Great War as the epitome of modern historical crisis as so many early-twentieth-century novelists do," Doyle suggests that "Durkin gives his novel a regional context that further emphasizes the sinister aims and methods of entrenched capitalist power in the world of historical actuality" (45). In other words, while Durkin sets his novel amid global post-war anxieties, he also sets the scene of labour's collective action in Winnipeg just weeks after the General Strike had been brutally suppressed by the police with the happy encouragement of representatives of the capitalist class through their Citizen's Committee of 1000.²⁶ The coherent merger of the contexts of post-war anxieties and labour resistance is articulated in an altered recreation of the scene in which Craig gives Dick a drive home. Instead of presenting an incident recorded in his journal, in this re-enacted, yet modified scene Craig offers not Dick, but fellow veteran Jimmy Dyer a drive to his modest home on the outskirts of the city, where they engage in a lengthy dialogue about the world they witnessed in Europe and the one to which they have returned. Jimmy reflects on the struggles of returned working-class veterans:

We've spent four years of the best part of our lives fighting for the big fellows, and we'll spend the rest of our days working for them just the same as we did before the war. The only real difference is that we had a band or two and a banner or two and a chaplain or two to remind us that we were fighting for the glory of God and the

brotherhood of mankind, and now we have the squalls of hungry kids and the insults of a few God damned slackers to cheer us on our way. That sums it up for me, just about. (12–13)

Jimmy has witnessed the capitalist class's willing disregard for those whom they had until recently deemed heroes. While Craig attempts to advocate for a "new sense of justice, a new intelligence, a different ordering of things," Jimmy makes classed connections between post-war capitalist reconstruction and the state's treatment of those who participated in the General Strike (14). "The guys on the other side of the business," Jimmy argues, "the big fellows who called out the Mounties and had the streets cleared with bullets, don't worry any about how we think. It's how we feel that's got them worrying" (13). The same people who called the working class to pick up guns to fight for King and country in Europe were now turning the guns on the working class. While Craig looks towards a cerebral utopian humanism under which class distinctions can be willingly forgotten, his working-class companion—who is less able to traverse class lines—suggests that it is "nice to think of a perfect world, but we have to look things in the face and fight through," and hence grounds his support for collective action against the material aims of capitalist reconstruction.

In counter-distinction to the ubiquitous post-war anxieties and the persistence of simmering labour action, Craig becomes distracted from social and political questions by his new-found love for Marion Nason, with whom he falls in love as she entertains at a dinner party by singing the enormously popular "The World is Waiting for the Sunrise."²⁷ When Craig is invited to the Nasons' cottage for a summer weekend, he again encounters Marion's brother Dick and engages him in a conversation centred on modern literature:

“Well, Dick,” Craig began at once, “what’s the latest thing among the moderns? Or do you do any reading down here?”

“What else is there to do?” Dickie responded. “I don’t swim, and fishing is my idea of nothing to do. I might get a thrill if I went sailing with Dad, but I consider that taking too great chances. And while I don’t think much of life the way it’s lived here, I’d rather not drown. It suggests cats and superfluous puppies.”

“You refuse to be classed with—“

“I refuse to be classed at all,” Dickie interrupted. “When a man allows himself to be put into a class he becomes vulgar.” (63–64)

Though Craig makes an effort to engage in conversation with his love’s brother about modern art, communication is constantly shut down by Dick’s epigrammatic posturing that acutely marks his own class and exposes a lopsided dismissal of rural life even in its bourgeois recreational forms. Dick’s overdetermined positioning of the importance of art is revealed when Craig tries to comprehend one of Dick’s vague adages through his own experience:

“All the old men are doing to-day is trying to kill off the younger generation.”

“You mean the old men brought on the war because there were too many youngsters in the world?” Craig never knew just what Dickie Nason was driving at.

“The war? Pooh! They did some of it there, but its nothing to what they’re doing now. If they had their way they’d kill off every modern poet and novelist that didn’t use the same forms as Tennyson and Scott. There’s James Branch Cabell’s ‘Jurgen’ for example—” (64)²⁸

By positioning the death of millions of men in the First World War against one generation's dislike for experimental artistic forms, Durkin exposes the flippant nature of a bourgeois appropriation of artistic practice. What is more, instead of distancing himself from the bourgeois social and economic concerns of his family through his aestheticist performance, out of self-centredness Dick reproduces the structures of the novel's class antagonisms through his disregard for the loss of life in the First World War.

Craig's continued search for an adequate means of representing his personal values takes on a more prominent role after Craig and Marion are married. They become increasingly at odds with each other as she exhibits ever more conservative values against his increasingly clear articulation of socialist values. For instance, she becomes enraged when Craig debates with the arch-capitalist Blount and advocates on behalf of veterans during a dinner party, she entrenches herself in upper-class social networks, and she has an affair with Craig's colleague. Having identified the sinister character of the compulsive capitalist drive towards progress and efficiency that he calls the "Machine," Craig searches for a way to articulate the "Something-or-other that was opposed to the Machine. He thought of calling it by various names. The Soul. Humanity. The Spirit. Perhaps it was the Ideal. Perhaps there was no word for it in the language. And yet the thing itself was more real to him than the Machine could ever be to Blount" (147–48). Craig begins to develop a better understanding of the "Something-or-other" as a greater focus on artistic practice enters into the narrative through the figure of Martha Lane, his childhood sweetheart who returns from Europe where she had been studying modernist sculpture in various European cities as well as doing medical work during the war.²⁹ After reconnecting with Martha a few times in the city, Craig and Marion take a short drive out to the farm where Martha does her sculpting. The narrator

suggests that Martha's "work was unusually delicate, at times almost mystic in its bizarre impressionism" and that she "had received gratifying attention in Paris while she was a student there" (178). Martha is modest: "I haven't developed nearly so much as you think. All I have to do is glance at a piece of work by Rodin and despair" (179). Martha's reference to Auguste Rodin places her own ideal artistic practice within a tradition of modernist sculpture. As Martha gives them a guided tour of her studio the narrative further develops a vocabulary of modernism. Craig engages with Martha's sculpture while Marion becomes dismissive:

"This one is *Chrysalis*—this one, *Incarnation*," Martha explained. "The difference is merely a matter of mood. The spirit is the same in both."

They were tenuous, unfolding forms, arresting in their simplicity, quite beyond the power of words to describe—two bold, clear strokes in symbolic impressionism. For an instant Craig felt that he stood in a presence...it was a sensation almost identical with that of the memorable night in France...the night when the hope had been born in him out of the darkness of the world and its sorrow. And then, incongruously enough, his mind turned to Blount...the Machine...the exact antithesis of *Chrysalis*... of *Incarnation*."

"But—but I don't see the sense in this futuristic art—or in any art that requires so much explaining. This must be explained, for I'm quite sure I don't understand it."

Marion spoke as if she not only found it impossible to explain the forms before which they were standing, but as if she questioned the right of an artist to

express an idea or an emotion in any form the meaning of which was not clear at first glance. (180)

Craig finds a mode of expression in Martha's modernist practice that matches his epiphanic episode in Flanders and characterizes the "Something-or-other" that he sought to articulate in opposition to the "Machine." This moment of insight in Martha's studio comes to inform Craig's increasing ability to express his socialist values while also serving to cement the disjuncture of his own principles and those of his wife. Unable to immediately incorporate Martha's work into a bourgeois economy of recognizable forms, Marion is dismissive of the sculpture's formal abstraction. The apprehension of art in this scene reproduces the couple's divergent ideas about the formal arrangement of society. While Craig is in constant search for new, more equitable ways of organizing social relations, Marion places greater value in recognizable, entrenched arrangements of both social hierarchies and representational codes. After this visit to the farm Craig agrees to help Martha mount an exhibition and they work together on preparations over the course of a few months.³⁰

While a good number of people attend the exhibition of Martha's modernist sculpture, some of the reactions Durkin presents suggest a patronizing attitude mixed with bourgeois moral panic and misapprehension. For example, the elderly Mrs. Ogletree approaches Martha and suggests that she finds her modernist work "very pretty—very sweet, indeed" (288). There is, of course, a qualification:

There's one thing about it, however, that I find difficult in explaining ... I mean in work of this kind taken generally, of course. I do think too much lewdness is perpetrated in the name of art, especially in sculpture. Why on earth must so much of

the figure be exposed....can you tell me that? It seems to me that very graceful effects could be achieved with drapes and....and wreathes, for example. (288)

Unlike Marion's dismissal of Martha's "futuristic" art on the grounds of representational abstraction, the humorously-named Mrs. Ogletree objects to the work's willing depiction of the naked human form on account of "instincts, especially in men, that are roused by a display of this kind" (288). Drapes and wreathes, according to Mrs. Ogletree, might serve to enable the incorporation of Martha's art—modernist or otherwise—into the bourgeois realm of good manners and propriety.

Once the exhibit is declared a success Marion is all too happy to act the part of the broker who can boast to all of her friends that she discovered a genius. With the help of her industrialist father who owns a metalwork factory, Marion quickly engages in the commodification of Martha's status as an artist as she parades her in front of "the 'best people' in town" (289). Eventually they secure a buyer for one of the exhibition's prominent pieces, and on the final evening of the exhibit the arch-capitalist Mr. Blount presents Martha with a cheque for five thousand dollars to purchase her piece titled *Bacchante*. He explains his objective in acquiring the work of art:

I have no intention of placing the figure, much as I prize it personally, in an obscure corner of my own home and leaving it there to be forgotten. I have determined, in short, to do my little part towards making her work known throughout the country. To that end, I have consulted with my good friend, Mr. Nason, and have learned that small replicas of the figure can be made from metal sufficiently inexpensive to justify my having a few thousand of them struck off and distributed among the customers

of my company for use as paper weights. The figure will remain the same except that it will be in miniature with stamped lettering along— (301)

Before Blount finishes his description of his intended reproduction of branded miniatures, Craig interrupts him, displaying the crumpled cheque in his hand. Confronted with the spectre of what Walter Benjamin famously calls the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, the refusal to allow appropriation and erasure of the sculpture *as an art object* through mass production and corporate inscription becomes a politically symbolic act. The work of art, which does not necessarily rely on political discourse for its expression, becomes politicized in the rejection of Blount's efforts to use the object to aestheticize a corporate logic that espouses inequitable labour relations. Martha's sculpture does not do the work of aestheticizing the political, as Benjamin accuses fascism of doing (241); rather, the sculpture becomes the ground on which the crisis of dominant capitalist logic is fought. While this refusal of the corporatization of art does not signal the defeat of capital, the episode pushes the plot to a crisis as it causes Craig to defend Martha and signals his withdrawal from assimilation into bourgeois subjectivity. Within hours, Craig discovers his wife's affair with the man who he also learns has just ruined him financially. Propelled into a disoriented state, Craig flees the scene of discovered adultery to a labour demonstration that has become violent. He is knocked unconscious and wakes in a hospital with Martha beside him. Though he recovers his health Craig is left penniless and the novel ends with him joining Martha on the farm. Craig's subjectivity, in the end, is analogous to the work of art: his transcendental and epiphanic conception of the "Something-or-other" that is antithetical to the "Machine" becomes politicized. This humanistic expression, like the art object, does not circulate (in the first instance) within a political discourse but becomes politicized in the denunciation of

incorporation into support for a capitalist logic that espouses inequitable social and economic relations.

Critics have consistently aligned Craig's rejection of a bourgeois life with his departure from the city. Doyle insists that the novel "contrasts the modern urban commercial ethic with a humanistic agrarian ideal" (77). Though we are not actually told what sort of life Craig leads once he arrives on the farm, Colin Hill, in his dissertation "The Modern-Realist Movement in English-Canadian Fiction, 1919–1950," suggests that "Forrester returns to his childhood home and takes up a traditional way of life, reinforcing the common prairie-realist critique of modern society that runs throughout *The Magpie*" (145). In his introduction to the 1974 facsimile edition of the novel, Peter E. Rider suggests that

In returning to the land Craig reaffirms his traditional values, which stress honesty and simplicity and reject the corruption, callousness, and selfishness of urban life. By having his hero make this choice, Durkin adopts one of the great themes of Canadian literature and intellectual thought, the agrarian myth. (xiii)

While I am not sure Craig's values are "traditional" in any general sense as he advocates against the reconstruction of pre-war social and economic conditions, he certainly does value honesty and rejects "corruption, callousness, and selfishness" (xiii). Less clear is the supposed rejection of the totality of urban life. It is not critically sound to project a rejection of the city onto either the narrative or the characters when the conditions and contradictions of urban modernity work to construct and inform the narrative as well as the protagonist's subjectivity and political resolve. While the final few pages of the novel narrate Craig's journey to the farm on which Martha lives, the majority of the novel takes place in the city

and does the work of complicating clear and easy distinctions between the country and the city in Canadian modernity, which is consistent with what Willmott calls the “intrusion of a global modernity into the imagination of life possibilities” in modern Canadian novels. (5)³¹ One of the more prominent ways in which this happens is through Durkin’s favourable staging of the ongoing cosmopolitan modernist practice of Martha Lane, which emerged out of direct contact with modernism’s European city-centres—an artistic practice able to continue its production and circulation in both the Canadian city and the Canadian country. Rider admits Martha’s prominent status as an artist almost apologetically while precluding her cosmopolitan possibilities: “Although she has studied in Europe and become an accomplished sculptress, she retains her links with her family and home” (xv). Participating in the discourse of modernism while in Europe and retaining rural and familial links is, in itself, not so very contradictory in the Canadian context. Furthermore, links to Europe’s modernist cultural practices are maintained upon Martha’s return to Canada through her own sculpting. She is successful in maintaining her cosmopolitan modernist practice and Craig arrives into *that* world at the end of the novel. With his father dead and another family living in his father’s house, Craig does not return home as such. Rather, he leaves his bourgeois life in Winnipeg to join Martha in the cosmopolitan space she created for herself.

Durkin does not necessarily eliminate the possibilities of urban life when he chooses to reject the representational tactics of a detached aestheticism associated with urban exclusivity as represented by Dick. It is critically important to recognize that he also rejects overly romanticized codes of rural representation of Canadian subjectivity—the “tuggery of romance” (6). He also rejects the prudish bourgeois admonishments of representations of the human form as well as the corporatization of art. Instead, Durkin allows a sub-plot about

modernist formal experimentation that is embedded within the realist narrative to consolidate the values of the novel's protagonist. The only form of artistic expression to which the protagonist can relate his socialist values is a cosmopolitan modernism exemplified in Martha's sculpture. For Craig, aestheticism is too detached from society; nostalgic romanticization thwarts modern realities by mythologizing the Canadian past, and corporate appropriation of art aestheticizes a capitalist logic that espouses inequitable social relations. In placing a figural modernist production in the background of his own realist narrative framework, Durkin articulates ways in which multiple modernist practices might arise in the Canadian context to help articulate socialist politics. In other words, through using a Martha to associate modernist art with socialist politics—a transvaluative manoeuvre—he teaches his reader not only to read modernism—thus creating Willmott's modernist reader—but also to associate that modernism with socialism.

A.M. STEPHEN'S *THE GLEAMING ARCHWAY* AND POETIC CATHARSIS

Unlike the prominence of a modernist artistic practice that reinforces an articulation of collective political action in Durkin's novel, A.M. Stephen's *The Gleaming Archway* constructs an example of artistic practice in contradistinction to collective political action. While the narrative of *The Gleaming Archway* engages less with the search for forms or modes of artistic production to correspond with collective action than does that of *The Magpie*, it nonetheless provides an important counter-example to the successful pairing of collective action and art as it creates a gendered disconnection between the work of politics and the work of artistic

representation. While Stephen's novel explores conflicts between capital and labour on Canada's west coast, it focuses more narrowly on the wars of position—revolutionary, evolutionary, parliamentary, and syndicalist—on the left. What is more, *The Gleaming Archway* is a piece of historical fiction set a quarter century before it was published in 1929. This historicized setting is significant for the way it exerts a tension between what McKay has called the first formation of Canadian socialism (1890–1919) that “was defined as the applied science of social evolution” and the second formation of Canadian socialism (1917–39) that had stronger ties to ideas of revolution and was bolstered by the post-revolutionary context in Russia (*Rebels* 147). The historical setting is perhaps more significant for the present argument because of its adherence to pre-modernist artistic practices (though not a nostalgic subject), at least in part, for the sake of historical continuity.

One of the ways in which the novel negotiates different strategies of representation is through its relationship to reportage. Hill discusses how the novel at once stages and enacts reportage: “[t]his novel rather ingeniously both reports and explores the idea of reportage by making the protagonist a reporter who investigates leftist movements in British Columbia” (255). While Stephen's novel does report the complex and changing nature of leftist politics in western Canada as his protagonist moves through multiple political considerations and alignments, the work of journalism in the novel is not presented as artistic practice and Craig's journalism is not transcribed into the novel. Journalism for Craig is a political tool. In the course of the novel he gains more access to varying positions on the left and chooses to switch from writing the labour beat for the mainstream *Daily Telegraph* to working for the labour movement by writing for *The Beacon*, a socialist party publication. While Craig states

early in the novel that he believes in “evolution but not in revolution,” he eventually submits to a more complex construction of leftist politics (43). As the narrator suggests,

He had found himself drawn to the moderate wing of the party, the Social Democrats, and yet when their mild politics failed repeatedly to obtain more than a crumb from the legislative tables, he was forced to see the reason for the inflexible orthodoxy of the Reds, who believed that only revolution could overthrow the power of money. (132)

While Hill and Rifkind suggest that the novel does not support revolutionary politics, neither the novel nor the protagonist work wholeheartedly against revolutionary political theory as they explore various modes of action on the left.³² Rather, the political conflicts outlined in the latter part of the novel centre on tactical discussions about mass collective action in a non-revolutionary Canadian setting. Craig and some of his revolutionary friends side against mass strike action on the docks because they believe it will undermine the popular support that labour has achieved through modes of parliamentary democracy—a system they support in a non-revolutionary moment. In other words, Craig and his friends are aware that the liberal state is all too willing to suppress mass action through inciting violence, which they realize would erode popular electoral support for labour.

Similar to *The Magpie*, there is more than one romantic plot in *The Gleaming Archway*. In the two main romantic plots of Stephen’s novel, women bring artistic practice into consideration. While Martha Lane’s art plays an active role in Craig Forrester’s search for ways to clarify the “Something-or-other” that corresponds to his social and political values in *The Magpie*, art for Craig Maitland is figured not only as a distraction from active labour organizing, but as an impulse requiring either repression or expulsion. For example, while

sitting at the edge of a river with his first love interest, Jocelyn Paget, Craig is told that “[w]e think and blunder. You must live, Mr. Maitland, and write ... but first, you must live” (103). Jocelyn detaches artistic expression from cognitive experience and in doing so detaches artistic practice from a discourse of affective performativity. Art is gendered feminine while action is gendered masculine.

In another context, while sitting just outside the city with his new wife, Stella echoes Hamlet when she tells Craig that “[t]here is more inside of you—more that you have not found—than in all the social commonwealths which you build in your imagination” (229).³³ She supports her claim by producing a poem he had written:

She opened a little handbag which lay on the turf at her side and, from a maze of manicuring tools, powder-puffs, and weapons of Eve’s devising, she produced a scrap of writing-paper carefully folded together. Stella spread it out upon her knees and then handed it to her companion.

“Who wrote that?” she demanded.

Craig looked embarrassed. Then a smile spread over his face.

“Guilty!” he laughed. “I did it. These things keep chiming in my ears and, to get rid of them, I resort to pencil and paper. Nothing to it!” (229)

While placing the poem among objects of feminine beauty which Stephen clearly does not trust, he uses Stella to project non-politicized romantic poetry as ideal while he has Craig view poetry as something that needs to be expunged in order to focus on his politicized work—two polarities that exclude the type of modernist engagement evidenced in *The Magpie*. Stella undermines the work of the imagination in building social commonwealths and places greater importance on self-knowledge and self-expression as worthy artistic practice

while Craig fails to see poetry as mode through which that social commonwealth can be articulated.³⁴

Unlike Durkin, Stephen fails to present his constructed art objects as complementary to collective political action. Instead, in the framework of the novel he bifurcates creative practice into a masculine journalism that fulfils only a political function and a feminized poetry that functions as an individual's cathartic expression. While presenting similar leftist subject matter as *The Magpie* and, as we shall see, *Waste Heritage*, Stephen's novel does not foster a transvaluation of modernist and socialist practice. The narrative projection into historical time provides an interwar audience with a critical distance with which to approach the intricate developments of a leftist culture in Canada while precluding possibilities for representations of artistic practice to signal modernism's emergence from beneath the novel's generic framework.

IRENE BAIRD'S *WASTE HERITAGE* AND THE MODERNIST PARABLE

While *The Magpie* and *The Gleaming Archway* have received relatively scant critical attention, Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage* is an example of a leftist text that has recently been recovered and is now one of the most discussed novels of the interwar period.³⁵ Baird's novel is formally and topically unique in Canadian literature and, as a result, there is a dearth of novels with which it can be formally or topically compared. Not surprisingly critics have cassified it in divergent ways. As Hill remarks in the introduction to his edition of the novel, "it is difficult to situate Baird's *Waste Heritage* in a singular literary tradition because it resists

many labels, draws upon many influences, and breaks much new ground” (xxv). He nonetheless suggests that the novel is “perhaps the finest achievement in a body of early twentieth-century Canadian social-realist fiction” while at the same moment suggesting that it “also resists the ‘leftist’ label that critics often apply to it” (xxv). Jody Mason, writing out of an archival and bio-critical context, examines the ambivalence of the novel’s politics through questioning “Baird’s commitment to the political causes of transients’ rights” (160). If there is one categorical realm that the novel does not confuse, in my opinion, it is its leftist affinities and its exploration of divergent modes of collective protest. James Doyle suggests that “Baird uses her protagonist as the epitome of a whole generation of young adults whose lives have been blighted by the Depression. Through the frequent emphasis on rallies, marches, demonstrations, and group discussions, Baird suggests further that her subject is collective rather than individual” (118). Much like *The Gleaming Archway*, Baird’s text explores the wars of position—revolutionary, evolutionary, parliamentary, and syndicalist—within the left. Willmott suggests that although the novel is “recognized for its sympathetic treatment of Left politics in the thirties, it is not—despite Robin Mathews’s powerful but, I think, overcompensatory defence of it as such—a Leftist romance” (34). Instead, Willmott deems it an “inconclusive Bildungsroman” (33). Though she misreads the novel’s setting in “Vancouver and various prairie towns during the sit-down strikes that led to the 1935 On-to-Ottawa trek,” Caren Irr suggests that “more than any other Canadian fiction of the decade, *Waste Heritage*, with its vaguely humanist sympathies and depiction of an exemplary topical conflict, comes closest to the American model of the political novel. It depicts local class conflicts with documentary specificity and publicizes them as prototypical” (166). Indeed, the novel exhibits most of the characteristics on which various critics have focused. Its realist

idiom and its reportage stylistics are apparent. There are enough instances of growth in its characters to warrant a relationship to the Bildungsroman while it could also easily be classed within the tradition of the collective novel. Candida Rifkind's reading comes closest in my estimation when she suggests *Waste Heritage* is "a novel in which the governing mode is documentary modernism, but at times this dominant mode enters into a provisional coalition with biblical allegory and metafictional satire" (180). I want to push Rifkind's reading further to suggest more than a provisional coalition. By reading Baird's representation of the novelistic project through the character of Kenneth Hughes, I want to suggest that *Waste Heritage* uses a realist, documentary idiom to construct a modernist parable. In other words, by embedding the construction of a realist strike novel within her own novel Baird presents a genre against which to read her own work.

At the outset of the novel the protagonist, Matt Striker, emerges from a boxcar at Aschelon, the thinly disguised Vancouver. He enters into a diner to ask directions of the proprietor, Harry, a former boxer with only one arm whom he befriends. Matt is looking for the organized unemployed men who have staged the sit-down strikes.³⁶ After informing Matt that the strikes have just been broken up and that he should avoid that area of the city, Harry asks Matt if he is a transient: "“Sure, I'm a transient,” he said quietly, ‘I was born back in the province of Saskatchewan but that province don't own me no more. Six years now I bummed around trying to rustle up some kind of steady job. I bummed around so long even the country don't own me no more’” (5). This articulation of a “transient” subjectivity in relation to state ownership figures Matt as representative of a generation of other unemployed men who are estranged from normative modes of citizenship and employment. Indeed, as Roger Hyman suggests, the novel “begins with one of the oldest of literary

archetypes, the arrival of the stranger” (n. pag.). As the archetypal stranger, Matt arrives as an isolated individual with knowledge of the outside world—in this case it is the socially unjust world of the Depression as it existed in Canada. He is quickly integrated into a movement of the unemployed who actively protest against government inaction. While ascribing to the tenets of collective action, he also becomes a guardian to Eddy, an individual who has ostensibly suffered brain injuries from police brutality. Having narrated Matt’s integration into the ranks of the organized unemployed, Baird introduces an artist figure into the narrative when Matt reads a pro-unemployed newspaper article aloud and suggests that “[i]f I could write like that, [...] I could write a book about this thing” (67). Gabby, a boy of nineteen who “settled right down to the profession of unemployment like a veteran” introduces Kenny to Matt: ““Brother, you took the words right outa my mouth! Meet the guy that’s goin’ to do that very thing. *Mister* Kenny Hughes, the genelman on my right. Don’t be shy, Kenny, come forward an’ take a bow”” (67). Kenny is an out-of-work schoolteacher who has been compiling notes on the strikes and on the daily lives of his fellow unemployed men. Kenny “sweated after technical detail and local colour, trying to get at what was really going on behind this whole situation” (67). As soon as Kenny is introduced the narrator leaves the narrative present to inform the reader that his book is never published:

It never was published, not, as Hughes went around saying after, because it would have ripped the administration to pieces and forced a change of government, but simply because it was not a good book. Hughes had all the conviction and the sympathy and he moled around earnestly making notes, the only thing he forgot was to learn how to write. (68)

Baird's narrator establishes an aesthetic presupposition about the appropriate mode of narrative production that is persistent throughout *Waste Heritage*. Kenny fails to actually write the book, at least in part, because he is too fixated on documenting minute details and getting the facts exactly right—too fixated, that is, on conveying a painstakingly direct mimetic rendition of the events. Throughout *Waste Heritage* Kenny's failure is figured within a discourse of emasculated performance, as he does not adequately execute the appropriate codes of masculinity in relation to his fellow unemployed strikers, despite becoming obsessed with documenting those very codes.

Not only does Kenny attempt to record the objects of typical masculine interest such as the make and model of different trucks, he also endeavours to transcribe the dialogue of his fellow strikers. For example, while the unemployed strikers bicker among themselves, Kenny attempts to capture the tone and substance of their arguments:

“What th' heck are you writin' down now, Kenny?”

Hughes did not look up. He went on writing very fast. When he finished he looked up with a proud smile. “I didn't want to lose a word of it,” he said, “I think I got it all.”

Matt gaped. “Fer the luvva pete, Kenny, got what?”

Hughes blushed. “Naturalistic dialogue.”

“What's that?”

“What a book has to have to sell nowadays.”

“No kiddin'?”

Hughes gave a faint sigh, “I'm afraid so,” he said.

Matt went on staring at him and then he touched his head. “Nuts,” he said gently, “honestly, Kenny, I think you’re nuts!” It was that moment Hughes first got the idea of using him in the book. (104)

More than wanting to capture the representative dialogue of the men he did not resemble, Kenny pushes his novel further towards a direct mimetic rendering as he decides to use Matt as his protagonist. Though he does reveal to Matt his plans to characterize him for his own book, he is hesitant to do so because he does not want to draw attention to his alterity or remoteness from the other men. He feels it is “dangerous to be thought queer, especially in any large company of men” (150). It becomes increasingly clear that Kenny is enamoured of Matt through his adoption of a voyeuristic gaze and homoerotic envy. The most prominent example of this occurs when Matt strips naked to swim and Hughes watches him from the shore:

From a distance he watched Matt climb to the rock and take his dive. It was a bad dive but just the same Hughes envied the way he did it. He envied a lot of things about Matt, his spare, hard flesh, his impression of taciturnity and poise. All that he could do to get close to Matt, he did. He lent him writing paper and salts and shaving kit but he knew in his heart that these things were superficial, the same way as physical proximity, eating, sleeping, travelling round together never gave him the one thing he needed if he was to graft Matt into a book. [...] Hughes went on watching him, trying to penetrate by intuition what he could never hope to arrive at by experience. (150–51)

Throughout the narrative Kenny continues in his attempts to capture an intimate representation of Matt and the other strikers’ reality, and he continues to do so despite

realizing his novel's "entire absence of plot" and that writing a novel contains "a lot of technical difficulties" (170). These problems of literary convention and methodology do not stop Kenny from attempting to get as close as possible to the representation of his characters as real subjects. Despite not wanting to differentiate himself from the unemployed men with whom he associates and studies, he finally admits to one man, "I don't think you quite get what it is I'm trying to do. This book of mine is to be more than just another book, it's to be a...a kind of a social document, a book that will bring before the nation this whole problem of unemployment that is festering on its body like a bloody sore" (171). Near the end of the novel Kenny is told by Hep—the veteran political organizer in charge of the group of men that also includes Matt and Eddy and whom Kenny trusts—that "there isn't going to be any book," and that he has "got nothing to make a book out of [...] no plot, nothing" (247). Shortly after Hep's assertion Kenny claims, "I shan't give up, I shan't desert the ship" and that "more than ever a book like this will be needed now" (262). This declaration is followed by an interaction in which Kenny admits to Matt that he does not know him well enough, "not the sort of things I need to know, how you feel..." (262). Not being sure himself how he feels, Matt "had to get away. Another minute and he would have pasted poor patient Hughes right on the kisser" (262). Once Matt refuses this plea for intimacy, Kenny simply becomes absent from the remainder of Baird's narrative. The novel ends as does the two novels examined above: with violence. Upon leaving a boxing match Matt is arrested for his killing of a police officer who was beating Eddy, who is subsequently killed when he stumbles onto train tracks.

Baird's placement of Kenny and his book within her own narrative functions differently than Durkin's deployment of modernist art in *The Magpie*. Kenny's book does not

reveal modernist concerns with abstraction in, or experimentation with, novelistic form. Rather, his book takes on a synecdochic representation of the realist ideal, or at least the realist function that Willmott states is “to register the interrelations and values of a given, secular world, or ‘what is’” (5). Baird deploys the figure of the writer and his book in her own narrative to present a model against which her own work can be read. In other words, while deploying all of the information that Kenny’s novel would have included had it ever been published, Baird signals that her novel is doing more than just presenting a record of specific events. By narrativizing Kenny’s idea of realism and the failure of that realism to actually create a “social document,” Baird indicates to the reader of her completed, published book that she has produced something different from Kenny’s book. Given the embedded subplot of the non-modernist writer figure, what Rifkind identifies as Baird’s “metafictional satire” is also an attempt by Baird to develop her reader into Willmott’s modernist reader (180). While using the cultural authority of realism in her own narrative mode, she simultaneously undermines that cultural authority by presenting the failure of a model realism. Her undermining of this ideal realism invites her reader to see the larger parable that structures her novel—what Rifkind identifies, in part, as “biblical allegory” (180).

While critics have separately noted the allegorically named protagonist (Irr 166, Mason 144), Matt’s archetypal role as the stranger (Hyman n. pag.), and the biblically named cities (Rifkind 180), critics have not extended the implications of those readings to the whole book. The cyclical structure of the narrative (beginning with a train before meeting Hep the boxer and ending at a boxing match before Eddy is killed by a train), the deus-ex-machina-timing of Hep as he figures as a type of fairy godmother rescuing Matt, the lack of intricate plot, and the inconclusive meanings that nonetheless express the social and

economic anxieties prevalent throughout 1930s Canada, all infect the book's realist conventions with modernist instability and move the novel away from political didacticism.³⁷

Hill suggests that Baird

incorporates at least one high-modernist device that leads her away from the straightforward and mimetic treatment of contemporary Canada. Her main cities, Vancouver and Victoria, have been allusively renamed after the Biblical cities, Aschelon and Gath. In thinly disguising these cities, Baird was not trying to obscure the source for the events her narrative fictionalizes. (xxxiv)

Using more than just one modernist device, Baird shapes her own practice of the realist mode within a parable, a form used by many modernist writers of the 1930s. Rather than coming close to the American political novel, as Irr suggests, Baird's novel has closer ties to British notions of the modernist parable.³⁸ Samuel Hynes suggests that in "criticism and reviews [the 1930s generation of British writers] commonly used terms that identify this element of conceptual form: terms like *fable*, *myth*, and *allegory*. These terms have different literary ancestries, of course, but in the 'thirties they were used more or less as synonyms" (14). The critical debate on the function of the parable in literature began in earnest in 1935 with a flurry of publications by the likes of Auden ("Psychology and Art To-day"), Spender (*The Destructive Element*), and Day Lewis (*Revolution in Writing*). Conceptualizing the way the term "parable" was used collectively, Hynes suggests that

The definition that emerges is something like this: a parable is functional—that is message-bearing, clarifying, instructive—but it is not didactic. Rather it is an *escape* from didacticism; like a myth, it renders the feeling of human issues, not an

interpretation of them. It is non-realistic, because it takes its form from its content, and not from an idea of fidelity to the observed world. (15)

While it would be bald conjecture to suggest that Baird was privy to the preoccupations and debates over the nature of the modernist parable in British literary culture, it is not unconceivable that she turned to the British writers of the 1930s to make up for Kenny's failure "to learn how to write" a strike novel (68). Kenny's "social document," as it strives for mimetic accuracy, would have been in competition with "non-fictional accounts of the events" as Denning suggests was the case for the 1930s strike novels in the American context (236). Resting in a literary space between Kenny's ideal realism (Hill's "straightforward and mimetic treatment of contemporary Canada" [xxxiv]) and the Auden Generation's modernist parable, modernism emerges in Baird's text through an undermining of the cultural authority of realism. By presenting a parable she expands the collective nature of the strike into a broader social and political realm, thus inviting her readers to use modernist tactics to conceptualize collective action—yet another transvaluative device.

Artistic practice in *The Magpie* and *Waste Heritage* fulfils the modernist function in Willmott's sense in that it appears "not merely reflectively, as literary reflections of a historical condition, but actively and deliberately, as attempts to think toward some adequate feeling of social recognition and belonging" (5). Counter to this, artistic practice as it is depicted in *The Gleaming Archway* is not about social recognition or belonging. Rather, it is figured as a function in the care of the self, that is, as a self-expression or as catharsis. The emergence of modernism through the realist form of the novels of Durkin and Baird demonstrates that modernism does not always need to shout its arrival from on high, that it

can make its presence be known by working cooperatively on the streets.

