

**THE QUESTION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF NATIONALISM:  
INTERROGATING THE NATION IN EARLE BIRNEY,  
PHYLLIS WEBB, AND LEONARD COHEN**

by

Virginia Mae Houk

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts

at

Dalhousie University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
August 2012

© Copyright by Virginia Mae Houk, 2012

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

The undersigned hereby certify that they have read and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance a thesis entitled “The Question as an Instrument of Nationalism: Interrogating the Nation in Earle Birney, Phyllis Webb, and Leonard Cohen” by Virginia Mae Houk in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Dated: August 22, 2012

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Readers: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

DATE: August 22, 2012

AUTHOR: Virginia Mae Houk

TITLE: The Question as an Instrument of Nationalism: Interrogating the Nation in  
Earle Birney, Phyllis Webb, and Leonard Cohen

DEPARTMENT OR SCHOOL: Department of English

DEGREE: MA CONVOCATION: October YEAR: 2012

Permission is herewith granted to Dalhousie University to circulate and to have copied for non-commercial purposes, at its discretion, the above title upon the request of individuals or institutions. I understand that my thesis will be electronically available to the public.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

The author attests that permission has been obtained for the use of any copyrighted material appearing in the thesis (other than the brief excerpts requiring only proper acknowledgement in scholarly writing), and that all such use is clearly acknowledged.

---

Signature of Author

To My Parents  
& Guillaume

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED .....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2 EARLE BIRNEY.....	20
2.1 CRISIS OF IDENTITY.....	26
2.2 RESPONDING TO INTERROGATION .....	38
CHAPTER 3 PHYLLIS WEBB .....	45
3.1 SEARCHING FOR THE TRUTH .....	49
3.2 TRIAL AND JUDGEMENT .....	53
3.3 INTERROGATIVE TORTURE.....	57
CHAPTER 4 LEONARD COHEN .....	63
4.1 DECONSTRUCTING THE PALIMPSEST .....	71
4.2 ON THE BORDERS OF IDENTITY.....	78
4.3 RECONSTRUCTION OF "TRUTH" WITHIN THE MACHINE .....	87
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION .....	95
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	101

## **ABSTRACT**

Through the study of selected works written by Earle Birney, Phyllis Webb, and Leonard Cohen, this thesis seeks to interrogate the wave of modern Canadian nationalism and culture construction that grew as a result of the loosening ties to British roots, the increasing infiltration of American influence, and the political climate following the Second World War. As the Cold War began to take root, Canada found itself amid not only a political conflict, but also a barrage of emerging mass media on a global scale. As a result of this crossfire of national voices, the Canadian culturati made efforts to join in the conversation—through national radio, film, literature, and the creation of a new flag and dictionary—but before the nation could speak, it had to answer the questions that dominated the era: Who is Canada? What is the voice of Canada? Whose voice speaks for the nation? This thesis aims to study the evolution of the answers that were given to these questions. Through the lens of nationalist theory, translation theory, and the postcolonial Gothic, this thesis traces a route from Birney’s attempt to create a nation within a perceived “lack of ghosts,” to Webb’s efforts to question the very question of nationalism, ultimately to Cohen’s illumination of the internal mechanics of national identity as he worked to reconstruct it in a movement toward the Clear Light.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED**

CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CCF	Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
CRBC	Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NFB	National Film Board of Canada
NORAD	North American Air Defense Command
OAS	Organization of American States
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Socialist Republics

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many people who helped me get to this point in my life that it's hard to know where to begin. First and foremost I have to thank my parents. From reading me medieval fairy tales, "Little Miss" books, and chapters of C.S Lewis before bed; to taking me to the local library whenever I asked; to forcing me to read the entire **unabridged** version of *The Count of Monte Cristo* (which later became my favorite book) in the summer before ninth grade English; to filling my book shelves—and the book shelves in every other room of the house—I thank you from the bottom of my heart for starting my addiction to reading at a very young age and for introducing me to this incredible tradition of storytelling and self-expression. But even more than the books, all of you—Bev, Leslie, Mary Anne, and Tammy—have supported me, encouraged me, inspired me, loved me, and have believed in me during every moment, every step, of my life and for this invaluable gift, I am forever grateful. No matter which path I choose, I know that y'all will always stand behind me and this is the most awesome gift.

Second, I thank you Guillaume. From cooking dinner alone on the nights that I really could not stop working, to constantly encouraging me and loving me, to challenging me to take my studies outside of the classroom and outside of the written word as you introduced me to entirely new modes of creativity and expression, you have become a constant rock of stability, breath of happiness, warmth of comfort (like Christmas! 😊) in my life and I can no longer imagine it without you. Thank you for letting me rediscover through your eyes the beauty of Nova Scotia and the wondrous miracle of standing at the edge of the untamed ocean for the first time. I simply hope that for you I can be at least half of what you've been for me.

Third, I'd like to thank my grandparents in Kentucky, Amos and Frances. You both mean more to me than I can ever express. I never called as often as I wanted to, but whenever we spoke you two always became a bright spot in my day with all of our laughter and love. You constantly reminded me not to work too hard, you encouraged my faith, and I thank you so much for this constant reminder of the priorities in my life. Thank you for making my "ears burn" so often, for always opening your doors to me as my home away from home, and for all of your many prayers. I am forever blessed to have two such beautiful people as my grandparents.

Finally I have a few professors at Dalhousie to thank. Dr. Irvine, your willingness and enthusiasm to work with me on both my graduate application and my entire thesis from the other side of an international border has been remarkable and I thank you. Dr. White, for challenging the reach of my scholarship and for your incredible turnaround speed, my thesis and I are quite indebted. Dr. Evans, thank you for stepping in at the last minute to ensure that I'd dotted my i's and crossed all of my t's before the final deadline. Dr. Tillotson and Dr. Wunker, this thesis would not be what it is without both of your mind-bending seminars. And Dr. Stewart, thank you for bringing my literary interests beyond the scope of Victorian literature and for introducing me to my own dangling modifiers and use of "that" when I really mean "who." I finally feel like a true English nerd.

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

During the first decades of the Cold War, nationalist ideologies dominated broadcast and print media—most notably within the culture crossfire between the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). During the 1940s, the radio programme *Voices of America* was broadcast worldwide as a form of global public relations, funded by tens of millions of dollars from the US State Department (Lehman 26). In contrast, a decade earlier, the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (reorganized into the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC] in 1936) was just getting its feet off the ground in an attempt to bolster Canadian media on merely a national scale (“Early Years”). According to Leonard Brockington, chairman of the CBC until 1939, “If radio in Canada had not been nationalized the great American chains would have dominated Canada” (Ostry 556), and thus Canadian broadcasters hurried to protect the Canadian national voice from being lost under the tide of the encroaching American influence. This then led to programs such as the *Canadian Chronicle* being broadcast by the CBC International Service by the 1940s (Finnie) and to a proposal by Liberal cabinet member Brooke Claxton to develop the “Canadian spirit” through government funding to the national culture creators, which resulted in the formation of the Massey Commission (Litt 11). Such an effort to save Canadian cultural nationalism—to construct and reinforce the Canadian voice—poses questions that dominated the era: Who is Canada? What is the voice of Canada? Whose voice speaks for the nation?

Ironically, even within Canada this question was not always asked. According to Leo Kennedy, of the Montreal Group from the 1920s, modernist Canadian poets had no knowledge of or regard for any previous Canadian poetic tradition: "We despised them unbeknownst, and you can quote me" (qtd. in Morley 67). However, by the 1940s, the Canadian poet Earle Birney made it his mission—as seen in poems such as “Can.Lit.”—to find and help to develop this poetic tradition, and to promote Canadian media and culture on a larger scale. This effort to foster Canadian literature was tied into a larger national movement after the Second World War to create a modern Canadian nationalism, as separate from extra-national influences, and to then launch it on a global scale. It was an effort to promote ethnic nationalism—or the recognition of common memory, national space, and emotional charge, according to Anthony D. Smith in his book *Nationalism—within Canada* (13). Smith called these societies *ethnies* and, in *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, he emphasises the importance of symbols such as coins, totems, and flags as inherent to their existence (16). However, according to Benedict Anderson, nationalists define this instead as support for “the existence of Nationalism-with-a-big-N,” which moves past the articulation of ideology into that of analytical expression (5).