CHAPTER THREE: ORGANIZING THE PARTY

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER THREE

More than any other mode of political organization, the figure of “The Party” has dominated transnational critical accounts of leftist literature from the first half of the twentieth century. For many, socialism finds its tangibility in the form of the political party as the most concrete mode of political expression. In the United States during the interwar period leftist discourse about “The Party” referred to the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA). In Great Britain and Canada though, leftists could claim at least two parties on the left (which often exhibited much hostility toward each other)—Great Britain could claim the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the more mainstream Labour Party, while in the interwar period Canada’s two major leftist parties were the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) and the Canadian Commonwealth Federation (CCF). It was in the interwar period that the CPC and the CCF arose as the two main political parties on the left. Though the Communist Party of Canada was formed in 1921, it was not until the 1930s, as we shall see, that it gained large-scale popular support in Canada. The CCF was founded in 1932 and after the 1935 federal election it held seats in the Parliament of Canada until it was disbanded and replaced by the New Democratic Party in 1961.¹

Both the CPC and the CCF had periodicals that functioned as party organs. Apart from the *Worker* (1924–36), which was carried on as the *Daily Clarion* (1936–39), the CPC

supported *Masses* (1932–34) and *New Frontier* (1936–37). These publications, along with countless other CPC-affiliated pamphlets and broadsides, made up a rich leftist print culture in Canada during the interwar period. The CCF often used the *Canadian Forum* as its own publication venue, especially when the League for Social Reconstruction took over the direction of the periodical in the mid-1930s. The above periodicals contain much of the shorter literary work of Canada's left from the interwar period, especially its poetry.

While the organizing principle of Chapter Three centres on the idea of “The Party,” it is important to acknowledge that the subject matter of the case studies in this chapter is rooted, in large part, in the Great Depression of the 1930s. While the world was in the midst of the Great Depression, Canada was hit hard in particular ways: the suffering of Canadian agricultural workers was compounded due to ecological disaster; the Conservative government of R.B. Bennett had done little to relieve the most blatant effects of mass unemployment; and, large numbers of recent immigrants to Canada were subject to the racist anxieties of the dominant cultures. The social and economic effects of the Great Depression often led to political action, as was seen in Baird's *Waste Heritage*, but it also led to popular political participation which often found expression in “The Party.”

The two case studies in Chapter Three explore the connection between cultural production and the two main political parties of the Canadian left. Beginning with the CCF, “F.R. Scott and the Emergence of a Poetics of Institutional Critique” traces Scott's poetic development from his earliest extant published poems to his modernist expression of the platform of the CCF in the early 1930s. The second case study, “Section 98 and the Theatricality of the Canadian Left,” examines the ways in which the conventions of

modernist theatre were used in CPC-affiliated print culture in order to persuasively lend legal validity to the Communist Party of Canada in the midst of state repression.

F.R. SCOTT AND THE EMERGENCE OF A POETICS OF INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE

I never felt the slightest contradiction between activities and politics and writing poetry, because the politics I professed and practiced was to me a creative idea about society, and any creation is art. You can have as imaginative ideas about society as you can have about a new form of verse.

—F.R. Scott (Scott interviewed by Chisholm)

F.R. Scott's instigation of a poetics of institutional critique can be found in his earliest poems. By examining Scott's critical navigation of multiple formal and institutional alignments we can get an account of the ways in which politics and poetics join forces in his work. In some cases this poetics of institutional critique gets articulated through direct appraisals of singular institutions, in other cases it is through critiques of poetic institutions and traditions, and in others still, it is through critiques of institutionalized social inequity. Throughout the development of this poetics of institutional critique there is never a critique of institutions *qua* institutions. Scott fights hard for the establishment and maintenance of an assortment of institutions. For Scott, institutions facilitate a space for critique and creative shaping of society. We find Scott's mastery in his ability to mobilize the enabling and disabling conditions of institutions through—and in the service of—politics and poetry.

Focusing on his earliest published poetry about various universities and systems of education, his critique of a national body of artistic producers—the Canadian Authors

Association—and the rise of his poetic manifestoes in the *Canadian Forum*, I argue for a view of Scott's early poetry that finds the integration of politics and poetics rather than an incongruity.

Two critical narratives have persisted throughout many scholarly portraits of Scott and his work. While one critical path has highlighted a supposed ambiguity and duplicity in Scott's poetics, the other uses political commitment as a measuring stick with which to judge his poetry.² Both narratives have played a role in consolidating a critical polarization between Scott's poetry and politics. A framework that constructs in Scott a debilitating inner struggle between the pursuit of social justice and artistic production is neither compelling nor adequate when looking at a broad range of Scott's poetry. A framework of commitment must also be avoided in order to deal with the connection between poetry and politics in Scott's work. We know that Scott was "committed" to both social justice as well as poetry, but when we view poetry through the lens of commitment we too often linger on searching for and considering *direct* manifestations of political affiliations; the poet's membership card risks becoming his or her best-known poem. The academic bifurcation of Scott's poetry and politics is more a symptom of the structural limitations of disciplinary critical practice than it is about a strict division in Scott's mode of production.³

Because Scott did not publish a single-author collection of poetry until the 1940s, the most readily available way to highlight these connections is through Scott's early relationship to periodical culture. By reading representative examples from magazines across three decades a pattern emerges that shows literature and politics have more than nominal adjacency or "imagined proximity" in Scott's early oeuvre (Anderson 34). The primary task

of this case study is to take seriously Scott's use of a mode of production through which politics and literature become inextricable.

F.R. SCOTT AND THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

Scott's juvenilia and early poems of the 1920s reveal a preoccupation with fashioning poetic equivalents to what would later be called the campus novel. Unlike later campus novels, though, Scott's poetry does not simply take the university or college as its constructed *mise en scène*. More than that, Scott persists in grappling with organizational structures of education in his early poetry. By organizational structures I mean to point to an engagement with governing bodies within the university as well as cultural formations within the general student population that shape student life. His poems participated in institutionalized educational cultures through their publication in university-affiliated periodicals inasmuch as these periodicals acted as forums for debate, protest, and satire.

This early poetry has not enjoyed the measure of critical attention afforded to the rest of his oeuvre. In relation to the successes of his later poetic production, Scott's early poetry has been generally shunned as aesthetically and politically un-representative of his poetic voice. In spite of this dismissal, there is an argument to be made for going back to these texts to find emergent tenets in Scott's career. Despite scholars' attention to the supposed ambiguity and duplicity in Scott's poetics, a genealogical approach to his poetry that looks for the founding of a particular mode of discursivity is needed if we are to avoid dismissing his

earliest poetry as either the scribbling of an adolescent or as representative of a residual Victorian or Georgian comportment.

Brian Trehearne outlines the messy ways this early work of Scott's has been classified: it has been called Victorian *and* Georgian *and* Aesthetic but as he suggests, "Victorian poetry simply is not Aesthetic poetry, nor is either of these the same as Georgian poetry: and it is not critically sound (at least not without evidence) to suggest that Scott was a relaxed practitioner of all three indifferently" (*Aestheticism* 139). Because Scott has been placed within a literary narrative that has him act the part of a founding member of a Canadian modernist movement, his small amount of pre- and proto-modernist verse has been discharged from the active service of narrating the full spectrum of his poetics. Perhaps this narrowing of vision has occurred as a matter of access, as much of Scott's early poetry has simply been left out of *The Collected Poems of F.R. Scott*, for which he received the Governor General's Award for poetry in 1981.⁴

Trehearne suggests that Scott's public career as a poet began while he was enrolled at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar. Before exploring these Oxford poems, though, it is important to note that Trehearne skips over Scott's earliest extant published poem, "[The girls are too much with us...]," which appeared in *Mitre* in February 1918. This poem speaks directly to a notion of how tradition is able to shape the function of the educational establishment. In this case it is Bishop's College, where, in September of 1916 Scott enrolled and remained until graduation in June of 1919 (Djwa 37, 41). The sonnet, co-authored by Sydney Williams, is a parodic critique of the admittance of women into the school. Their call was for the maintenance of the college's fraternal tradition and the poem enacts a familial—paternal—

tradition as well.⁵ The opening quatrain is overly concerned with the protection of a gendered cultural authority:

The girls are too much with us; late and soon,
Working and playing, they usurp our powers;
Little remains at Bishop's that is ours;
They are taking our rights away, no thing's immune. (1–4)

Apart from the obvious chauvinism that attempts to uphold institutional patriarchy, the poem is an example of the integration of Romantic poetics into the service of appraising institutional practice and tradition. While the poem is far too close to Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much with Us" (1807) to grant it any formal ingenuity, what the poem does show is that Scott and Williams had enough sophistication to recognize how to employ an established literary mode of production in a critique of the direction in which the educational establishment was headed. It is this very action that distinguishes Scott's political poetry from beginning to end. But of course we cannot end here.

With his removal to England, Scott continued to incorporate Romantic poetics into a field of critique, but this time, a critique of his own place in academia. In "Lament, after Reading the Results of Schools"⁶ Scott reflects on the disappointment of only achieving "a third" in history at Oxford instead of his aimed at "first." The opening lines of Scott's sonnet echo Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (1816): "Now know I how stout Cortez would have felt / Had fog hid the Pacific from his sight" (1–2). The solipsistic reflection and self-aggrandizement in the poem does not suggest to the reader of Scott's later poetry the emergence of a preoccupation in his writing. But, if we put the tone aside, we can see the continued emergence of a mode of composition that calls upon poetic tradition to

engage in the structural functioning of the institution. In this poem we also begin to see the influence of the Aestheticism so present at what Trehearne refers to as “that remarkable socio-cultural institution” (153). Oxford, while being a bastion of tradition, was also a space of exuberant bending of cultural assumptions where young men were presented with alternative opportunities for their performances of self. Scott, it would seem, was not outside this identity play. The poem was signed De Profundis, almost certainly an allusion to the Aesthete *par excellence* in its mimicry of the title of Oscar Wilde’s famous letter to Lord Alfred Douglas.

“The Problem,” also published in *Isis*, renders obvious Scott’s engagement with both Oxford’s adventurous Aestheticism as well as the university’s traditional, upper-class masculine configuration. This too has been well documented by Trehearne (157–9). The first stanza of the poem sets the rhetorical situation:

No problem can be worse than mine,
My state is quite pathetic;
One half my soul’s a Philistine,
The other half’s aesthetic. (1–4)

The poem shows that Scott was able to survey the field of campus culture and put his findings in poetic—albeit ironic—form. Trehearne suggests that when reading “The Problem” our conclusions can reach no further than to point out that Scott was attentive to the Aestheticism of Oxford “and that he understood the social polarization of the university’s student populace” (159). But Trehearne goes further to suggest that Scott’s understanding of Aestheticism at Oxford is crucial for an understanding of his Aesthetic poems that were to be published four years later in the *Fortnightly* under the pseudonyms

Brian Tuke and Bernard March.⁷ Trehearne's assertion provokes questioning: if Scott's understanding of Aestheticism is important for our reading his poetry in the *Fortnightly* under the names Brian Tuke and Bernard March, what are the implications of Scott's well-developed understanding of the social and cultural division in the student body when reading the poems published in the *Fortnightly* under the names Student, Sax, X, T.T., R.S., and F.R.S.⁸ While it may be important to trace the figurative philistine, it is perhaps more important to look for continuities in the ways Scott mobilizes his institutional surroundings in poetic form. In other words, our critical account of Scott's emergent poetics cannot be based on a struggle between Aestheticism and a more masculine "philistine" poetics alone. Nor can it be based on attempting to hear an opportunistic mid-Atlantic poetic accent upon Scott's return to Canada and enrolment in the Faculty of Law at McGill. Instead, I suggest that a focus on Scott's grasp of the social and cultural division in the student body can better assist a reading of Scott's movement toward an increasingly political poetics.

On Saturday, 21 November 1925—just over a year after Scott enrolled at McGill—the *McGill Fortnightly Review* introduced itself and took centre stage in the political and literary life of the McGill campus. Literary critics more often than not refer to the *Fortnightly* as an integral component of the first modernist movement in Canada, namely, the McGill Movement. Trehearne rightly makes a corrective by identifying the pre- and proto-modernist aspects of the periodical in reference to Scott's poems published under the pseudonyms Brian Tuke and Bernard March. So, while the magazine was defiantly part of a movement *towards* modernism, it is not the place to look for a cohesive and consolidated modernism. If there was a unifying movement in the *Fortnightly* it was the fact that it was born as part of an animated student movement.

Scott was part of these spirited student politics and after a year in the McGill Law faculty he became critical and publicly vocal about how the university—Administration and Student Council—was being run. Perhaps the best example of Scott’s early poetic engagement with student politics at McGill is his poem, “The Scarlet Key Society,” which was published just before the advent of the *Fortnightly*. Signed “Student,” “The Scarlet Key Society” was published in the literary supplement of the *McGill Daily* in October 1925.⁹ The poem was published just as political tensions on campus were erupting—one month prior to the emergence of the *Fortnightly*—and it has not been published since. The student union had decided that they would form a new society for the purpose of entertaining students visiting from other universities for sports or debating, and so on. No longer were varsity teams going to entertain their competitors in a gesture of gentlemanly gamesmanship. Instead, the Student Council adopted an American tradition of having a single, small group of elites entertain visiting students and Scott was infuriated. The final stanza of “The Scarlet Key Society” shows his irritation:

Then toast the Scarlet Key, boys,

The latest Yankee fad.

Our manners must be changed, boys,

The Council says they’re bad.

So scrap the old-time customs,

And let each student shout;

“The Scarlet Key! The Scarlet Key!”

(Let’s K-ck the d——— thing out —). (33–40)

While the poem takes the satiric tone of a locker-room chantey, it has something serious to say about cultural imperialism coming from south of the border. For the young Scott, it was also crucial that McGill maintain a respectable image in the eyes of rival universities as well as the general public. The many letters and editorials that would accompany the poem in railing against the society during Scott's tenure at McGill evidence this. The frequency of the rejoinders were so high that his *Fortnightly* editorial of 6 February 1926 makes the analogy that, "[c]onstant dripping, though a monotonous process, is reputed to have its effect even upon the hardest material" (54). Scott's unremitting critique of the Society reveals a deep engagement and concern for the ways in which organizational structures could be a determining factor in the stratification of the student populace. For the main criticism pitted against the formation of the Scarlet Key Society was its members' claim to a collegiate aristocracy.

Just as Scott incorporated Romanticism into his Bishop's College poem and his Oxford poems, he incorporates and satirizes modernism in his critiques of student life at McGill. Perhaps the best examples of this are his "Sweeney Comes to McGill (With apologies to Mr. Eliot)," and the prose piece "Gertrude Stein Has Tea at the Union" published in the *Fortnightly* in November 1926 and March 1927 respectively. Sweeney appears again in the *McGilliad* in 1930 with a poem entitled "Sweeney Graduates (With all necessary apologies)." In both of the "Sweeney" poems Scott comments on the corporatization of higher education. In "Sweeney Comes to McGill" it is the physical arrival at the university that signals the moneyed prospects of the bourgeois subject's matriculation into a corporate class: "The fifty-thousand-dollar gates / Give promise of more startling sins" (3-4). In "Sweeney Graduates," Scott decries the granting of degrees to the pupil who has not actually

engaged in any serious scholarship but the student who only “emits stenography” (2) to arrive at commencement into a corporate class. In this sense the university only functions as a place where the “educated hordes intrude / On meretricious premises, / And magnates in their magnitude / Dispense the dubious degrees” (25–28). By adopting Stein’s persona in his parodic prose report and one of Eliot’s characters for the two Sweeney poems, Scott is emulating his old habit of adopting discrete literary modes in the service of expounding upon student life. The difference is, of course, that this time he was looking to newly established modernist literary celebrities instead of Romantic poets.

Although Scott adopts the character and persona of two prominent modernist writers, we should not be too hasty in suggesting the poems were a straightforward embrace. Scott is not the reverent young student paying homage. Instead, he is rather irreverent towards the transnational modernists, Eliot and Stein. He is utilizing their literary clout while at the same time mocking the products of their work. He soon turned this mocking and irreverent attitude at a closer target, namely, the Canadian Authors Association.

F.R. SCOTT AND THE LITERARY INSTITUTION

When Scott published “The Canadian Authors Meet” in April 1927 in the *Fortnightly*, he was taking steps to move beyond the campus. This time the scene was a Canadian Authors Association meeting and Scott placed himself in an irreverent position in relation to a

national body of literary producers. For an idea of this impertinent position we need only look to the final figure of the poet in the last stanza of Scott's oft-cited poem:¹⁰

Far in corner sits (though none would know it)
The very picture of disconsolation,
A rather lewd and most ungodly poet
Writing these verses, for his soul's salvation. (25–28)

Dean Irvine, in his introduction to *The Canadian Modernists Meet*, suggests that Scott situated the Canadian modernist poet as “distant from the metropolitan centres of international modernisms and detached from the antimodernism of the Canadian authors he satirizes” (1). While this is no doubt the case for the poet's distances and detachments, it remains that the poet attaches a meaning to the composition of the occasional poem: he writes “for his soul's salvation” (28). While creating a distance from the central figures of inter- or transnational modernism (Eliot and Stein) as well as the metropolitan or cosmopolitan centre, Scott incorporates modernism's productive break from older literary practices in order to produce institutional analysis. He rejects the poetic *status quo*—through parody—as well as Canadian poetic and public tradition in order that he might envision the rise of a new modernist Canadian poetry of institutional critique. Louis Dudek points out a supposed odd contradiction in the final stanza of the “The Canadian Authors Meet”: “I hardly need to point out,” he writes, “the contradiction between an ‘ungodly poet’ and one ‘writing verses for his soul's salvation.’ In dreams, Freud tells us, contradictions simply co-exist, and the same is true of poems” (qtd. in Trehearne *Aestheticism* 170). The contradiction is not really much of a contradiction if we look closely. The irreverence that Scott's poem enunciates is the irreverence held not for the metaphysical pursuit of Beauty or Art, or God for that

matter, but for the residually colonial poetic practice of “Lampman, Roberts, Carman, Campbell, Scott” and all the other “*literati*” he satirizes in the poem (“The Canadian Authors Meet” 10, 14). The salvation of the soul in the last line of the poem recalls Scott’s own Aesthetic leanings, which are not alien to formal analysis, literary innovation, or social engagement.¹¹ Because salvation for Scott does not lie in obligatory reverence but in the realm of institutional critique and reform, Scott’s poem seeks to institutionalize a national poetics that is resistant to Victorian or Georgian coloniality. Scott confronts Canada’s residual imperialist ties as he gestures toward the poets who are “puppets” to the waning myth of imperial order, positioned “Beneath a portrait of the Prince of Wales” (1–2). Indeed, Scott would write in “New Poems for Old: I. The Decline of Poesy” that poetry in Canada “in a word, was cut and trimmed to suit a particular body politic with a revered constitutional monarch and wide Imperial interests ... and it fitted like a frock coat on an M.P.” (297). Scott recognized that there was already an institutional connection between poetry and politics in Canada but, importantly, he did not see the development of a new vision for an institutional and national poetics as something coming out of formal literary criticism but out of critical poetic practice.¹²

Soon after the publication of “The Canadian Authors Meet” Scott sent a letter to the editor of the *Canadian Forum* in response to A.J.M. Smith’s article “Wanted—Canadian Criticism.” If in “The Canadian Authors Meet” he satirizes the Canadian poetic establishment, he offers a structural analysis of how new literature could emerge in Canada with his letter to the editor published in June 1928. While suggesting that Smith’s article was correct in pointing to the “predominance of commercial standards and the confusion between commerce and art in Canada,” he questions Smith’s insistence on the development

of a national critical apparatus prior to the emergence of a “native” literature (698). Scott writes, “It is true to say that in a country where there are good critics the level of literary attainment will probably be high. But it is a very different matter to say that so soon as a country has found its critics, a native literature will arise” (698). Scott’s rather structuralist analysis of how the emergence of a “native” literature in Canada might be facilitated is remarkable in relation to “The Canadian Authors Meet.” As if trying to meet Smith half way, Scott develops a poetics of critique instead of a literary criticism.

F.R. SCOTT AND THE POLITICAL INSTITUTION

The slow movement away from examinations of the educational institution and its politics towards a critique of the Canadian poetic *status quo* is correspondent with a movement towards an ever-widening figuration of spheres of civic participation. For example, Scott’s “Vagrant,” published in the first issue of the *Canadian Mercury* (December 1928), is a satiric illustration of a mythologized individualism that positions itself spatially “beyond the outer star / to spaces where no systems are” (1–2). He also calls abstract temporality into question in the life of an individual for whom “infinity became his own / himself the sole criterion” (11–12). In the final lines of “Vagrant” Scott points to the absurdity and hypocrisy of an individualism that disregards the very public and material surroundings that enable the conditions of abstract individualism, as his subject must, in the end, be “content to live in montreal” (16). Alan Richards, in “Between Tradition and Counter-Tradition: The Poems of

A.J.M. Smith and F.R. Scott in *The Canadian Mercury* (1928–29),” notes that Scott “sardonically deflates the vagrant’s vaulting individuality” (123) and makes the astute suggestion that the poem is an explicit move away from Bliss Carman’s mystical “vagabondia” (124). While Richards reads resignation in the figure of the vagrant, I read Scott’s poem as an ironic expression of a character who does not know that his “search” is actually a romantic disengagement with and ignorance of society and its structures and normative alignments. Scott was not afraid of structures or norms within society; he was critical of hypocrisy and disengagement. By the time “Vagrant” was published, he had already begun advocating for vigorous changes to the codification of the Canadian legal system as well as federal economic planning along socialist lines. This becomes an increasingly pronounced tenet of Scott’s thought with the onset of the depression and the election of a Conservative government in the summer of 1930.

In the early 1930s Scott laid the foundations for what would become a more fully articulated and integrated social and poetic programme with national consequence. This shift was coincident with the *Canadian Forum* becoming Scott’s primary venue of publication. The most developed instance of Scott’s early 1930s integration of poetic and political modes of production came in the form of two poem cycles published in the *Canadian Forum* under the titles “An Anthology of Up-to-Date Canadian Poetry” (1932) and “Social Notes” (1935). Published in May 1932, “Anthology” is a poem cycle consisting of sixteen poems with a prologue and epilogue. “Social Notes,” published in March 1935, is a poem cycle consisting of thirteen poems. These poems, which appear in various configurations in subsequent collections, have gained some attention in recent scholarship.

In “F.R. Scott and Social Justice in the 1930s,” Robert May suggests that the “effectiveness of these poems emerges not so much from the clever or unorthodox phraseology, but from the righteous indignation the reader inevitably feels upon reading an unvarnished account of social injustice” (41). He intimates that the force of the poems lies in readers’ emotional intelligence or empathetic apprehension of the subject matter. May couples this assertion with a sustained effort to point to intricate links between the poems and Scott’s political and legal writings. Dean Irvine, in “Editing Canadian Modernism” focuses on the paratextual anthologising impulse suggested in the first cycle’s title. He links this practice of socialization to a modernist poetics that enables a socialist politics, “where the modernist poet creates a new kind of anthology as the poetic form through which he enacts his socialist critique of the capitalist social order” (70). Anouk Lang, in “Creative Advocates: Art, Commitment, and Canadian Literary History,” obstructs the possibilities of intertextual or paratextual readings by contending that, among others, the poems in “Anthology” and “Social Notes” contain “no complexity or ambiguity at all to the meaning: no figurative depth, no metaphorical possibilities to be excavated and weighed up against each other” (171). Both Lang and May attempt to push readings of the poems to the realm of the extra-literary, albeit for different reasons. Lang’s contention builds on Scott’s own assertion that his early poetry consisted of some instances of “pregnant doggerel” (qtd. in Lang 169).¹³ For Lang, there are poems in Scott’s early oeuvre that are not as “easily assimilable to a modernist aesthetic” as his “stylized and semantically opaque” poems (169). She cites his later poems—“Laurentian Shield” (1945) and “Impressions” (1965)—as examples of his “stylized and semantically opaque manner” (169). While it may be correct to say that the diction is more dense and opaque in these later poems mentioned by Lang, I

want to contend that both “Anthology” and “Social Notes” are as equally “stylized” as these later poems. A critical account of phraseology, diction, semantic apparatuses, idiom, or style in poetry would do well to figure the productive capacity of what is presented and not the negative capacity of what is absent. In other words, it neither critically suffices to suggest that only intensely difficult or opaque poetry can be enumerated in critical narratives of modernist production, nor does it suffice to insist upon a specific “style” as the *de facto* modernist mode. Modernism presents many more possibilities. When Lang suggests that the “pregnant doggerel poems evidently do not make anything new, despite their overt anxieties over modernity” (176), she is making an implicit comparison here with easily recognizable high modernist form and an evaluative assessment based on an adherence to Pound’s dictum to *make it new*.

Under this rubric Scott’s poems are placed within a limited framework that allows for no more than a single-sided (high-modernist) and dismissive view that Scott was just attempting to aestheticize the social. Scott asserts a more comprehensive modernist mode of production that can be better ascertained by looking to the ways he was attempting to socialise aesthetics through the adoption of a political idiom. In making this assertion I mean to point to what I see as the distinctly formal innovations that Scott makes with “Anthology” and “Social Notes.” It is by looking toward a wider array of aesthetic possibilities that these poem cycles can be given their due. Brian Trehearne, in a review of Sandra Djwa’s biography of Scott, suggests that “Scott’s 1930s satiric squibs at the expense of capitalism could have been criticized on aesthetic grounds much more firmly than Djwa has done” (“An Interpreted Life” 87). I want to take Trehearne seriously on this point in order to push an analysis of “Anthology” and “Social Notes” into a framework of modernist poetic practice.

Before doing this, though, it is necessary to introduce some political context that allows us to push the aesthetic analysis further.

In August 1931 Scott travelled to the Institute of Politics at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts. There he met Frank Underhill, a history professor at Toronto. Together, while hiking Mount Greylock, they planned the formation of The League for Social Reconstruction (LSR). Once back in Canada they set about organizing—Scott in Montreal and Underhill in Toronto. The LSR was loosely modelled on the British Fabian Society, the organisation that profoundly shaped left-wing thought in Britain.¹⁴ On 19 July 1933 the national convention of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) opened in Regina. Among delegates from farmer and labour parties as well as CCF clubs were delegates from Ontario and Quebec who were members of the LSR, Scott among them. They were at the convention to discuss the party's draft manifesto that the LSR had been charged with preparing. The political party was just a year old and was in need of a solid programme. Frank Underhill drafted the manifesto in consultation with other members of the LSR. Textual evidence points to the fact that Underhill relied heavily on the manifesto the LSR had adopted for itself in 1932. "In an important sense," Michael Horn tells us, "Forsey, Gordon, and Scott, as well as their chief collaborator, a law student named David Lewis, were the original drafters of the Regina Manifesto" (31–32). The evidence suggests that Scott was busy composing his "An Anthology of Up-to-Date Canadian Poetry" at the same time the LSR manifesto was being drafted and that he was composing "Social Notes" while members of the LSR were drafting the "Regina Manifesto." I mean to suggest that the "LSR Manifesto" and the "Regina Manifesto" have more in common with Scott's

“Anthology” and “Social Notes” than composition within close temporal adjacency: both texts engage with the genre of the manifesto.

Janet Lyon, in *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*, suggests that “the manifesto form has much to teach us about the problems of modernity: while it may be best known as the no-nonsense genre of plain speech, the genre that shoots from the hip, it is in fact a complex, ideologically inflected genre that has helped to create modern public spheres” (2). Mary Ann Caws, in the “The Poetics of the Manifesto,” the Introduction to her collection *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, suggests that the “manifesto is an act of *démésure*, going past what is thought of as proper, sane, and literary. Its outreach demands an extravagant self-assurance. At its peak of performance, its form creates its meaning” (xx). She also adds that “the manifesto, at its height, is a poem in heightened prose” (xxvii). Charles Jenck, in his preface to the anthology *Theories and Manifestoes of Contemporary Architecture*, writes that the manifesto is a “curious art form, like the haiku, with its own rules of brevity, wit, and *le mot juste*” (2). He also suggests that the “good manifesto mixes a bit of terror, runaway emotion and charisma with a lot of common sense” and that “the genre demands blood” (2). Janet Lyon goes further to explore some of the consistent formal features of the manifesto: “its selective and impassioned chronicle of the oppression that has led to the present moment of rupture; its forceful enumeration of grievances; its epigrammatic style” (3). Further, she suggests that one of the oft-employed conventions

involves the forceful enumeration of grievances or demands or declarations which cast a group’s oppression as a struggle between the empowered and the disempowered, or between the corrupt and the sanctified, or between usurpers and rightful heirs. The numbered lists in which these demands are often presented

convey a specific rhetorical force: the parataxis of a list—its refusal of mediated prose or synthesized transitions—enhances the manifesto’s descanting imperative. (15)

Lyon’s taxonomy of the manifesto helps us understand the ways through which Scott helped to create a modernist public and poetic sphere. To push the point even further, if we allow that Scott’s “Anthology” and “Social Notes” (1932 and 1935) have a significant correlation to both the “LSR Manifesto” the “Regina Manifesto,” it will facilitate a clearer view of Scott’s political and poetic integration; all four texts were part of the same process of institutional critique. In addition, Scott did not publish any new poetry in the interval between the two series of poems, which allows for a larger sense of their coherence. In that vein, it is certainly justifiable to suggest that “Social Notes” is a continuation of “Anthology,” especially given that the two would collapse into the demarcation of “Social Notes I” and Social Notes II” in subsequent publications.

There is a marked correspondence between the “LSR Manifesto’s” preamble and ten-point programme, the “Regina Manifesto’s” preamble and fourteen-point programme, the sixteen sections (with prologue and epilogue) of “Anthology,” and the series of thirteen sections of “Social Notes.” The multiple poems act like grievances that will be alleviated by the point-by-point programmes of the manifestoes of the LSR and the CCF. What follow is a brief look at some of those correspondences.

The first insistence of the “LSR Manifesto” and the third point of the “Regina Manifesto” speak to the need for public ownership. The “Regina Manifesto” makes clear that “public utilities must be operated for the public benefit and not for the private profit of a small group of owners of financial manipulators” (2). As one of the main tenets of socialist politics, it is not surprising that this contentious issue is addressed so often in “Anthology”

and “Social Notes.” In “Sound Finance,” for example, Scott condemns the “executive heads” (1) of private corporations who “follow principles of sound, conservative finance” (2) such as “reducing wages” and “turning workers into the streets” (3) so that they can “continue paying full dividends” (5). Likewise, in “Big Brothers” Scott points to the contradiction of businessmen “Setting up charitable organizations / To overcome some of the inevitable consequences / Of the economic system they support” (3–5).

In the fifth poem of “Anthology,” “Modern Medicine,” Scott speaks directly to the dangers market capitalism poses on the health of the population, especially the poor:

Here is a marvellous new serum:

Six injections and your pneumonia is cured.

But at present a drug firm holds the monopoly

So you must pay \$14 a shot — or die. (1–4).

Corresponding to this is the fifth point of the “LSR Manifesto” and the eighth point in the “Regina Manifesto” that call for publicly organized health, hospital, and medical services. Scott also takes up these concerns in “Hospital,” where “the sick and dying are cared for / With the latest scientific skill” (1–2). In this poem Scott bemoans the economic division between patients: the rich are visited by their loved ones daily while “The poor, in the public wards,” may only be visited “From 2 to 5 P. M. on Tuesdays and Thursdays” (5–6). Without the universalized healthcare that the LSR and CCF call for, privilege is proportional to the patient’s economic support of the hospital.

The final demand of the “Regina Manifesto,” “An Emergency Programme,” speaks directly to the development of a system of employment insurance and the maintenance of a living wage through measures resembling various American New Deal programmes, the likes

of which the Conservative government in Canada neglected to enact. This can be seen echoed in Scott's "The New Philanthropy":

This employer, who pays \$9 a week for a ten-hour day,
Is exceedingly concerned
Lest Mr. Bennett should adopt the dole,
And so ruin the morale of the workers. (1–4)

Scott sets R.B. Bennett, then Prime Minister, in the role of mediator between the bourgeois employer and the worker, assuming the invested role of government as an overarching economic regulatory institution. Indeed, this final proposition of the "Regina Manifesto" is an overarching demand to alleviate the economic crises of the Great Depression and corresponds with the general grievances of most poems in the two cycles.

In each case of correlation between the poetry and the political demands of the LSR and CCF—and there are more for which space disallows further explication—the reader is required to make the figural connection between the plain-speaking poetry and the implied political programme. While the manifestoes of the LSR and CCF are more traditional assertions of manifesto form, the two-part poetic manifesto asserts itself into a poetic practice while disrupting dominant notions of high modernist production through the production of an "up-to-date" national poetics. With reference to Scott's anthologizing impulse, Irvine suggests that "the modernist's remaking of the poetic form is analogous to the socialist's renovation of social order" (70). Taken as manifestoes, I suggest that the poem cycles participate in modernist practice through adopting the manifesto form while disrupting the expectations of high modernist syntax and individuality. The manifesto form, with its inbuilt unclouded idiom, acts to socialize aesthetics in explicitly figural ways. The

manifesto, as Lyon, Caws, and Jenck show, relies heavily on form to constitute the force of the language. Much like the sonnet, the specific grievances that the manifesto enumerates can be wide ranging but the form is fairly consistent. “Anthology” and “Social Notes” enact the “rules of brevity, wit, and *le mot juste*” in unique and sustained ways (Jenck 2). Though the two poem cycles perform a paratactic enumeration of grievances without opaque language, they are not without their figural complexity. Indeed, the formal adherence of the poem cycles to the manifesto form is, in part, the strength of that figural complexity. The extended conceit of the poems is one of institutional critique: topical critique of hegemonic capitalist institutions and the formation of an institutional poetics whose job it is to support that mode of critique. This poetics of institutional critique does not arise from the aestheticization of the social—there are not the beautiful labouring bodies one finds in Canadian communist poetry of the early 1930s—but through the socialization of aesthetics whereby poetic complexity, in this case formal complexity, does not occlude the possibilities of the poetry making incursions into the public sphere. This is the rise of a critical poetics—supported by institutional affiliation—which Scott thought was structurally necessary for an unyielding literary criticism to arise and persist in Canada (“Letter” 698). Indeed, as Allen Mills tells us, it “requires little imagination to infer [...] that there is in Scott a theory of the importance of institutions, the legitimacy and significance of which are crucial pre-conditions of a democratic, participatory politics” (59). By correlating the manifestoes of the LSR and CCF with “Anthology” and “Social Notes,” we see how Scott’s involvement in the formation of a socialist national opposition party corresponds to his poetic production. Again, we find Scott’s mastery in his ability to mobilize the enabling and disabling conditions of institutions through—and in the service of—politics and poetry.

In 1940 Scott wrote of this interconnection in a poem that would not be published until the appearance of his *Collected Poems* (1981). “Archive” speaks directly to the emergence Scott’s vocation as a poet whose products are inextricably linked to both Canadian political formations and Canadian literary moments:

Begun

In gentle language, probing for the heart,

But soon involuntarily made a part

Of social change and crisis (5–8)

Having begun his public poetic career in 1918 with the parody of Wordsworth, “[The girls are too much with us...],” Scott continued over the following years to probe his own heart as well as the heart of Canadian social and political issues. Perhaps an early draft of “Villanelle for our Time,” “Archive” goes beyond the purview of “Villanelle” in that it references its own textuality and mode of production. The final stanza is as follows:

The personal pronoun does not count in this tale.

Before so great upheavals love grows pale,

The precious ego shivers in the storm.

Footnotes for sociologists are here,

And writing finis I shall drop no tear

Though I am the name, the content, and the form. (11–16)

In ending “Archive” with the coordination of name, content, and form, Scott articulates his conception of politics as a literary pursuit outside of the individual author and points to a conception of a public poetics. A return to E.P. Thompson’s polemic, “Commitment in Poetry,” is useful here because I think Thompson writes something incredibly “Scottesque”

as his thoughts turn to the public commitment *to* poetry and he gives us reasons as to why *this* commitment is so vitally important. “If we had better poetry,” Thompson writes, “we might have less bad sociology and less empty and mendacious politics. People with cleansed perception would no longer tolerate these offences against language and these trivialisations of values” (335). Scott’s “Archive” offers footnotes for sociologists and, in doing so, admits to a conception of a social philosophy as something emerging out of a creative—in this case poetic—engagement with the political.

SECTION 98 AND THE THEATRICALITY OF THE CANADIAN LEFT

(4) In any prosecution under this section, if it be proved that the person charged has,—

- (a) attended meetings of an unlawful association; or
- (b) spoken publicly in advocacy of an unlawful association; or
- (c) distributed literature of an unlawful association by circulation through the Post Office mails of Canada, or otherwise;

it shall be presumed, in the absence of proof to the contrary, that he is a member of such unlawful association.

—Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada (qtd. in Scott, “Communists, Senators, and All That” 128)

Just examine that for a moment, all you red college professors. None of your old-fashioned ideas that a man is presumed innocent until he is proved guilty. All the police need do here is to show that you once attended a Communist meeting, perhaps through curiosity, or spoke publicly in advocacy of the party, or distributed literature (presumably any kind of literature) of the party, and at once the Canadian legal machinery gets to work and says you are a criminal liable to twenty years. You won't escape gaol unless you can prove that you are not a member of the party. And think what it will be like trying to make this proof! Obviously no member of the

party will dare to testify that you are a non-member, because by coming forward he would at once give notice to the police that he is a criminal. You will simply have to give your own word—and why should a college professor’s red word destroy a legal presumption?

—F.R. Scott, “Communists, Senators, and All That” (128)

When, in January of 1932, Scott published an article in the *Canadian Forum* on the implications of the newly prosecuted Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada, he returned to his old habit of imparting critique through an educational framework. “Communists, Senators, and All That” is not written from the perspective of the student irritated by the encroaching cultural imperialism from the south or disappointed in his exam results. Instead, Scott employed his signature satiric style to address college professors. Though far from being a member of the Communist Party, Scott came dangerously close to exemplifying one of those “red college professors” and by writing through a satiric mode he provided just enough camouflage so as not to implicate himself.¹⁵ During the early 1930s Scott, as a legal scholar, wrote much about the implications of Section 98, but he did not explicitly take up the subject in his poetry.¹⁶ Instead, his criticism of the overtly repressive section of the Criminal Code draws on his authority as a legal scholar. Indeed, a very small amount of Canadian poetry responded to Section 98, unlike the considerable poetic response Canadians afforded to the 1936 attempted *coup d'état* in Spain. Instead, the bulk of the cultural response was theatrical.

While the previous case study traced the development of Scott’s poetics from an overt concern with educational structures into modernist poetic manifestoes aligned with an

emergent pan-Canadian political institution, this case study starts with a single legal codification of state power and traces the theatricality of responses to that state power as cultural expressions informed by modernist concerns. I use the term “theatricality” to point to the conventions of theatre in multiple forms of writing and performance. These cultural expressions range from theatrically infused political pamphlets to the performance of theatre on stage. To be clear, I use the term theatricality, as opposed to theatre, to highlight the importation of modernist developments in theatre into political discourse. I do not focus on performance texts (i.e., plays as they are acted on stage) in this case study. Rather, I focus on the ways modernist theatrical conventions circulate in discourses outside of the theatre, mainly in the rich print culture of the 1930s left.

In *Comrades and Critics*, Candida Rifkind expresses a methodological concern about a particular mode of criticism that examines the relationship between the state and theatrical production. She points to the *Massey Report* (1951) and suggests that it has become “the benchmark against which early twentieth-century theatre [in Canada] is measured” (122). She cites Paul Litt’s summary of the mythological status sometimes given to the Massey Commission: “the essentials of the parable are simple: before Massey, barbarism; after Massey, civilization and arts subsidies for all” (5). While making an argument for the re-evaluation of pre-*Massey Report* theatre in Canada, Rifkind also responds to the type of critical engagement that uses a model based on an action of the state:

The effect is to reduce a series of ideological debates and competing notions of national culture, the arts, and the role of the state to a singular symbolic moment organized by the liberal welfare state. Despite the lack of state institutions, or perhaps even because of it, the interwar period fostered a range of amateur artistic

endeavours across the country and from multiple aesthetic and ideological positions.
(122–23)

If I read her correctly, she sees critical consideration of the conjuncture of political and cultural production in relation to the state diminished by continued reference to a report prepared as the direct result of the two-year Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences, a commission appointed by the federal government by an Order in Council on 8 April 1949. On the one hand, I agree with Rifkind that it is questionable to participate in the formation and persistence of any kind of critical parable that uses hyperbole to mythologize periods of cultural production—that is, barbarism versus civilization. On the other hand, to engage critically with the relationship between cultural production and the state by looking to the mechanisms and moments of state-sanctioned action can, rather than being reductive, open up greater critical understanding of the ways in which cultural practices emerge coextensively with political critique. Furthermore, the interwar period in Canada had no “lack of state institutions” despite not quite resembling those of the supposed “liberal welfare state” of 1951 (122). On the contrary, cultural production in the interwar period responded directly to moments in which the state actively asserted control over the shape of social and cultural formations, in much the same way as post-1951 cultural production responded to the results of the Massey Commission, a state-sanctioned body that equally asserted control over the shape of cultural and social formations. The shapes may be different but the rules of geometry remain.

How, then, can a critical examination of Section 98 of the Criminal Code garner a productive understanding of the ways in which modernist theatricality emerged out of critique of political repression? To begin with, this framework emerges out of the material in

question—a cluster of texts that speak directly to the moving parts of Section 98. By bracketing off enquiry around the life-span of Section 98 instead of, say, that of a cultural programme of the Communist International (Comintern), the lines of analysis do not get restricted by the traps of commitment or consolidation. As I stated in the Introduction to *Writing Left*, the search for direct manifestations of political commitment and consolidation of aesthetic movements are not the goals of this project. These are the traps, as Alan Filewod notes, into which historians of leftist theatre in Canada have too often fallen.

In what is probably the most heartfelt and critically agile account of 1930s leftist theatre in Canada, Filewod suggests in his article “Performance and Memory in the Party: Dismembering the Workers’ Theatre Movement” that critical histories of leftist theatre in Canada have been divided into two camps. On the one hand, leftist theatre history has reinscribed “gifted” narratives that are driven by teleology rather than histories of emergence—narratives that maintain “that there were no discontinuities” between aesthetic theories or practices from one moment to the next (71). More specifically, he points toward criticism that collapses practical differences when mapping out a move from agit-prop of the Third Period Workers’ Theatre to socialist realism of the Popular Front Theatre of Action as a seamless development toward professionalism without interference from the Communist Party of Canada.¹⁷ This version has privileged continuity in the face of evidence of massive shifts in modes of cultural organization and production. On the other hand, another version of retrospective narration of leftist theatre in Canada vilifies and therefore gives unwarranted attention to “the image of ruthless Stalinist commissars liquidating the workers’ theatre and erecting monumental bastions of socialist realism” (71). Filewod sees veracity in both camps:

Both of these positions are equally right, and both are equally reductive, because in Canada the indeterminacy of the movement meant that it could follow equally indeterminate paths to its futures. It was and was not a movement; it was and was not terminated by the Popular Front; it did and did not evolve into the humanist social action theatres of the later 1930s; it did and did not initiate a continuous tradition of interventionist collective creation that lives on in Canadian theatre culture. (71–72)

The critical impasse to which Filewod rightly points can be routed by not valuing a critical practice that obsessively looks toward the consolidation of cultural movements, by not participating in critical narratives that look for *direct* manifestations of political programatics in cultural products, by not insisting that modernist experimentation and realism are always separate entities, and by not looking for successful re-inscriptions of past historical contingencies into the critical present. By examining an emergent cultural practice of theatricality in response to Section 98 the critical framework used here finds value in examining texts that, while not part of a consolidated movement, represent “the situational tactics of the strategic attempt to organize a movement” (61). In other words, this work is appropriate to the aim of my larger project precisely because, as Filewod suggests, the emergent “Workers’ Theatre Movement was marked by conditionality and desire, as something always coming into being” (68). I agree with Filewod’s foundational suggestion that there “is indeed sufficient material to argue the case that in the 1930s there was a productive field of engaged radical theatre culture that intervened in the public sphere” (61). While I aim to build on and add to Filewod’s important work, I depart from his work in my focus on leftist print culture rather than theatre performance and history. Moreover, I argue

that when the left generated a theatrical culture, they also utilized and bestowed explicitly modernist tactics on a larger leftist literary community in Canada.

Beginning with a brief genealogy of Section 98 of the Criminal Code and its enforcement in order to ground my readings historically, this case study then turns to various artistic enactments that resist and undermine the force of the Code's repressive measures. Chief among the organization of resistance was the work of the Canadian Labor Defence League (CLDL), which published *Not Guilty! The Verdict of the Workers' Jury*. After examining the resistant response to the state in the print culture of the CLDL, I dwell for some time on the legality of *Eight Men Speak*, which was written by Oscar Ryan, Ed Cecil-Smith, H. Francis (pseudonym of Frank Love), and Mildred Goldberg. In considering *Eight Men Speak*, my argument focuses more on the discourse of legality surrounding the play in reviews and print commentary than on a close reading. I move on to examine Oscar Ryan's *The "Sedition" of A.E. Smith*. The case study ends with an account of the way in which popular support for the Communist Party of Canada was manifest through theatricality as opposed to the workings of parliamentary democracy. By reading the theatricality embedded in print responses to Section 98 of the Criminal Code, I show the ways in which cultural interaction with the state shapes the institutional structures of politics.

SECTION 98 OF THE CRIMINAL CODE

In many ways Section 98 arose out of abstract xenophobic fears that labour organizations were being run by “enemy aliens” and those uncertainties reached a pinnacle with the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919. This fear illustrates widespread post-war anxieties about Canada’s lingering imperial status. While the social anxieties that gave rise to the enactment of this legislation were complex, the legal materialization of Section 98 came out of the confluence of an imprecise construction of Sedition law in Canada and the untenable continuation of Order-in-Council PC 2384, which was issued under authority of the War Measures Act on 28 September 1918. As Richard Fidler points out, “[w]hile setting out the offences of seditious words, seditious libel, and seditious conspiracy,” the models for Canada’s Criminal Code “do not define seditious intention, a necessary ingredient in each of those offences” (2). There was a definition contained in the original Criminal Code Bill of 1891, but MPs deleted it by amending the bill before it passed, which left the definition of sedition to common law and therefore to the discretion of the judiciary. Seen as too risky to prosecute, accusations of sedition were not often brought before the courts prior to the First World War, when fears brought accusations of pro-German or pacifist sentiments.

Not content to control the spread of critique of the state by pursuing individuals and arguing for clear convictions on charges of sedition, police and government officials called for restrictions on radical organizations, their literature, and their meetings, with a focus on obstructing the activities of so-called “enemy aliens.” As a result, on 28 September 1918 Robert Borden’s Conservative government implemented Order-in-Council PC 2384 under authority of the War Measures Act (enacted in August 1914), which initially banned fourteen specific organizations, adding another two within weeks (5). Apart from the named

organizations, PC 2384 deemed association unlawful—“while Canada is engaged in war”—with any group whose purpose

is to bring about any governmental, political, social, industrial, or economic change within Canada by the use of force, violence, or physical injury, or which teaches, advocates, advises or defends the use of force, violence, or physical injury in order to accomplish such changes or for any other purpose, or which shall by any means prosecute or pursue such purpose. (qtd. in Fidler 6)

Furthermore, it was punishable to be a member of such an organization and “the onus was on the accused to disprove membership in an unlawful association once the Crown had adduced evidence that he had attended its meetings, distributed its literature, or spoken publicly in its support” (7). Shortly after PC 2384 was implemented, a flurry of arrests occurred that aimed to wipe out leftist organization in Canada.¹⁸ Because PC 2384 was a wartime order it was soon repealed, though not until 1 April 1919. The Borden government acted quickly to replace PC 2384 with a more permanent law. Sections 97A and 97B were introduced into parliament immediately following the Winnipeg General Strike and were adopted 2 July 1919—Sections 97A and 97B became Section 98 in the 1927 revision and consolidation of the statutes (10). A near replica of PC 2384, Section 98 increased the maximum penalty to twenty years and made it illegal to import or send through the mail any literature that advocated force or violence (10). Section 98, as Fidler points out, “imposed criminal liability for mere status—membership, or presumed membership, in an association—and identified the unlawful association not by its deeds but by its words” (10). Though enacted with urgency in 1919, it was a decade before charges were laid under Section 98.¹⁹

When the Liberals returned to the House of Commons to form the government in 1926 they introduced a bill to repeal Sections 97A and 97B, which passed in the House but was defeated in the Conservative-dominated Senate. Bills of Repeal were passed in the House of Commons again in 1927, 1928, 1929, and 1930 only to be continually defeated in the Conservative-led Senate. The first prosecution under Section 98 (R. vs. Weir) occurred in 1929 when four women in Toronto were accused of disseminating literature that advocated for the use of force, violence and terrorism. The printer of the literature also stood trial. They were all acquitted (Fidler 23–24).

When R.B. Bennett arrived in the House of Commons to lead a Conservative majority in August 1930, he explicitly set out to quell political dissent in Canada, hence his nickname “Iron Heal” Bennett. The scandalous aspects of what followed are not only to be found in the patently repressive actions of government authorities directed toward individuals but also in the governments’ attempted regulation of the larger Canadian political climate by restricting associations. In coordination with multiple levels of government, a Canada-wide raid took place on 11 August 1931 and eight communist leaders were indicted under Section 98: Tim Buck, Tom Ewen (McEwen), Malcolm Bruce, Tom Hill, John Boychuk, Sam Carr, Matthew Popovich, and Tom Cacic.²⁰ The eight men were tried, convicted, and sentenced to terms varying from three to five years.

Following the trial, the Canadian Labor Defense League (CLDL) published *An Indictment of Capitalism* (1932), which contained Tim Buck’s address to the Supreme Court of Ontario. The 88-page pamphlet also contained an explanatory introduction by Buck and a preface by A.E. Smith. Andrea Hasenbank positions the whole document in the tradition of the manifesto, though she also notes that Buck’s address “must be read as rhetorical

performance as well as an attempt to force an analysis of Marxist ideology into the public record” (17).²¹ What is more, Hasenbank suggests that the address contains “moments that resemble the dialogue of a play” because Buck is frequently interrupted by the judge (17).

On 17 October 1932, a few months after the incarceration of the eight men, a substantial uprising broke out at Kingston Penitentiary. Three days after the riot, prison guards attempted to assassinate Tim Buck (Smith, *All My Life* 143). Shots were fired into his locked cell. The prison authorities denied this and, in fact, deflected blame onto Buck and the other Communists in the penitentiary for having instigated the riot. Morris Wolfe, in “Hard Labour,” explains that “an embarrassed Hugh Guthrie, Minister of Justice, admitted in the House of Commons that shots had in fact been fired into Buck’s cell—but just ‘to frighten him’” (14). After this event, the CLDL intensified its lobbying on the prisoners’ behalf.

THE CANADIAN LABOR DEFENSE LEAGUE AND *NOT GUILTY!*

In addition to publishing Buck’s *An Indictment of Capitalism* in 1932, the Executive Committee of the CLDL also published a twenty-eight-page pamphlet entitled *Not Guilty! The Verdict of the Workers’ Jury: On the Trial and Conviction of the Eight Communist Leaders, With a Preface, Introduction and Other Features*. The text contains five linocut illustrations by Avrom [Yanofsky], the most prominent illustrator of the monthly Progressive Arts Club journal *Masses*. In exactly the same formula as the printed text of *Eight Men Speak*, the illustrations in *Not Guilty!* appear prior to each section and give a visual cue as to the rhetorical situation of

the printed text or scene. Each illustration, in the absence of a physical stage, creates a *mise-en-scène* coded by the stark contrasts and quick, harsh lines characteristic of Avrom's muscular abstraction.²² What is more, they generate a narrative on their own, across the printed text, allowing for the simultaneous doubling of narrative trajectory that interrupts simple linearity. The cover illustration shows Liberty holding the scales of justice and wearing the uniform hat of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police with a dollar sign in place of the RCMP insignia. With "The Eight" on one scale and a large "98" on the other, the figure of capitalism sneaks from behind Liberty and puts his weight on the scale holding the "98."

The cover illustration is followed by a preface—or prologue—by Tim Buck, wherein his narrative voice exists outside of the temporality of the narrative told in the texts that make up the bulk of the pamphlet. Much like an actor removing him or herself from the inner world of a play before it starts in order to deliver a knowing address to an assembled audience, Buck explains the complex relationship between the artificiality of the capitalist courtroom and the ways in which that courtroom works as a text to be interpreted by the working class. In outlining what he sees as the real issues coming out of the trial, he incorporates classical uses of the dramatic prologue in order to undercut rivals, give a sense of the plot, and commend his audience:

In the court of working class opinion, however, the trial assumed a meaning far different than the meaning one gathered from the atmosphere of the court. The Attorney-General could declare that the trial was to wipe out Communism in Canada, as undoubtedly he hoped it would. And the decision of the Supreme Court of Ontario did render the Party illegal, in the eyes of the law in Ontario. But in the other and greater court, the court to which we Communists direct our appeal, the

effect was much different. In this court it was not Communism that was on trial, but Capitalism. And not the nine workers who were being tried, but the capitalist class fighting to defend its system, and the privileges and prerogatives of those that have.

(2)

Despite the heavily codified procedure of a courtroom, Buck undercuts the authority of the court by highlighting the creation of “atmosphere.” Instead of showing respect for the court’s authority, he places authority in the “opinion” of the working class spectators. He signals that the court becomes the stage and the codified procedure of the Supreme Court of Ontario becomes a satire on itself.

The actual plot of the pamphlet begins with an illustration showing the eight communist leaders leading the masses, with the figures behind them waving flags and holding placards—the most prominent flag depicts a hammer and sickle. Oscar Ryan then provides, in his introduction, the story of the eight communist leaders and positions them as representative of the Canadian working class: “The eight working class leaders are not simply eight individuals who by accident have come together. They represent, on the other hand, an entity. They are part of a working class movement, an expression of the development and problems of the Canadian working class at a given historical period” (3). More than folk heroes, the eight communist leaders are vaulted into martyrdom and also commemorated as an expression of something greater. Conforming to the illustration, Ryan positions the eight at the head of the masses.

The illustrative setting for the main text—“The Workers’ Jury”—depicts two rows of men, six to a row, representing the working class composition of the alternate jury. The actual formation of a workers’ jury exemplifies the theatricality brought to bear on the use of

Section 98 to arrest and imprison the eight communist leaders, and Avrom's illustration provides the visual blocking and costuming appropriate to such a task. Many of the men hold tools of the labouring class such as an axe, a wrench, a trowel, a sickle, and a hammer (presumably, they did not carry these tools to the actual courtroom). The illustration is followed by the ten-page findings signed by the workers' jury, 14 November 1931. The printed text narrates the proceedings of the trial in which "[d]emagogy of the rankest kind was used by the Crown to create 'red hysteria' in the court" (10).

When the trial of the eight communists was set, the CLLDL set out to elect a jury of twelve workers who would sit through the trial and give their own verdict. The jury was made up of "workers from Vancouver, Saskatoon (a farmer), Sudbury, Timmins, Montreal, Windsor, Hamilton, Toronto and New Waterford, N.S." and represented multiple labour positions: "miners, lumber workers, machinists, a laundry worker, a building trades worker, a printing pressman, a draftsman, a laborer and a farmer" (16). These men were assembled because one of the best ways to undermine authority is to mock it—and that is just what the workers' jury did. In staging their own mock trial in the very courtroom where the eight communist leaders were tried, they were able to condense the court's performance to a differentiation of class.

To mock (or parody) something successfully takes artistry. The artistry of the alternate jury is evidenced by the recognition and double projection of the complex juxtaposition and conceptual collapse of the role of a trial's audience and the trial's legal actors. The alternate jury theatricalizes the all-but-predetermined legal proceedings as an interventionist tactic that condenses multiple performances into the one courtroom. The worker's jury, not surprisingly, found the defendants not guilty.

Between the findings of the workers' jury and a reprint of Scott's article "Communists, Senators, and All That," which itself satirizes the legal system that upholds such a foolhardy law, is a linocut of a tank—the new machinery of state—emblazoned with a huge "98" and driving over prostrate bodies. Following Scott's article is the image that introduces the final section of the pamphlet: an RCMP Sergeant surrounded by hands that point directly at him and thus shame him. This is the figure of Sergeant John Leopold, the stool-pigeon who infiltrated the Communist Party of Canada under the name Jack Esselwein.²³ He was a key witness at the trial of the eight communists. The image is followed by an "Open Letter to Sgt. Leopold, R.C.M.P. Spy," written by one Ben Lennard and originally published in the British *Worker*. This last text—a letter first published in a British periodical—gestures towards a transnational communist network of affiliation that was active in collective political action across state borders.

EIGHT MEN SPEAK

In support of the passionate campaign fronted by the CLDL, the Workers' Theatre—an offshoot of the Progressive Arts Club—wrote and staged what Filewod calls "a spectacle of party leadership and workers' justice that was famously suppressed after its premiere by the Toronto Police Commission" ("Performance" 62–63). The theatricality that informs the construction of *Not Guilty!* prefigures the compositional tactics used to create the best-known artistic response to Section 98, *Eight Men Speak*.²⁴ Over the course of many scholarly articles

Filewod has provided thorough critical accounts of the play's status in the canon of Canadian Theatre, its historical context, mode of authorship, and the political and social roots of its modernism. He suggests that *Eight Men Speak* "may be the clearest example in Canada of the brief moment when artistic and political radicalisms aligned in a vision of an artistic practice mobilized by proletarian modernity" (*Eight Men Speak* 35). Further, Filewod enumerates a taxonomy of the play's modernist elements:

With its innovative structure, narrative use of interruptive theatrical lighting, and quick, dynamic blackout scenes, *Eight Men Speak* is one of the first Canadian examples of the modernist theatre in which the director functions as the author or conductor of the performance text. As a general principle, the play follows a montage structure, in which scenes are presented through rhythmic and staging contradictions. Transitions tend to be abrupt and contradictory rather than smooth elisions. The play makes liberal use of blackouts, tightly focused and moving spotlights, gestic props (such as pop-up masks in a jury box), abrupt sound effects (such as the banging of a gavel) and tableaux. (40)

Recognizing the recovery of the play's modernist implications in the past three decades (undertaken predominantly by Filewod, but also by Doyle), Rifkind, in *Comrades and Critics*, provides an important feminist reading of the play to show how the play "articulates revolutionary socialism and enacts modernist aesthetics through rigid gender types absorbed from modern popular culture" (142).²⁵ While the play offers many alternative readings, I continue my argument by focusing on the modernist staging of legality in order to show how legal actions intensified the leftist response to Section 98.

The play does not begin with a modernist scene. Rather, the opening scene depicts a bourgeois garden party and replicates the genre of the drawing-room play. While this opening scene introduces the bourgeois legal players (the superintendent, the warden, the deputy warden, and Guard X) through a comedy of errors, the play morphs into a montage of bourgeois misinformation before switching over to a proletarian perspective. This is achieved through the management of space on the stage through content, setting, and lighting: Buck first appears confined to a small cell as the first montage of proletarian-prisoner voices catalogue grievances in complete darkness. As the bourgeois-dominated social space of the stage transitions to a proletarian space, the proletariat gradually comes to occupy the spaces of bourgeois power. The most prominent example of this is the appropriation of the courtroom. While act 2, scene 7 represents the extant power structures of a Canadian criminal court through both staging and iconography, the very next scene (act 3, scene 1) renovates the court into the Workers' Court replete with the appropriate iconography and socially coded ideals. For example, the dais is draped in red and there are three judges instead of one. All of them wear black with red kerchiefs around their necks. Also important here is the lack of a jury in the Workers' Court. While the bourgeois court stages a masked pantomime of a jury, the Workers' Court uses the play's audience to fulfil the role of the jury.

The Workers' Court of *Eight Men Speak* is an obvious development from the jury of workers who were present at the trial of the eight communists in 1931. It is set up to try Guard X, who is accused of shooting five bullets into Tim Buck's cell. He is represented by the counsel named Capitalism, who is present on "behalf of the firm of Capitalism, Capitalism, Capitalism and Exploitation" (Ryan et al. 20). C.L.D.L., gendered female, is the

prosecutor. While the courtroom scenes are interspersed with moments of experimental modernist form, in the final act the *mise-en-scène* of the Worker's Court is changed. The final proceedings of the Workers' Court take place in a street scene that is actualized by a painted banner depicting a crowd of workers that the stage directions suggest should cover "almost the entire backdrop" (41). This shift modifies the conceptual configuration of the play's audience: while the first five acts make use of the proscenium arch, the sixth and final act morphs into a representation of theatre-in-the-round. The audience, with the addition of the banner, looks over the actors at the painting of the workers, who, in turn, look out at the audience—a formal reconfiguration that works to consolidate a proletarian subjectivity for the audience. This construction of a conceptual theatre-in-the-round helps tie the play to a history of agitprop street theatre, which, as Filewod suggests, "extracted theatrical modernism from the playhouse—the 'stationary' stage—and literally mobilized it in the practice of agitprop. Agitprop could thus be theorized as the theatricalization of modernity" (*Eight Men Speak* 38). Moreover, the print edition of *Eight Men Speak* enables us to continue theorizing a repressive Canadian political modernity in so far as it extends the life of the performance text by participating in a rich print culture.

Importantly, the machinations of the state precipitated the silencing of more than just the eight Communist leaders sentenced to time in Kingston penitentiary. While dominance of the Workers' Court facilitates the focus of *Eight Men Speak* most directly on the conviction and detention of the eight communist leaders and the attempted murder of Buck, the play is part of broader cultural trajectory critiquing repressive actions of the state. As such, the *Eight Men Speak* addresses multiple instances of the state's aggression. For example: act 3, scene 3 addresses the murder of three miners by the RCMP in Estevan, Saskatchewan during a strike

and protest march on 29 September 1931; act 3, scene 4 is a monologue spoken by Peter Grabowski, an unemployed man shot and killed in Hornepayne, Ontario; and, act 3, scene 5 is another monologue spoken by Nick Zynchuk, a young man killed by the police in Montreal during an eviction.²⁶

The play's overt concern with the construction and revision of legal discourse continues in its post-performance life. The Toronto Police Commission, who had a stenographer at the premiere, decided that rather than attacking the Progressive Arts Club, the authors of the play, or the actors through laying formal charges, they would work in conjunction with authorities in the provincial government to utilize a codified regulatory apparatus that prevented a remounting of the play. The Police Commission approached the provincial inspector of theatres who in turn warned the Standard Theatre's proprietor I.J. Weinrot that upon performance of *Eight Men Speak* at his, or any, theatre in Ontario, there would be an immediate revocation of the theatre's licence. This warning was issued to the manager of the Standard Theatre on 13 January 1934, just two days before the scheduled second performance (Livesay 83; Gordon Ryan 45). The theatre was forced to break the contract it held with the PAC.

Looking back from a critical distance of almost eighty years, the play's recognizable modernist methods have become relatively clear. Less clear are the ways discussion of the play's aesthetic allegiances and formal aims circulated just after it was written and staged. In fact, there is a very small window through which to examine aesthetic questions before the discourse of legal scandal takes over. As a result, aesthetic and legal concerns intermingle in the play's reception history. In a review of Tim Robbins' film *The Cradle Will Rock* (1999) published in *Canadian Dimension*, Doug Smith cites *Eight Men Speak* and the history of political

theatre in Canada in order to give context to the film's portrayal of the 1930s theatre scene in the United States. He suggests that, "when the company decided to put on a second performance [of *Eight Men Speak*], the Toronto Police Commission gave the play that accolade that every political theatre company hungers after—they banned it" (48). Doug Smith points to the larger life of theatre as it takes on a scandalous character. The key points in the history of the play's reception shifted significantly when it was thrust into an intimate relationship with the machinations of federal, provincial, and municipal law. Smith also suggests that the attempted assassination of Tim Buck and the plight of the eight men were "custom made for political drama, and Oscar Ryan, Frank Love, Ed Cecil-Smith and Mildred Goldberg rose to the task" (48). By looking at the reception history of the play in the intervening period between its first production on 4 December 1933 and the threat of injunction that was handed down on 13 January 1934, we can get a sense of how this task of political theatre gets weighed before being pitted against what Smith sees as the accolade of repression. If the creative process of the play's production speaks directly to the "task" of political drama, then we must also admit the messy nature of political drama's reception once it enters into a compromised legality. For the genre of political drama assumes a counterpart in either a politicized audience or an audience that can be assigned political subjectivity, but its mode of production does not necessarily assume a compromised legal subjectivity for itself. While, as Smith suggests, the shutting down the second performance gained the Progressive Arts Club the accolade of publicity and notoriety, as we shall see it also halted critical discussion of many of the artistic implications of the play's construction.

Despite the fact that the Standard Theatre was packed with fifteen hundred people on the night of the premiere performance, the play garnered little attention in mainstream media. Shortly after the first performance, the *Toronto Daily Star* reported only that

“The Internationale” was given preference over “God Save the King” by an audience which crowded the Standard Theatre last night to applaud “Eight Men Speak,” a dramatic protest against the imprisonment of Tim Buck and seven comrades in Kingston Penitentiary.

When the curtain fell at the close of the six-act play the orchestra rose and played the National Anthem. Boos and cat-calls rang from the gallery. The musicians struck up the Internationale. With one accord the hundreds joined with the actors to fill the little theatre on Spadina Ave. with their enthusiastic voices.

The ovation climaxed the players’ finale in which Guard X (Max Bloom), a penitentiary “screw,” stood on trial before the workers’ court accused of the attempted murder of Tim Buck during the prison riots last October 17. Charged with firing five shots at the Communist leader, the guard faced a tribunal of three, dressed in black and red on a bench draped with a red banner. At the close of the trial the judgement was left to the audience and in a thunderous voice they returned the verdict—“guilty.” (“Sing Out” 5)

The review focuses on representing a participatory audience. While it begins by highlighting the audience’s preference for the “Internationale” over the National Anthem (“O Canada” did not become the official National Anthem until 1980), the review clearly positions the complex negotiation of imperial subjectivity as secondary to the larger implications of theatrical participation. The review focuses on the actions and agency of the audience. It is

the audience that figures as the principle (collective) actor within the performance: they “crowded” the theatre to “applaud”; their “boos and cat-calls rang”; and, they were the “hundreds” who sang with “their enthusiastic voices” (5). Though the theatre company gestured toward compliance when they played “God Save the King,” which was mandatory at theatrical performances, the audience of hundreds singing the “Internationale” would have quickly drowned out the orchestra as well as the actors on stage. Rather than being the passive receptors of narrative deployments of colonial nationhood (“God Save the King”), the audience preferred a participatory counter-narrative. The review’s focus on the audience’s action during the performance highlights one initial critical engagement with the text, but a more thorough engagement with the play can be found in the pages of *Masses*.²⁷ An organ of the Progressive Arts Club, *Masses* published an issue in the intervening period between the performance and the threat of licence revocation. Affiliated with the theatre company, *Masses* was a venue in which the critical and artistic aims of the play were initially displayed and defended before the banning of the play came to dominate and diffuse any discussion of the actual performance text.

Many responses from the play’s supporters—sometimes the authors themselves—focused on a local theatre practitioner named Dickson-Kenwin.²⁸ In the January 1934 issue of *Masses* an unnamed author writes,

A Certain Dickson-Kenwin, who has been a disgrace to the stage in Toronto for a number of years, recently scored a complete failure in an attempt to break into stock. This coincided with the great success of the Workers’ Theatre in packing a house to see their presentation of “Eight Men Speak.” In an attempt to accrue as much unpaid

advertising to himself as possible, this man has been conducting a provocative campaign against the Workers' Theatre. ("Reaction in Art" 5)

Situated after the first performance of *Eight Men Speak*, but before the cancelled performance slated for 15 January 1934, the above statement positions a space of dispute between theatre practitioners. The comment reveals interesting if not contradictory assertions: that the Toronto stage was debased not by its bourgeois forms of theatricality or by a bourgeois audience supporting those forms, but by a single practitioner's presence in the theatrical community. It also suggests that "success" is a packed house, not the production of meaning through formal technique.

In the same issue of *Masses*, Ed Cecil-Smith wrote about Dickson-Kenwin in an article entitled "Propaganda and Art." Unlike the notice above ("Reaction in Art"), Cecil-Smith takes aim at bourgeois subjectivity, calling Dickson-Kenwin a "watch dog" of the ruling class and quoting him on the performance of the Workers' Theatre: "[t]hose in this city who have a vestige of pride left in their hearts for British traditional drama and all it stands for, will care nothing about how this play was produced, or how it was acted. They will regard it as an insult to the British Empire" (qtd. in "Propaganda and Art" 11). Dickson-Kenwin's disregard for the actual production of the play and assertion that it was "an insult to the British Empire" approximates the reception of the National Anthem by the audience after the performance (11). Dickson-Kenwin intimates the move of the Workers' Theatre away from the precepts of the normative "Toronto Stage"—the one that Cecil-Smith says he disgraces—which, it would seem, upholds colonial relations of theatrical production. Cecil-Smith's immediate response was to rephrase Dickson-Kenwin's statement: "In other words,"

Cecil-Smith writes, “even if it is good, Mr. Dickson-Kenwin doesn’t like it, neither do his owners” (11).

Cecil-Smith’s article is probably the best available theoretical meditation on the aesthetic implications of proletarian art in Canada contemporaneous with the play—as Filewod suggests, “in 1933 he was the closest thing the [Communist] Party had to a cultural theorist” (*Eight Men Speak* 11). While taking Dickson-Kenwin to task for not approaching the play aesthetically, Cecil-Smith also takes aim at the shaky arguments and polemics of the “Red Sparks” column of *The Young Worker* and those of the Student League of Canada, published in the undergraduate newspaper of the University of Toronto, *The Varsity*. Cecil-Smith speaks against the programmatic idea that “[p]roletarian art and poetry must be judged entirely on the basis of whether or not it expresses the program and fighting policy of the class struggle” (qtd. in “Propaganda and Art” 11). He goes on to address the possibilities of a movement beyond “British traditional drama,” one which does not simply turn Dickson-Kenwin’s argument upside down in a “very mechanical manner” (11). He gives caution to a stock response resembling the arguments in the “Red Sparks” column of *The Young Worker*: “Those who have a vestige of revolution in their hearts, will care nothing about how this play was produced, or how it was acted. They will regard it as a weapon of class struggle” (11). Counter to this oversimplified response, Cecil-Smith addresses the urgent importance of fostering “dynamic realist” modes of artistic production within the Workers’ Theatre based on contrast, contradiction, and a dialectical process (11).²⁹ He writes,

Of course it matters how the play is acted and how it is staged; and how it is written, too. If we believe that we are the ones who must carry on the development of art

from the point where the bourgeoisie have left off, we must at least see to it that we have the technical ability to accomplish our tasks. (11)

Cecil-Smith's retort provides clues about both the attempted professionalization of the Workers' Theatre as well as the actual experimental and methodological shifts in the modes of theatrical production that place it outside the hegemonic traditions of bourgeois art—that is, “static realist, naturalist and romantic” (11).³⁰

To get a better sense of the attempt to lend seriousness, artistic credibility, and ingenuity to the Workers' Theatre, we need only turn a few pages in *Masses* to see the assertion of an active professional development program. In “Workers' Theatre in Action” we learn that “[c]onsiderable growth in membership has resulted from [*Eight Men Speak*], in which 32 actors took part, and immediate plans are being made for short courses to improve the stage work of this group. Diction, voice culture and plastic movement lectures are being arranged” (13). I call this an *assertion* because there is no available documentation that would confirm the actual occurrence of these courses.³¹ What we can confirm, though, is a desire for an increasingly professionalized mode of theatrical production. This projected development also moves *Eight Men Speak* beyond the localized performance in Toronto and disseminates the play across the nation: an article appeared in the same issue written by one of the four authors of *Eight Men Speak*, Mildred Goldberg, titled, “How to Form a Dramatic Group in your District.”³² Goldberg's article includes instructions on how to structure such a group with officers, what types of plays should be presented, and what courses of study should be formulated. The Toronto Workers' Theatre also offered to answer any questions a new Workers' Theatre troupe might have (13-14). Directly following this article is an excerpt from *Eight Men Speak*. The excerpt confirms Mildred Goldberg's authorship of the fourth act

of the play (14). The play, once published in 1934, gets disseminated not only across the nation but internationally as well.³³ In this case, art continues to get mobilized as action through its relationship to print culture.