In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson speaks of the development of nationalism in relation to the influences of capitalism, leadership, and fear of the Other—all of which will appear during the course of this thesis. However, it is his focus on the power of language in creating nationalist groups that serves as the backbone of my argument. Apart from an extensive historical survey of nationalism in European history, Anderson’s argument focuses primarily on nationalisms within the colonial territories of Asia, Africa,

and South America. Addressing this context, Anderson writes that “from the start the nation was conceived in language, not blood, and that one could be ‘invited into’ the imagined community” (133). Anderson further stipulates that sharing a language with a European homeland made “the first national imaginings possible” and that it was European thinking which subsequently led to creations such as the linguistically unifying *American Dictionary of the English Language* (197). While it is obvious that many factors separate the rise of nationalism in Indonesia and Africa from its rise in Canada, it is this thread between nationalism and language that ties Anderson’s theory to my argument. Without violent revolution, Canada became an autonomous nationalist power through acts of rebellion from the cultural influences of its colonial past and neo-colonialism within the media. Time and time again the Canadian cultural elite—an instance of Anderson’s nationalist *leadership*—focused on the power of language to bolster nationalism, through books, radio plays, and—like the Americans—through the writing of the first strictly Canadian English dictionary (Boberg 48). The voice of Canadian language is what stood between the British colonial influence of the past and the threat of an invasion of American cultural influence. Indeed, during the start of this nationalist movement it was strictly a concern for the protection of English Canadian nationalism and its assimilation of other ethnic groups into this linguistic nation—as I will discuss in further detail in the second chapter. Modern Canada is not, however, strictly English-speaking and, while George Grant writes, in his eminent and polemical work *Lament for a Nation*, “The keystone of a Canadian nation is the French fact” (20), it is not until the subsequent chapters of this thesis that this “fact”—along with that of the First Nations “fact”—will begin to be truly incorporated into the Canadian definition of nationalism.

Anderson ultimately defines nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6), and through the course of this cultural survey I will move from the exposition of tactics along the lines of Anthony D. Smith’s ethnically focused definition of a single nationalist concept to revealing, in the works of Canadian writers, an idea closer to that of Anderson’s more linguistically centered and colonially influenced creation of the imagination.

Using works by Earle Birney, Phyllis Webb, and Leonard Cohen, I will trace the twentieth-century construction and reconstruction of Canadian Nationalism (with-a-big-N)—first as an impassioned reaction to the question of identity in order to bolster the present against the overwhelming extra-national influences during the early Cold War, then as a probing introspection and redefinition in light of the act and implication of this question and the subsequent hauntings that cropped up from forgotten ghosts. From the distance of an historical survey of government cultural mandates, one can see the first decades of the Cold War as an era that finally answered the question, “What is the voice of Canada?” However, this thesis will bring us down to a street-level view of Canada—through the varied individual voices of Canadian writers Birney, Webb, and Cohen—in order to see the internal conflict within this very question and its influence on the drive to create a unified—and ultimately imaginary—answer.

From the start, Canada was directly involved in the Cold War in numerous ways. On the most basic level, Canada sat directly between the USA and the USSR. This position caused the US to view Canada as “a potential battleground or at least a transit route for Soviet bombers on their way to drop their payload on American cities,” thus US bases and radar lines began to appear across Canada as part of the North American

Air Defence Command (NORAD) (Whittaker and Hewitt 129-30). Canada's geography was clearly carved laterally by the radar lines of the US military in order to protect the neighbour to the south from the neighbour to the north. By 1957, this military infiltration was intensified when Prime Minister Diefenbaker announced "joint control of military officers of both nations" (Whittaker and Hewitt 130). This event was then exacerbated by the fact that Diefenbaker, during the Defence Crisis of the early 1960s, hesitated when asked to accept American nuclear arms into Canada (McMahon 46). Though he acted upon his own strong nationalist principles (Champion 3), he was subsequently named a "bad ally" (Grant 30) and this became a key factor in what ultimately led to the end of his rule as Prime Minister. This line between Cold War political loyalties becomes even more blurred in light of the fact that the celebrated account of Diefenbaker's fall—*Lament for a Nation*—was written by George Grant who was accused, by Gad Horowitz in 1966, of being a "Red Tory" (159)—though this claim was later contested by William Christian (Christian 40). Clearly Canada stood as a buffer zone between two warring super-powers but, on the stage of politics, it was not always clear in which direction Canada leaned.

Canada was also positioned ideologically between the two powers. Leftist publications, such as the *Canadian Forum*, which was founded in 1920 and employed Birney as its literary editor in the 1930s (Granatstein), demonstrate the existence of Canadian thought and culture that leaned toward the Soviet Socialist ideology to the north despite the political climate during the first half of the twentieth century. Canada was not a country entirely in solidarity with the US in its political ideas, but rather a nation of heterogeneous thought and opinion that had a vested interest in the Cold War.

After the Second World War, news stories pertaining to this conflict soared in popularity. In 1945, Canada was irreversibly pulled into the Cold War conflict when the story of a clerk for the Soviet Embassy, Igor Gouzenko, defecting and providing proof of Soviet spying in Canada was released around the globe (Whitaker and Hewitt 9). With this knowledge of Soviet espionage efforts aided by Canadian citizens, the political landscape of Canada was revealed as more of a grey area between the surrounding political extremes. Less than a decade later, Gouzenko found national cultural recognition when his novel *The Fall of a Titan* won the Governor General's Literary Award in 1954 ("Cumulative").

While there was a clear leftist culture in Canada, anti-communist movements in the US did not go unheeded by the Canadian population or its politicians. The RCMP took an active role in the enforcement of right-thinking ideology (Whitaker and Hewitt 12) and separate political movements, like those for human rights, began to feel the effects of Cold War hostility as their movements to organize were thwarted by questions of connections to Communism (Lambertson 775). The surveillance and occasional harassment—a reflection of the McCarthy trials in the US—existed in Canada as well, and it is said that, in one such instance, only “death in 1973 freed [Tim Buck, a former leader of the Communist Party of Canada,] from his perpetual watchdogs” (Whitaker and Hewitt 34). Beyond individual Canadians, entire trade unions were viewed as a “target for Communist organizers” (Whitaker and Hewitt 12) and thus closely monitored by the Canadian government. Communism was also resisted within the national government. For example, born out of the growing socialism of North America during the Great Depression (Lipset 28), the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF)

quickly rose to power and worked to protect the struggling agrarian population. However, with the changing political climate as the Cold War began, the CCF eventually and dramatically fell in the late 1950s due to a decrease in support for agrarian radicalism (Lipset xiv) and perceived—though false—connections with the Communist party (Morton 212). The entire party suffered because of perceived ties to a political ideology spurned by the greater Canadian public. Canada, because of its geographic location and its ideological landscape, was drawn into a conflict of ideas in which it had to make its voice heard or else drown under the political tides, and in these instances followed the example of its Cold War ally to the south.

In addition to my focus on political location in this thesis, I will also be discussing works that I believe reside in the canon of Canadian postcolonialism. The connection between the modern Canadian nation-space and postcolonial theory is still highly debated. Laura Moss emphasises the difference between post-colonial as a temporal marker and postcolonial as a critical lens that encompasses numerous areas of academic study. She contends also that Canada is not simply a white-dominated settler country in that this definition would place many contemporary writers at continual opposition between classifications of race or ethnicity (11-12). Ultimately many scholars agree that this label of postcolonial is contingent on a number of factors, and Diana Brydon writes to this end that Canada is “[p]ostcolonial if necessary, but not necessarily postcolonial” (49). She in turn is cautious about using this term because she feels that this label of postcolonial is threatened by the dangers of relativism—both within the study of identity politics that claims that no one experience matches any other and within the study of postmodernism in which there is never one defining and universal truth (73). Len

Findlay on the other hand feels that Canada exists within the decolonization of both the United States and the United Kingdom—facing colonialism of both the past and the present (299). To avoid oversimplifying the concept of the postcolonial state, Stephen Slemon refuses to answer the question of a postcolonial state in Canada completely. With all of this in mind—and for the purpose of this study—I have chosen to define modern Canada after the Second World War as postcolonial in that this critical lens addresses both Canada’s conscious move away from British and American imperial influence and the movement toward the inclusion of previously buried ghosts of various minority populations. Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte delve into the discussion of the Canadian postcolonial in connection with forgotten ghosts in their exploration of the postcolonial Gothic. Argued by Sugars and Turcotte as necessary to a unique Canadian identity (xxi) and the challenge of the “dominant literary, political, and social narratives” (xviii), the postcolonial Gothic then becomes central to my argument as I seek to trace the movement away from Birney’s claim of a ghostless Canada, through Webb’s interrogation of the very process of constructing a Canadian nationalist ideology, and finally culminating in Cohen’s reconstruction of Canadian identity as full of ghosts and moving toward an ultimate and universally encompassing truth. Ultimately, through the study of Cohen, this thesis will move Canadian nationalism—as expressed within Canadian literature—out of a form of colonial construction into a state of postcolonial existence free from the dangers of relativism and oversimplification as many voices suddenly come together to represent a unified truth of modern Canadian nationalism. On the other side of the interrogation of Canadian identity construction, the postcolonial ghosts are finally able to speak when the question is asked, “who is Canada?”

In the course of this study I repeatedly associate the works of Birney, Webb, and Cohen with modern Canadian nationalism. When I use the word modern I am referring entirely to this concept in its socio-political form, as a stage in the development of Canadian society. I am drawing connections between these works and a unique Canadian nationalism that began to take shape during the twentieth century—as opposed to various other forms of Canadian nationalism prior to this point. In using the term modern Canadian nationalism, my aim is to pinpoint the era in which Canada began to move away from its imperial roots, resist the growing American influence, and come into a new, purely Canadian, and modern concept of nationalism. While I do continually make this connection to the historical notion of modern, it is not my intention for this thesis to then incorporate the critical lens of modernism. Though the placement of Birney, Webb, and Cohen into this tradition is debatable—scholars such as Gnarowski and Stephen Scobie have both argued in favour of it—I will not try to incorporate this discussion into my thesis because I simply cannot give it due justice. Critics such as Jody Berland have argued that there existed a “coalition between nationalism and modernism ... in Canada in the 1950s” (15); however, this claim is then complicated as the notion of Canadian modernism collides with Canadian postcolonialism. Within this intersection rests a “state of historical amnesia,” according to Gary Boire (222). Modernist constructions of national identity are hollow, simply creating new layers of constructed reality over a perceived emptiness, Boire claims (223), “colonizing an existing cultural history by rendering it altogether invisible” (228). The modern postcolonial is built over a forgotten and recreated past and is thus unsound. This theory is then contested by Dean Irvine who calls for a new critical approach to modernism in Canada and its connections

to a postcolonial state (“Dialectical” 601), as well as for the placement of Canadian modernist works within the study of other national modernisms in order to re-evaluate “its marginality” within the canon (“Introduction” 9). Because I have chosen a postcolonial approach for my thesis and I do not have the space to give justice to this debate surrounding postcolonialism and modernism in Canada, I must here both acknowledge this discussion and leave it for future study outside of the scope of this thesis.

Amidst the Cold War battle of political ideologies stood Earle Birney—one of the writers who, in the words of Canadian poet A.M. Klein in “Portrait of the Poet as Landscape,” “unrolled our culture from his scroll,” and he will thus be the focus of my second chapter. A Trotskyist by the 1920s (Cameron 105), Birney did not fit neatly into the idea of the traditional citizen and yet he had a vested interest—as a writer—in the formation of a Canadian cultural nationalism. By the early 1960s, Birney was visiting various universities around the world as a sort of Canadian poet-ambassador, reading not only his own poetry, but that of other Canadian poets as well (Low). By 1981, his status as a canonical Canadian writer was documented by the National Film Board (NFB) in a film directed by Donald Winkler and produced by Tom Daly, titled *Earle Birney: Portrait of a Poet*. Though he did not conform to the dominant politics of Canada during his lifetime, Birney acquired a cultural status among his fellow writers, editors, and critics to represent one of modern Canada’s cultural voices. Focusing on Birney’s novel *Down the Long Table* and his CBC radio drama *Damnation of Vancouver*, I will spend the second chapter of my thesis using Birney’s works to demonstrate the role of the Canadian culturati in coming up with an answer to the question of Canadian national and cultural

identity. In the highly political *Down the Long Table*, Birney tells the autobiographically influenced story of a Trotskyist scholar searching for national and political answers—fighting for a unified identity—as he drifts across the ideological and physical borders of the Cold War. In the radio drama *Damnation of Vancouver*, a trial is presented, which argues for and against the destruction of one of Canada’s major cities, and in which various cultural voices from the past are called as witnesses in an effort to save it, though ultimately the trial ends abruptly as the cultural identity of the present continues to exist despite the testimony from the past. In these two works, Birney gives a passing nod at most to the pre-European history of Canada in his attempt to construct a unified national voice. Against the threat of cultural annihilation—occasionally represented literally—Birney explores the construction of a modern Canadian nationalism without much regard for the presence of non-European and non-English voices as he responds to questions of the strength and significance of the Canadian identity. Indeed, both works are dominated by the reaction to an interrogation that eventually begins to deconstruct his initial views of national identity.

Phyllis Webb, the subject of my third chapter, studied under Earle Birney at the University of British Columbia. Also politically involved, Webb was associated with the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in the 1940s and eventually became an anarchist (Potvin). With international grant-funded travel in order to work on various research and poetic projects (Thesen), Webb also became a Canadian nationalist voice with ties to and influence from an international cultural community (Butling 237-8). In the 1960s she helped to create and produce the CBC radio programme *University of the Air*—later renamed *Ideas*—which was, and still is, a reflection and dissemination of

Canadian nationalism through the constant presentation and examination of ideologies and scholarship such as a number of the Massey Lectures (“The Art of Ideas”). Webb is known as a woman of questions and, in my third chapter, I study these questions—around the axis of her essay “The Question as an Instrument of Torture”—and show how they relate to the interrogation of a socially and politically constructed Canadian voice. As Webb moves in this essay from the question “how are you?” to the more soul-searching “why are you?”, so I too trace this progression of interrogation from “who is Canada?” to “why is Canada?” Using this essay, along with the collection *Naked Poems* and the Kropotkin poems from *Wilson’s Bowl*, I move from Birney’s attempt at a unified political construction of the Canadian voice into Webb’s interrogation of the central question of this singular identity and voice. She does not seek to redefine national identity, but rather to question the very nature of its existence. She moves from the effort to answer “who” and “what,” and uses her position within the Canadian culturati to change the focus to “how” and “why.” Through these works of Webb, I follow the deconstruction of Birney’s unified conception of Canadian nationalism by interrogating it with the redefining power of the question.