After the ban, Dickson-Kenwin continues to be mentioned but without much explanation or expansion of aesthetic complaints. Instead, he comes to represent an attack on the Workers' Theatre analogous to the repression to which the company was subject by agents of the state. This coalescence is confirmed when Dickson-Kenwin is mentioned in a standardized form entitled "Resolution on the Freedom of the Stage in Canada." This document, reproduced in full in Dorothy Livesay's *Right Hand Left Hand: A True Life of the Thirties*, necessitates a move to consider the broader implications of the banning of the play. Like the dissemination of the play in *Masses*, the formalized political document moves the issue outside of Toronto in order to comment on the larger concerns of a Canadian theatrical project. There are four explicit demands made in the "Resolution." The first demand calls for the immediate rescinding of the ban. The second demand is for "[f]ull freedom of the Canadian stage from censorship and police intimidation, so that a living Theatre Art may be built in the country" (qtd. in Livesay 82). The third demand makes reference to Dickson-Kenwin for the second time and calls for the end to his attacks on the workers' cultural movement. Finally, the document demands "[f]ull freedom for the Progressive Arts Club in Ontario and throughout Canada, who are particularly threatened as the first victims of this reactionary campaign" (qtd. in Livesay 82). The "Resolution" was left blank to be endorsed by outside organizations in solidarity with the PAC. The declarations made in this resolution anticipate, though do not consolidate, the broader formation of a critically engaged pan-Canadian theatre with institutional status through print culture, however ephemeral.

Dorothy Livesay, who has become a central figure in critical accounts of Canada's interwar left and was living in Montreal when *Eight Men Speak's* was produced and banned, includes more discussion and documents about the Workers' Theatre in Toronto (made up of many friends) in *Right Hand Left Hand*. One such document is a call to action she had written on 16 January 1934 when she was the secretary of the Montreal branch of the Progressive Arts Club. She writes:

Believing that this play is a sincere effort on the part of the producers to build a living Workers' Theatre in Canada and that it is imperative that the ideas contained in the play be brought to public attention, we are asking you to co-operate with us to re-establish the freedom of the Theatre before this phrase becomes an empty one. (83)

Writing from Montreal, Livesay nationalizes the call against censorship in the theatre. That there was to be a "meeting of protest" in Montreal about the banning of a play by the Ontario government points to organization within the national network of Progressive Arts Clubs. In other words, it is not enough to say that Livesay was organizing just because her close comrades were involved with the Toronto production. The lengths to which that PAC network went to communicate the larger implications of the banning to a public audience suggests the anticipation of further restrictions on artistic production in Canada. Importantly here, these mobilizations were not the only way through which the public was informed of the police imposed ban of *Eight Men Speak*.

The *Toronto Mail* covered the confusion surrounding the banning of the play. Their coverage included interviews with W.A. Orr, assistant controller of revenue in the Ontario Treasury Department, Ed Cecil-Smith, cited as a director of the Progressive Arts Club, and J.R.L. Starr of the Toronto Police Commission. Orr states that no reason was given to the

Treasury Department by the Police Commission for issuing a warning to the Standard Theatre proprietor I.J. Weinrot: “[t]hey simply said they did not want the play presented. They are privileged to make the request because the censorship of the legitimate stage in Toronto is in the hands of the municipal police” (qtd. in Livesay 78). Likewise, Starr attempted to deny responsibility for the order. He is quoted as saying, “I don’t recall that we made a definite request or recommendation that the theatre license be cancelled if the presentation was repeated [...] There was a suggestion to this effect, I think, but my impression is that final disposition of the problem was left in the hands of the treasury department, which has jurisdiction over theatres” (qtd. in Livesay 79). This mutual denial signals an attempt to render the banning unquestionable in terms of culpability.

On 13 January 1934 the *Toronto Star* ran an article entitled “The Banning of a Play Which Gave Distaste.” This article, aside from containing strands of the exact wording contained in the *Toronto Mail* article, took a decided stance. The article begins with a generalized comment on a supposedly common critique of Canada’s multilateral governing structures. The author writes that “[c]ritics are forever saying that in this country we are over-governed—two houses of parliament at Ottawa while one would be enough, too many legislatures, county councils, city, town, village and township councils, too many commissions, boards and what not” (qtd. in Livesay 79). This opening statement frames the subsequent attempt to grapple explicitly with the ways in which cultural production can find itself caught in bureaucratic webs. “It would be supposed, then,” the article continues, “that we would have laws enough and by-laws enough and regulations enough to meet every need, so that the Toronto Board of Police Commissioners could, in its performances, keep within the law. It seems not, however” (79). This statement posits first, that the Toronto Board of

Police Commissioners were not acting within the law, and second, that what comes out of the Board, the result of laws, by-laws, and regulations, are “performances.” To evoke the performative aspects of police action is telling in this case, as we will see.

The author of the *Toronto Star* article stages a bluff on the part of the police; the problem, of course, is that the proprietor of the Standard Theatre did not effectively call the bluff. This argument, without calling it such, outlines the police action as a scare tactic that would not hold up in court. Knowing that the provincial treasury department issues licences to theatres and possesses power to cancel them, the author states that the “power was exercised, that is to say, warning was given that the power would be exercised if the play were staged” (80). Further, the author argues that the “authority of the province was exercised without those who wielded the power knowing why they did what they did” (80). So, here we are shown co-operation (through mutual denial) between two levels of authority—a bilateral move, if you will. Cecil-Smith, in his introduction to the published script of *Eight Men Speak*, takes the argument somewhat further:

It was finally disclosed that Prime Minister R.B. Bennett himself had been sent a copy of the stenographic report of the play by the RCMP. He could not understand, he is quoted as saying, how on earth the Toronto public ever allowed this play to be produced at all. So now we find that this attack on the freedom of the stage and the freedom of criticism of the government has a very highly centralized beginning. (3)

With the addition of Cecil-Smith’s introductory comments, we have cursory evidence of a truly multilateral involvement in the attempted elimination of *Eight Men Speak* from public performance. However, to show the federal government’s concern we need not rely upon Cecil-Smith. We need only look towards the “Royal Canadian Mounted Police Weekly

Report on Revolutionary Organizations and Agitators in Canada.” The “Table of Contents” of the report of 22 December 1933 shows us that the RCMP kept tabs on the reviews of the performance of *Eight Men Speak*.³⁴ Another example is the report of 5 September 1934, which makes note of the fact that “J.A. MacPherson, Chairman of the Unemployed Married Men’s Association [of Edmonton, AB], Dramatic Section, appealed to the meeting to donate \$3 to be sent to the Progressive Arts Club at Toronto, Ont., for copies of ‘Eight Men Speak’” (254). A last example from the RCMP weekly report states that a scene from *Eight Men Speak* was performed in Winnipeg, Manitoba, at a celebration held of the 17th anniversary of the Russian Revolution (397). Within these three examples we see explicit federal surveillance of *Eight Men Speak* with concern for public reaction (the reviews), the publication and dissemination of the script (the meeting in Edmonton), and instances of the play’s subsequent performances (in Winnipeg). That which began as a localized performance soon became a national concern and an issue of national security.

These state interventions and public reactions to the play reveal the emergence of the scandalous characteristics of *Eight Men Speak* outside the realm of aesthetic criticism. It begs the question of the scandal’s origin: why exactly was the play suppressed? Was it just a reaction to the play’s content? Was it the audience’s disregard for imperial subjectivity that prompted the threat of licence revocation? Surely, it was both, but neither the content nor the audience’s participation in the creation of a counter-narrative exists without the formal innovations that worked to convey the meaning and interpellate the audience into participation. Could it be, in the tradition of the 1913 Armory Show or the Paris premiere of *The Rite of Spring*, that the scandal emerged in part out of reaction to the experimental modernism contained in the performance? Though perhaps unanswerable in any

substantiated way, the question provokes a further line of enquiry about interaction of codified formal strategies of representation—at once legal and aesthetic.

THE “SEDITION” OF A.E. SMITH

Though the aesthetic interventions of *Eight Men Speak* may have provided strong enough motivation to elicit the repressive action by the state, the aesthetics of the play have been eclipsed by the discourse of scandal. The legal scandal surrounding Section 98 and the play continued to snowball when the CLDL leader A.E. Smith spoke at a 17 January 1934 protest meeting (held in Hygeia Hall, Toronto), where he spoke out against the banning of the play and against Section 98. He was soon charged with seditious libel. The police alleged that Smith said that Bennett had personally ordered the murder of Buck. According to Cecil-Smith (who also spoke at the 17 January meeting), in his May 1934 introduction to the published script of *Eight Men Speak*, the charge “was based on the unsupported, framed-up evidence of Sergeant of Detectives Wm. Nursey and his crew” (3). At the trial Smith was represented by Hon. E.J. McMurray, K.C., former Solicitor-General for Canada, and was acquitted by a jury in Toronto on 8 March 1934.

Oscar Ryan then prepared *The “Sedition” of A.E. Smith*, a pamphlet that Filewod deems “a little-known masterpiece of polemical invective” (*Eight Men Speak* 21).³⁵ Indeed, it is a deft construction of political theatricality. After having co-authored *Eight Men Speak*, Ryan pushed the writing of this pamphlet further into abstraction than he had when writing

the Introduction to *Not Guilty!* The text of *The "Sedition" of A.E. Smith* opens with a pair of columns, titled "Two Men—Two Lives—Two Classes" that run parallel over two pages. The left hand column is written in earnest prose that nonetheless morphs into a hagiographic documentation the life of A.E. Smith. The right hand column contains the opposite—Ryan writes the mythic fable of the birth and development of a strange creature:

On July 3rd, 1870, the ocean seethed. At Hopewell, N.B., the earth groaned. Above, the heavens parted in fire. A babe was born into the comfortable household of Mr. and Mrs. Bennett. All who saw the little creature marvelled, not so much at its beet-red face and bellowing voice, but because of a strange phenomenon: For in one pudgy fist the child grasped a bag of gold and on one pink foot there grew a cast-iron heel....It was agreed to call the strange infant Richard (after Richard-the-Lion-Hearted) and Bedford (after someone else). (Ryan, "Sedition" 3)

The dénouement of the fable reassures that his "bellow and his roar do not frighten people any longer" (4). The two-column structure works as an introductory fragmentation whereby the reader must manage two contradictory narratives as he or she moves into the subsequent text. What follows the two columns is a series of twenty-one short elliptical blocks of prose.

While the theatricality of the workers' jury at the trial of the eight communist leaders developed into the theatrical setting of the Workers' Court in *Eight Men Speak*, I suggest that Ryan adapted a theatrical convention for his formal construction of *The "Sedition" of A.E. Smith*. These blocks of texts are unique for their modernist use of the conventions of theatre: not only do the elliptical texts disrupt narrative continuity, they also resemble stage directions. They provide brief descriptions of various scenes from the then-recent history of the Canadian working-class struggle, while also leaving room for a reader to interpret and

project his or her agency into the scene. This space for the readers' performance is constructed through form and by tone. The short, staccato sentences are imagistic and the imagery accumulates without grammatical temporal progression. Rather, the blocks of text contain an immoderate use of ellipses that demand the reader choreograph narrative linearity.³⁶

The stage directions come together to form a tableau of key Canadian working-class events. The first segment of prose, titled "The Scene Opens in Drumheller, 1925," tells of a miners' strike and the creation of the CLDL. The sections of elliptical prose continue through different scenes, highlighting free speech fights in Toronto, the prosecution of the eight communist leaders under Section 98, the 1931 mining strike in Estevan, the deportation of foreign-born workers in 1932, the attempted murder of Tim Buck, the murder of Nick Zynchuk in Montreal, the conditions in the jail where the eight communist leaders are held, more deportations, the banning of *Eight Men Speak*, the mass support given to the CLDL, the arrest of Joe Derry, the history of Canadian sedition laws, and eventually, "The Scene is Set," which depicts the scandal around A.E. Smith's arrest for sedition. The tableau ends with a return to mythology. Ryan constructs a victory of the working class as they discover Achilles's (Bennett's) vulnerable iron heel: "This government, too, thinks it is very powerful and will always be powerful. But this government, it seems, considers that its greatest strength is in its heel, which it calls Iron....The workers of Canada, the farmers of Canada, and the friends of the working class are determined to pierce that Iron Heel" (19).

More than just polemic, Ryan's compositional strategy for *The "Sedition" of A.E. Smith* reveals a proclivity for the conventions of modernist theatre. Part of a group of possible conventions that contribute to the creation of modernist theatre—alongside interruption of

temporal narrative progression, stark formal contrasts, and revisionary codes of audience participation—is the experimentation with cross-genre production.³⁷ Rather than bringing external conventions into the theatre, *The “Sedition” of A.E. Smith* imports modernist theatrical convention into legal argumentation.

MAPLE LEAF GARDENS

The theatricality of the texts within leftist print culture facilitated both the emergence of a theatrical movement of proletarian modernism (though not consolidating the movement) and to the popular pressure to repeal Section 98 and release the prisoners convicted under its power. What is more, the theatricality of the response to Section 98 facilitated the high point of popular participation with Communist Party of Canada (CPC). RCMP documents illustrate an utterly unique moment in the history of Canadian politics:

A huge rally in the Maple Leaf Gardens, Toronto, Ont., on the evening of 2nd December [1934] climaxed Tim Buck’s return to the revolutionary movement. A crowd of 17,000 packed the Maple Leaf Gardens, the largest indoor auditorium in Canada, and several thousand people had to be turned away. The meeting was well organized and constituted one of the largest ever held in Toronto or in all Canada. (Kealey and Whitaker, *R.C.M.P....Part I* 439)

Almost a year to the day after the performance of *Eight Men Speak* at the Standard Theatre in Toronto, Tim Buck walked onto the stage at Maple Leaf Gardens and spoke to those in

attendance, giving thanks for “the mass support of hundreds of thousands of people throughout Canada” (441). He had emerged from Kingston Penitentiary on 24 November, the last of the eight detainees, after a successful campaign that was spearheaded by the CLDL. Filewod suggests that “[i]n this moment, elative in that it generated an embodied, physiological rapture through spectacle, the party performed itself as a simulacrum of revolution. The performance *was* the party, not just iconically but also materially, as the embodied locus of its ideological and discursive regimes” (“Performance and Memory” 75). Giving a reading of a photograph of the rally, he focuses on the regimentation of the performance on the floor of Maple Leaf Gardens. Moving beyond just the floor of the arena, this photograph also shows something beyond the militaristic blocking and scenographic regimentation—an audience seated in the round that does not quite make up the party as it adopts a spectatorial subject position.

In its “simulacrum of revolution” the rally fails to incorporate the innovations in theatricality that were harnessed in the responses to Section 98. The mode of modernist experimentation and theatricality contained in *Not Guilty!*, *Eight Men Speak*, and *The “Sedition” of A.E. Smith* emerged out of a response to the legal conditions in Canada. To perform the revolution through regimented representational codes that were beyond the pale of political conditions in Canada, the party misunderstood the origins of support as well as the seat of its own “ideological and discursive regimes” in the Canadian context (75). The texts examined in this case study were able to infuse their audiences with legal power on behalf of the CPC through undermining conservative codes of state power. When Buck thanks the “hundreds of thousands of people throughout Canada,” he is thanking them for exercising a legal subjectivity; he is not thanking them for their vote (Kealey and Whitaker 441). While the

RCMP suggest that 2 December 1934 was the climax of “Tim Buck’s return to the revolutionary movement,” I suggest that Buck’s release was the actual climax of the CPC in the popular Canadian imaginary (439). The popular support that the party garnered throughout the early 1930s did not transfer over into parliament, unlike the upstart CCF. In other words, it may be that while the party may have lost momentum in its membership drive due to the shifting policies of the Comintern from the Third Period toward a Popular Front policy, the party was not able to survive without pushing up against its own suppression—a suppression powerful enough to, as Filewod suggests, create a theatre practice in Canada that “survived the erosion and collapse of the Communist Party” (“Performance and Memory” 75). More than facilitating a history of theatre performance, the theatricality of resistance to the legal suppression of the CPC—with its attendant proletarian modernism—added much to an already rich leftist print culture in Canada.

CHAPTER FOUR: ORGANIZING THE TRANSNATIONAL FIGHT

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER FOUR: THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Particular world-historical events capture the global imagination, force us to take stock of our convictions, and demand that we be mindful against recurrence. Rarely simple or fleeting, these events are often compounded with both tragedy and persistent optimism. Details of these events get absorbed, shaped, and redeployed over time by a large number of writers, scholars, and readers from around the world. The Spanish Civil War is such an event. As will be argued shortly, it was a matrix-event. It was a moment that changed the structuring principles of political formations around the globe, and more importantly here, it was a moment that changed the structuring logic of cultural production. The following case studies show how the Spanish Civil War had an important and often overlooked influence on the emergence of transnational characteristics of modernism in Canada. As Valentine Cunningham suggests in *British Writers of the Thirties*, if there is “one decisive event which focuses the hopes and fears of the literary ’30s, a moment that seems to summarize and test the period’s myths and dreams, to enact and encapsulate its dominant themes and images, the Spanish Civil War is it” (419). The conflict in Spain was crucial to the work of many well-known modernist writers including Langston Hughes, Ernest Hemingway, André Malraux, George Orwell, Pablo Neruda, W.H. Auden, and Stephen Spender. The literary works that took up the challenge of representing the Spanish Civil War continue to garner critical attention in many different national and transnational contexts, but the Canadian literary

contributions to the anti-fascist cause have not enjoyed the same sustained attention. As a result, the cultural significance of Ted Allan, Norman Bethune, Charles Yale Harrison, and Jean Watts, which is the main focus of this chapter, has not been widely acknowledged. The Spanish Civil War inspired their work and, as such, some knowledge of the conflict is required for an appreciation of their texts. While few readers in 1939 would have been unacquainted with the events in Spain, that is no longer an assumption that can be taken for granted. This situation evidences the need for literary reconnaissance to be coupled with historiographic narratives.

What began as an attempted *coup d'état* in July of 1936 quickly turned into a full-scale conflict lasting until the spring of 1939. The attempted coup began when a collection of Spanish Army generals conspired against the democratically-elected government of the Second Spanish Republic, which had been elected just a few months previously. The rebellion was, in part, a response by the political right in Spain to the long-term reform policies upon which the Republic was founded in 1931. The military uprising began soon after the 1936 elections produced a coalition government of parties on the left—a Popular Front. The uprising was led by rebel Nationalists and supported by landowners, monarchists, Carlists, conservative Catholics, and the fascist Flange. The ruling Republicans were supported by workers, moderates, the educated middle class, socialists, and communists, as well as Catalan and Basque regionalists and anarchists. The socialist premiers Francisco Largo Caballero, Juan Negrín, and the liberal president Manuel Azaña y Días led the Republican government. The Republicans (also called Loyalists) were sent support from the Soviet Union, and a global volunteer force, the International Brigades, also joined the Republicans in their defence of democracy. The Nationalists received troops, tanks, and

planes from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, which used Spain as a testing ground for new methods of tank and air warfare. France and Great Britain alleged they were attempting to prevent a general European conflict when they proposed a non-intervention pact, which was signed in August 1936 by twenty-seven nations (Germany, Italy, and the USSR included). The right-wing Spanish General Francisco Franco commanded a professional army in Spanish Morocco, also known as the Army of Africa, which was blockaded by Republican warships until Hitler and Mussolini provided transport aircraft to get Franco's troops into Spain. It was the arrival of Franco and his army that turned the failing coup into a longer conflict. Franco consolidated power and became the leader of the Nationalist cause during the course of the war.

The Nationalists' initial campaign seized much of northwest Spain and parts of the southwest. In the autumn of 1936 Franco's troops advanced upon Madrid, but the initial assault failed and they were met with defeat in their subsequent attempts to encircle the city—at Boadilla in December 1936, Jarama in February 1937, and Guadalajara in March 1937. In April 1937, the indiscriminate German bombing of Guernica, famously commemorated by Pablo Picasso, became well known across the globe and helped gain the Republicans widespread popular support. This popular support for the Loyalists did not transform into governmental or military support from the Western democracies.

Gradually, the Nationalists—with the continued support of Hitler and Mussolini—wore down the Republicans. Late in 1938 the International Brigades were disbanded. Franco eventually launched an offensive that advanced to the Mediterranean, separating Catalonia from the rest of the Republic. Barcelona fell in January 1939 and Madrid fell in the last days of March 1939. The Republic, which had given great hope of a more just future to a whole

generation who had either suffered or inherited the trauma of the First World War and the Great Depression, was defeated. The onslaught of the Second World War grabbed the world's immediate attention, but Spain remained in the hearts and minds of those who had experienced the hope of the cause—those who were certain that the anti-fascist fight would usher in a better, more just world.

Much of the history of the Spanish Civil War has been written from outside of Spain. This is, in part, because Franco's regime lasted until his death in 1975. During his lengthy dictatorship any writing that shed negative light on the nationalist cause was disallowed. Michael Petrou suggests that, as a result, histories of the Spanish conflict tend to have more of an international focus than they would had they been written by Spaniards, and non-Spanish historians have been criticised for highlighting the international elements of the war. Petrou acknowledges the criticism—that the conflict had deep roots in Spain's class and regional divides—but only “to a point,” because “the conflict was also played out on the international stage” (5). Apart from official intergovernmental affairs, such as Hitler's assisting the Nationalists with his Condor Legion (Air Force) and France and Britain's participation in the Non-Intervention Committee (to name only a few instances), there was much transnational involvement at the level of non-governmental organisation. The formation of the International Brigades was an example of the global character of the conflict. Coming from many different countries, men and women volunteered to fight alongside Spanish anti-fascists in defence of the democratically elected government. According to Hugh Thomas, approximately forty thousand internationals fought for the Republic and a solid portion of those volunteers travelled from Canada (982).

While there have been previous histories of the Canadian participation in Spain by Victor Hoar (1969), William Beeching (1989), and Mark Zuehlke (1996)—all of which merit reading—the most recent and comprehensive is Michael Petrou’s *Renegades: Canadians in the Spanish Civil War* (2008). By way of introduction, Petrou asks an important question:

Canadians in the 1930s had little obvious reason to feel as if their own lives and fates were entwined with those of Spaniards. Spain was, after all, far away. Its inhabitants spoke a different language. Few Canadians could trace their origins to Spain or had any relatives there. The two nations might as well have belonged to different worlds. And yet, between 1936 and 1939, almost seventeen hundred Canadians chose to fight in the Spanish Civil War, of whom more than four hundred were killed. Why? (3)

Though the answer is complex and of larger scope than can be covered in these introductory remarks, the question remains vitally compelling. Why did so many Canadians risk life and limb to go to Spain? In part, their motivation came out of a growing animosity toward the emergence of far-right politics both at home and abroad. The conditions that brought about this understanding and attitude in the Canadian context were a mixture of economic, political, ecological, class, xenophobic, and colonial circumstances. As mentioned in the introduction to the previous chapter, the world was in the midst of the Great Depression and Canada was hit particularly hard: the suffering of Canadian agricultural workers was compounded due to ecological disaster; the Conservative government of R.B. Bennett had done little to relieve the most blatant effects of mass unemployment; recent immigrants to Canada were subject to the racist anxieties of the dominant cultures; and, more and more people had become aware of the rise of fascism in Canada, especially the Catholic Church’s support of fascist ideology (which had greater repercussions in Quebec). Also, many of the

volunteers were unemployed men and/or recent immigrants who were fearful of the rise of fascism in their European homelands. Many of the volunteers were dedicated communists who thought that Spain would be a springboard for global revolution. Although the reasons for volunteering were often diverse, the vast majority of the volunteers were united in their potent anti-fascist beliefs. Whatever the particular motivation, the fact remains that almost seventeen hundred Canadians were compelled enough by the plight of the Spanish Republic to make their way to the Iberian Peninsula to fight fascism.

When the Canadian volunteers started arriving in Spain, they joined the International Brigades, with most of the English-speaking Canadians joining the Abraham Lincoln Battalion as part of the XV International Brigade. Many Canadians who spoke languages other than English were placed in battalions of the International Brigades organized by language groups. A separate battalion was formed for the Canadian volunteers early in the summer of 1937: the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion. The battalion, which also housed many American volunteers, was named after William Lyon Mackenzie and Louis-Joseph Papineau, who were leaders of the 1837 pro-democracy rebellions in Upper Canada (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Québec).

The volunteers—the men and women who actually made their way to Spain—were not the only Canadians who took notice of the events shaking Europe. Spain became a magnetic topic for many in Canada. Committees were formed in support of the republic, speaking tours were organized, rallies were held, and money was raised. Even more, Spain saturated the news. With the concurrent rise of news agencies, photo agencies, and transnational networks of mass communication, accounts of what was happening in Spain

were making their way around the globe in quick succession and in unprecedented ways. As such, the Spanish Civil War became part of the Canadian public imaginary.

The artistic community adopted Spain as one of the most rigorously represented subjects of the time, as the work of culture and the military defence of democracy collapsed into a single pursuit. Indeed, the anti-fascist cause in Spain helped to reorganize some of the prevailing aesthetic principles circulating throughout Canada. In the midst of the conflict, for example, Spain acted as a catalyst for metapoetic expression of modernism in some Canadian poetry.¹ Even a partial list of poets who have written about the events surrounding the Spanish Civil War reads like an anthology of modern poetry in Canada: Patrick Anderson, Louis Dudek, Ralph Gustafson, Irving Layton, Leo Kennedy, A.M. Klein, Kenneth Leslie, Dorothy Livesay, P.K. Page, E.J. Pratt, Sir Charles G.D. Roberts, F.R. Scott, Raymond Souster, A.M. Stephen, Miriam Waddington, Patrick Waddington, Joe Wallace, and George Woodcock, among others. Canadian fiction was to feel the reverberations of Spain for quite some time. In retrospective novels Spain is often treated as a sort of character in itself, or an ideal of (often masculine) social expression, or the catalyst for a character's action, or (ironically) a socialist utopia. Spain plays a major part in Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* (1947); Hugh Garner's *Cabbagetown* (1950/1968); Hugh MacLennan's *The Watch That Ends the Night* (1959); Mordecai Richler's *Joshua Then and Now* (1980), which was dedicated to Ted Allan; Mark Frutkin's *Slow Lightning* (2001); Denis Bock's *The Communist's Daughter* (2006); and, most recently, June Hutton's *Underground* (2009).

During the conflict itself, two novels with strong Canadian connections were published (though not in Canadian editions) that deal directly with the events in Spain: Charles Yale Harrison's *Meet Me On The Barricades* in 1938 and Ted Allan's *This Time a Better*

Earth in 1939. These novels make up portions of each case study in the present chapter: I argue that Allan's text enters into the realm of modernist reportage through both form and content. I argue that Harrison's Spanish Civil War text is a decidedly experimental modernist exploration of the leftist North American imaginary. While Harrison brings the issues of Spain to North America, Allan transports the convictions of North America's left to the mediated Spanish battlefield. Each novel exhibits an exploration and critique of the interaction between multiple political actors within a world-changing event. In other words, each text pays close attention to the contested ground that covers the formation, scope, and organization of the transnational Popular Front as it responds to the Spanish Civil War.

In exploring Canadian literature about the Spanish Civil War the following case studies grapple with a distinctive event around which a body of social, political and cultural discourse emerged. Moreover, the case studies in this chapter explore how the Spanish Civil War works as a "matrix-event" that demands tactical recalibrations of the literary-critical discourse used to engage with the texts which the event occasions. While there are various modes of philosophical and materialist positioning that theorize what constitutes an "event,"² I have chosen to focus on historiographic conceptualizations of "the event"—namely, those put forth by the French *Annales* school.

The *Annales* school was a scholarly group that was founded on the very critique of methodological reliance on political and diplomatic events for the writing of history. In the early years of the group, the scholars who were involved aimed to shift focus from the telling of history as one event after the next, to a focus (perhaps echoing Bergson) on the *longue durée* or the broad, long-term persistence of structures within society. Over time, the *Annales* group of historians and social scientists came to pinpoint *types* of events necessary to address when

looking at the emergence and persistence of structures within society. Events of this kind have been termed “matrix-events.” A matrix-event is a moment that reshapes hegemonic structures at an ideological and conscious level. As Ian McKay points out, “Wars and matrix-events often go together. In wartime the language of politics is transformed” (101). Matrix-events are contradictory moments that demand a new or transformed framework of understanding—a new or transformed discourse. Writing about the Spanish Civil War, McKay suggests, the “craven failure of the liberal state to defend democracy in Spain in the 1930s stank in the nostrils of [the] left,” but, just as importantly, it also changed the ways the proponents of liberal democracy could smell themselves (*Rebels* 101). In other words, the state-sanctioned disavowal of Spanish democracy by the majority of Western democracies was at odds with the popular support the cause received from within those states; peoples’ ideas of what democracy would stand for was shaken. This contradiction, some have argued, was the beginning of the end for the international liberal order as embodied by the League of Nations. In other words, it may have ushered in the end of liberal political modernity under the weight of neo-liberal economic sovereignty.

One unique feature of a matrix-event is that its gravitas can live on, often to be recalled at strategic moments, even after other structure-changing events have superseded the first. The Spanish Civil War, as evidenced by the number of authors who persist in writing about the conflict, continues to be evoked not just as a topic but as a resource and counter-example. In this sense, then, the moment of a matrix-event is not limited to a specific site in temporal progression—poets and novelists (as shown above) are still writing fiction and poetry about the Spanish Civil War. However, the following case studies do not explore recent literary texts in which the Spanish Civil War is evoked. Rather, they explore texts

written during the initial action of the event in order to show how it influenced the emergence of distinct modernist expressions in Canadian literature. In other words, the following case studies show how the Spanish Civil War had an important and often overlooked influence on the emergence of transnational characteristics of modernism in Canada.

While critics have frequently noted that the Spanish Civil War gave rise to a fairly consistent set of literary tropes, slogans, and topics, less clear is how the matrix-event occasioned changes in the way the cultural production inspired by the conflict was organized in different transnational contexts. While the second chapter of this dissertation explores the conceptual and mechanical ways in which collectives can enable different modes of literary production and subject positions in relation to individual modernist production, and the third chapter provides two examples of the concurrent emergence of modernism and political parties in Canada, this fourth chapter investigates how a select number of authors navigate transnational and leftist literary production at a moment of political crisis. The case studies in this chapter ask the following question: how did the Spanish Civil war shape the production of narrative while also transforming the very basis of *how* leftist politics could be approached in literary ways?

If your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough.

—Robert Capa (qtd. in Wallis 16)

While cities and neighbourhoods are often cited as foundational spaces for specific types of cultural production (think of London's Bloomsbury or Paris's Montparnasse), literary historians have often identified specific locations within those neighbourhoods as scenes out of which innovative cultural production emanates. The same is true for historians of Canada's literary production. For example, the home of Andrew and Tully Merkel at 50 South Park Street, Halifax, has already been mentioned. The home of Frank and Marian Scott, at 541 Clarke Avenue, Westmount, is often cited as a space in which a modernist spark ignited. For yet another generation of literary producers, the location of Coach House Press at what is now 80 bpNichol Lane, Toronto, has become an important municipal marker of literary innovation. This case study seeks to add 36 Principe de Vergara, Madrid, to the address books of Canada's cultural historians. This address represents a transnational site for the production of Canadian culture.

Most famously, this address on the Principe de Vergara was the location of the Spanish-Canadian Blood Transfusion Institute (Instituto Hispano-Canadiense de Transfusión de Sangre). The Institute consisted of a fifteen-room apartment below the offices of the Socorro Rojo Internacional (SRI)—the communist-affiliated humanitarian and

medical relief agency. The texts I consider in this case study (writing, radio broadcasts, photography, and film) are inextricably linked to this address. Having all lived and worked at this location at some point, the cultural producers whose work is examined here are anomalous. Unlike the majority of Canadians whose cultural work was aimed at supporting the anti-fascist cause, Norman Bethune, Hazen Sise, Jean Watts, and Ted Allan actually went to Spain. Their work takes on unique characteristics because of this exceptionality.³ Each negotiates proximity to his or her audience in different and unique ways. As each works through his or her gendered and classed relations in the transnational spatialization of the conflict, each negotiates, mediates, and ultimately undermines the construction of a far-off and exotic Spain in ways that serve to legitimate the Republican cause within the localized, everyday lives of the Canadian audience. Moreover, each uses different aesthetic techniques to familiarize one segment of the Spanish population (anti-fascists) while giving another segment of the Spanish population (fascists) all the archetypical characteristics of the foreign enemy. This careful negotiation of illustrative proximity assembles multiple modernist techniques in the service of journalistic witnessing and the mustering of anti-fascist solidarity.

The Spanish Civil War has often been referred to as the poets' war, but it was also a journalists' war. This case study examines the journalistic work of Canadians who were in Spain during the conflict. Furthermore, this investigation understands the potential for journalistic production to be an influential mode of cultural and artistic production. Leaving behind traditional examples of journalism as the objective and indexical presentation of facts, this case study looks at journalistic output that does not aim at objectivity, yet has an important drive towards truth. As the American writer Martha Gellhorn succinctly suggests, journalistic truth in reporting on the Spanish Civil War meant "explaining that the Spanish

Republic was neither a collection of blood-slathering Reds nor a cat's-paw of Russia" (qtd. in Preston 23). In other words, journalistic production should actively avoid what she called "all that objectivity shit" (qtd. in Preston 23). As Paul Preston suggests, in *We Saw Spain Die: Foreign Correspondents in the Spanish Civil War*, Gellhorn and many, many other writers who were in Spain refused to "adopt a morally repugnant neutrality equidistant between two very different sides" (23).⁴ The Spanish Civil War was in many ways a watershed moment in reframing the dominant perceptions of journalism—the journalists in Spain did not pretend to be objective.