Though they do not appear in the selected works of Birney or Webb, French Canadians did raise their voice and play an important role in the Cold War dialogue and in the movement to define the Canadian voice. Anti-communist labour groups, such as the Confédération des Travailleurs Catholiques du Canada, played a role in quieting the Communist politics within unions up to the 1950s (Morton 219). Also, Maurice Duplessis, former Premier of Quebec, was a staunch anti-communist and implemented infamous legislation such as the “Padlock Law, which permitted Québec authorities to

close any premises deemed to be used for the propagation of ‘communism or bolshevism by any means whatsoever’” (Whitaker and Hewitt 84). With such strong movements against the Cold War era influences from the USSR, it becomes obvious that French Canadians did take a stand within the ideological crossfire of nationalisms; however, tying this back to Anthony D. Smith’s definition of nationalism, French Canadians at this point did not present themselves as a part of a united Canadian ethnic identity as they focused their attention on rights and recognition for their separate nation (Laurendeau).

After the era of Duplessis—on the other side of La Grande Noirceur in Quebec—stood Pierre Elliot Trudeau who helped ring in a new era of Quebec nationalism that saw the rise of the liberals, progressives, and the workers’ trades unions in an act of retaliation against Duplessis (Couture xii). Recognized as the “intellectual leader of this opposition” (xi), Trudeau helped to lay the foundations of the Quiet Revolution; yet, he also contributed to the Canadian adoption of “the idea that English and American liberty is superior to the concept of liberty in other cultures” (xiv) and the subsequently popular view of Quebec as a “monolithic French-Canadian society” (xiv). Despite this conception—as proven by the dramatic ideological conflict within this quite heterogeneous society—the Quebecois ascribed to their own individual ideas of nationalism during the Cold War and laboured to bring recognition to this position both on a national and an international scale. By the 1960s, amid this provincial and nationalist transformation, the headquarters of the NFB moved to Montreal and the World Expo in 1967 was staged in the same French Canadian city. Because of this, the very linguistic nature of the question “who is Canada?” was fundamentally transformed

in the first decades of the Cold War, though this influence often continued to remain outside of the greater Canadian definition of identity—including that found within Canadian writing.

In the last two lines of Birney's poem "*Can.Lit. (or them able to leave her ever)*," he writes, "it's only by our lack of ghosts / we're haunted." However, in my thesis I will argue that, as seen in the history of French Canadians—along with the First Nations—during this twentieth-century period of nationalist definition, there are many ghosts who do exist under the surface of Canadian identity, and who are ignored and subsequently destroyed under this effort to create a unified and distinct Canadian voice from a perceived historical void. In her lecture "Variation on the Right to be Untranslatable," Anne Carson states that translation is a "spectacular violence," a "catastrophe," and a "black hole." When one text is translated from the body of its alphabet into the space of another alphabet, it moves from being something to being nothing as its parts are transformed into cliché—it becomes a vacuum where there was once meaning. According to Carson, to truly translate a text means to destroy clarity with a new clarity. This form of translation does not mould a text into the borders of an exterior existing linguistic tradition, but rather obliterates the text and rebuilds it anew within a new frame of linguistic reference. When answering the question "who is Canada?", the efforts of Birney helped to eradicate, through a form of amnesia, ghosts who were not Anglo European from the foundations of Canadian identity. From here, Webb then interrogates the very nature of the question of Canadian identity—why ask this question and what is accomplished by result of assembling an answer? After Webb, one writer

began to work within Birney's deconstructed answer in order to give voice back to the national ghosts.

In my fourth chapter, I discuss the works of Leonard Cohen, who was a young man writing in Montréal during the time that Webb lived there. Also a member of this group of Canadian poets writing with radically different content and politics than the traditional Canadian voice, Cohen lived and worked both in Canada and internationally and was the subject of a NFB documentary from the 1960s, *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen*. Though this film was originally to include other poets such as Irving Layton and Earle Birney, Cohen was chosen to be the sole subject due to the appeal of his personality (Reynolds 50); thus he was singled out as a preferred depiction of Canadian artistry for both national and international audiences. In the year of the release of this documentary alone, theatrical bookings of NFB films almost doubled outside of Canada—actually tripling in Europe (National Film Board 26). Over 79 million people outside of Canada saw an NFB film screening in 1966 (26), and *Ladies and Gentlemen* won a Blue Ribbon Award at the American Film Festival in New York (35). Following in the footsteps of Birney and Webb, Cohen explored the concept of the Canadian voice and helped to create a new ideology, which was then accepted and disseminated by the Canadian culturati. To delve into Cohen's influence on the concept of national-identity construction, I explore his novel *Beautiful Losers* for its break with dominant forms of Canadian cultural nationalism—both in its narrative form and content and in its international reception. With the analysis of this novel as a framework, I also explore the influence of the Quiet Revolution and First Nations history on his writing and analyze

lyrics from Cohen's album *Songs from a Room* to highlight his exploration of nationalist identities and his enactment of strategies of cultural and media translations.

The modern Canadian movement to create a unified nationalism was primarily constructed by the intellectual and political elite—which in turn consolidated the nation's cultural elite. For example, the *Massey Report* of 1951 was created and funded by a royal commission from the Canadian national government. The Canada Council, which was founded in 1957, is also a government-funded institution. A majority of nationalist mass media was government-funded and various private organizations funded the movement to create a literary canon. Every one of these projects was led by an individual member of the cultural elite in order to create a modern Canadian national brand in the arts that could then be disseminated to the rest of the nation and beyond its borders. Because these pursuits were carried out by the *culturati* and were thus almost entirely separate from capitalistic aims, they were not dependent on the consumerist patterns of Canadian masses but existed solely to construct an identity that met the approval of accepted Canadian cultural experts. Because of this, I focus my argument on the efforts of the *culturati* and not on grassroots movements within Canada. As seen in the writing of Birney, Webb, and Cohen, it was primarily within the sphere of academia and government-funded art that the question of the modern Canadian voice was answered, interrogated, and finally broken open completely.

Building upon the critical conversation surrounding Birney, Webb, and Cohen, this thesis stands as a link between this body of literary criticism and cultural surveys of Canadian nationalism. In doing so, I connect the works of these writers with the development, interrogation, and reconstruction of Canadian national identity in the mid-

to-late twentieth century. While Les McLeod reads Birney's work through the lens of the irony between humanism and humanity's destructive reality in light of Birney's doctoral thesis, and Bruce Nesbitt and George Woodcock argue for and against, respectively, the very value of *Down the Long Table* as a work of literature, I instead focus on Birney's work as it reflects the Canadian nationalist agenda during the start of the Cold War. Birney's work has been discussed in connection to Canadian nationalism—Howard Fink states that *Damnation of Vancouver* works to “justify the existence of...Canada” (69) and Sandra Djwa explores the influence of the romantic and realist traditions within Birney's work toward the creation of a Canadian poetic tradition—but I take this one step further as I move away from Birney's connections with culture creation and instead toward the efforts of culture interrogation. I do not believe that Birney was by any means static in his responses to the modern Canadian nationalist movement.

Many critics, such as Pauline Butling and John Hulcoop, have explored the works of Webb through the framework of a feminist critique, citing her movement away from male dominance and the imperial father figure. Stephen Collins takes this one step further as he moves beyond simply shrugging off masculine influence and instead moves entirely away from form, ownership, and dominance and toward complete abstraction. While the works of Webb have also been studied in connection with Canadian nationalism—Butling suggests that Webb left *Ideas* when she felt too attached to the nationalist movement—I feel that Webb's role in this movement is not quite so polarized—either for it or against it. Through this study of her works, I show that she did indeed play an active part in the creation of a modern Canadian nationalism after the Second World War. While she did not strictly support or oppose this national ideological

construction, I believe that she worked to move away from the “I” of self-definition and to open an exchange—as is on the path between Collin’s mapped route toward abstraction. Through the question, Webb opened up form of constructed nationalism as she guided it toward abstraction. Rather than simply exploring the self, I argue that Webb stood as an interrogator of the very concept of a defined Canadian nation.