At question is what kinds of journalism arose from the conflict. If, for journalists, as Preston suggests, in "trying to capture accurately what they saw, observation became indignation and sympathy became partisanship," what formal shape did their journalism take (18)? To begin with, the question, I believe, demands that cultural historians look across various media and their attendant conventions. The conflict occurred amidst the concurrent rise of news agencies, photo agencies, and transnational networks of mass communication. Within the history of print journalism, the experimentations of 1930s reportage—both in Spain and in North America—were monumental in terms of the destabilization of discursive traditions and established professional practices, even though prior examples of innovation in reportage certainly existed.⁵ Radio-based reportage and photojournalism were still emergent forms and therefore not as restricted by codified modes of production. Filmic journalism of a type that would become subsumed into the discourse of documentary was even more recent to the journalistic scene. What is more, each medium has its own relationship to human perception and ways of knowing. The social, political, artistic, and spatio-temporal literacies that inform the communicative process of print media, from sites

of production to sites of reception, are different from the social, political, artistic, and spatio-temporal literacies demanded by photography. So too are different literacies required for radio or film. All of these literacies are employed at a unique moment in the history of technological development and in the service of staging a journalist encounter aimed at fostering solidarity.

Not only are the particulars of established and emergent media at stake, in *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary*, Paula Rabinowitz notes that the “place of writers [as well as photographers and cinematographers] as witness to atrocity assumes new urgency with the advent of mass destruction. The scale of horror, beginning with Spain, calls forth a moral stance that undoes the objective pose of the observer” (118). The work of the observer under the conditions of modern warfare, Rabinowitz suggests, was to “get a clear sense of the social,” and to “develop mimetic effects which were adequate to the task of translating areas previously outside the view of observers” (6). So, on top of negotiating and retooling the conventions of hegemonic and emergent media, the work of journalism in Spain also demanded innovation in new representational directions.⁶

Another key consideration in figuring out the shape of the journalistic production of Canadians in Spain is the function of the “event” in history. The Spanish Civil War is a notoriously complicated event. In the introduction to this section I suggested that the conflict was a matrix-event that precipitated changes in the structuring principles of various discursive practices. Journalism was no exception. The conflict in Spain, with its power to change representational and discursive codes, demanded the development of new “mimetic effects” within journalism (6). As a result, the production of journalism borrowed from developments in modernist artistic practice and experimentation to help supply those new

mimetic effects. One of the more prominent mimetic negotiations the Canadians had to deal with was around issues of proximity—how to represent and recalibrate space, be it emotional, geographic, racial, national, gendered, ethnic, ideological, and so on. While Rabinowitz suggests that the language of reportage “foregrounds sexual, class, racial and gender *differences* within its address, and that “these *differences* construct a spectator whose position is located within history, essentially remaking the relationship of truth to ideology by insisting on advocacy rather than objectivity” (7, my emphasis), she fails to capture reportage’s equally important construction of solidarity and *sameness* through proximity.

For the Canadians who were in Spain and who produced reportage for Canadian audiences, the recalibration of space was requisite. In order for Canadian audiences (across fields of class, gender, and race) to support and identify with the plight of Spanish anti-fascists, a careful negotiation was necessary to collapse particular conceptual distances and divisions, while maintaining others. The cultural geographer Rob Shields, in “A Truant Proximity: Presence and Absence in the Space of Modernity,” outlines three modes of analysis which frame the construction of space: (1) cultural conceptions, (2) social constructions, and (3) practices. He suggests that these “three aspects, the social imaginary, social representations, and practices constitute the axes of our spatiality and the space that marks the uniqueness of our historical moment and place” (183). Further, there are three “paradigmatic but related spatial ‘forms’” that “provide tangible manifestations of the above three aspects of spatiality” (184):

First, *inclusion* and *exclusion*, “inside and outside,” or interiority and exteriority characterizes foundational notions of the individual, the community, and the nation-state. Second, *differentiation* or “contrast” provides regional oppositions, and social

status distinction by geographical division. Third, as hinted above, *presence* and *absence* is closely bound up with conceptions of truth, being, contemporaneity, and proximity. Amongst others, these three spatial forms operate together to underwrite the modernist “social spatialisation” of Western cultures. (184)

Shields’s theorization of space in modernity helps to show that in order to gather support for the Republican cause in Canada, the Canadians in Spain had to encode the mechanisms of spatialization that are already, always present in communicative modes of production. They had to represent and reproduce a representational ethics of solidarity across space—create a transnational “duty of care”—while also maintaining an adequate construction of enemies who have “renounced this duty of care” and who are figured as “archetypical adversaries” (183). This differentiation, more often than not, is tied up with tropes and grammars of presence and absence, inclusion and exclusion. Each work under consideration here negotiates the spatialization of the conflict differently.

In what follows I show how Norman Bethune, with the help of Hazen Sise, incorporated modernist techniques into various media in an effort to stage an artistic experience for the audience of his journalism. Providing an artistic experience for an audience instead of an indexical recitation of facts was used in the name of transmitting of what Bethune calls “the truth of a non-shared experience” and, therefore, gathering support for the republican cause (*Politics of Passion* 161). Next, a critical reading of Jean “Jim” Watts’s work explores the ways in which she negotiated the “everyday” as a technique for collapsing the conceptual distance between the people of Spain and her Canadian audience. While the first part of this case study looks at journalism’s use of modernist techniques, the second part looks to Ted Allan’s novel, *This Time a Better Earth*, not only for the ways in which it helps

build the conventions of the Reportageroman, but also for the way it *stages* journalism—journalism is the *mise en scène* of the novel. Splitting my investigation thus allows for a reading of the ways in which journalism adopts modernist representational forms as well as a reading of the ways in which fiction can represent multiple forms of journalism. A bifurcation of the case study in such a way might suggest a definitional challenge: does reportage properly belong to journalism or artistic production? Rather than searching for a proper home for reportage, this case study develops a mode of reading formal techniques of representation that expose the modernist implications that blur the lines between the disciplinary disparities and complicate this definitional challenge. The critical aim of this case study is to explore the ways authors use formal innovation in different media in order to present different negotiations of proximity and how this recalibration of space represents the emergence of a distinct modernist articulation in Canada.

REPORTING PROXIMITY

A critical investigation of the journalistic production that came from Canadians in Spain would be remiss in not addressing the reportage of the most famous Canadian to lend efforts to the anti-fascist cause. Norman Bethune has captured the imagination of people from around the globe, most notably, perhaps, in China, where Chairman Mao proffered his image as the ideal of internationalism.⁷ Born in Gravenhurst, Ontario, in March of 1890, Bethune left his post as Chief of Service in the Department of Thoracic Surgery at Montreal's Sacré

Coeur Hospital to offer his services in aid of the Spanish Republic. While his activities in Spain took many forms, he is best remembered for spearheading the innovations made by the Spanish-Canadian Blood Transfusion Institute (Instituto Hispano-Canadiense de Transfusión de Sangre). When he returned to Canada in June of 1937, he carried out a speaking tour, raising funds for the anti-fascist cause, before leaving for China the following year, where he died of septicaemia in November of 1939. The example set by Norman Bethune has been significant for Canadians, in part, because he affords a strong alternative model of citizenship beyond restrictive national or neo-liberal formulations.⁸

In *The Politics of Passion: Norman Bethune's Writing and Art*, Larry Hannant notes that the “genius of the Spanish-Canadian Blood Transfusion Institute was not just the precious work it performed but also its propaganda value back home” (128). Much of the “propaganda value” was communicated through a large network of supporters based around the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy (CASD).⁹ As the institutional body that officially sent Bethune to Spain, they led a tireless public relations campaign to raise funds and unofficially solicit volunteers for Spain. Bethune supported their effort through various media: radio, film, newspaper, photography, and pamphlet. Depending on the media, subject, and audience, Bethune’s narrative strategies changed as he negotiated his and his audience’s proximity to the conditions of Republican Spain through appeals to professional authority and through combining diverse media to interpellate an audience.

In late 1936 and early 1937 Bethune delivered a series of radio broadcasts from Madrid that were subsequently printed by the CASD and distributed throughout Canada.¹⁰ The composition of these broadcasts incorporates a continually changing addressee. The broadcast of 24 December 1936, “Canada Greets Spain,” is addressed to Spanish workers

and anti-fascists—“Comrades of Spain”—and Bethune figures himself synecdochically as the “United Front of Canada” (*Politics of Passion* 135). This early broadcast constructs Bethune as spokesman for Canadian workers who, in turn, fuses the plight of Canadian workers with workers from around the globe. In a broadcast delivered five days later, the construction of the addressee seems to have changed to a general European audience, with a focus on reaching out to British anti-fascists. In this broadcast Bethune frames himself as a speaker who appeals less to the authority of the generalized Canadian Popular Front than to his own professional authority as a surgeon. He describes the state of medical infrastructure in Madrid before making appeals to the generalized European audience for doctors and nurses who speak French or German (if not Spanish), brain surgeons, funds and staff for language-specific convalescent homes, ambulances, as well as supplies such as splints and X-ray film (138). He also reaches out to European listeners: “We would also be glad to hear from those who are listening in nightly as we are not sure of the number of our audience. Will you drop me a line?” (138). By making the appeal for personnel and supplies at the same time as he makes an appeal for active dialogue to emerge out of what is ostensibly a one-way medium, Bethune’s addressee is interpellated into the general cause through identification with the singular, professionalized speaker.

“They Made the Supreme Sacrifice,” a broadcast on New Year’s Day 1937, does not have an identifiable national or transnational addressee but, as if the distance is collapsed by his previous appeal for active dialogue with listeners, the broadcast imagines an addressee who shares Bethune’s physical, or at least visual, proximity to the fighting. In this broadcast Bethune uses personal pronouns instead of figuring himself as the collective representative of the Canadian—and by extension, transnational—Popular Front. He does not appeal to his

own authority as a physician; rather he legitimizes the anti-fascist cause by giving his listener a physical presence with him in Spain. Bethune narrates this broadcast topographically. Having described a graveyard as “within sight” of his rural location at the scene of two downed fighter planes (139)—as he narrates a radio broadcast from Madrid—he moves across the Spanish countryside (in present tense) to the graveyard of volunteers:

And here they lie, quietly and still. And see what is written above their heads: “Volunteers of the International Brigade”—“Who died as heroes for the liberty of the Spanish people and the happiness and progress of humanity.” Above each grave is written his name, his nationality and the date of his death. (140)

Bethune identifies the space as “here” and then verbally narrates aural silence and lack of bodily locomotion, but he gives his audience the directive to “see what is written” (140). The directive is slightly at odds with his subsequent presentation of the words on the grave-markers. If this is radio, the directive relies on the dominance of vision-based epistemological identification, and the listener to whom Bethune tells of the soldiers lying quietly in their graves must make an epistemological identification of presence through an abstract sensory shift from the aural to the visual. When in print form, the staging of presence functions in a slightly different way. The directive for an audience to see a form—text—that they are already (by necessity) seeing highlights a shift that moves text from communicative tool to image, again relying on the dominance of vision-based epistemological identification of presence. Bethune’s audience is not asked to identify with the individual soldiers who have died: the audience is told that the soldier’s names, nationalities, and dates of death are written on the graves, but unlike the collective message about the volunteer’s heroic status, the audience is not permitted to turn that information into image. Instead, the audience is meant

to identify with Bethune, the Canadian who is doing the work of witnessing in Spain: the transnational distance is meant to collapse into political presence and solidarity.¹¹ This tactic continues into Bethune's next radio address where the audience is directed: "Now observe the faces of, not the dead, but those who still live" (142). Unlike commanding an audience to turn objects into images, the directive—"now observe"—to behold the faces of the living collapses distance into temporal presence, but it also collapses spatialized national foreignness into a transnational familiarity presented as local—within sight. The audience who was present for Bethune's topographical tour of political presence now finds presence in Bethune's familiarity with what was once foreign, the people of Spain.

As mentioned above, these radio broadcasts were printed by the CASD and distributed in Canada under the title *Listen in! This is station EAQ Madrid, Spain*, with the title page inviting readers to "hear" the broadcasts. The transfer from one medium to the next shifts conditions for the staging of proximity—different media function under different structural restraints and position audiences differently even when conveying similar content. There are no extant recordings, but the content survives through the pamphlet.¹² In representing radio broadcasts, the pamphlet stages temporal and spatial proximity in more immediate ways than are assumed of the conventions of print technology. The structures of *temporal* proximity intensify as the readers of the pamphlet are figured as privileged interlopers in a quicker, newer technology grounded in a singular transmission. The structures of *spatial* proximity intensify as the readers of the pamphlet are figured as privileged interlopers in a medium-specific, peripatetic tour of the Spanish battlefield, which builds on the staged interpellation of the listener as a seeing, knowing subject located within

close proximity to the conflict. Again, this experiential turn relies on the dominance of visual codes in the construction of knowledge.

Bethune continued to produce multi-media reportage that negotiated proximity and presence by inviting his audience to become active viewers of fascist atrocities in Spain. When the city of Málaga fell to Nationalist forces in early February 1937, thousands of refugees fled to Almería, more than two hundred kilometers to the east. Bethune, along with Hazen Sise and Tom Worsley, arrived to give medical aid and witnessed a massacre akin to the better-known atrocity that occurred at Guernica. Strung along the road with the Mediterranean Sea to the immediate right and the Sierra Nevada's escarpment to the left, Bethune suggests that one hundred and fifty thousand refugees were trapped and bombarded from sea and air by the Spanish fascists and their German and Italian allies. After driving back and forth, transporting as many refugees as possible to Almería, only to be attacked once amassed in Almería, Bethune wrote a narrative of the experience. Bethune's reportage was published as *The Crime on the Road: Malaga-Almeria* and billed as a "narrative with graphic documents revealing fascist cruelty" (3). These "graphic documents" are comprised of a series of nineteen unattributed photographs that were skilfully captured by Hazen Sise. Published in English by Publicaciones Iberia in 1937, the thirty-page book includes a three-page introduction by Alardo Prats, accompanied by photos of Bethune—both "floating head" portraiture and action shots—adjacent to the text of the introduction.

While the CASD's *Listen In!* transcribes reportage from one medium to the next, *The Crime on the Road* presents four pages of textual narrative written by Bethune followed by Sise's nineteen unattributed photographs. Bethune narrates how he, Sise, and Worsley travelled to Almería with the intention of going on to Málaga to administer blood

transfusions to the wounded, and how they were quick to realize that their job would be to assist in the exodus. He writes of the conditions under which the refugees suffered and asks his reader to “[i]magine four days and four nights, hiding by day in the hills as the fascist barbarians pursued them by plane, walking by night packed in a solid stream men, women, children, mules, donkeys, goats, crying out the names of their separated relatives, lost in the mob” (8–9). Further, he writes of the difficulties in choosing whom to assist: “We first decided to take only children and mothers. Then the separation between father and child, husband and wife became too cruel to bear” (9). He ends his reportage on fascist atrocities by asking what crime the refugees had committed to earn the wrath of the fascists. He answers his own question: “Their only crime was that they had voted to elect a government of the people, committed to the most modest alleviation of the crushing burden of centuries of the greed of capitalism” (10). In one sense, what makes Bethune’s reportage unique is that he is narrating aspects of war—mass destruction and displacement of civilian populations—that are absolutely new to the history of warfare.

While the general subject of his reportage is evocative, Bethune’s four-page narrative attempts to capture immediacy though manipulating proximity. For example, out of the text’s eight paragraphs, four begin by forcefully pushing the event to the narrative present through performative utterances: “Now imagine”; “Now, what I want to tell you...”; “And now comes...”; and, “Now, what was the crime...” (7–10). Partly directive and partly sequencing, Bethune’s tactical interpellation of readers into the narrative present brings his readers closer to the event, closer to him as confidant, and as a result, closer to the refugees themselves. This textual tactic, I suggest, is heightened by the visual proximity that Sise’s photographs bring to the book—a medium-specific idealization of photographs as factual

document of an event's present moment. Though Bethune's professional status and burgeoning celebrity serve to inflate a normative author function, I suggest that the photographs lend the text a type of authority capable of staging closer proximity. Further, it is the combination and coordination of photographic narrative with textual narrative that stages closer proximity. On the one hand, Bethune's celebrity and professional status gains the text access to readers. On the other hand, Bethune's individual authority based on celebrity and professional status must also be undermined due to its appeal to an authority of exceptionalism. It is the photographs that provide the de-individualizing "proof" needed to astound the reader/viewer into presence and solidarity.

The arrangement of Sise's photographs creates a visual narrative that oscillates between the presentation of portraits of stasis (usually with the majority of his subject's suffering and dust-laden bodies included in the frame) and photographs that construct movement along the road. The portraiture highlights bodies at rest in familial groupings, often with parents tending to children—two photos feature mothers breastfeeding.¹³ The road itself rarely features within the frame of these shots. The most conventional in terms of composition, these photos (numbering approximately eight) present exhaustion and scarcity. This portraiture presents images of fatigue and paucity that would have been somewhat familiar to Canadians suffering the effects of the Depression, aiding in strengthening the bond between the audience and the subjects. Moreover, these photographs of families- and children-at-risk construct intimacy and establish in the viewer the possibility for compassion and outrage. This concern constructed through the visual image works in conjunction with the temporal immediacy and urgency of Bethune's narrative.

In the photos of movement, however, the road itself frames the forward motion of the exodus. Rarely is the camera positioned on the road itself. More often than not, the camera captures images from the side of the road, with shots taken from close to the ground as well as photos taken from higher ground. An architect, Sise had a well-developed sense of spatial form. Not only do the photographs show the refugees making their way along the road to Almería, they actually move the viewer along the road by using the compositional construction of depth through presentation of the road at multiple angles in the field of vision to draw the viewer's eye. By presenting the road as a line for the viewer to follow, the camera's lens ceases to be the viewer's primary vantage point. Instead, the viewer becomes accustomed to following the forward momentum across the photograph's field of vision—a constant among the changing angles (above, below, and from the side of the road) created within the frames of multiple images. The viewer follows in the wake of the refugees and the spatialized plight of the people of Málaga becomes the predicament of the viewer.

The penultimate photo presents a parched field scattered with the dead bodies of children, with the accompanying matter-of-fact caption, "Collapsed along the length of the route" (28). After following the plight of these people through seventeen images that alternate between rest and movement, the viewer is shocked by the breakdown of life in the forced exodus. But in the name of continued support, the visual narrative cannot end here. The final photo captures two women and two children huddling next to a wall at their destination—Almería—where, the caption tells us, "international machine-gunning also pursues fiercely the defenceless inhabitants of Malaga" (29). Even after arriving at the end of their long route, they are still chased by the fascists and still in need of support and anti-fascist solidarity. The dispersion of these photograph across the whole process of war—

bombardment, death, arrival at Almería—presents a large field of experience with which to hail empathy and a duty of care.

Contemporaneous with Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell's *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937) and predating James Agee and Walker Evans's genre-establishing *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941),¹⁴ Bethune and Sise's reportage shares many strategies with the better-known texts, such as stressed bodies and material scarcity. The outcome, though, is markedly different. Rabinowitz suggests that the reception history of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* tells "an uncanny history of middle-class perception and its relationship to the powers and pleasures of looking at others" (36). This history involves the American "North" looking at the American "South." Coming out of a very different context, the reportage of Sise and Bethune uses far more complicated strategies of formal composition to generate solidarity in their reader/viewer across space. Their formal innovations place greater weight on inclusion and presence than on differentiation in the modernist construction of proximity. *The Crime on the Road* is not modernist because it collides text and photograph; it is modernist because of the way this collision condenses experience through collapsing conceptual distance. Without dismissing the complex power relations involved in the classed and national differences between observer and observed in Sise's images and Bethune's text as those relations get propelled across a transnational space, I suggest that *The Crime on the Road* collapses those differences rather than reinforcing them.

Not content to work only with text-based, photographic, or broadcast media, Bethune solicited the help of the American Herbert Kline and the Hungarian Geza Karpathi (both photographers) to make a film about the Spanish-Canadian Blood Transfusion Institute.¹⁵ Kline wrote a piece of reportage—"Hospital in Spain"—that was published in the

June 1937 issue of the British periodical *Left Review* that chronicles the making of *Heart of Spain*. The text begins with an acknowledgement of Bethune's intentions: "We had been engaged by Dr. Bethune, head of the Canadian blood transfusion service, to make a film picturing the medical side of the war so as to acquaint people in the world outside with the sort of 'order' Franco is bringing to Spain" (261). Once Kline and Karpathi captured footage, Paul Strand and Leo Hurwitz, who added newsreels and other source materials, then edited the film, which was transformed into what Russell Campbell in *Cinema Strikes Back: Radical Filmmaking in the United States 1930-1942* calls "a broadly-based study of the struggle against fascism" (167). Further, Campbell makes the connection between the film's structure and politics when he suggests that *Heart of Spain* reveals "an attempt to organize documentary material according to montage principles, incorporating, as Leo Hurwitz expresses it, 'opposition, conflict, and contradiction' into their image assembly" and "contrast editing is deployed in a conscious effort to mold a political aesthetic" (177). William Alexander, in *Film on the Left*, suggests that the film

does not try to tell a story in sequence or to compose a linear essay—nor does it attempt to develop fictional or real characters either dramatically or in depth. Instead . . . it dynamically utilizes appropriate fragments of cinema—shots, scenes, sequences, commentary, and music—to dramatize a situation in a telling, convincing, powerful way. (165)

The series of short shots—taken with a camera that was only "good for shots with a maximum length of ten seconds" (Campbell 182)—works to disrupt continuities of both space and time.¹⁶ The categorization of the film as a "documentary" should not intimate, as is too often the case, realism. Michael Denning highlights both the experimental

incorporation of different genres into the work and the inability to imagine a completed narrative—a modernist predicament, to be sure. The 1930s documentaries, he suggests, “are less a form of social realism than formal experiments” (120). Moreover, Leo Hurwitz, the editor of *Heart of Spain*, would later suggest that the genre of the 1930s documentary film “did not ‘document’ reality at all”:

Its tiny documents in the form of shots and sounds bore the same relation to the film as the small pieces of colored stone and glass to the mosaic mural, the brush-strokes to the painting, the individual words and phrases to the novel. The stuff was document, but the construction was invented, a time-collage. (qtd. in Denning 120)

In disrupting normative temporal and spatial continuity, the film speaks to Bethune’s penchant for the construction of an alternative, form-driven proximity between subject and audience. Though Bethune did not get behind the camera or edit the film, he was a central instigator of the production of what turned out to be an extremely significant film. Alongside of the important “propaganda value” of the film, *Heart of Spain* is groundbreaking in the history of documentary filmmaking. It was the first film produced by Frontier Films, who went on to produce *China Strikes Back* (1937), *People of the Cumberland* (1938), and *Native Land* (1942).

While the products of Bethune’s work survive, it is more difficult to assess the influence his artistic strategies had on his audience. We do know that, with the film in tow, Bethune set out to “acquaint people in the world outside” with the consequences of Franco’s mission of “order” (Kline 261). Most notably, Bethune conducted a tour upon his return to Canada and before embarking on his voyage to China. Unfortunately, a reception history of ephemeral cultural productions and performances in interwar Canada must often rely on the

official interpretation of a rather repressive state apparatus. Hannant's suggestion that Bethune's "propaganda value" in Canada was significant is attested to by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, in their weekly "Report on Revolutionary Organizations and Agitation in Canada" in which they include a section on Bethune's activities upon his return from Spain:

Norman Bethune has concluded his tour of Western Canada. It has been a great success; over 30,000 people heard him speak and saw the film "The Heart of Spain," it is said. This film, produced in Spain at great expense by the Canadian Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, under the supervision of Dr. Bethune and filmed by the Hungarian Camera-man, Geysa Kaiser [sic], has helped considerably to swell the proceeds of the numerous meetings which he addressed throughout Western Canada.

(363)

One of the implications of thirty thousand Canadians being witness not only to the horrors of fascist aggression, but also to a founding production of modernist documentary is that Bethune was responsible for a *popular* reception of modernist cultural production in Canada. Moreover, this popular reception of modernism resulted not in the estrangement of Bethune's audience from the subjects of the film (as Rabinowitz suggests is the case for *You Have Seen Their Faces* and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*), but in tangible expressions of solidarity which helps in the formation of working, viable, and effective Popular Front in Canada.

We need not rely only on my readings of Bethune's work to show that he was consciously attempting to negotiate proximity through aesthetic innovation. As Bethune was leaving Spain he wrote a letter to Marian Scott (and other friends), which he titled "An Apology for Not Writing Letters." Not having maintained communication with friends in

Canada, he waited until he is on his way out of Spain to contact them. When he did write this letter, the topic is production and meaning of art. In the letter he writes the following:

Only by a shared physical experience—tactile, visual or auditory—may an approximately similar emotion be felt by two people without the aid of art. Only through art, can the truth of a non-shared experience be transmitted. To share with you what I have seen, what I have experienced in the past six months, is impossible without art. Without art, experience becomes, on the one hand, the denuded, bare bones of fact—a static, still-life—the how-many-ness of things; or, on the other hand, the swollen, exaggerated shapes of fantastically-coloured romanticism. And I will do neither. I refuse to write either way. Both are false—the first by its poverty, the second by its excess. (*Politics of Passion* 161)

In many ways, this letter acts as a reader's guide for the cultural work he facilitated, collaborated on, and produced while in Spain. Bethune's notion of a shared physical experience implicates both immediate spatial and temporal proximity. He believed that to share his anti-fascist experience in Spain with people who are absent from the immediate proximity of the event in time-space required abstraction through art that would re-present the experience of proximity. Bethune espoused a philosophy of art as presence and understood the ability of art to collapse distance and allow for shared emotion. In Bethune's own style of soliciting a closer proximity, Hannant points to the enormity of Bethune's accomplishments: "Here was a doctor who pushed Canada into the limelight in the anti-fascist cause, and Canadians—even wracked as they were by the Depression—responded by donating tens of thousands of dollars to the unit" (128). Bethune was able to motivate thousands of Canadians to lend their support to their Spanish counterparts through his

temporal and spatial negotiations of proximity. With slightly less conspicuousness Jean Watts attempted to collapse conceptual distance through representations of everyday life in the city of Madrid.

Jim Watts, as Myrtle Eugenia Watts was commonly known, grew up in Toronto, a close companion to Dorothy Livesay.¹⁷ Cultural historians seem to acknowledge that Watts was an important enabler or instigator of cultural production in 1930s Canada, but, as Candida Rifkind suggests, a thorough “reconsideration of the importance of Jean Watts to the English-Canadian literary left” could be modelled on analogous scholarly work that has been undertaken on the likes of Nancy Cunard, an important figure in the European modernist left (226n9). We know that Watts financed *New Frontier* and most likely other activities of the Progressive Arts Club in Toronto with an inheritance from her grandparents. We know that she led the Theatre of Action that emerged out of the Workers’ Experimental Theatre. We also know that she began directing *Eight Men Speak* but was relieved of that post, though it is not altogether clear why. She married William (Lon) Lawson in 1933. She travelled to Spain in early 1937 as the correspondent for the *Daily Clarion*, stayed with the Blood Transfusion Institute at 36 Principe de Vergara, and, according to Larry Hannant, was the “only woman to officially join the MacKenzie-Papineau Battalion” (“My God” 153). We also know that while in Spain she worked in the censorship bureau in Valencia, served as a driver for the British Medical Unit about two hundred kilometres northeast of Madrid, and managed to have an affair with an Englishman named David Crook.¹⁸ While Hannant’s article, “My God, are they sending women?: Three Canadian Woman in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939,” is the most informative biographical source available on Watts, Canadian cultural historians have given very little attention to her actual cultural production.¹⁹

While in Spain, Watts's articles were published regularly in the *Daily Clarion* (out of Toronto). Hannant characterizes Watt's overall contributions by suggesting that "Watts seemed to be assigned to what Canadian newspapers at the time would have described as the 'woman's beat.' The subject of her articles was almost never military matters. Most often it related to culture or the Spanish Republic's care of women and children" (159). While many of her articles did relate to culture and many others highlighted the gendered ways in which the conflict was playing out, I do not see evidence of Watts being confined to what might be constructed as a "woman's beat." The description of multiple aspects of the war, in part, has to do with the unique ways in which the military *defence* of the republic was framed. Responding to the structures of resistance that were in place during the conflict, her articles—ranging from concise factual enumerations of fascist brutality to more artistically rendered examples of reportage—conflate military and cultural structures to reflect the concerns of a non-professional army made up of civilians who fought in defence of culture and democratic civilian life. For example, the point of her 15 April 1937 article, "Spain Tries Salvage Art During War," is to show that preservation of culture *is* a military matter:

In Germany, the fascists burned books, burned plays, destroyed science. In Spain today the people are risking their lives to save these things. Goering may have said: "When I hear the word Culture I reach for my gun," but the people of Spain have said: "When I reach for my gun I don't forget the word Culture." (2)

After making this distinction between fascist (or Nazi) militarist aggression against an all-encompassing notion of culture and the Republican militaristic defence of culture, Watts describes soldiers working to rescue "the El Grecos and the Goyas" from the Museo del Prado "even when it was being bombed" (2). Rather than just focusing on lists of battles

won and lost, Watts was busy enacting Martha Gellhorn's suggestion that journalistic truth in reporting on the Spanish Civil War meant "explaining that the Spanish Republic was neither a collection of blood-slathering Reds nor a cat's-paw of Russia" (qtd. in Preston 23). It is for this reason that Watts, an avowed atheist, attended a church service and afterwards visited the church's school. She begins her 25 March 1937 article about her visit to the church, "Tales of Religious Persecution Spiked: Clergyman is Scornful of Fascism," with this unashamed, indignant directive: "Let those who talk about the persecution of religion in Spain, who cry of reds and rape and ruin, listen to this" (2). The indignation with which she writes is coupled with astonishment and pride at the ways in which the subjects of her reportage carry out everyday life as a matter of principle. In contempt of the fascist "demoralization shells" the people of Madrid refuse to retreat from the lives for which they fight ("Fascist Shells Slay Civilians of Madrid" 1). While Madrileños perform the "everyday" as a resistance strategy, Watts deploys a literary construction of the everyday in her reportage as a tactic of familiarization, enticing the Canadian reader to identify with the indispensable humanity of the civilian population while also recognizing the fascist aggression as a diabolical threat to that shared humanity.

Nowhere is Watts more successful in this strategy than in her longest piece of reportage, "Spain is Different," which was published in the June 1937 issue of *New Frontier*. In constructing a rhetorical situation in for her article that allows her to lead Canadian readers through the city of Madrid, Watts relies on the trope of tourism:

Some inspired publicity writer, tired of blurbs on "Sunny Spain—The Tourist's Paradise" once designed a poster which said simply "Spain is Different." That man, if he is still alive today, must be amazed at his own perspicacity. For Spain *is* different.

There has probably never been a city in the world where it was possible to walk out to the trenches and get back “in time for tea.” But you can do it in Madrid. Or never another city where life goes on so normally amid the sound of guns and the whistle of dropping shells. (12)

Leading off with the figure of the inspired writer with a creative idea, Watts shifts the idea of normative constructions of Spain from a space of romanticized leisure to a place represented through profound understatement. The initial signal to the reader of her reportage is that Spain can no longer be represented through old, tired tropes. Furthermore, she suggests that the job of the one representing Spain is to make the shift that will enable the compassionate tourist/reader to participate in a modified, up-to-date tour. Madrid, in this first paragraph, quickly takes over as metonymic stand-in for Spain and persists in that role throughout the three-page piece. Watts also establishes in this opening paragraph a mode of juxtaposition that enables differentiation between perseverance of the everyday and the fact of a city under siege.

After addressing the writer’s role in soliciting visitors to Spain, Watts extends the rhetorical situation to people visiting Madrid, ready to witness the ways in which Spain is different from the romantic representations of the country. As the narrative develops, a series of guests to Madrid get condensed into the single visitor who is spoken of possessively: “Our visitor, being a curious person, would like to get a glimpse of the trenches. He would be told to take the metro to a certain station, then walk west for five minutes to the headquarters of the commander of the section, to have his front-pass signed” (12). Moreover, after taking the metro and

[e]merging into the dazzling sunshine again, he would find himself in the midst of a working-class neighbourhood where the streets are filled with small boys playing marbles in the dust, with all the serious concentration that small boys put into such an occupation in the spring, war or no war; and small girls, braids flying, turning their skipping ropes to strange incantations exactly as they do in America. He would be sure he has lost his way, that this could not be the outskirts of the city near the trenches. (12)

Watts highlights the everyday childhood humanity in order to cause cognitive disorientation in the hypothetical visitor who expects the conflict to foreclose the routines of common peoples' lives. With a war raging in close proximity to the everyday pastimes of boys and girls, the reader is able to imagine her own neighbourhood's routines and way of life at risk.

In "Spain is Different" Watts returns to the confluence of war and culture that she so often reported on for the *Daily Clarion*. By constructing this passage through narrative space, she walks her visitor along trenches into a university building's sheltered courtyard that is crowded with soldiers. The soldiers in their undershirts, like the civilians of Madrid, are exercising everyday habits and diversions—washing in the fountain, playing ball, singing a flamenco. She expresses the esprit de corps by pointing out some of the slogans written on the courtyard wall: "BY ARMS AND CULTURE THE WAR WILL BE WON: WE MUST BE CULTURED COMRADES..." (13). Not content to let the truth of her tour rest on the evidence of graffiti, she leads the visitor into the university library, where

as far as the eye can penetrate, stretch row on row of green metal shelves, each with its neat row of volumes, catalogued, untouched [...] It was perfectly silent behind the

heavy doors. It seemed impossible that this academic calm would not embarrass a shell into turning around and going back where it came from. (14)

In describing the university library she spatializes her representation of book culture in a time of war and reproduces an atmosphere in which careful study and thought might occur at some point in the future, but only if its protection from the fascists (who by contrast are incapable of careful thought) persists throughout the course of the war. By personifying an assaulting shell, not only does she wonder at the persistence of laws of physics in the face of this forceful space of knowledge, she also accuses those firing the artillery of having neither cultural respect nor generalized shame. While Watts makes it clear that the books in the library are worthy of protection, she also makes the point of specifying exactly from whom the books need not be protected. “No need to keep the doors locked,” she writes, “[i]t was obvious that the [Republican] soldiers respected the books” (14). She notes that while the soldiers do not have much time to read, the certainty that other armies at other times burnt books makes “the fact that the books were unmolested and important one” (14). As Watts leads the hypothetical visitor from the city centre to the trenches of University City on the outskirts of Madrid and then back into the heart of the city again, she constantly presents the juxtaposition of everyday practices and the horrors of a city-space under attack, which causes the reader to question the spatial and social expectations of war:

What a war, when quiet on the front meant death at the rear! Trenches in parks; barracks in the universities; shells in the houses and cafes and cinemas. But people working and riding in trains and facing death without excitement, without heroics; soldiers keeping Plato and Kant and Hegel from being harmed—a war? (14).

Rather than focus her representation of Madrid solely on its obviously fragmented and threatened condition, Watts chooses to represent a resistance to the typified fragmentation of the modernist city. The subjects who define the city are represented through differentiation rather than universalization, as she maintains the careful distinction between the fascists on the outskirts of the city and the general anti-fascist population within the city.²⁰ Moreover, Watts does not dehistoricize, decontextualize, or despatialize the city as she constructs a transnational practice of the anti-fascist everyday. By constantly collapsing and conjoining the expectations of experience—battlefield and cityscape—Watts articulates an experience that is both familiar and unfamiliar. This double bind allows the reader to denounce fascist aggression while lending conceptual support to the defence of the everyday in modern city. Watts's reportage constructs an uncanny proximity that is both easily imagined and horrifically unthinkable—a cognitive disorientation that prompts the reader to seek out moral ground from which to enact anti-fascist solidarity.