Cohen, too, has been critically interpreted as a surveyor of the state of the individual and the Canadian nation. Patricia Morely has written a fascinating study on the works of Cohen in connection with puritanism and its role in Canadian literature and modern society. Citing a nationalism of diffidence, views on the US, the presented unity of the body and soul, and the body as a mechanism of communication between humans, Morely presents Cohen as a teacher of a modern evolving morality within the Canadian nation. Entirely aside from the conversation of Canadian culture, scholars such as Michael Gnarowski and Steven Scobie have chosen to focus on Cohen’s commentary on the connections between truth, spirituality, and the self. In fact, Dennis Duffy states that “Being Canadian” is not integrated well at all into *Beautiful Losers* (30). George Woodcock, while denigrating the inherent value of *Beautiful Losers*—calling it a “tedious book” (“Song” 165)—also speaks to this link between the self and universal truth, connecting the loss of self in *Beautiful Losers* to the goal of “imprinting ourselves into the evanescence of existence” (164). Cohen has thus been well connected to explorations of both nation and identity; however, in my thesis, I build upon this past scholarship by bringing the discussion specifically into the era of the early Cold War. While I acknowledge the connection of the self to the spirituality and to universal truth, I bring this concept of self beyond the individual perhaps Canadian citizen and project it as a

commentary upon the state of modern Canadian nationalism after the Second World War. I believe that, in *Beautiful Losers*, Cohen is not simply commenting on our collective human existence, but also on the Canadian existence—in a space filled with ghosts—that must be interrogated and reconstructed in a movement toward a more objective concept of nationalism.

This thesis goes beyond analyzing Canadian identity as it existed during the first decades of the Cold War and explores the very process of constructing this identity in works of literature. In an extended response to a conception of modern Canadian cultural nationalism that is predicated on a “lack of ghosts,” one that eradicates centuries of pre-European Canadian history, I use the poetry, drama, and prose of Birney, Webb, and Cohen to scrutinize the literary representation of Canadian identity during the Cold War, to examine the call for a united Canadian voice for global broadcast, and to finally break open the notion of Canadian nationalism as a prescriptive model. Through the voices of three writers of the Canadian-supported culturati, I examine the pervasive nature of Canadian nationalism during the early Cold War decades, while also deconstructing it as merely a singular construction of an era—the formation of a precarious imagined community in response to one immeasurable question.

## CHAPTER 2

## EARLE BIRNEY

*“Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore.” –Virgil*

In the introduction to her biography of Earle Birney, Elspeth Cameron beautifully writes that as “he grew older, Birney more and more resembled Don Quixote.... The spindly old white-bearded knight tilting at windmills, inspired by visions so idealistic they eclipsed reality, suggest[ing] almost exactly the fervent dedication to causes that pricked Birney to action” (xi). Birney lived during a turbulent period of shifting Canadian national ideology. Focusing on the development of Canadian cultural nationalism during the decades after the Second World War—as I will for the course of this chapter—one is inevitably faced with what C.P. Champion refers to in the title of his book as the “strange demise of British Canada.” Following the ratification of the 1931 Statute of Westminster, Canada gained legislative independence from England (Morton 225) and, after the end of the Second World War, armed with freedom as a self-governing nation and no longer a colonial extremity of the commonwealth, Canada was thrust into the Cold War. As a nation positioned uncomfortably between two warring world superpowers, Canada was threatened with not only the danger of nuclear armament, but also the effects of the new wave of wartime dissemination of nationalist propaganda. Within this environment, Birney forged ahead with the drive of Don Quixote to fight for “various journals, for the rights of poets and other beleaguered members of society, for Canada, for the cause of Creative Writing, for numerous organizations, such as the Canada Council or the League of Canadian Poets” and also for

the political theory of Leon Trotsky (Cameron xi). As Canada recoiled from its second major war of the century and struggled to carve out its identity as a unique national voice on the global stage, Birney worked to answer the burning question—who is Canada?—from his position among the Canadian cultural and academic elite, but also from his perspective as a Marxist in Canada. Through the study of his novel *Down the Long Table* and his radio play *Damnation of Vancouver*, I want to trace the conflict between the drive for a unified Canadian nationalist construct and the reality of the diverse political and cultural landscape. Based on these texts, it is then my argument that Birney endeavours to answer the question of Canadian identity—to work alongside the culturati in their efforts to construct a modern autonomous Canadian nationalism—but only to find this overly simplified notion renounced in the decades that followed. With always an eye forward to the future and not to the past, Birney continues to swim, like his character Gordon, toward an island—a united nationalist ideal between the politics of the US and the USSR—that he is never able to see and yet in which he never loses faith.

The movement to create a modern Canadian nationalism can be seen as taking root on a national level with the 1946 Canadian Citizenship Act that defined the parameters of a separate Canadian citizenship, as well as the regulations surrounding the process of becoming a Canadian citizen, which became selective and varied in degree of difficulty between immigrants of different backgrounds (Igartua 16). One should note that this was altered to become more inclusive to all immigrants in the 1977 Canadian Citizenship Act (Young). In the 1920s, before the 1946 act, Canada was an entirely different entity in that to “say it was British was not to deny it was North American,” according to Canadian professor and political commentator George Grant (3). However,

as Canada moved further into the twentieth century, it began to face the growing threat of “American imperialism, consumerism, and materialism” (Champion 26). With the growth of the Canadian industrial complex came integration with the US and, in response, this initial 1946 citizenship act revealed a formalized effort within the national government to create a uniquely Canadian nationalism within a specific structure that was conducive to the solidification of collective memory and emotional charge necessary in a successful nation-space, as described in Anthony D. Smith’s concept of ethnic nationalism. By galvanizing the concept of the Canadian citizen in this way, the government set the cornerstone for the construction of the modern Canadian nationalist movement.

Because of the homogenizing effects of the “American empire” (Grant 5), the issue of this cultural infiltration was a driving force behind the movement to construct a Canadian nationalism within the arts. Northrop Frye wrote in his conclusion to the *Literary History of Canada*, “The immense power of American penetration into Canada is traditionally seen thought of as either economic or sub-cultural...[but] in the last decade there has been a considerable growth of emphasis on more genuinely cultural aspects,” of which Canadian publishing is given as an example (320). Here the direct effects of American culture are seen to be invading Canadian culture space and thus the formation of a modern Canadian nationalism. As the US grew economically and politically while engaged in the Cold War, the power and the range of the American national ideology and culture also increased. For example, during Diefenbaker’s time in office, his version of federalism was arguably American in that it was based on a concept of complete national unity rather than the recognition of individual groups or nations (Grant 21);

simultaneously, however, he continually resisted American influence, refusing to join the Organization of American States (OAS) and refusing to be pushed into accepting nuclear weapons from the US into Canada (Slade 107). On the one hand he was closely aligned with US ideology, but on the other he took active steps to keep certain aspects of this ideology at bay. This continued within the Liberal-controlled national government as well. As Canada was moving away from its British colonial roots, it still remained an integral part of the political landscape of North America—often concerned with claims of being a “‘soft’ cold warrior” (Champion 148)—and thus the cultural elites took it upon themselves to bolster the cultural borders around Canada so as not to become lost beneath the voices to the south—and to the north at times. This struggle, exacerbated by the Cold War, in large part prompted the national culture-building movement.

The existence of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences and its final report, also known as the Massey Report, demonstrate the perceived gravity of Canadian nation- and culture-building amid the Cold War ideological crossfire on a governmental level—as part of a political movement. In 1945, Brooke Claxton, a member of the Liberal cabinet, tried to drum up government funding for Canadian artists (Litt 11). His proposal for this read as follows:

The Liberal Party of Canada believes that the future of the nation depends upon things of the spirit as well as material progress. It believes in the existence and development of a Canadian spirit, uniting the various traditions and creative abilities of our people, enriching the lives of all Canadians and widening our contribution to the community of nations. (quoted in Litt 11-12)

Here Claxton outlines exactly what was deemed to be missing from and necessary to a modern Canadian nationalism—a fully developed “Canadian spirit”—and offered a proposed means of attaining this goal—“material progress [and] ... uniting various traditions and creative abilities of our people”—which echoes Smith’s concept of a common memory as Caxton called for a means to represent and expand this singular cultural memory. Within the context of the Cold War, the formation of this “Canadian Spirit” was again obstructed on an artistic level by the United States. According to the Massey Commissions *Report* of 1951, “the literature of the United States, which in the last thirty years has acquired an increasing international reputation, exercises an impact...[which] may be almost overpowering” (225). Similarly, in the 1930s, the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission was founded because “many Canadian radio stations were either joining American networks or were owned by Americans” (Miller 11) and again this was viewed as a threat to the “Canadian Spirit.” As seen in these two instances, to create a united and unique Canadian nationalist voice, Canada was forced to actively push back against the tides of the American cultural voice. In order to create a space of silence in which to build the voice of a modern nationalist ideology—in which to house the new ghosts of the country—the voices of both British and American nationalism had to be suppressed within Canada.

In order to accomplish this task, the Canadian cultural elite had first to decide what voices to include under the umbrella of Canadian nationalism. This proved to be a difficult task as Birney articulates in his poem, written in 1947, titled “Can.Lit. (*or them able leave her ever*):

since we'd always sky about  
when we had eagles they flew out  
leaving no shadow bigger than wren's  
to trouble even our broodiest hens

too busy bridging loneliness  
to be alone  
we hacked in railway ties  
what Emily etched in bone

we French&English never lost  
our civil war  
endure it still  
a bloody civil bore

the wounded sired off  
no Whitman wanted  
it's only by our lack of ghosts  
we're haunted

Written in response to “a question from John Ciardi, editor of the New York journal *Saturday Review*[, who] had asked why Canada had no Dickinson, no Whitman, no great body of poetry” (Cameron 408), Birney’s poem captures both the physical and cultural expanse of the Canadian nation as well as the perceived non-existence of a modern unifying Canadian nationalism. Haunted by a lack of ghosts, Canadian culture was thought to be missing the canonical artists whose voices would outline and depict the existence of Smith’s ethnosymbolic nationalism within Canada. Because the cultural elites believed that Canada had no canon, no tradition, and subsequently no viable presence in cultural society, they began to seek ways of collecting these symbols with the aim of thus creating a Canadian nationalism. Through support for programmes such as the CRBC and the CBC, the New Canadian Library, and the National Film Board, the Canadian culturati began to build ghosts where none had been perceived before.

Birney played a large role in this movement of Canadian culture creation. Working with the Massy Commission, the Arts Advisory Committee, and the Canada Council to secure “travel and other grants” for academics, creative writers, and other Canadian artists (Cameron 561), Birney was not content with simply pointing out the cultural silence and lack of ghosts in Canada, but instead actively worked to create a nation-space that was conducive to these voices. Throughout the duration of his professional life, Birney supported Canadian poets like Dorothy Livesay, bpNichol, Leonard Cohen (Cameron 560), Irving Layton (427), and Phyllis Webb (555) in their careers. He also helped during the early years of the League of Canadian Poets (561). Birney’s dedication to the cultivation of Canadian content and talent was so immense that, by as early as 1955, “he had made more than one hundred radio appearances and had done about thirty [radio] plays” (357). Simultaneously he was corresponding with about 1,200 people spanning seven countries (“List of My Correspondents about 1955”). Apart from this incredible feat of publicity and networking, Birney also wrote his own poetry and fiction. As he worked to support and strengthen the Canadian national voice, he added his own to the alleged void through works like *Down the Long Table* and *Damnation of Vancouver*.

## **2.1 Crisis of Identity**

Birney began work on *Down the Long Table*—initially titled “Summer Rebel”—in 1952 and he expected to publish in 1953 (Cameron 340); however, this novel was a rather difficult sell and was not published until 1955. Although the novel was refused for serialized publication and did not rouse the attention of reviewers (Cameron 367),

McClelland and Stewart eventually published it and publisher Jack McClelland had this to say about the decision:

I had the policy of publishing authors, not books. And if they came up with a novel that we didn't think was the greatest thing that we'd ever seen in print and they really wanted it published, my attitude was to publish the bloody thing. I still think *Down the Long Table* should not have been published, but I didn't want ever to tell Earle that it was a piece of junk. (Cameron 356)

Here again we see the effort of the era to produce ghosts within the void of Canadian nationalism. Separate from the quality of his work, Birney and others stood as appointed voices for a nation during this period in Canadian history. Despite the difficulties with publication, the lack of appeal to American audiences, and indeed the absence of any interested American or British publishers (Cameron 342, 388), McClelland and Stewart—home of the New Canadian Library—published this novel on artistic and arguably nationalistic principle. A novel written by a Marxist Canadian, about a time of drastic political change in 1930s Canada, and set between the bookends of a trial reminiscent of McCarthyism in the 1950s, *Down the Long Table* was a timely and highly autobiographical work based on Birney's own experience as “a radical Trotskyist at the University of Utah” (Cameron 342). Similar to the main character Gordon who uses the alias Paul Green, Birney used the name Earle Robertson, had his own Catherine in Utah who aborted their child (Cameron 92), and his own “four hours of marriage” to Sylvia Johnstone of Toronto (Cameron 93), all occurring while he developed both politically and academically as a voice of Canada. With the publication of this self-reflective novel, Birney became a voice among the newly constructed ghosts of Canada. Through these

characters, Birney attempts to answer the question “who is Canada?” in the absence of a Dickinson or a Whitman.

Like Canada in the 1950s, the character Gordon is also experiencing an identity crisis. He names the different variations of his self Gordon and Gordy and writes that the diminutive form is “the me that wants to own a house, a car about the same size, a streamlined wife, four kids and a yacht.... He’s a man of business” (*Down the Long Table* 42). On the other hand, Gordon “always hated that slick go-getting twerp, Gordy, me.... From then on I’ve been a nice boy who did all his lessons and tried to keep his academic nose clean in the hope to be a Great Harvard Professor someday” (43). While Elspeth Cameron writes that this reflects Birney’s own ability to “compartmentalize himself” (91), I believe that this defined split reflects a larger reality in Canada at the time that Birney was writing and that this was then transferred to a more personal level. Like Gordon’s distaste for Gordy, Canada too had an aversion to the capitalist pressures of the United States—at least in the context of culture creation. With his big house, big car, and big yacht, Gordy displays his way of life in a loud and garish fashion, much like the radio programmes, television shows, literature, and other cultural elements from the US that flooded Canada daily and prompted acts of cultural protection. Like Gordon, Canadians rested on a spectrum that spanned between the capitalism to the south and the communism to the north, but also like Gordon’s desire to teach in the US, Canadians still leaned en masse culturally toward the US as seen in their reaction to Diefenbaker’s decisions regarding NORAD.