Watts, Bethune, and Sise utilized various media outlets for their journalistic expressions that construct proximity to their readers in an effort to gain support for the anti-fascist cause. While journalists and travel writers alike have manipulated normative constructions of proximity in other contexts, Watts, Bethune, and Sise do so in the context of unprecedented modes of conflict. In doing so, they pushed the boundaries of conventional representation in new and innovative ways, unprecedented in Canadian representations of conflict and war. By experimenting with mimetic strategies they sought to reorganize spatialized connections between Canada and Spain. Ted Allan, who was with them in Spain, built on his own journalistic production in order to make journalistic incursions into the form of the novel. He remains unique in the history of Canadian

literature for actually going to Spain and representing his experiences in novelistic form while the conflict continued.

FICTIONALIZING JOURNALISM IN SPAIN

Originally published in 1939, *This Time a Better Earth* has never been reprinted. Few copies are available in libraries and even fewer copies are available for purchase. This scarcity is disproportionate to the novel's significance both as a literary-historical text and as documentation of modernist culture. Allan's novel evocatively depicts a model of transnational solidarity while sustaining candid and brutal descriptions of the horrors of a particular, new-fangled type of warfare. While the maturity with which it was composed should not be underestimated, it is also a youthful novel—one written by Allan while in his early twenties—rife with depictions of the anxieties and fervour of coming into adulthood in the midst of large-scale political and social turmoil. Before turning attention to the ways in which the novel negotiates proximity and stages a modernist scene, it is important to explain its genesis.

Born Alan Herman in Montreal in 1916, Allan grew up in a working-class Jewish neighbourhood of Montreal. He began writing at a young age and, like so many other writers of his generation, adopted a pseudonym. The moniker stuck. He was known as Ted Allan both in print and in person for the rest of his life. The change in name was concurrent with his growing involvement with leftist politics in Montreal.²¹ He joined and wrote journalism

for the Communist Party of Canada, and it was in that capacity, at the age of twenty, that he was sent to Spain, along with Jean Watts, to cover the conflict for the *Daily Clarion* and the monthly magazine *New Frontier*. While in Spain he joined Bethune, and acted for a short time as Political Commissar for Blood Transfusion Institute.²²

Allan's novel is the culmination of many different pieces of writing. He went to Spain as a journalist and wrote many short pieces for the *Clarion*, though not as many as did Watts. He wrote three pieces for *New Frontier* that reveal the wide-ranging scope of his involvement in the Spanish Civil War. In "Blood for Spanish Democracy" (February 1937) he gives an exposé on the Blood Transfusion Institute. The two-page report on the transfusion service ends with a call for Canadians to give financial support to the Canadian Medical Mission to Spain. Allan's second piece for *New Frontier*, "Bombardment at Albacete" (May 1937), is a signature example of narrative reportage. He opens the piece in a pointed manner of expression typical of the genre: "Full moons are nice to watch when they don't act as a spotlight for bombing planes" (16). Throughout the short narrative Allan gives an indication of the style he later employed when writing about aerial bombardment in *This Time a Better Earth*. Allan's third instalment for the magazine, "An Interview with Ernest Hemingway" (July-August 1937), uses Hemingway's credentials to put forth an argument for literature as a tool for witnessing atrocity. According to Hemingway's suggestion that it was absolutely necessary for writers to see Spain, it follows that the fate of literature depended upon bearing witness to atrocities in much the same way as the fate of global democracy relied upon defeating Franco.

Allan also wrote the introduction to a pamphlet issued by the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion called *Hello Canada! Canada's Mackenzie Papineau Battalion*

(1937). The pamphlet is dominated by A.E. Smith's narrative of his visit to Spain, but also includes excerpts from letters of the Canadian volunteers in Spain. Allan writes in the introduction about talking to the Canadian volunteers and their wish for him not to exaggerate their experiences: "They used to tell me to make sure that when I wrote I would not depict them as heroes, that I would make sure to show the horror of war, what it did to people, how insane it was, and they wanted me to tell the people back home why they came here and why even mountains could not stop them" (4). He stays true to their wish. Much of the three-page introduction does not frame the volunteers as heroic but rather as resolute Canadians following in the footsteps of those who have fought for democracy in Canada (Louis Papineau and William Lyon Mackenzie) as well as those Canadians who have showed determination and prowess when fighting in other conflicts. Using appeals to a sense of national pride, he implores that "we Canadians must never forget that on the battlefields of Spain, Canada has once again made a name for herself in shaping the history of the world" (5).

Allan began publishing in the United States upon his return to North America. He had two pieces published in *New Masses*, the leftist journal based in New York. His first piece for *New Masses*, "A Gun is Watered" (January 1938), is a short story made up of dialogue between two International Brigade volunteers—Butterley and Durnor—out of which he develops *This Time a Better Earth's* Milton "Milty" Schwartz. The story sets the scene for the way in which Milty—of "the Brooklyn Schwartzes"—becomes increasingly attached to his machine gun, which he names "Mother Bloor." Allan's second piece for *New Masses*, "Canada's Fascists: Duplessis Lets Them in the Back Door" (June 1938), does not focus on

Spain.²³ In July 1938 Allan published in *Harper's Magazine* "Lisa: A Story," an early version of the penultimate chapter of *This Time a Better Earth*.

Since the initial flurry of positive reviews in 1939 and 1940 that gave the book general approval, critical treatment of the novel has been very sparse.²⁴ The only scholar who has given more than passing reference to the novel is James Doyle.²⁵ In his landmark survey of Communist literature in Canada, *Progressive Heritage: The Evolution of a Politically Radical Literary Tradition in Canada*, he suggests that *This Time a Better Earth* is the only Canadian novel of the 1930s that "rigorously follows the formulas of socialist realism" as opposed to the more common tradition of "social realism" (122). Doyle contends that the book demonstrates "how socialist realism, using a Canadian subject with international and revolutionary implications, could reach beyond the limited readership of [Communist] Party members and sympathizers toward a mass audience" (225). He also suggests that the critical neglect of the novel "is regrettable, for Allan effectively integrates the technique of socialist realism with such elements of the novelistic appeal as battlefield adventure and romantic love" (123). Instead of following Doyle's critical trajectory along the lines of whether or not Allan's novel fits within "committed" formal guidelines, I want to explore Allan's staging of journalism. While there are scores of critical questions to be asked of Allan's novel, important for this project are the ways in which the book's representational strategies are geared toward staging transnational proximity and representations of the grotesque as a modernist tropological anxiety.²⁶ Tied in with the construction of proximity are deployments of grotesque scenes, which help construct the book as a fitting example of the reportage novel or Reportageroman—a literary genre that takes a subjective or partisan stance and imitates or approximates a piece of journalistic or factual writing. Not only is *This Time a*

Better Earth exemplary for its reportage stylistics, it places the subject of journalism at the forefront of the narrative through positioning journalism itself as a *mise-en-scène*.

The novel's narrator and protagonist, Bob Curtis, is a young Toronto newspaper journalist prior to his arrival in Spain.²⁷ He did not set out for Spain to take up journalism; he travelled from Canada with the intentions of fighting with the International Brigades. He crosses the Atlantic with a group of North Americans who represent an array of racial, class, and national subject positions. Together they hike from France across the Pyrenees into Spain, avoiding the non-intervention patrols, as did many volunteers. The opening chapter of the book highlights the shifting role Spain played in the North American imaginary—for the men trekking over the Pyrenees, Spain had once embodied a distant realm of romanticism:

What had Spain been to us? Nothing but a coloured space on the map and unclear pictures of señoritas and Don Juans playing guitars, and castles and bull-fights and red wine and olives. We were conscious of Spain for the length of time it took us to read the newspapers or the pages of a book. Then Spain ceased to exist. It played no part in our existence or development. Perhaps we dreamed of castles and romance, but we had grown up and lived and thought and laughed and suffered without Spain—and now Spain was where we were going to live or die. (4)

No longer a distant realm, the attempted fascist coup in Spain captured the imaginations of these men—as it did of thousands around the globe—and it stirred them to travel to Spain, knowing full well the risks and rewards. The men arrive at the large fort in Figueras, where the International Brigades congregated before being sent to Albacete for training. There the close-knit group of North Americans are incorporated into an alternative mode of citizenship that suspends national or geographic considerations. An example of a collective

approach to subject formation and transnational responsibility is expressed through a gathering of all of the expectant volunteers stationed at the fort:

Alan was trying to be calm, but he kept brushing his chin, and Harry beamed at us and suddenly someone began to sing the *International*. We all sang it, because we all knew it. It was never sung like that before. Anywhere. We stood erect and straight as we sang, and proud. We shouted it out, and our fists were clenched tight as we sang the chorus. Five hundred men going into the trenches singing one song in eleven different languages.

Arise ye prisoners of starvation

Debout les forçats de la faim

Das Recht wie Glut im Kraterherde

Il tracollo non è lontan

Sterft gij oude wormen en gedachten

Snart verden Grundvold sig forrykker

Boż to jest nasz ostatni

We have been naught, we shall be all!

'Tis the final conflict.

Let each stand in his place,

The International

Unites the Human Race.

Comandante Kuller looked at us. He was not smiling now.

“There is nothing for me to say. We shall win.” (39)

By amalgamating “eleven different languages” into a singular performance Allan is able to stage a moment of collective cultural action, with hundreds of men singing a highly recognizable anthem of transnational socialism. Rather than interpellating the reader through careful negotiation of mixed media or through narration of the everyday, as do Bethune and Watts, Allan invites the English-language reader into a moment of translation. Through the act of translating the well-known text, the reader participates in the performance of anti-fascist transnationalism and constructs a close political proximity to the singers across national and linguistic categories. Furthermore, in chronicling this collective incantation, Allan highlights the objectives of the Popular Front in collapsing differences in the face of the fascist threat.

Bob briefly meets Lisa, a photojournalist, at the old fort. He and the other men then travel on to the International Brigades training camp at Albecete, where Bob is wounded by a piece of shrapnel during a fascist bombardment. It is by way of this bombardment that Allan provides his first example among many of an astonishing grotesqueness—first, that is, apart from the thick descriptions of the rank bathroom facilities at the fort. Bob and his comrades volunteer to help with rescue efforts in the town. They dig through rubble with pickaxes, caught between a moral imperative to recover the dead family members of an onlooking Spaniard—“Two men, one woman, three boys, two girls”—and the nauseating realities of the pickaxes striking soft bodies of the dead (69). The men count the dead bodies, complain about the stench of death, vomit, and Bob gets increasingly agitated due to the shock caused by his injury, which is compounded by the shock brought on by encountering death on this scale for the first time (67–73). Allan, in this instance and throughout the novel, carefully negotiates the emotive disparity between atrocity and the grotesque. While maintaining a

truthful portrayal, Allan utilizes a physical and moral grotesqueness to encourage a heuristic response in the reader.

The intentional use of grotesque figurations to construct an alternate proximity was a tactic much used in the 1930s. As Joseph Entin points out, Kenneth Burke noticed this as early as 1937: “Describing the grotesque as ‘planned incongruity,’ the combination of unexpected and unlikely elements that threatens old orders of classification and proposes new ones, Burke argued that it is a potentially ‘revolutionary’ form that flourishes in moments of social instability” (11).²⁸ It is crucial to remember that the bombardments that Allan describes, like those described by Bethune and Watts, were completely new to modern warfare and, therefore, to modern readers. As Spain served as a testing and training ground for Italian fascists and German Nazis, aerial bombardment of civilian targets on such a vast and horrific scale had never been witnessed. Allan was narrating what had theretofore been both “unexpected and unlikely” (11).

Denning also picks up on Burke’s theorizations of the grotesque and proposes the category of the “Proletarian Grotesque” because he sees the employment of the grotesque in the 1930s as a way to characterize “both communism and surrealism, both Marx’s account of class consciousness, which grotesquely realigns our categories of allegiance, and the ‘modern linguistic gargoyles’ of Joyce” (122–3). Further, Denning suggests that the 1930s “‘grotesques’ are an attempt to wrench us out of the repose and distance of the [high modernist] ‘aesthetic’” (123). To try to collapse the distance supposed of pre-1930s high modernist aesthetics, is to try to construct a close proximity in the spatialization of the cultural imaginary.

Bob leaves his wound untended while helping to recover the dead bodies. The wound becomes infected and, as a result, he is unable to accompany his comrades when they go to the front. Corresponding to his infected wound, the experience of the bombardment and recovery effort also infects Bob's psyche—from this point on in the narrative Bob's "nerves" are repeatedly noted for their fragile state. For the remainder of the novel Bob is outwardly anxious about his performance of masculinity, as though this wound has robbed him of the conditions under which bravery and unselfishness might flourish. While convalescing in Albacete, Bob is seconded by the Republicans to deliver radio broadcasts to North America from Madrid. After much protest on the grounds of being perceived as a coward, he travels to Madrid and settles into the life of a journalist in the city, where he made two broadcasts each day. Among the cast of characters with whom Bob interacts in Madrid, most are involved with journalism of one stripe or another. Indeed, journalism became central to the culture of Madrid during the conflict. As a result, Madrid, for that brief moment, supplanted other cities, such as Paris, as the quintessential modernist metropole. *This Time a Better Earth* stages Madrid as the scene out of which modernist journalism is produced by the likes of Bethune, Watts, and Allan himself (along with countless others from around the globe). While cultural producers of all sorts flocked to Madrid, which famously hosted the Second International Writers Congress in the midst of the conflict, they overwhelmingly turned to the job of witnessing and of reporting the victories and struggles of a transnational anti-fascist movement. As the writer Arthur Koestler wrote at the time,

Anyone who has lived through the hell of Madrid with his eyes, his nerves, his heart, his stomach—and then pretends to be objective, is a liar. If those who have at their command printing machines and printer's ink for the expression of their opinions,

remain neutral and objective in the face of such bestiality, then Europe is lost. In that case let us all sit down and bury our heads in the sand and wait until the devils take us. In that case it is time for Western Civilization to say good night (qtd. in Preston 55).

Like other modernists, the writers who turned to journalism upon arrival in Madrid enacted a model of modernist life as they prowled the bombed-out streets, congregated in cafes and hotel rooms, and debated the politics of representation. What is unique about Madrid as the modernist metropole is that the politics of culture and cultural representation were subsumed into the social and martial politics of anti-fascism, as evidenced by Watts's constant conflation of cultural and military purpose.

Not until halfway through *This Time a Better Earth* does the romantic plot emerge, and it does so amongst the scrum of Madrid's journalistic intensity. When the beautiful Lisa Kammerer walks into the pressroom in which Bob debates the intricacies of the war with the other journalists, Allan introduces (for the second time) a thinly fictionalized representation of Gerda Taro, one of the war's most remarkable, innovative, and intrepid photojournalists.²⁹ Having met Lisa briefly at the fort in Figueras, he quickly takes her under his wing and finagles to get her a room in his hotel by calling her his fiancée. Their relationship develops and they get eventually get engaged. Much of the depicted action around their relationship centres on Lisa taking photographs and Bob feeling guilty for being in love while his comrades are fighting and dying in the trenches. Lisa and Bob constantly try to enable Lisa to get as close to the front, and to her subjects, as possible. After Bob organizes for her to get to the Guadalajara front, she returns and describes her experience:

“It was terrible,” she said.

“Terrible?”

“I got good pictures...wonderful pictures....” She sat down on the bed. “You will see them. But, Bob, it was terrible. Their bodies strewn over the ground like garbage. A hand here. A head there. Wait till you see the pictures. They were being buried in heaps. They were so young, young Italian boys.” (137)

Recalling the scenes of destruction and death Bob witnessed and that left him in a fragile state, Lisa’s account oscillates between her own horror at witnessing the scene, the quality of her photos, and the anticipation of Bob experiencing her horror once he sees the pictures. Once more a grotesque narrative situation surfaces in which emotional experience is transferred through representation and through facilitating the collapse of normative modes of spatial and temporal experience—an intentional alternative construction of proximity. The transaction, this time, happens within the confines of a novel—a mediated experience between two characters who develop a relationship and emotional bond through their cultural production.

In his essay on the recent recovery of the negatives of Gerda Taro, Robert Capa, and Chim (David Seymour) from the Spanish Civil War, Brian Wallis considers “the modernist notion of proximity, or what would be called by photographers the ‘close up’” (16):

The close up, whether famous faces or surprising biological specimens, was the visual design tour-de-force of the weekly photographic tabloids. But Capa, Chim, and Taro applied this idea for the first time to modern warfare. Capa of course famously said, “If your pictures aren’t good enough, you’re not close enough.” And this general concept seemed to dictate not only that the photographer be “embedded” with his or her subjects, but also that he or she be part of the action, if not necessarily partisan.

Proximity also meant dynamic and dramatic movement, action, blur; this became the hallmark for Capa and other modernist photographers. (16)

Indeed, Lisa needs (as did Taro) to get as close as possible to the subject of her photos, whether the subject is a line of women waiting for food (153), exploding shells in the midst of a bombardment (194), or the men at rest in the trenches (196). By writing about the photojournalist who has a constant need to get closer to her subject, Allan is able to represent an exemplary figure among the coterie of modernists in Madrid as well as illustrate the ways in which the formal techniques of modernist journalism are actualized. The tragedy of the romantic plot (and in the history of photojournalism) is that Lisa gets too close.

In the penultimate chapter Bob and Lisa travel to the Brunete front to get photos before taking leave in Paris to get married. Once at the scene of the “Battle of Brunete,” they find themselves in the midst of a fascist aerial attack. As she takes photos from inadequate cover, Lisa and Bob become the target of the attack:

The planes swung toward us. They saw us. They must have seen her camera flashing in the sun. There was a machine-gun in the next dug-out. They must have seen that too. Men crawled about when they should have been lying quiet. The first plane turned on its side and dived gently toward us. The earth in front of the hole began to rise in short spurts.

Tata-tat-tata-tat. Tata-tat-tata-tat. Tata-tat-tata-tat.

Lisa got a picture of the earth jumping in spurts. Then she took pictures of the planes as they came down toward us. (264)

No longer just playing the role of witness to atrocity, the photojournalist herself becomes the target of fascist aggression once the pilots catch sight of her camera’s reflection. She

becomes a figural combatant, situated next to the machine-gun, as she “shoots” the plane and is subject to the attendant risks. Having run out of film, Lisa and Bob retreat by jumping on the running board of a car that is heading away from the front:

She took a deep breath. “Boy—that was a day. I feel good. The lines re-formed and I feel good. And I got the best pictures of my life. Tonight we will have a farewell party in Madrid. And then, next week—Paris.” She held back her hand for me to take. She squeezed my hand. “Think you will have time to ask for leave tonight?”
(268)

Suddenly, a tank hits them. The day that provided the best photos of her life was also the last day of her life. The tragedy of Lisa’s death also leads to a type of resolution: all previous traumas had worked to destabilize Bob and his own conceptions of masculine performance. With Lisa’s death, Bob reintegrates into the International Brigades, reuniting with the surviving members of the group with whom he trekked over the Pyrenees. Bob completes his initial journey as “arm in arm” he and his comrades “walked toward the trenches” (279). The final actions of the protagonist complete the final collapse of narrative distance and consolidation of close proximity: having used the scene of journalism to expose the reader to the larger machinations and events of the conflict, he invites his reader to follow him—“arm in arm”—into the actual defence of Spain and global democracy.³⁰

* * *

When, in a 1939 CBC interview, Hazen Sise suggested that 36 Principe de Vergara, was located in the “Westmount of Madrid,” he was doing more than pointing out that the offices

of the Spanish-Canadian Blood Transfusion Institute were largely spared Franco's bombs because of their location in a wealthy district of the city (qtd. in Hannant 118). He was also collapsing the conceptual distance between Canada and Spain—yet another instance to show that, as Shields suggests,

presence and absence motivates a set of modernist spatial metaphors which only make sense in modernist terms if they can also and at the same time be read as metaphors of inclusion and exclusion. Taking this as an ideal type, in modernity presence and absence, spatialised as proximity and distance, crops up again and again in spatial metaphors structuring notions of group membership and conceptions of the state, community, and of the individual. (191)

The Canadians who went to Spain laboured to construct solidarity between the Canadian citizenry and the anti-fascist cause. What is more, the construction of this solidarity necessitated a questioning and undermining of liberal notions of both the state and the individual. The Popular Front in which Allan, Bethune, Sise, and Watts participated was communicated and built upon the development of modernist tactics of representation in new and innovative ways, ways never before available to the Canadian public. For this, they stand out as intrepid innovators of a Canadian modernism.

His dream-world turned upon the axis of revolutionism.

—Harrison, *Meet Me on the Barricades* (29)

In his first three novels—*Generals Die in Bed* (1930), *A Child is Born* (1931), *There are Victories* (1933)—Charles Yale Harrison’s engagement with modernism is revealed through his use of a diverse set of leftist stylistic and generic conventions that create alternatives to an easily recognizable high modernism.³¹ At the same time, they maintain a topical thread that explores the abhorrent ramifications of the First World War on both the battlefield and the home front, and it is the persistence of these ethical and political motives that place his work firmly in an anti-war position. Harrison, I argue, is deeply engaged in the production of a leftist modernism when he constructs these alternatives to high modernism. With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the large-scale support given to the anti-fascist cause by the North American left, Harrison, in *Meet Me on the Barricades* (1938), abandons the creation of an alternative modernism in favour of a full-blown, recognizably high-modernist articulation that complicates his aforementioned anti-war stance. *Meet Me on the Barricades* uses the backdrop of the Spanish Civil War to explore the North American leftist imaginary at a time when the Popular Front dominated the tactical manoeuvres of the left. More specifically, his fourth novel is a romp around the romanticized, hallucinatory consciousness of the middle-class fellow traveller, figured in the character of a single anti-hero. The

particular set of cultural and political conditions brought about by the Spanish Civil War, as a matrix-event, allows Harrison's emergent leftist modernism to shift from the production of alternatives to the amalgamation of leftist critique with the cultural authority found in the literary conventions and experimentations of high modernism.

While Ted Allan practically started writing in the midst of the Spanish Civil War, Harrison was already an established novelist, magazine editor, and political activist by the time of the attempted fascist coup in Spain. This case study shows the multiple alternative techniques of modernism Harrison used to express common concerns among his first three novels—as each text employs drastically divergent styles and generic conventions—and, finally, examines his turn to easily recognizable modernist techniques in his fourth novel. The size of his oeuvre allows for critical enquiry into a less-direct and varied emergence of modernism, one that exposes the complexity and depth of his creative deliberations throughout changing social and cultural conditions. Each of Harrison's four novels are unique articulations of modernism but the Spanish Civil War enabled *Meet Me on the Barricades* to stand out among his novels as the most easily recognizable modernist text.

GENERALS DIE IN BED

Generals Die in Bed, which is embedded firmly in the canon of Canadian novels of the First World War, opens in a Montreal army barracks. The first chapter depicts the excitement and carnivalesque qualities of expectant troops and civilians. After this opening chapter, the

unnamed, universalized narrator marches into the European trenches. The remainder of the novel oscillates between life and death on the front lines and life on leave, both in Europe and in London. The concise, unnerving, and grotesquely stylized descriptions of the horrors of soldiering life are particularly poignant in their critique of a war-mongering, elite officer class.

While scholars who have written about *Generals Die in Bed* have been fairly consistent about the book's anti-war stance and its anti-capitalist politics, there has been less clarity about the modernist implications of the book's prose or, indeed, larger project.³² While critics have posited that the novel is realist, there have also been intimations made about the book's modernist stylistics, but only through association. For example, Doyle asserts that the book is "written in a spare understated language modelled on the stylistics that Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway were developing in the 1920s" (87). Given the status of Anderson and Hemingway in the modernist canon, this association would suggest that Harrison was at least aiming at a form of modernism. But, Peter Webb suggests that Harrison was not truly a modernist, even though he makes associations between Harrison and the likes of Bertram Brooker, Morley Callaghan, and Wyndham Lewis (112).

Granted, *Generals Die in Bed* does not fit easily into a familiar right-leaning discourse of Anglo-American high-modernism. Instead of presenting a high-modernist style that generates density and multiple layers of meaning in order to survey the effects of modernity on the individualized subject, Harrison goes in the opposite direction and ends up on the other side of realism: a stripped-back minimalism that is coextensively leftist and modernist. Divesting his novel of individualist subjectivity, he uses a set of literary tactics that highlight a sense of physical grotesqueness, large-scale ethical emptiness, and general moral degradation

in order to distil the classed experience of the soldiering multitude into the narrative of a singular, unnamed subject. Given that the novel relies on an economy of language that disrupts normative conventions of subjectivity and temporal representation and that the narrative itself is overtly concerned with the disintegration of humanist structures under the pressures of war-saturated capitalist modernity, I suggest that it deserves consideration amongst other examples of modernist production. Joseph Entin's theorization of "sensational modernism" is particularly compelling and useful in accounting for the inclusion of *Generals Die in Bed* within a modernist taxonomy. Entin identifies an alternative 1930s modernist tradition that takes America's poor as its typical subject, a subject position assignable to Harrison's working-class soldiery:

Combining a sensational focus on visceral impact and social contrast with a modernist emphasis on aesthetic experimentation and cognitive disorientation, sensational modernists deploy arresting images of disfigured bodies to depict the poor and dispossessed in ways that challenge the sense of moral authority and cultural control that sentimentalism, naturalism, documentary photography, and high modernism typically grant the middle and upper classes. (3)

In adopting a style of prose that works against normative tropes of bourgeois patriotism that often construct moral authority in Canadian novels of the First World War, Harrison attempts to reassign subjectivity to the soldiering multitude through what Entin calls the "aesthetics of astonishment" (17). Entin applies his theory of astonishment to 1930s modernist literature by adopting and adapting Benjamin's thoughts on epic theatre, namely, the aesthetic principle suggesting that "instead of identifying with the characters, the audience [of epic theatre] should be educated to be astonished at the circumstances under

which they function” (qtd. in Entin 18).³³ Particular to the aesthetics of astonishment that function within sensational modernism (as opposed to epic theatre) is an attention to, and intense depiction of, the human body, which is often represented as suffering, maimed, or abnormal. Harrison pushes his text away from conventional, realist representational codes by focusing on the depiction of the grotesque conditions that multiple theatres of war (Montreal, London, Amiens, etc.) place upon the human body. Though not reminiscent of a modernist concern with the individual’s dense experience amongst the multitude of, say, the modern city, Harrison’s alternative modernism figures the grotesque experience of the soldiering multitude in the midst of capitalism’s unembroidered battlefields. This text, for which he is best known, expresses only one of many possible alternative modernisms. As Harrison continued to write he engaged, as we shall see, with other forms of modernism that enabled a leftist critique.

A CHILD IS BORN

While Harrison continues to take aim at the destructive forces of the First World War, he employs divergent modes of critique in his two novels following *Generals Die in Bed* and, in doing so, depicts the destructive forces of war away from the battlefield. In *A Child is Born*, Harrison accentuates the economics of the First World War and how they get played out in the American metropolis. The novel opens with a series of fragmented, verbal snapshots of the development of America, from its British imperialist beginnings, through revolution, civil

war, imperialist expansion and industrialisation, culminating in the early twentieth century and the fact of urban slums. With these snapshots Harrison signals the novel's deep concern with the effects of capitalist economics on the conditions of America's urban working class. Harrison's urban slum, Red Hook, in Brooklyn, comes to represent a larger, more general condition of the working class in the American city. He would later publish six activist tracts under the auspices of the New York City Housing Authority that highlight the novel's concern with housing conditions in the American metropolis.

Harrison's activist concern with housing conditions finds its literary equivalent in the genre of the proletarian tenement novel. While the strike novel is often thought of as the proletarian novel *par excellence*, Michael Denning, presenting the many novels about the 1929 Gastonia textile strike as a strong example, points out that "neither the novels nor their authors appear in the little magazines of the proletarian movement" (235). In other words, Denning does not see literary coordination and literary criticism accompanying the production of strike novels the same way he notices networked literary organization emerging alongside novels about the urban slum. More often than not, the critics involved in the debates about proletarian literature, when they actually wrote literature, focused on the urban tenement novel, or what Denning calls ghetto pastorals.³⁴ Mike Gold has become the prototypical critic of proletarian literature who also, with his *Jews Without Money*, wrote the prototypical tenement novel.³⁵ Moving beyond the singularity of Gold as representative proletarian author, Denning makes a distinct connection between modernism and the authors of tenement novels:

For the plebeian writers, modernism meant two things: on the one hand, a way to use a vernacular that was not an "ethnic" dialect, always already a minstrel exercise in

misspelling, broken grammar, and comic solecisms; on the other hand, a freedom from plot, a way to avoid the well-crafted intrigues and counterplotting of the novel proper. The most striking aspect of the ghetto pastorals is their lack of unifying narrative, their sketchiness. (243)

Indeed, *A Child is Born* resists the arc of plot as a structuring principle. Relying instead on episodic containment of various economically driven (not to say determined) conditions, the chapters of the text exhibit allegorical characteristics alongside moments of pastiche and incorporation of other print texts (mostly newspaper articles, à la dos Passos) as an appeal to authority in place of an agency that the proletarian characters of his novels clearly do not possess. While *A Child is Born* is part of the tenement-novel tradition, it can also be understood as a two-fold socialist Bildungsroman, tracing the development of Red Hook as a character itself while also exhibiting the more traditional conventions of the Bildungsroman when it bridges the book's episodic character with semi-sustained focus on the working-class, tenement-based education of its protagonist, Arthur Roberts. It is the novel's seventh chapter, "Rise and Fall," that is most specific in its depiction of the effects of the First World War on Red Hook and Arthur's family. The rise of wartime commerce is narrated in geographic terms: "[f]rom the American Middle West endless trains of food began to roll toward the Atlantic ports" where "ships waited at docks in New York, Hoboken, Jersey City, Philadelphia, Red Hook in Brooklyn" (66). Furthermore, from "Pennsylvania and New Jersey freight cars rumbled up to the wharves laden with copper-banded ammunition for heavy artillery" (66). The convergence of labour and raw material at the urban American port supported a violent conflict that America had yet to enter. This increase in demand for American supplies in war-torn Europe provided employment for the longshoremen of Red

Hook or, as Harrison's narrator suggests in a conciliatory tone, "Good times came to Red Hook; that is, comparative good times [...] The general living conditions of Red Hook, however, remained the same" (69). The competing economies of survival that form between battlefield and home front are best illuminated when Harrison suggests that a "Scottish lad in kilts at the foot of a Belgian ridge whimpered at the sight of his shell-amputated leg, but [Arthur's mother] Margaret was getting a fat pay envelope every Saturday night" (67). Harrison pushes the juxtaposition even further:

A little manila yellow envelope made Margaret happy, made her children well-fed, gave Edward [Arthur's father] a sense of importance.

In Europe manila envelopes made mothers and wives stare in horror: "*His Majesty regrets to inform you...*" (67)

While the juxtaposition of geo-coded renderings of the manila envelope constructs an opposition between the conditions for economic betterment in the American republic and the mortifying, gendered abandonment in a disintegrating European empire, a representational recalibration in the narrative occurs when the United States enters the war. Harrison focuses on a shift in language to describe the shift from economic opportunism to patriotic adventurism: "Sonorous words rang in the newspapers—country, honor, battlefield, to die for one's country—words to quicken the pace of slum-sluggish blood, words to color a drab life filled with petty cares and ills" (72). Harrison introduces a shift in language in order to signal a large-scale shift in the formation of national identity: from the discourse of opportunistic economic development to one of loyal, sacrificial subjectivity (though still a large-scale economic boon for some, to be sure). Shifts in language-use and representational style, throughout Harrison's prose, play an almost deterministic role in the alteration of

material reality. For example, switching from a scene of familial dialogue he gives, in quick succession, the effects of the armistice on Red Hook:

The war was over.

Troops came home.

Work became scarce again. Wages dropped. Strikes broke out in factories, in mines. Steel mills in many states shut down. Blood stained the streets leading to mills and factories.

Troops patrolled strike areas.

A wave of radicalism swept from New York to California. Aliens were thrown into prison, deported, persecuted. Union meetings were raided and dispersed.

The hatred of the war was finding a new outlet. (78–79)

The turn to truncated prose signals a large-scale alteration of the disposition of the American populace from opportunism and patriotism to protest and discontent. Harrison's post-war slum becomes an even more contested space after the brief moment of wartime liquidity and patriotic talk of peace gives way to a harsh new reality of capitalist deregulation. The end of the war signals the transfer of wartime, European violence back onto the American home front. Shortly after the war, Arthur's father dies in a violent strike, while Arthur eventually becomes involved in petty crime, is caught, and sent to a juvenile penitentiary. The novel ends with Arthur's escape from social segregation at the East River Island Reformatory during a fire. He swims, determined by hatred, to Manhattan and is reabsorbed back into the city. The sustained focus on Red Hook and the working-class education and coming-of-age of Arthur accomplishes a successful placement of the Bildungsroman within the generic conventions of the leftist tenement novel. What is more, Harrison works within this tradition

of proletarian modernism—as an alternative modernism—along with the deft inclusion of the disastrous effects of the First World War on both Red Hook and Arthur, which sustains the topical anti-war concerns of *Generals Die in Bed*, though through a much-changed representational strategy.

THERE ARE VICTORIES

Like *A Child is Born*, Harrison's third novel *There are Victories* is a type of Bildungsroman, but it is not a two-fold story of the life of a young man and that of an American slum. Instead, *There are Victories* is a proto-feminist anti-Bildungsroman that explores the gendered and classed constraints of the upper class in Anglo-Montreal and then, in New York City. Harrison begins his third novel with the five-year-old Ruth Courtney weeping in a Montreal convent. As the narrative develops, Ruth emerges a naïve young woman expected to fulfil the social obligations thrust upon her by a neurotic mother who is consumed with following the strictures of bourgeois society.

Similar to the war-time Montreal represented at the beginning of *Generals Die in Bed*, war-time Montreal in *There are Victories* has “an excited, tense air about everything and everybody as though a decaying and sluggish humanity had suddenly found the way to ultimate happiness” (110). The war also causes a blurring of gendered class lines whereby “[a]ristocratic young ladies reared in luxury and refinement, prostrated themselves in patriotic self-abasement before lumberjacks and day laborers in uniform” (110). Amidst the patriotic,

pro-war excitement of Montreal, Ruth's husband, Edgar Kennedy, receives a commission as Captain in Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and the patriotic home-front rhetoric continues unabashed while Edgar is fighting in Europe.