Because of this response from the general population—which eventually led in part to the ousting of Diefenbaker from office and the reinstatement of the Liberal party

to power—the very concept of Canadian identity continued to stand on precarious grounds. Again, Birney comments on this directly in his novel when, during the interrogation, Gordon is asked, in a simultaneously external and an internal dialogue, “‘You’re a Canadian then?’...You *do* want to become an American, Mr. Saunders?...‘Canadians, Americans, the same—you’ll be part of us in ten years’” (*Down the Long Table* 35). In response, Gordon simply states, “You say that as if it explained me” (35). After spending the better part of a century separating itself legally and symbolically from its colonial past, Canada then faced the challenge of defining itself as a sovereign presence within the North American continent. As seen in the controversy surrounding Diefenbaker and his decisions regarding NORAD and nuclear armament, the Cold War ideological conflict further exacerbated this debate surrounding the concept of Canadian identity. The nationalist movement as Canada was connected to the US diplomatically through NATO, but constantly had to reaffirm its political and cultural autonomy or risk being subsumed into American culture. Even the question that Birney responded to by writing “Can.Lit.” was an interrogation into the apparent lack of poets like Dickinson and Whitman—American cultural ghosts disseminated on a global scale. Unfortunately, even though Gordon resents being “explained” solely by his national affiliation in *Down the Long Table*, in the context of other postwar nationalisms, emergent postcolonialism, and global ideological conflicts, Canada and in turn Canadians were forced to construct a nationalist voice rather than have one forcibly imposed upon them.

This conflict between the colonial influence of the past and the contemporaneous pressures of American culture are present within the language of Birney’s novel as well. Gordon is a teacher and student of Medieval literature, and as he goes through life, his

very thoughts are often framed by quotations from Chaucer—“*Sin I from love escaped am so fat*” (Down 48)—and William Langland—“*I assent...I shall work as you will have me while life is lasting...I shall put on, said Perkin, a pilgrim’s garment*” (148). He also quotes T.S. Eliot—“*I have measured out my life with coffee spoons*” (92)—and eventually marries an English woman (292). Though Gordon does not identify himself as British or under British influence, it is part of his consciousness. In the same vein, the American cultural influence is littered throughout the novel, as illustrated by Sather’s remarks during a dinner at the Barstows: “And don’t forget we’re only a tail to the American comet, all three million seven hundred thousand square miles of us. They’ve got four billions invested in us” (122). Even more explicitly, Jack writes to Gordon, “We’ll always be waiting to see what Uncle does.... [W]e’ll just adopt whatever streamlined brand of state socialism or state capitalism they dream up. Only we’ll adopt it ten years later, step it down to second gear for Canadian driving, give it a quiet print job and a Mounted Police escort” (253). Even in some of the novel’s most radical political contexts, the American presence is symbolically predominant: the Communist League of North America publications are smuggled into Canada inside of past issues of *Time* magazine (239). Just as Canada moved away from the shadow of a British past, out of the Second World War, and through a strong nationalist movement in response to the new shadow of American cultural imperialism, so too does Gordon travel through life with a metaphorical foot still in England as he tries to avoid the path behind the American comet. Though his political beliefs belong to neither country, both England and the US still manage to become a part of his daily life—both externally and internally.

As I discussed during the introduction of this chapter, many Canadian nationalist policies were instated due to the overwhelming influx of American culture through media including radio, television, literature, and film. Like Canada strengthening its cultural borders, Gordon removes American capitalist influence from his life as he refuses the advances of the American Joan while living in the US. As she asks him to marry her, “In a frenzy of shame he shook her off, struggling to his feet, and she went sprawling on her back on the carpet, the wine-silk dressing-gown flaring open.... He turned, stumbling over her splayed and brawny thighs, and rushed through the half-darkened rooms” (*Down* 49). Just as Canadians were drawn to aspects of American nationalism and capitalism—when consuming US goods and questioning Diefenbaker’s decision to keep nuclear arms out of Canada—Gordon too is tempted by Joan—drawn to all of the financial security that she can offer; however, in this moment he realizes that, in order to marry her, he must give up what he sees as the more admirable side of himself—Gordon—and live forever as the model capitalist, Gordy. This thought suddenly shames him and, like the Massey Commission calling for the expulsion of American culture in order to augment the presence of a “Canadian Spirit,” Gordon forcefully throws Joan from him, stumbles over her corpulent physique, and rushes out into the night, soon leaving the US as well. As a country, Canada was repelled by certain aspects of American culture. As a Trotskyist, Birney was repulsed by certain aspects of American capitalism. So, as a reflection of both the author and the nationalist movement, Gordon is revolted by the physical embodiment of greed that can be inherent within the culture of American capitalism.

Instead, like Diefenbaker's decision to consult the UN before agreeing to accept nuclear weapons from the US onto Canadian soil, Gordon is dedicated to internationalism. During the initial interrogation in the 1950s frame narrative, the Senator asks, "Three years ago you became, at last, an American citizen, at which time you swore loyalty to our government, and yet when I ask you if you are loyal to it you begin to qualify... But ...your first loyalty is to internationalism?" (*Down* 5). To this, Gordon replies, "To a peaceful, freely achieved internationalism, a world state, yes" (5). Here again Gordon expresses a close approximation of Birney's own political beliefs, but he is also the exemplification of Canada's role in the period of the Cold War. Diefenbaker's actions in refusing to act upon the will of only one or two countries draw a clear parallel to Gordon's call for internationalism, but while Gordon has a larger and more globally encompassing scope in mind, the international community began to take small steps toward this ideal through the creation of NATO, which encouraged the political integration of Europe with North America to serve as a prominent presence ("Short History of NATO"). While Canada was not moving toward a truly global state, it did take internationalism into careful consideration as it, yet again, rebuffed American cultural and ideological pressures.

With these historical references and allusions throughout *Down the Long Table*, one can see Gordon as a reflection of Canadian nationalism during the Cold War, but it is his role as a teacher—with the aspiration to "help students to think" (*Down* 2)—that truly represents the nationalist aims of the culturati during this era. Instead of allowing Canadian cultural identity to be obscured by the overpowering American voice, the government and the cultural elite took steps to guide Canadians to think about what it is

to be Canadian in the twentieth century—symbolizing this with new flags and dictionaries (Boberg 48)—in order to give voice to a unified Canadian culture and to answer the question “who is Canada?” Later in the novel Gordon states, “I want to learn, all this concerns me, concerns everyone. I want to be honest” (*Down* 65), which not only emphasizes the scope of importance attached to the Canadian nationalist movement but also the drive to give an honest depiction of the voice of Canada. Like Diefenbaker’s drive to create a unified nation based on equality of individual rights to the detriment of the rights of nations within the Canadian nation, Birney here too reflects this desire to create an “honest” culture—a nation built upon a history of ghosts—within a space that he deems ghostless. Working within a Eurocentric worldview, Gordon and Birney and Canada all move out of a postcolonial space to face a cultural void that can only be appropriately filled by self-reflection, education, and a subsequent modern ideological construct.

Birney began this journey on an individual level when he explored politics as a young man. Like Gordon, he too was labeled a Trotskyist by a social problems club before he knew the meaning of the term (Cameron 104). In fact, it was an essay that Birney wrote for this very organization that was reprinted in *Down the Long Table* in Gordon’s voice (Cameron 104). In it he writes of a group called the “Greyboys” who attempt to swim from the bourgeois land of the Bathers to a utopian island that has never been proven to exist (*Down* 75). Gordon writes from the perspective of one of the Greyboys who attempts to swim to the island only to become trapped on a rock when he can go no further. He writes, “I must slip from this rock, now, down once more into the give and thrust of the waves. I see at last that I cannot go back. But I do not know how

to go on” (76), which he later references by saying, “I don’t know anything. Except that the rock’s awash and I thought I wanted to swim somewhere” (88). This rock between the bourgeoisie and utopia stands as a central metaphor in the novel. Just as Canada had formally cut ties with colonial Britain, so too does Gordon leave the land he knows, unable to “go back.” Moving away from British and subsequently American influence, Canada was like the swimmer during its era of mid-century nationalism on a number of levels: ideologically located between the British past and an uncertain future, physically located between two warring superpowers, and nationally located between the capitalist culture to the south and an unknown nationalist utopia of the idea Canadian voice that had yet to be heard. Gordon, like Canada, floats on the rock, knowing that he wants to move forward, but he is not sure toward what. Like Gordon, Canada had to keep moving forward—building national ghosts that Birney claims are lacking—in order to create a reality from within the utopic lore of a fixed Canadian nationalism.