Just prior to Ruth's husband returning home, she receives "a letter from London: he had been buried alive twice and his nerves were gone" (132). Much like the many instances in which a focus on language heralds a major change in the plot in *A Child is Born*, this focus on the language and form of the letter, which was "terse and cold, like a military dispatch, like most of his letters lately" (132), foreshadows Edgar's social and mental disintegration made apparent upon his return to Canada. As Ruth reads the letter she notices that Edgar's "handwriting seemed to have changed. It was loose and sprawled over the page like the writing of a boy of ten" (132). The description of the prose style of Edgar's letter brings his elevated social and military status to the level of the prose style employed by Harrison's anonymous working-class soldier in *Generals Die in Bed*. Further connecting *There are Victories* to his first novel, Harrison stages Edgar's return to Montreal at the "monstrosity which the Grand Trunk Lines called Bonaventure Station" (133), the very same location he stages the soldiers' departure from Montreal in *Generals Die in Bed*. It is at Bonaventure Station that, in the eyes of the female protagonist, the bravado of wartime Montreal is finally decimated. Ruth recalls Samuel Butler's words in his "A Psalm of Montreal" to describe the backward and bourgeois character of the city: "Oh God, oh Montreal" (133). Much like his handwriting, Edgar returns to Montreal in disarray and unable to be contained within the bourgeois social fabric of the city, the very social system that had facilitated his commission as Captain in the Princess Pats.

It is upon Edgar's return to Montreal that the vast wreckage of war gets represented in the novel. Edgar returns to Montreal an alcoholic who believes that after what he has given to the war effort, he deserves "a little dirty frigging" (170). In other words, Edgar overextends the temporary suspension of social boundaries that was celebrated at the outbreak of war when he returns to re-stratified post-war Montreal. This leaves him blind to the transgressive implications of bringing prostitutes into the family home, which happens to be in upper class Westmount. Edgar is incapable of conforming to pre-war social structures that governed sex, gender performance, and class. Amidst the frustration of what we now call post-traumatic stress, Edgar becomes violent with Ruth. During one of his drunken episodes, Ruth relies on her own silence:

A terrified silence fell upon Ruth. She was filled with a vast pity for the poor wretch who paced bravely to and fro before her, frightening her into speechlessness with the threat of fists. This was what the war had done for him, she thought, it had taken the lowest in his nature and exalted it. It had made virtues of his weaknesses, it had elevated the lust for blood into a holy thing. The brutal power of the fist which men had been curbing through all the long painful centuries was now supreme. The war had converted Edgar into a drunken, vicious sot, it had made him forget the restraints which once held men in check. It had made filth a laughing matter, the subject for marching songs as they sent youngsters to slaughter... (156–57)

Ruth comes to frame the war as a force of social devolution whereby it is just as much the war that enacts violence as it is her husband. The war takes over the subjectivity of the individual, upon which bourgeois society depends. During this moment of rumination Ruth makes the decision to leave her husband, and later, the familiar city of Montreal for New

York, where she attempts to begin her life anew and where the remainder of the novel takes place. At the novel's conclusion, having had a child with another unfaithful man, she sits in her kitchen, ruminating on a theory of life as conflict—"life against life"—and she thinks, "[y]es, the guns have smashed everything" as she "one by one, with studied deliberation, opened the four gas jets" (318).

While developing the novel with all the plot-driven conventions of the realist Bildungsroman, Harrison rejects the protagonist's expected social integration at the novel's end and thus produces a proto-feminist anti-Bildungsroman—the book enacts the disintegration of the bourgeois subject rather than an expected individual subject (re)formation.³⁶ The novel traces the disintegration of pre-war codes of personal and social interaction, precluding the expected consolidation of the individual protagonist. By taking a totalizing literary genre rooted in nineteenth-century notions of enlightenment and male personal development, and turning it on its head, the subject of Harrison's novel becomes, in part, the failure of the realist Bildungsroman itself. This conceptual estrangement, rather than an estrangement through fragmented consciousness or minimalist technique, is what animates Harrison's third modernist alternative.

The minimalist description of modern warfare in prose, for which Harrison has largely become known, is mostly absent from *A Child is Born* and *There are Victories*. There are no grenades or gas attacks (save the self-afflicted), no machine-gun fire or wounds caused by bayonets. As Harrison's subject and setting move away from an overwhelming concern with the battlefield, the *raison d'être* of the stylized form of *Generals Die in Bed* melts away. The prose style, pastiche form, and episodic structure that Harrison adopts in writing *A Child is Born* reflects the construction of powerless proletarian subjectivity outside of conventional

realist narrative in as much as, like Denning suggests, “a group must have a sense of agency in order to imagine realistic narrative about itself” (249). Harrison saves his realism for bourgeois subjectivity, though he represents it as a corrupted and disintegrating one. He uses the conventions of realism, which are historically tied to elevated social power, so that he can undermine the consolidation of that social power, or rather show the inability of those conventions to consolidate that social power in light of modernity’s militaristic subsumption of individual subjectivity—as Ruth says, “the guns have smashed everything” (318). In each of the three texts he puts forth a type of writing that is counter to what we might recognize as the overwhelming concerns of high modernism. Harrison’s fourth novel, *Meet Me on the Barricades*, constitutes a departure: it is unique among his oeuvre for its adoption of easily recognizable high-modernist strategies. His first three novels do not commit to the layered, high-modernist experimentation that Harrison’s fourth novel enacts. Before turning to this final novel, though, it is important to complicate and contextualize the stylistic shifts among his first three novels in light of his shifting status within leftist literary and political culture.

HARRISON’S LITERARY POLITICAL WORK

Apparently never joining the Canadian or American Communist Party, Harrison became radicalized during and immediately following the First World War. At the very least, he was a dedicated fellow traveller who made his way from Montreal to New York in the 1920s, where he worked on the staff of the Communist Party of America (CPUSA)-led *New Masses*.

He was also a founding member of one of a series of John Reed Clubs, established in 1929 in an attempt to create a large forum for leftist writers. According to Alan Wald, Harrison “was a leading figure in Left literary circles” and “had directed the [Communist] Party’s publicity campaign on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti” (*Exiles* 361). Unlike some of the other members of the John Reed Clubs and contributors to the production of *New Masses*, Harrison gained the status of a “leading figure,” but historians of the North American literary left have largely ignored his contributions to both criticism and literature. One reason for this omission may be his seemingly fluctuating affiliations and alignments, which changed over time when he was presented with different political and cultural conditions.

What I have thus far called Harrison’s alternative modernisms find their correspondence in his changing political affiliations and alignments. The success of *Generals Die in Bed* continues to set the terms of a critical reception that underplays the tensions of writing between Canadian and American literary cultures. After *Generals Die in Bed*, his critical reception is affected by his shifting national affiliations, and compounded by his shifting political alignments. Given that Harrison worked on the staff of *New Masses* alongside outspoken literary critics of proletarian literature such as Mike Gold, it does not take much critical insight on my part to notice the skill with which the novel Harrison wrote while enmeshed in that milieu enacts the conventions of proletarian literature in general, and the tenement novel specifically, when he writes *A Child is Born*. The novel is a successful rendition of the programmatic ideals for literary production that were active within what Denning calls the “proletarian movement” (235), which, in Harrison’s case, includes the experimental interjections into the narrative with the use of the print texts of mass culture. After the deft attainment of this programmatic rendition of proletarian literature, something

obviously had to have changed for Harrison to proffer the characters and conundrums particular to the collapsing bourgeois ethos of *There are Victories*. Indeed, Harrison's literary and political alignments changed. It is not altogether clear if, in 1933, Harrison left or if he was expelled from the *New Masses* staff and the John Reed Club. Alan Wald, writing in *The New York Intellectuals*, confuses the timeline but gets the character of Harrison's change of heart right when he suggests that an "example of a post-Moscow trial defection was the particularly abrupt about-face of the novelist Charles Yale Harrison" (154).³⁷ Whether he left or was expelled, it is clear that he was unhappy with the direction in which the CPUSA-led organizations were headed in 1933. The same year he left behind the apparatuses of "proletarian movement" he published an essay on proletarian literature in *The Nation* that sheds some light on his changing literary-critical position (as evidenced by the editorial policies of *New Masses*) and his production of yet another example of an alternative modernism.

"Proletarian Literary Sans-Culottes" is a biting critique of the disconnect between the underwhelming failures of the CPUSA's 1932 electoral results and the hyperbole of the *literary* politicians who were already announcing that American writers had "made their final break with the middle class" (321). Harrison denounces the then current pronouncements and literary aspirations of the Communist Party during its Third Period (1928–34) and those who spoke on its behalf, including the John Reed Clubs, the very organization he helped form. It is important to note that Harrison critiques the John Reed Clubs of 1933, which took a much more programmatic stance than, I think, its founding principles would suggest. In many ways, it was the leadership of the clubs who performed what Wald calls Harrison's the "about-face." Much of Harrison's critique of the official party line seems to be about the

exclusion of the possibilities for modernism and formal innovation *within* the proletarian movement—a dismissal of “aesthetic criticism for the heady, magic facility of pseudo-Marxian proletarianism” (321). As Barbara Foley notes, the founding “manifestoes of the John Reed Clubs stressed formal innovation as a necessary companion to revolutionary politics” (56). Harrison suggests that the “basis for membership [within the John Reed Club of 1933] is the acceptance of the current political ‘line’ of the Communist International recently promulgated at the last session of the International Convention of Revolutionary Writers in Kharkov, Russia” (321–22). Harrison evokes the Russian revolutionary and Marxist theoretician Georgi Plekhanov in order to offer a critique of the disconnect between the imposition of a Stalinist programmatic literary style and a desire for the writing of an authentic leftist American literature:

If, as Plekhanov pointed out, art is the manifestation in form of the cultural superstructure of society, then, on the basis of the 1932 election returns, the proletarian literary movement in America is a synthetic monstrosity imposed upon American literature by a handful of wilful propagandists. (321)

While Harrison is not wrong to suggest that the Party was attempting to proffer a literary programme, he hastily dismisses the divergent productive potential of cultural programmes from that of the electoral process. That the CPUSA only received “1/4 of 1 per cent” of the electorate’s vote in the 1932 election does not determine an equivalence in the Comintern’s *cultural* power (321). Indeed, leftist debates around politics and aesthetics throughout the 1930s profoundly shaped North American literary production.

Harrison does not end his essay with a rejection of political content in literature or proletarian literature as such, but with an appeal to a sort of national authenticity. “From

now on,” he writes, “our writers will do well to ignore the blandishments of all party encampments, left, center, or right. Instead of writing soap-box orations, our proletarian writers ought to create authentic, representative American literature” (322). The appearance of “Proletarian Literary Sans-Culottes” in the same year as *There Are Victories* is not a coincidence. Whereas *A Child is Born* fits neatly within programmatic codes of the proletarian novel that the Comintern would come to endorse, Harrison rejects the strictures of the proletarian novel when he takes up an upper-class narrative perspective in *There Are Victories*.

Though Harrison situated himself outside of the communist-led coterie of literary politicians, he continued to participate in leftist debates about cultural production throughout the 1930s, arguing against strict programmatic codes in cultural production. In situating his leftist aesthetic principles against the Comintern’s programmatic of the early 1930s, Harrison was already anticipating a Popular Front aesthetic. By the late 1930s Harrison had long since rejected the literary restraints of the Third Period. When confronted with the social, political, and cultural intricacies of the emergence of the Popular Front and the onset of the Spanish Civil War, his problem was somewhat different than those who had to adapt very quickly to the Comintern’s change of tack. Because he had been so successful at producing anti-war narratives, when confronted with the political implications embedded in the anti-fascist fight in Spain, he would need to find a new literary strategy if he was to lend even hesitant support to the cause. In other words, the key question is what a leftist, modernist writer does about the Spanish Civil War when he has made a name for himself as an anti-war novelist. If you’re Charles Yale Harrison you switch tactics dramatically. Whereas he had previously relied on producing alternatives to high modernism to express the horrors of war and its horrid consequences, his novel written in the midst of the Spanish Civil War

employs a thickly layered and complicating narrative style that is easily recognizable as a high-modernist mode. In switching tactics he does not undermine his previous work. Instead, he uses the cultural authority of high-modernist conventions to articulate a different social and cultural problematic. By working with different literary conventions and experimentations he is able to express the contradictions of a political modernity in a different way.

MEET ME ON THE BARRICADES

As much about the heated culture wars of the 1930s as about the Spanish Civil War, *Meet Me on the Barricades* is a highly allusive text that layers global politics, revolutionary theory, classical music, literary theory, world history, and anti-Stalinism, as well as emergent biological discourses about sex. The novel switches easily between earnest political philosophy and slapstick comedy (Hitler in drag, Mussolini dying a syphilitic death, zombie Lenin, etc.). What is most unique about the novel is the way Harrison uses modernist tactics to explore the North American leftist imaginary. To survey this leftist imaginary Harrison allows “the legerdemain of memory” to reduce cultural and political debates of “a decade to a moment” (189) when he constructs two days in the life of the antihero P. Herbert Simpson, a middle-aged, weak-hearted oboist with the New York Symphony Orchestra. What makes Simpson unique is that he is subject to wild hallucinations that are sometimes daydreams, sometimes drunken delirium, and, finally, intricate dreams while asleep. “*His imagination annihilated reality, telescoped time and space*” (15).

Simpson's dream world, we are told in the opening chapter, developed out of fascination with political revolution and "people who had harnessed their daydreams to a scientific social concept and who one day would alter the essential conditions under which mankind lived" (12). Though always a "devout fellow-traveller" (28), Simpson meandered through various labels for himself over the years—from formless sort of humanitarian to philosophical anarchist—and he finally found a nominal resting place as a "*free lance* communist" (30). Outside of the nominal though, "fear of reality made actual participation impossible, revolution had become an integral and important part of his dream-world. In real life he could not bring himself to become so much as a distributor of leaflets, but in his daydreams he was a veritable firebrand" (13). Early in the novel Harrison makes a connection between Simpson's consciousness and the actual form of the novel. After absenting himself from playing bridge with his conventional suburban wife and some of her conventional suburban friends, we learn the following:

He undressed, got into his pajamas and dressing-gown and settled down for an evening with an exceedingly modern novel. After reading for a few minutes he put the book down. He was in no mood for unusual syntax, it corresponded too closely with the unevenness of his intellectual existence. (32)

While Simpson is the antihero of the novel, he is also a stand-in for the novel itself—a conflation of the leftist imaginary with modernist experimentation and idiom. Before even getting to the narrative itself, the reader is informed about the book's intentions through the "Note" that appears between the title page and the first chapter of prose. Though this note goes through the familiar gesture of stating that the characters in the novel are not intended to represent any actual person, it also offers the following instruction:

[...] certain well-known public persons appear as hallucinatory figures in the minds of two characters, but these must not be interpreted as realistic portrayals. This literary device, for which the author makes no boast of originality, in this case is simply a method of presenting social criticism within the framework of the novel. As such, it definitely comes within the realm of public interest. Any person who chooses to identify himself with any of the characters of this book, does so at his own peril.

(n.pag.)

Harrison states his project explicitly. His aims are to use literary devices to present social criticism. When he dismisses any designs at claiming originality, he also acknowledges that the literary devices he chooses to employ exist within a tradition—in this case, a modernist tradition.

Harrison frequently allows Simpson's consciousness to jump across space and time as he consistently returns to the Spanish Civil War as the *mise en scène* of Simpson's imagined political action. The first mention of the conflict in Spain is in the novel's second chapter: Simpson sits on the train making his daily commute. He reads a newspaper-account of a bombing of Barcelona, which is reproduced in the text: "*...the rhythm of this bombing contained a diabolical logic—first, hand grenades and heavy projectiles to stampede the population, then machine-gunning to drive them below, next heavy incendiary bombs to wreck houses and burn them over the victims*" (13; original italics). As Simpson slips into a hallucination about Spain, the "cataclysmic roar of an approaching shell" becomes the "gigantic horn motif of the last movement of the Schubert *C Major Symphony*" (13–14). As he slips further into hallucination, he imagines himself to be Captain Pedro H. Simpson, heroically leading the "battle-torn 14th Machine-Gun Company" of the Loyalist army (16). Again, the barrage turns into music.

“‘God, what a crescendo!’ he exclaims, ‘louder than thunder, more original than Stravinsky’” (17). As the barrage against the fascists intensifies it figuratively trumps thunder and moves into modernist experiment, collapsing artistic and political revolution.

As this first hallucination of Spain persists, Simpson continues to lead troops in the midst of battle. Harrison constructs the scene’s imagined stoicism as a way of focusing on Simpson’s hallucinatory consciousness while making clear the roles that language, literature, and reading play in constructing that consciousness. For example, when a young Spanish student from the University at Salamanca begins to whimper and grovel with fear, Harrison has Captain Pedro reassure the young man while making clear the constructed nature of the performance through language: “‘Courage, *compañero* [he thinks of the word in italics, the only way he has ever known it]; ‘by noon we shall have avenged the dastardly bombing of Madrid’” (17 [square brackets in orig.]). Pushing the awareness of language and textuality into the realm of the literary, Harrison includes the following in square brackets:

[The pages of a dozen war novels flutter in his mind. Putrescent, shapeless, the corpse of Kemmerich lies in the path of his advance. Broadbent reclines in a shell crater, looking away from his shattered leg where a pool of blood grows as though fed by some subterranean spring. At the bottom of that chalk pit a trench rat steps daintily onto Paolacci’s chest, prepares to eat with relish the lieutenant’s lower lip.] (18)

Within this paragraph Harrison cites Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*, his own *Generals Die in Bed*, and Humphrey Cobb’s 1935 novel *Paths of Glory*. This self-citation allows Harrison’s his well-known anti-war novel to seep into Simpson’s hallucinatory consciousness. Harrison is acutely aware that despite the outwardly anti-war character of his literary production, it is still subject to appropriation in the cause of romanticizing war, that

his cultural production has helped to inform a citation-prone aspect of the leftist imaginary. Simpson emerges from this exhausting first hallucination of Spain in order to change trains. Once on the second train he “found a comfortable seat, slumped into it, a veteran returning from the wars” (22).

The Spanish Civil War re-emerges without hallucination when Simpson has lunch with a colleague, Ascaso, a violinist and seasoned radical from Spain who had taken part in the Barcelona uprising in 1917 and spent a year in jail as a result. Simpson and Ascaso converse at length about the conflict in Spain. As they speak of the factionalism of the left, the power and misanthropic actions of Stalinist Russia in Spain, and the “trap of anti-fascism,” which he outlines the problems of joining in a Popular Front coalition with non-revolutionary parties and abandoning of revolutionary objectives in order to defeat fascism,³⁸ the conversation confuses the easy distinctions Simpson has relied upon in order to create his heroic romanticization of himself in Spain. Harrison continues to rely on the tropes of writing and language in order to work through these complications. In this case, Simpson’s consciousness does not reproduce passages from war novels. Instead, recalling the pastiche he uses in *A Child is Born* and the letters he uses as plot devices in *There are Victories*, Harrison has Ascaso produce a letter from a Spanish friend along with clippings from Spanish newspapers. These are reproduced in the novel and mediated through Ascaso’s translation from Spanish. The non-hallucinatory discussion does not last through to the end of the meal. With use of these textual props, Ascaso is able to complicate and undermine the strength of Simpson’s convictions, which sends Simpson into an overloaded stream-of-consciousness narrative in which “words and phrases, like dismembered bodies, whirled in his mind” (109). For Simpson, language and warfare have imploded into each other. Recognition of the

complications of the Spanish Civil War forces Simpson to return to a previous hallucination, this time with a less heroic construction:

He closed his eyes for a moment and saw cascades of colored distress signals leap from the entrenched lowlands of his fancy. Artillery thundered in his ears and through the prism of his gathering despair, feebly sustained by an ebbing faith, he saw the green face of the dying student from Salamanca, an image born of an image, his forehead gaping where it had been torn by a jagged fragment of shell. (107)

By revisiting the figure of the university student from Salamanca—“an image born of an image”—and by presenting his maimed body—particularly a injured cranium—Harrison signals the snowballing of abstraction in Simpson’s consciousness as it gets further and further away from material reality. His own romanticized construction of himself as Captain Pedro begins to deteriorate as he loses the ability to maintain control and guardianship over his hallucinated characters and surroundings. The confusion continues and sparks even more wild hallucinations, after which a switch in representational form signals the intensification of the hallucinatory content. Harrison’s tenth chapter switches from stream-of-consciousness prose narrative to dramatic dialogue, and in doing so, takes the hallucinations out of Simpson’s individual consciousness and lays bare the leftist imaginary as constructed through a whole cast of characters.

It is through the mode of dramatic dialogue, replete with stage directions, that Harrison intensifies and further conflates his representations of the literary and political debates of the 1930s. The scene takes place in the back of Gallagher’s Bar and Grill. Simpson is with Ascaso and another man, Darrell, who is a newspaperman, a novelist, and a burnt-out radical.³⁹ A wild cast of characters come in and out of the scene, including a circus barker, a

stenographer, Stalin, Dr. Samuel Johnson, Heywood Broun, The Unknown Soldier, Lenin, policemen, reporters, conjugal rights, and various others. This switch in representational style is certainly a nod in Joyce's direction—so much so that Joyce becomes a speaking subject, quoting directly from *Ulysses*. Before introducing JOYCE, though, Harrison introduces Mike Gold to the scene as a sort of actor who begrudgingly takes direction from DARRELL. EAST SIDE NOVELIST arrives first as a Yeshiva student, but when DARRELL does not think he could achieve anything but sympathy, he changes into “*ill-fitting clothes, derby hat pulled low over his ears; he carries a sewing machine slung over his crooked back*” (151). Finally (after taking DARRELL's direction to try again), dressed in a “*smart, newly purchased tweed suit,*” he settles into the role of Mike Gold, who exclaims: “We were caught in the trap of poverty. The agony of it! Three hundred and nine pages of it!” (152). The quotation of the exact number of pages of the 1930 first edition of *Jews Without Money* confirms the identity of EAST SIDE NOVELIST as Mike Gold. EAST SIDE NOVELIST goes on to interrogate GOD about one of the recurrent tropological obsessions of *Jews Without Money*: “Did you or did you not make bedbugs? And no theological hairsplitting, please” (152). After Harrison introduces the character of proletarian literature's most vocal American advocate, complete with a jab at the genre conventions of the tenement novel, EAST SIDE NOVELIST makes a connection between political intent and modernist prose when he asks if Lenin or Marx needed to “write like James Joyce or wait until a new kind of prose was invented before stating their message” (153). DARRELL responds to EAST SIDE NOVELIST's accusation that he had never read Marx with a remembered passage from Chapter Sixteen of *Capital: Volume II*:

DARRELL

Brightening as he recalls

Yes, now I have it. The annual rate of surplus-value, or the comparison between the surplus-value produced during one year and the variable capital advanced (as distinguished from the variable capital turned over during one year) is therefore not merely a subjective matter, but the actual movement of capital causes this juxtaposition.

He pauses, breathless, mopping his brow

Correct me if I'm in error. I quote from memory, of course. The point is that the complexities of the soul are as involved as the intricacies of political science, a fact recognized by Marx himself. (155–56)

Through an appeal to Marx himself, Harrison justifies the complexities of literary language and the difficulty of modernism. Not content to let the issue drop, Harrison has JOYCE respond to EAST SIDE NOVELIST's vehement stance against high-modernist experimentation and suggestion that "communist art now needs a Tolstoi more than it does a James Joyce" (156). JOYCE appears in the scene and recites from the "Sirens" episode of *Ulysses*:

JOYCE

Earnest, intent, he peers half-blindly at a manuscript

Bronze from anear, by gold from afar, heard steel from anear, hoofs ring from afar, and heard steelhoofs ringhoof ringsteel.

Looking up to E.S.N. shamefaced

No good, eh?

Apologetically

Excuse it, please.

EAST SIDE NOVELIST

With a gesture of impatience

How can drivels like that help the building of socialism in the Soviet Union or the people's front in America? All responsible critics will agree.... (156–7)

Harrison adopts a Joycean form in defence of high-modernist language and style but exposes his explicit appropriation by letting James Joyce actually speak through the form. By figuring Gold's attack on the modernist prose of Joyce through modernist form, Harrison attempts to advance the writing of leftist critique as a viable possibility within modernist experimentation. Harrison also brings in the materiality of text when, in between quotations from Marx and Joyce, he has DARRELL say: "Acknowledgements are hereby made. Direct quotations limited to three hundred words without permission of the copyright owner" (155).

If the dialogue between DARRELL and EAST SIDE NOVELIST represents contested conceptions surrounding the production of either revolutionary or proletarian literature, he uses another device to critique the political hypocrisies of Stalinist communism. He stages a lengthy shouting match between the temporally-split subjectivities of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of America, Earl Browder. The argument is between BROWDER 1932 and BROWDER 1937 which ends in a fist fight:

BROWDER 1932

Liar! Betrayer! Party hack!

BROWDER 1937

Stool-pigeon!

BROWDER 1932

Pigeon stools!

In a violent rage BROWDER 1937 falls upon his past, beats him, knocks him down, kicks him into a bloody pulp, snatches the pamphlet from his limp hands and tears it into a hundred pieces (176)

By moving back and forth between the split subjectivity, Harrison imitates his own practice of incorporating his earlier authorial voice into his fourth novel. This split in subjectivity is carried even further—across a life and death divide—when Harrison has Lenin come back to life only to be ordered shot in the back by Stalin (184). In each instance of symbolic incorporation of an earlier subjectivity (BROWDER 1932 and LENIN) Harrison maintains fidelity to the earlier incarnations and satirizes the hypocritical betrayals of the latter political actors (BROWDER 1937 and STALIN). By association, in his earlier self-quotation from *Generals Die in Bed*, he exhibits a continued fidelity to his own earlier work, which suggests that though he adopts divergent literary tactics, his overriding convictions have not changed, as have the convictions of his former political allies.

By including this single chapter of dramatic dialogue, Harrison is able to expose the extremes of the debates around both leftist and modernist practices from outside the hallucinatory consciousness of a single character and, as a result, make explicit how the literary and the political were deeply intertwined and hotly debated milieu of the 1930s. The three men who enter and leave the bar together take up divergent roles in expressing the complexity of the leftist imaginary. Simpson had spent his life cultivating a “dream-world [which] turned upon the axis of revolutionism,” because, for him, no “mental fiction can be more satisfying than one which holds forth the promise to destroy old concepts, to create new social forms and which is at once the life and the resurrection” (29). Darrell, on the other hand, had participated in revolutionary movements but, out of feelings of betrayal, had

lost all ability to imagine the possibility of a better world. All that remains of his convictions are the technical and theoretical aspects of Marxism that he subjects to a biting sarcasm. For example, commenting on the Stalinist takeover of revolutionary potential, he says, “At last the dialectical method is completely substantiated. We have witnessed the ultimate contradiction. The revolutionists have killed the revolution” (188). “[N]ot once during the evening had [Ascaso’s] thoughts been hallucinatory” and he is the only one who is able to substantiate the continued role of the leftist imaginary, which he does by attaching it to historical moments (187). “There are times,” Ascaso says, “when history seems to burn with energy, when thought is brave and one feels that mankind stands on the verge of a glorious adventure...” (191). Despite Ascaso’s continued critique of Stalinism’s many betrayals, he does not give up his leftism. Rather, he appeals to the “unthinkable” scenario in which humanity would allow the “barbarism of fascism” to remain (193). The hallucinations of Simpson and Darrell, as well as the sobriety and cautious hope of Ascaso, all find ways into the construction of Simpson’s last hallucination of the Spanish Civil War. The final hallucination, which takes the form of a layered dreamscape, facilitates the closing of the book.

Simpson’s last hallucination places him back in Spain, where he—as Captain Pedro—is captured by Franco’s fascist troops along with other anti-fascists. Here we do not get the minimalist prose of *Generals Die in Bed*, we get a carry-over of the confusion of the factionalist debates that were discussed over lunch with the Spanish violinist. The anti-fascist prisoners begin to argue amongst themselves, with a Stalinist accusing a syndicalist of various treachery, but their arguments and ideological conflicts are rendered minor in the face of the overwhelming struggle against a winning fascism. The captured anti-fascist soldiers are all

lined up in a cemetery and shot: “The gun roared, sweeping a slowly traversed arc, drowning out all cries, obliterating all polemics, forging a final indestructible bond of unity” (206). Simpson does not emerge from this dream. He is dead. Harrison has his antihero die heroically in Spain while simultaneously dying in his sleep in his New York home. The narrative ends with a conflation of the opposing sides of *Generals Die in Bed*: the anti-fascist cause incorporates the critiques of authoritarian military and political structures while at the same time the anti-hero, Herbert Simpson, is an armchair general who continually romanticises war though he never really participates in the battles of his own creation. While the anti-fascist Captain Pedro dies a martyr, Simpson is left to die in bed.

Meet Me on the Barricades is complex and uneven. Uneven, in this sense, does not suggest an evaluative measure. Rather, the novel is uneven because—through modernist experiment—it allows narratives to collapse into each other, both across the broad frame of the novel itself as well as across Harrison’s oeuvre. In his 1933 article “Proletarian Literary Sans-Culottes,” Harrison made a rhetorical correlation between electoral results and the strength of cultural politics. In *Meet Me on the Barricades* he interrogates that constructed equivalence by exploring the inner workings of the leftist imaginary of the 1930s—the motivations, emotional attachments, interpersonal dynamics, and artistic expressions that informed a generation of people who, like the characters of *This Time a Better Earth*, worked to conceptualize (and sometimes fight for) a more just transnational world, a world without fascism. *Meet Me on the Barricades* is complex and uneven, then, because the relationship of the leftist imaginary to material reality is complex and uneven—there are no direct or deterministic equivalences. The novel’s constant return to the Spanish Civil War speaks to a relationship that is constantly in flux—between the leftist imaginary and an actual, on the

ground, blood-and-guts fight against fascism. Each hallucination of Spain constructs a different outcome based on the strength and weaknesses of convictions in one character's dream world. That character, though, represents a larger generation of political actors. Harrison does not dismiss the necessity of the leftist imaginary in the struggle for a more just world, but he does give evidence for the need to carefully secure the leftist imaginary against the whims and betrayals of power-hungry authoritarian structures and individuals.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

As a project of recovery and reconnaissance, I have aimed for this dissertation to bring to light divergent instances in which modernism emerged in Canada through a syntax and grammar of the left that does not rely on an overemphasized framework of commitment. Though covering multiple genres—poetry, fiction, theatre, illustration, photography, radio, and film—this project has not sought to be comprehensive in the sense of narrating one single path of modernism’s emergence. Rather, I have aimed at providing six thorough and dense case studies to show the varied ways in which modernism addressed different political contexts though shared modes of organization—collective organization, party organization, and coalition-based organization. While these case studies are discrete entities, they are also connected. As McKay notes,

[e]ven when leftists were arguing with each other, they were at least sharing enough of a common language of leftism that their positions were mutually intelligible. Even when they were not connected by shared institutions, we can, judiciously, bring them together within the analysis of a formation if it can be shown that they were connected through a shared language of politics. (*Reasoning Otherwise* 7)

Sharing not only a language of politics, the case studies in this dissertation have been arranged in a way that draws attention to the multiple ways in which both leftism and modernism shared organizational structures—collective action, party politics, and coalition building.

In the selection of the case studies, I have presented evidence to show the multiple levels of uneven development of modernism in Canada. For example, the poetry of Martha Leslie and Robert Leslie emerged in the midst of a group of staunch antimodernist cultural producers whereas Norman Bethune, Hazen Sise, Jean Watts, and Ted Allan were immersed in a modernist milieu that provided a different kind of support to their work—when they were working in Spain, they were part of the transnational cutting edge of modernist production. Another instance of uneven development can be seen when the strike novels of Durkin and Baird, which were produced for a Canadian literary marketplace, are compared with the work of Charles Yale Harrison, whose four novels of the 1930s were produced for a non-Canadian literary marketplace. While Harrison could assume various kinds of modernist reader, Durkin and Baird had to work within the realist mode in order to create a modernist reader in Canada. In other words, I have not given priority to the avant-garde, but I have not ignored the importance of “new” types of modernist work in the transnational context. With critical acknowledgment of the condition of modernism’s uneven development in Canada, I have given equitable critical consideration to both the advances and retreats of Canadian modernism’s long march.

The choice of case studies for Chapter Two was purposefully made to present texts that interacted with non-modernist modes of production and to show critical recovery can sometimes unearth modernism in places where there are no obvious, avant-garde breaks. Modernism emerged through a complex set of material, temporal, and spatial conditions. Those conditions, as Willmott argues, sometimes necessitated the tactical use of realist, romantic, or, as we saw with the *Song Fishermen*, antimodernist modes of production to get modernism into circulation. These case studies also show how it was through the

presentation of leftist subject matter that writers enabled modernism to circulate in Canadian literature—both fiction and poetry. They simultaneously evidence the existence of cosmopolitan artistic practice in existing in regional Canadian settings and not just cosmopolitan centres. When read carefully, this condition of rural cosmopolitanism helps in debunking unwarranted applications of an agrarian myth as “one of the great themes of Canadian literature and intellectual thought” (Rider xiii). Instead, we can read modernism as interactive and reactive across cultural geographies.

A critical project on leftist literature in Canada in the interwar period must address the role of political parties in shaping that literature. While avoiding familiar discourses of commitment, the case studies in Chapter Three suggest that literature also played an active role in shaping the formation of political parties. This is accomplished by resituating canonical texts in relation to political parties, albeit in different ways. In examining *Eight Men Speak*, which is a canonical text of Canadian leftist theatre, the purview is expanded beyond a single text as well as beyond performance history to include print culture and legal discourse. This critical desire does not come from a critique of the ways in which the play has been situated previously. Rather, by expanding our understanding of the ways in which the left applied theatricality to CPC-affiliated print culture, we expand and reshape our conceptions about how the CPC was built and how it gained popular support. In examining the early work of F.R. Scott, who remains a canonical figure in literature, law, and political thought in Canada, I argue against the splitting of his work into separate projects. Instead, the case study on Scott shows the ways in which politics and literature are inextricable in his work.

Taken together, these case studies demonstrate how forms of composition—be it the manifesto form or developments in the staging of modernist theatre—are transferable to

other discourses and genres. Scott brought poetry to the manifesto as much as he brought the political manifesto to poetry. The CLLDL also transferred artistic forms across discourses, from the modernist stage to an active print culture that forwarded legal defense on behalf of the CPC. Both case studies show that in the interwar period artistic creation, and not just crafty political spin, was crucial to the development of leftist political parties in Canada and that artistic production was not simply a reflection of established party structures and platforms. The pairing of these two cases also shows that there was sometimes more crossover between the CPC and the CCF than most historians and literary scholars admit. For example, not only did Scott publish in the CCF-affiliated *Canadian Forum* criticism of the state in defense of the CPC's right to exist as a parliamentary party in Canada and in defense of the CPC leaders who were convicted under Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada, but his writing was also re-published by the CPC-affiliated Canadian Labor Defense League in *Not Guilty!* This crossover occurred during a moment in political history in which most scholars highlight fierce opposition between the two parties in ways that, sometimes, over-asserts unproductive sectarian narratives.

The case studies in Chapter Four show obvious ways in which Canadian modernism participated in a larger transnational modernist sphere. The Spanish Civil War elicited simultaneous literary responses from around the globe. In other words, the modernist innovations contained within the Canadian literary responses to the conflict were being made concurrently in a larger transnational context.

Though the first case study in Chapter Four focuses on Canadians who went to Spain and the second explores the role of the Spanish Civil War in the North American imaginary, there are connections between the texts that show correspondence. For example,

while Allan, Bethune, Sise, and Watts all wrote journalism with the hope of reaching and influencing a North American audience, Harrison incorporates journalism coming from Spain into *Meet Me on the Barricades*. Though it is not the journalism of the writers studied in the first case study, his modernist incorporation of journalism gives a sense of how important that journalism coming out of Spain was in the shaping of the North American leftist imaginary. By presenting these case studies together, readers will hopefully get a sense of the ways in which anti-fascism was articulated at multiple sites of both literary production and reception. What is more, Harrison's text adds to a sense of the speed with which journalism travelled with the development of new media technologies. Presenting a case study on Charles Yale Harrison's four novels of the 1930s as the final case study has allowed me to retrace a chronological path so as to reiterate modernism's multiple and continuous development. Harrison's constant rearrangements of generic expectations show that modernism continued to emerge in the interwar period, even though it continued to get recalibrated.

One happy result of limiting this project to six case studies is that there remains much more work to be done. For example, Dyson Carter's fiction and his Marxist science textbooks warrant attention, as do the poems Joe Wallace published in *The Worker*. The full relationship between Dorothy Livesay's early prose and leftist reportage has been neglected, as have the socialist poetry and editorial work of Kenneth Leslie. The poetry of Paul Potts, a Canadian who moved to and remained in Britain, also deserves consideration. The study of modernism's emergence in Canada as a leftist practice can also be strengthened, I believe, by presenting scarce right-wing counter examples of Canadian modernism. For example, the

right-wing, libertarian work of Isabelle Patterson (a mentor to Ayn Rand) should be read as an important and influential author opposed to Canada's overwhelmingly leftist modernism.

One of the more vexing matters, which this dissertation has not addressed, is the way Canada's leftist modernism was retroactively framed by those who were its early contributors. Historicized readings of literary-critical memoirs from the 1970s and 1980s, such as Toby Gordon Ryan's *Stage Left: Canadian Theatre in the Thirties: A Memoir* (1981), Dorothy Livesay's *Right Hand Left Hand: A True Life of the Thirties* (1977), and Earle Birney's *Spreading Time: Remarks on Canadian Writing and Writers, 1904-1949* (1980; 1989), beg for critical attention for their historical revisionism as they re-chart the interwar period and speak from positions entrenched in disavowals, bureaucratic betrayals, changing alignments, and the ideological meanderings of the Cold War period. The possibilities continue and the list could go on. I can only hope that the material I have provided in these pages will contribute to the expansion of McKay's "network of focused investigations" of the Canadian left in the direction of leftist cultural production (3).

In the introduction to "Writing Left" I suggested that I do not intend to develop this dissertation into a scholarly monograph and that decision stands. This does not mean that the research carried out for this dissertation has not instigated a different project. Indeed, by good fortune, the work of the present dissertation has set in motion a new project: I intend to take up a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship to produce a book-length study on Canadian writing about the Spanish Civil War, tentatively entitled *The Deed Becomes the Word: Canadian Writing on the Spanish Civil War*. Aside from examining the many published novels, short stories, poems, and journalistic pieces mentioned briefly in the introduction to Chapter Four, large amounts of life writing about Spain—memoirs, diaries, letters, and testimonials—exist

in both published and archival sources. *The Deed Becomes the Word* will analyse this life writing that comes out of direct experience of the nearly seventeen hundred Canadians who travelled to Spain and joined the Canadian Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion to volunteer in the anti-fascist cause. The critical purpose of this upcoming project is twofold: to contribute to Canadian scholarship by showing how Canadian writing about the Spanish Civil War has influenced cultural, social, and political formations within Canada; and to make scholarship on Canadian writing about the Spanish Civil War available to a broader network of scholars who are more familiar with writers and partisans from outside of Canada. As such, *The Deed Becomes the Word* responds to the work of scholars from around the globe who have made clear the importance of this material. The project also pushes the conceptual limits of exile. Rather than thinking of exile solely as a condition of national or geographical displacement, theorizing Canadian writing about the anti-fascist cause in Spain incorporates ideological and political displacements and affiliations within the discourse of exile.

I do not believe that the development of a book-length project that takes up some of the key questions posed in “Writing Left” will undermine the reasoning behind the methodological deployment of case studies in this doctoral project. To reiterate, this alternative mode of composition is responsive to the current state of scholarship around leftist and modernist Canadian literature. It is not just that there is a plethora of material to be examined in this scholarly field and that one doctoral project could not productively cover it all. More important is the fact that the confluence of leftism and modernism presents multiple and sometimes competing ways to critically approach a body of texts that themselves are often contradictory in their deployment of modernism and leftist politics. In presenting multiple avenues of entry into critical discussions of leftist and modernist

Canadian literature, I hope to have made a compelling case for the critical reinvigoration of the connection that Scott made eighty years ago in “New Poems for Old,” between modernism and socialism in imagining a “new and more suitable order” (338). Canadian modernism was not generally a bitter or despondent enterprise. Rather, it was more often than not a hopeful and expectant series of projects that sought to contribute to the building of a better, more just world.

ENDNOTES

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

¹ One highly theoretical and well-known exchange that I have not recounted here is Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of an engaged literature and Theodor Adorno's "Commitment" essay that repudiates Sartre's "What Is Literature?" and his notion of an engaged literature.

² It is for this reason that the work of Lukács is left absent from *Writing Left*. For a detailed argument against formal experimentation and in support of committed formal literary strategies, see his *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*.

³ For more on uneven development see Harvey, Lowy, Trotsky, Mao, and Neil Smith.

⁴ For more on modernism and fascism see Griffin, Julius, Munton, and Redman. For more on the leftism of modernism's second wave see Denning, Foley, Hynes, Miller, Nelson, Platt, and Rabinowitz.

⁵ Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz suggest that the "New Modernist Studies" was "born on or about 1999 with the invention of the Modernist Studies Association (MSA) and its annual conferences" (737). They suggest that the study of modernism has broadened in scope—in "temporal, spatial, and vertical directions" (737).

⁶ While theorized by critics such as Alan Wilde and Brian McHale, a critical account of late modernism has been most thoroughly articulated by Tyrus Miller in his 1999 study, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars*.

⁷ Here I am thinking of texts such as Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (1945), Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* (1959), and perhaps even Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966) and Scott Symons's *Place d'Armes* (1967).

⁸ For examples of the debates around the avant garde, see Bürger, Calinescu, Hobsbawm, Lukács, and Perloff.

⁹ In the very, very beginning, I conceptualized writing a dissertation that would read the emergence of modernism in Canada contrapuntally with Lenin’s writing on revolution. The present version is, I think, more productive.

¹⁰ I present and examine some non-modernist texts as counter examples in the first two case studies that look at modernism’s emergence from within non-modernist modes and organizations.

¹¹ Mason’s forthcoming monograph has been developed from her dissertation, “Landed: Labour, Literature, and the Politics of Mobility in Twentieth-century Canada.”

¹² I spend much more time introducing the Spanish Civil War than I do contextualizing either post-WWI or Depression-era Canada because those histories are, I think, more familiar to contemporary readers.

¹³ For example, much has been written in Canadian criticism about the “McGill Group,” writers affiliated with little magazines such as *New Frontier* or *Contemporary Verse*, and consistent styles of production, such as the Kootenay School of Writing.

NOTES ON CHAPTER TWO

¹ For more on the IWW and OBU in Canada see Leier and McCallum.

² For more on cultural formations that have specialized, alternative, or oppositional external relations see Williams’s *Culture* 68–71. For a discussion of modernist coteries see Waddell.

³ Jennifer Delisle has recently used the term “Genealogical Nostalgia” to describe the desire post-immigrant generations have for the narratives of a homeland in which they don’t they participate.

⁴ See Introduction, endnote 5.

⁵ The term “Maritime,” in this instance, points to the poets who were active in constructing the Maritimes and Maritimers as poetic subjects.

⁶ See Davies 140–141, Kizuk 179, and McKay *Quest* 227–229. More than just a generous host, Andrew Merkel was a “key proponent of historical reconstruction, an important force in the immensely popular cult of the schooner *Bluenose*,” who “helped shape Innocence as a mythomoteur in the 1920s and 1930s” (McKay, *Quest* 227).

⁷ Only three broadsides were published: Merkel’s “The Bluenose to the Wind”; Kenneth Leslie’s “On the Road to Maccan”; and Charles Bruce’s “Ragwort”.

⁸ McKay and Bates suggest Nova Scotia officially became “Canada’s Ocean Playground” as early as 1931 (120).

⁹ To that list I might add the Antigonish-born John D. Logan, who was “then Head of the English Department at the Jesuits’ prestigious Marquette University in Milwaukee” (Kizuk 185). He was co-author of *Highways of Canadian Literature* (1924) and he claimed to have taught the first university course in Canadian literature (at Acadia in 1915). He was added to the subscription list in the fourth issue (9 November 1928) and he sent poetry as well as commentary. He provided symbolic *academic* clout.

¹⁰ Not all of these figures lived in Halifax proper, but all lived in Nova Scotia.

¹¹ Brian Trehearne makes a similar claim in *Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists*, when he acknowledges that the *McGill Fortnightly* contained poetry that fell well outside modernist articulation (139).

¹² Bob (Robert) is the name of Martha Ann's husband.

¹³ Wallace became better known in the Soviet Union than in Canada and he remains an under-studied figure within Canadian literary history. James Doyle has written the most thorough scholarship on Wallace's six-decade-long poetic career. See Doyle's *Progressive Heritage* and "The Canadian Worker Poet."

¹⁴ "Call the Comely Daughters" and "Night Fishing" are ballad-like love poems that sustain ocean metaphors; "Night Fishing" figures a mermaid as the object of affection.

¹⁵ See Temkin, Watson, Avrich.

¹⁶ For detailed information on Gillis see McKay's *The Quest of the Folk*, 234–8.

¹⁷ The next issue, number twelve, gives additional contextual material on MacAskill. This time, the information comes by way of Stuart McCawley of Glace Bay, who attempts to humanize MacAskill by presenting facts that question Gillis's sensationalist construction of MacAskill as an super-human Folk-hero. McCawley had recently visited with, and thus presents the authority of, Angus's brother, who was "nearing the hundred mark" and who had explained that the "McAskill folks don't like Angus being referred to as a giant. He wasn't abnormal. He was a big, well-proportioned, intelligent, lovable character, who owned and ran a general store" and he was "not a Freak" (2). McCawley had asked a friend at Englishtown, Ross Macaulay, to interview Angus's brother to get the "true story of the incident" and a short, pithy portrait of the incident is provided under the authority of

Angus's brother, wherein the incident takes place at Neil's Harbour and the bow is pulled off another fisherman's boat. McCawley's interpolation, while challenging the construction of MacAskill as a Folk-hero, places him firmly within the realm of the Folk.

¹⁸ The editorial leaves out "Laureation: That Fishing Boat Exploit" by Katherine F. MacDonald and "Song of the Boat" by Molly Beresford.

¹⁹ Unlike his five other poems that were published in the *Song Fishermen's Song Sheets*, "The Giant out of a Job" has never been reprinted in any of Wallace's collections.

²⁰ See Rifkind 49.

²¹ The Gastonia Strike was the best known of a series of labour struggles that swept the cotton textile industry in North and South Carolina in the spring of 1929. The Gastonia novels—Mary Heaton Vorse's *Strike!* (1930), Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* (1932), Fielding Burke's *Call Home the Heart* (1932), Dorothy Myra Page's *Gathering Storm* (1932), and Sherwood Anderson's *Beyond Desire* (1932)—according to Denning, "are less products of the proletarian literary movement than the descendants of the novels written about the Molly Maguires and the Haymarket anarchists" (235). See "Gastonia Strike."

²² For information on the Künstlerroman in Canadian literature, see David Williams.

²³ For studies of *The Magpie*, see Arnason, Doyle, Hill, and Rider.

²⁴ While Craig keeps a journal, it figures neither prominently nor consistently in the novel and I am therefore hesitant to assign him the status of an artist figure.

²⁵ It is continually mentioned throughout the novel that Craig deals chiefly in export and not in gambling on futures.

²⁶ For detailed information on the General Strike and the Committee of 1000 see McKay's *Reasoning Otherwise*.

²⁷ "The World is Waiting for the Sunrise" (1919) was written by Canadians Gene Lockhart and Ernest Seitz.

²⁸ *Jurgen*, by James Branch Cabell was published in 1919 but was suppressed on grounds of obscenity from 1920 to 1922. See "Jurgen."

²⁹ By the time of the novel's publication Durkin was in a relationship with Martha Lane's namesake, Martha Ostenso.

³⁰ During this time both Craig and Martha become close friends with Jeanette, a war widow and ex-friend of Marion who has become politicized, and her lover, Amer, a veteran and leader in the labour movement. As their friendship builds and as Craig becomes increasingly involved in mounting Martha's exhibition, he comes to articulate a stronger opposition to the efforts of the capitalist class to organize against labour.

³¹ For a thorough discussion on the complications of too-easy distinctions between the country and the city in Canadian fiction of the first half of the twentieth century, see Willmott's *Unreal Country*.

³² See Hill 144 and Rifkind 25.

³³ "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (Act 1, scene 5).

³⁴ Craig's tactical hypotheses about the state's desire to have the labour movement resort to violence are confirmed by the fact that the powerful labour leader, Bud Powers, who advocates most strongly for violent strike action, is a spy for the North-West Mounted

Police. The dénouement of the novel resembles, in many ways, that of *The Magpie*. As Craig works to expose the stool pigeon he is beaten unconscious and kidnapped. While he is held, Powers is shot by one of Craig's friends, a revolutionary Russian labour organizer. The report of the gun shocks Craig's wife, who has been living with a heart condition, and she dies. The strike proceeds and Powers's men smash the printing presses of *The Beacon*. Craig recovers, heartbroken, and with everything gone. When he returns to the office and finds the modes of journalist production are no longer available to him, he decides to leave Vancouver and his work as a labour organizer and journalist—though he remains sympathetic—for the prospect of reuniting with Jocelyn Paget (who is also newly widowed) and writing a book about an imagined city somewhere in the Pacific.

³⁵ Colin Hill's scholarly edition of the novel was published in 2007. The novel also received a small flurry of critical attention in the 1970s.

³⁶ See Michiel Horn's "Transient Men in the Depression."

³⁷ A student of mine argued forcefully and compellingly for the parallels between *Waste Heritage* and *The Wizard of Oz*.

³⁸ While the culture wars over the political purposes and modes of art production raged in the United States in the early 1930s in the pages of *New Masses* and *Partisan Review*, the work of critics and writers on the left in Britain took a slightly different tenor. This was the rise of what would later be called the Auden Generation, a group who (among other things) began a widespread discussion of the political role of the parable.

NOTES ON CHAPTER THREE

¹ For detailed and diverse histories of the CPC, see Avakumovic, Purdy, Rodney, and Penner's *Canadian Communists*. For in depth and varied histories of the CCF, see Azoulay, Young, Whitehorn, Scott and Lewis, and Penner's *From Protest to Power*.

² For a variety of opinion on Scott's "duplicity" see Dudek, Jones, Campbell, and Lang. For different accounts of Scott's "commitment" see Shore, Campbell, Djwa, May, and Lang.

³ For detailed arguments against using a framework of commitment in our critical accounts of poetry, see my introduction as well as Thompson's "Commitment in Poetry" and Denning's *The Cultural Front*.

⁴ The following early poems are not included in *Collected Poems*: "[The girls are too much with us; late and soon...]" (1918); "Lament, after Reading the Results of Schools" (1922); "To R.P.S.: On His Going Down" (1923); "At L.C.C.: 1923" (1923); "The Scarlet Key Society" (1925); and, "Trivium" (1926, later published as "Lines").

⁵ In June 1906 F.R. Scott's father, F.G. Scott, as an external member of Bishop's College Council, attempted to pass a motion, albeit unsuccessfully, that no more women be admitted to the college (Nicholl 135).

⁶ "Lament" was later published as "Sonnet (*On reading the results of the examinations*)" in the *McGill Fortnightly Review* (23 January 1926: 43) and signed "T.T."

⁷ Although Trehearne suggests that "Miniature" was signed "Brian Tuke," it was, in fact, signed "R.S."

⁸ To give Trehearne due credit, he wrote a book on Aestheticism so he obviously need not follow the path himself.

⁹ “The Scarlet Key Society” was not Scott’s first publication at McGill. As he notes, “In the course of the [first] year [at McGill] I sent along two pieces [to the McGill Daily]: one a satire in prose written after I had read about the building in Pittsburgh of the “Cathedral of Learning,” fifty-five stories high; the other was a translation from a medaeval [sic] French poem” (Francis Reginald Scott Fonds [FRSF] Vol. 81, File 6). “The Cathedral of Learning” is an allegory in which the speaking subject sets out from “the secret cave on Mount Royal where I kept my private Time Machine” to an overly efficient institution of higher learning that allows for no reflective thought (1).

¹⁰ Desmond Pacey, in *Ten Canadian Poets*, deems this final stanza superfluous (249). I disagree. Though the poem later appeared without this final stanza, its inclusion as aid to the present argument is based on the poem’s textual history. It should be noted that while I am well aware of the importance of the debates about the poem’s apparent misogyny, I refrain, in this chapter, from joining that discussion. For a detailed discussion of critical accounts of the poem, see Bentley, 259–61.

¹¹ See Wilde’s “The Soul of Man Under Socialism” which was published in the British *Fortnightly Review* in February 1891.

¹² I take Scott’s “New Poems for Old” series as the work of literary history instead of literary criticism because there is no real prescription for a direction in which modernist poetry ought to go in Canada.

¹³ Speaking about his early poems, Lang suggests that “These poems, which he himself termed ‘pregnant doggerel,’ address social and economic inequities by employing a degraded kind of social realist mode. Ranging from mordantly sardonic to outraged, these texts employ

a regular meter and a straightforward rhyming scheme to rail against injustice and corruption and the capitalist system causing them” (169). Lang leaves the concept of “pregnant doggerel” undertheorised. Outside of archival holdings, the only uses of the term that I have been able to locate are in Lang’s article and Djwa’s biography. Djwa suggests that the term came out of conversation with Scott. There is an indication that Scott was taking about poetry quite different than “Anthology” and “Social Notes” when, in writing in his diary on 12 January, 1961, in the Vancouver Airport, en route to San Francisco, he wrote the following: “I have written frequently a kind of ‘pregnant doggerel,’ to express ideas about man, society and history. Such as my ‘Ode to Confederation,’ or ‘A Lass in Wonderland’” (FRSF Vol. 91, File 8).

¹⁴ For a detailed account of the LSR see Horn’s *The League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada 1930–1942*.

¹⁵ Given the composition of Scott’s own personal library now housed in Special Collections at McGill’s Redpath Library, which was full of Marxist literature, he had much to worry about.

¹⁶ For examples of Scott’s writing on Section 98 see “Communists, Senators, and All That,” “Political Prisoners,” “Section 98,” and “Trial of the Eight Communists.” In addition, it is important to note that the twelfth point of *Regina Manifesto* calls for the repeal of Section 98.

¹⁷ These narratives are also intimately tied in with the personal histories of people who lived through various red scares and political decampments.

¹⁸ For more on the arrests under PC 2384, see Ian Angus’s *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 29–32.

¹⁹ The leaders of the Winnipeg General Strike were tried under sedition provisions within the Criminal Code.

²⁰ A ninth man, Mike Golinski, was arrested in the raid but “was subsequently released, as it was proved that he was not a member of the Communist Party but only of the Young Communist League (Scott, “Trial” 515).

²¹ Beyond the manifesto, Hasenbank suggests the pamphlet can also be “situated within a particular contextual network, built around particular organizations (the Communist Party, the Canadian Labor Defence League), institutions (the criminal court), figures (Buck, Smith, Bennett, the other leaders on trial), and documents (the criminal code, exhibits entered into the court record, various accounts and narratives of the trial, the platform of the Communist Party of Canada, and the *Communist Manifesto*, which is cited extensively in the text of the address)” (16).

²² Avrom’s illustration style can be seen in contrast to the clean, curved lines of Lawrence Hyde, whose illustrations came to dominate the pages of *New Frontier*.

²³ See Kealey and Parnaby.

²⁴ The critical reading that follows is based on the published text, which was revised after the first performance.

²⁵ See Rifkind 137–145.

²⁶ Andrée Lévesque, in *Scène de la vie en rouge*, sums up the Zynchuk story:

This unfortunate unemployed man from rue Saint-Dominique in Montreal, who had emigrated 5 years previously from Poland, was cut down by constable Joseph Zappa. Finding out that the process-servers had carried out his belongings along with those

of other tenants in his building, Zynchuk grabbed a bed post and brandished it above the head of a policeman, who shot him at point-blank range. When his superiors demanded why he had fired, Zappa responded, 'He's a communist.' Cleared of all blame, Zappa represents the arrogance and impunity of the anti-communist forces" (qtd. in Lambertson 33).

There are accounts of Zynchuk's murder that have him unarmed and shot in the back. Ross Lambertson, in *Repression and Resistance*, states: "The *Canadian Forum* frequently referred to the issue as a powerful symbol of Quebec illiberalism, and, as the Canadian poet Dorothy Livesay recalls in her autobiography, 'the event captured the imagination of writers on the left, and became the theme of plays, stories, and poems'" (Lambertson 33).

²⁷ Discussion of the play also occurred in the pages of *The Varsity* and *The Worker*. See Filewod's Introduction to *Eight Men Speak*, 50–52.

²⁸ Filewod notes that "George Dickson-Kenwin [was] a Shakespearean actor from Britain who ran a classical theatre studio, the Academy of Dramatic Art, in the Little Playhouse on Bloor St West" (*Eight Men Speak* 20).

²⁹ For a discussion of the relationship between modernism and "dynamic realism," see Denning 122–23 and Foley 54–63.

³⁰ I use "professional" after Filewod's example: not the status of the artist but "the discourse of theatre culture as a disciplinary regime with embedded values of art, artistry, training, and stage conventions" ("Performance and Memory" 62).

³¹ For a discussion on the dubious assertion of a growing Workers' Theatre Movement, see Filewod, "Performance and Memory in the Party."

³² Following the work of Rifkind and Irvine, it is notable that a woman was the one to give logistical direction in the formation of a group of cultural producers.

³³ See Will Ferris's review of the play in the American magazine *New Theatre*.

³⁴ Unfortunately, Kealey and Whitaker only publish the "Table of Contents" and not the whole report.

³⁵ Filewod does not give the pamphlet a sustained critical reading.

³⁶ For an example of another Canadian modernist text that contains heavy use of ellipses, see Sol Allen's *They Have Bodies* (1929).

³⁷ The work of Ryan's Canadian contemporary, Herman Voaden, is exemplary for its multi-genre experimentations.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

¹ For example, see Vautour.

² For example, I considered "set theory" as championed by Alain Badiou in *Being and Event*, as well as Fredric Jameson's recent theorizations of revolution in "Lenin and Revisionism" whereby revolution becomes Event-as-process and process-as-Event, but neither model seemed to fit with my own ideas about cultural production occasioned by the Spanish Civil War.

³ This chapter does not consider the work of Canadian James M. Minifie, who wrote for *New York Herald Tribune*, though his writing and his own story are fascinating, because he was not involved in the networks of Canadian cultural production. For more information, see Preston's *We Saw Spain Die* and Minifie's own 1976 memoir, *Expatriate*.

⁴ Preston suggests “nearly one thousand newspaper correspondents went to Spain. Along with the professional war correspondents, some hardened veterans of Abyssinia, others still to win their spurs, came some of the world’s most prominent literary figures: Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, Josephine Herbst and Martha Gellhorn from the United States; W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender and George Orwell from Britain; André Malraux and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry from France. A few arrived as committed leftists, rather fewer as rightists, and plenty of those who spent brief periods in Spain were simply jobbing newspapermen” (18).

⁵ John Reed’s reportage stands out as a prime and fitting example in this case.

⁶ For a broader critical discussion of the role of photography in war, see Sontag and Barthes.

⁷ See Mao Zedong.

⁸ This recognition has enjoyed a marked increase in visibility in Canada in recent years. For more information on Bethune and the mobile transfusion unit, see Allan and Gordon, Shephard and Lévesque, Clarkson, Hannant, Lethbridge, Stewart, Petrou, and Stewart and Stewart.

⁹ The CASD had a Popular Front composition, with members from both the CCF and CPC.

¹⁰ The broadcasts could be heard on Station EAQ at 31.65 megahertz.

¹¹ For a broad discussion on the role of the witness, see Agamben.

¹² Admittedly, there is a remote possibility that the radio broadcasts were never delivered and that the form of the radio broadcast was a formal tactic used to construct presence in the production of the pamphlet. The sort of revisionary or editorial processes used in the transference from one medium to the next is also unclear.

¹³ Breastfeeding takes on special significance for Canadian audiences because one of the CASD's major funding drives was to provide milk for children.

¹⁴ As Denning notes, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is genre-establishing only through retroactive critical historiography of the 1960s. For more on this, see Denning 118-19.

¹⁵ Kline had previously been an activist in the workers' theatre movement in New York, and editor of *New Theatre*, which was the Popular Front reformation of *Workers' Theatre*, the primary vector of radical theatre theory in North America.

¹⁶ For a Spanish Civil War film that uses longer, panoramic shots see Ivens's *The Spanish Earth*.

¹⁷ Livesay's retrospective writings often return to Watts, with accompanying assertions of Watts's unrequited love for Livesay. The constant return to Watts occasions the reader to wonder if it might not have been a mutual sentiment.

¹⁸ David Crook had lost his diary shortly after the Spanish Civil War. It was found in the early 1970s and donated to the Imperial War Museum, and the Museum in turn deposited it in the Spanish Civil War collection at the Marx Memorial Library. The diary tells that he and Jean met while Crook was convalescing in Madrid. The following passages from his diary shows some of the urgency that war can bring to love: "...we got on well and under normal conditions—if we'd both had jobs—things might have gone well—except for her marriage! As it was, so far as my relations with a woman are concerned these two weeks have probably been the best in my life—and now that I am back here [at the front] I'm glad to have crammed them into life at the very time when such a thing seemed least likely" (MML SCWC:

D4/Cr). Crook became a spy for the KGB around the same time as the affair took place. His family has published an autobiography online: <http://www.davidcrook.net>.

¹⁹ Tara Beagan has written a play about the life of Jean Watts that will be mounted at Theatre Passe Muraille, Toronto, in the Fall of 2011.

²⁰ It was a (rather successful) tactic of the Fascists to induce panic and suspicion by insinuating that a group of latent supporters were already within the city. The term “fifth column” was coined by the Nationalist General Emilio Mola (1887–1937) in a 1936 radio address to suggest that he had a group of supporters within Madrid in addition to his army of four columns stationed outside the city. It was also the title of Ernest Hemingway’s only full-length play, first published in 1938.

²¹ He later penned a self-portrait of this time in *Love is a Long Shot*, which won the Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour in 1985.

²² Allan lived a full and storied life. As *This Time a Better Earth* was his first book, written when he was very young, the comprehensive details of his very full life lie somewhat outside the purview of this project. As this is being written, his son, Norman Allan, is preparing a biography of his father. An electronic draft of the biography can be found online at <http://www.normanallan.com>

²³ “Canada’s Fascists: Duplessis Lets Them in the Back Door” is an intricate three-page report on the rise of fascism in Canada in which he gives a damning portrait of Premier Hepburn of Ontario, Premier Duplessis of Quebec, and Adrien Arcand, the leader of fascist National Social Christian Party.

²⁴ When the novel finally appeared in 1939 it was well received in Canada. Edward Dix, in his review in *Saturday Night*, suggested that *This Time a Better Earth* is “not just another novel about Spain as we may begin to number novels about Spain, but a justification in the eyes of people other than Spanish that what has happened in Spain, and what is still happening there, is not primarily the concern of Spanish people” (20). Notably, the Canadian reviews focus on the character and political affiliations of the author to a greater extent than do the British or American reviews. For example, J.R. MacGillivray, in the 1939 “Letters in Canada” section of the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, focuses on the relationship between Allan’s political affiliation and literary skill—as if the two are normally mutually exclusive—when he writes that “Mr. Allan, like several of his characters, is probably a Marxist, but at no point does he allow political enthusiasm to vitiate the clarity and integrity of his impression of the Spanish war” (295). The review in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, which suggests Allan’s prose “bites clean and swift, like the hand grenades the International soldiers could not have,” calls Allan’s reliability into question: “He says that the names of his characters are fictitious. But their actions, their courage, their clear-sightedness and their wounds and their deaths have a terrible reality” (Ted Allan Fonds [TAF], box 4, file 22).

This Time a Better Earth was also widely reviewed in the United States. Unlike many of the Canadian reviews, the novel’s American reviews tend toward literary comparison and discussion of the book’s status. The reviewer for the *San Francisco Chronicle* writes that *This Time a Better Earth* “is an exciting picture of an exciting time. May the other novels that are sure to be written against the same background be as good” (TAF, box 32, file 37). John T. Appleby, in the *Washington Post*, claims that Allan has written “the best story to appear in

English about the recent Spanish war since [Elliot Paul's 1937] 'Life and Death in a Spanish Town'" [sic] (TAF, box 4, file 22). Howard Rushmore, in *People's World* of San Francisco, speculates that many more writers will take up the subject of the North American contribution to the fight against fascism in Spain and surmises that there is "room and plenty of it for such fiction but until it is written Mr. Allan's book stands out as a pioneer work of more than average stature and significance" (TAF, box 4, file 22). Leland Stowe, winner of a Pulitzer Prize in 1930, gives the book praise in a review for the *New York Herald Tribune*. Stowe focuses on the respect *This Time a Better Earth* pays to the volunteers when he suggests that the novel has not "smirched these unsung heroes with propagandistic oratory or sloppy emotionalism" (TAF, box 4, file 22). "Rather," he continues, the novel "has achieved a remarkably honest and accurate portrait, yet one which will appeal for its narrative value alone. [...] One reason for this, I think, is that Ted Allan is a good reporter" (TAF, box 4, file 22).

British reviewers were supportive, to be sure, but perhaps slightly less enthusiastic in their support than were their American and Canadian counterparts. This lukewarm support may be a result of the novel's focus on the American and Canadian volunteers and not the British contingent of anti-fascists who travelled to Spain. The British reviews tend to fixate on the novel's descriptions of bombardments and warfare. The reviewer for the *Perthshire Constitutional* focuses on the many scenes of bombardment, calling *This Time a Better Earth* a "breathless and immeasurably stirring account of six young volunteers who go to the aid of Republican Spain" (TAF, box 4, file 22). The review in the *Yorkshire Post* also makes much of the novel's description of modern war and praises the novel for not romanticising war and

presenting heroes who are often afraid. The review in the London-based *Daily Worker* asks: “Have you ever felt like a balloon that has just been deflated; as though you had been all tense and then suddenly relaxed[?] That is just how you will feel after reading Ted Allan’s description of an air raid. Everybody should read this book if only for that section alone” (TAF, box 4, file 22). Contrasted with a concern for the novel’s political affiliations, romantic plot, or portrayal of transnational camaraderie, the British fixation on Allan’s descriptions of modern warfare—especially aerial bombardment—uncannily anticipates the Blitz, which shook Britain starting in early September of 1940.

²⁵ Emily Robins Sharpe, a doctoral candidate at Pennsylvania State University, has presented a number of outstanding papers on *This Time a Better Earth* at conferences in recent years. Her dissertation is tentatively titled “A Better Earth: Spanish Civil War Literature and the Emergence of Multicultural Nationalism.”

²⁶ For example, the novel’s representation of Jewish characters and erasure of their Jewish heritage in the fictionalization of the narrative (principally the story of Allan and Taro) deserves closer scrutiny.

²⁷ While a biographical-critical reading of Allan provides many parallels with the novel’s protagonist, the plot also bears loose resemblance to the relationship between Jean Watts and David Crook. Though Norman Bethune became a lasting spectral figure for Allan, the famous communist doctor does not play a significant role in *This Time a Better Earth*. The doctor introduced in chapter ten—Doc Woods—may be loosely based on Bethune.

²⁸ See Kenneth Burke 160.

²⁹ *This Time a Better Earth*, much like Allan's own life, is haunted by the figure of Gerda Taro. Born Gerta Pohorylle in Stuttgart in 1910, she was a woman who would have profound influence on the history of photography and who Allan fictionalized as Lisa Kammerer in *This Time a Better Earth*. Irme Schaber has written a biography of Taro in German (1994), which has recently been translated into French (2006).

³⁰ This ideal reader is gendered male as Allan's invitation also challenges the reader to participate in the reconstitution of Bob's adequate performance of collective anti-fascist masculinity.

³¹ This case study does not build on Willmott's theorization of modernism emerging from within established modes of representations, as did the second case study of Writing Left, because Harrison, though writing on Canadian subjects, was not writing for a Canadian market that spurned modernist texts. All four books under consideration here were published in Britain and the United States where there was a market for modernist texts.

³² Indeed, there are three observations that repeatedly arise in the critical work about this novel: first, critics seem to be in agreement that *Generals Die in Bed* is an anti-war novel. Eric Thompson suggests that "Harrison's subject is the brutalization of man by war" and that he "unsparingly attacks violence" (89). Thompson rightly compares the style of *Generals Die in Bed* to that of Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and he uses strong language to make the comparison:

Remarque and Harrison are anti-war novelists: preoccupied with giving as accurate and damning a portrait of war as possible, they deliberately use their narrators as

personae for the millions of *poilus* who could not speak in their own defence. To these authors Militarism is the *real* enemy of the common soldiers. (87–88)

Likewise, Peter Webb suggests that the “point of *Generals Die in Bed* is to show war’s capacity to dehumanize normally decent people, and to prove that the real enemy of all soldiers—be they Canadian, British, or German—is not each other, but war itself” (107). A second recurrent and related focus of scholarly attention is on the book’s prose style. Webb has defined *Generals Die in Bed* in terms of “realist fiction” (109). The third observation scholars make about the book is its relationship to anti-capitalist politics. Commenting on the book’s reception, Webb suggests that “*Generals Die in Bed* was a much maligned book, owing to its visceral prose, blatant socialism, and anti-authoritarianism” (92). Webb also makes the explicit correlation between class and military structures when he suggests that Captain Clark, who leads the soldiers into battle, “represents the bourgeois element in society, the middle-authority figure who does the bidding of the effete brigadier-aristocrat while exploiting the powerlessness of the alienated worker-soldier” (99). When James Doyle suggests that *Generals Die in Bed* is a “bleakly ironic and repetitive demonstration of how the proletariat is oppressed by the powers in control of the capitalist system,” he does away with any representational abstraction of class structures in relation to military authority (86–87).

³³ Entin takes this from Walter Benjamin’s “What is Epic Theatre?” in *Illuminations*, 150.

³⁴ For a thorough survey of the ghetto pastoral tradition in American literature, see Denning, 230–58.

³⁵ Mike Gold (1894–1967) was born Itzok Isaac Granich to Jewish immigrants and he was raised on the Lower East Side of New York. See Gold's *Gold: A Literary Anthology* and *The Mike Gold Reader*.

³⁶ Abel, Elizabeth, et al., eds. *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Hanover: UP of New England, 1983; Fuderer, Laura Sue. *The Female Bildungsroman in English: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism*. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1990.

³⁷ It may be the case that Harrison took a turn to the right after the Moscow Trials but he had already broken with the CPUSA.

³⁸ Harrison makes the distinction that “a united front unites revolutionary parties only, while a popular front admits all parties as long as they are opposed to fascism” (100).

³⁹ He is the closest figure in the novel to Harrison himself.

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