This is the point at which the novel turns. Gordon loses sight of the island, confessing that “No ...[he] can’t see where it is anymore” (*Down* 293), and in turn he loses his purpose and sense of self:

They can’t understand. Utopians. New Atlantis. Island Mirages. Do they think I’m running away from them? He glanced back but they were absorbed in their technique of mutual interruptions... each believing in something—yet I too have beliefs. But you can’t organize...beliefs without belief...For where are you now? I am in Pedro’s bootleg joint in Salt Lake City, September the second, nineteen hundred and thirty-two...You are alone, alone and dying, *we who were living are now dying with a little patience.* (39)

Here Gordon's beliefs and identity are interrogated to the point of questioning his very location in the world, which he much then reiterate. Just as Canada was pressed to carve out a nationalism from within an existing set of warring ideologies and identities during Cold War, Gordon tries to classify and explain who he is within the political climate. While he—like Birney—may have come across as a radical, Gordon's conflict with the ideological majority reflects the tension that existed within Canada regarding the construction of a nationalist ideal and Canada's role in the modern world. Diefenbaker became unpopular—labeled a “bad ally”—when he took the time to consider the implications and consequences of accepting nuclear weapons into the country. Likewise, the cultural elite pressed to bolster and construct the voices of national culture even though the Canadian masses were happy consumers of American media. In fact, the New Canadian Library, which later reprinted *Down the Long Table*, was created by McClelland and Stewart in part because Canadian children were in large part learning American and British literature due to capitalistic advantage within this industry and “any ambition to teach Canadian literature was inhibited by a lack of available and affordable teaching texts, particularly low-priced editions of Canadian novels” (Friskney 4). Likewise, Leonard Brockington, chairman of the CBC until 1939, stated that “[i]f radio in Canada had not been nationalized the great American chains would have dominated Canada” (Ostry 556), again showing the level of enthusiastic consumerism of American media within Canada. “Do they think I'm running away from them?” Gordon asks, just as the cultural elite must have asked as they guided Canadians away from American media and toward the consumption of their own culture construct. Without it, the culturati feared for a loss of the “Canadian Spirit,” as George Grant mourns in *Lament for*

*a Nation*. Without national ghosts, Birney writes in this passage that the citizens of Canada are without community—are “alone, alone and dying.”

Faced with this conflict—like the affinity for American culture and enduring roots in a British past as Canada moved forward as postcolonial state—Gordon’s character suddenly becomes disillusioned with politics completely, thus reflecting a paradox of nationalism that Benedict Anderson points out in his book, *Imagined Communities*. Anderson lists three paradoxes within nationalism: the eternal nature of nations in the eyes of nationalists versus the very recent appearance of nations in the eyes of historians, the ubiquitous nature of nation as a socio-cultural concept along the same lines as gender versus the distinctiveness of each nation, and the political authority of the nation versus its philosophical impotence (14). Though one may attempt to construct a sense of national community and culture along the lines of Smith’s definition, Anderson takes this concept and deconstructs it to the point of its annihilation—until it is no longer a plausible reality but instead a construct entirely of the imagination. As Gordon tries to swim toward his metaphorical utopia amid the ideological battlefield, he eventually loses his faith in the plausibility—the reality—of his own philosophical aims as every individual he encounters politically splinters the Marxist cause ad infinitum. Like Anderson’s destruction of the basic concept of nationalism, Gordon suddenly sees Trotskyism and other variations of Marxism as beliefs entirely enclosed within the individual human mind with no true effect upon reality. He leaves one meeting, walks out into the snow, and is shocked to find that “this had been going on all the time, this utterly alien and natural descending of snow, without regard for the dialectics of Marxism; and it would shimmer as unconcernedly down on the roadways of a Soviet

Toronto, or on the ridged earth where Toronto had been” (*Down* 87). As he realizes the ultimately inconsequential nature of his political passions—suddenly seeing the existence of a Marxist nation from the overarching position of an historian rather than a nationalist—Gordon suddenly loses a part of himself. He sees himself and his cause as that of a “Summer Rebel” who was “just booing from the sidelines” (284). He confesses to the loss of his political faith (282) and thus becomes a martyr of nationalist construction, destroyed as he faces the reality of ideological construction. Hansen the Swede, a Trotskyist whom Gordon befriends in Vancouver, articulates this perfectly when he states, “Ravvalution iss making something get born, yaw. Iss killing too. Ay tink you run away from dat part” (268). When Gordon suddenly steps back and sees the true scope of his political beliefs beyond the imagination and into the eternal nature of reality, he stops running and it is at this point also that Birney moves away from trying to answer the now imaginary question “who is Canada?” and rather focuses on his role as an artist in the search for—rather than construction of—the Canadian voice.

During the height of his political involvement, Gordon was told that artists had no place during a revolution because they should instead use their time and efforts for the cause. However, later he responds to this Trotskyist claim by giving new importance to the creators of culture: “Yet already the rebellions...had passed into a limbo from which only the artist would ever again seek to rescue them” (*Down* 296). As a Trotskyist, Birney—and Gordon in turn—believed that the artist did have an important role to play within an ideological rebellion. Unlike Stalin’s idea of the role of the artist as “a servant of the state, incorporating communist doctrines into his work,” Birney ascribed to Trotsky’s belief that the artist should remain free and separate from revolutionary aims

and control in order to truly create (Cameron 103). As Birney moved away from the Stalinist-leaning idea of culture construction—as seen in Gordon’s disillusionment—and away from any attempt to create the ghosts that he felt were lacking in Canada, he moved instead closer to the Trotskyist ideal of the uninhibited artist. Instead of working to construct the voice of Canada, he instead moved into the role of advocate and supporter to Canadian writers and culture creators—as seen in his connections with writers like Layton and Cohen. Echoed in the almost autobiographical voice of Gordon who states, “No, I will never turn back and I don’t regret whatever swimming I did” (*Down the Long Table* 293), Birney never gave up his political ideals, but instead worked to give space to existing Canadian ghosts rather than constructing new ghosts within spaces that were never truly empty. Instead of swimming toward a utopia that he cannot see, Birney instead writes of swimming until the utopia finally presents itself.

## **2.2 Responding to Interrogation**

This movement from a closed construction of Canadian national identity to a stance with arms open, waiting for a utopian nationalism, is explored further in Birney’s radio drama *Damnation of Vancouver*. Serving as the inspiration for “Summer Rebel” (Cameron 341) and written after being inspired by a 1951 public hearing in Vancouver on the possible damming of Buttle Lake (334), this play presents a parody in which the entire fate of Vancouver is called into question. Birney writes of the drama, “For many years ... I had wanted to make a satiric survey of Vancouver, using in part a *Piers Plowman* technique but it wasn’t until this Hearing that I saw a way of binding Langland with other ghosts into a semi-dramatic form” (quoted in Cameron 334). Like *Down the Long Table*, *Damnation of Vancouver* is also framed by an act of interrogation that draws from the

McCarthy era, which Birney experienced directly when he was “named publically in the B.C. ‘Red Scare’ in 1948” (Cameron 341) and made a point to take a freighter all the way around North America to get to Europe rather than risk an encounter with the “U.S. border snarls,” as he later admitted to Kaye Lamb in a 1952 interview (qtd. in Cameron 342). In this play, Birney confronts the ghosts that he dismissed in “Can.Lit.” and gives them back that which was thought to be a silence in Canadian culture so that they may fill it once more with their voices. However, the fact that he questions figures including a European explorer and a First Nations chief—all within the narrative frame of arguably the first work of English literature—sheds a veil of suspicion over Birney’s view on nationalist culture creation, not least because this work is still written from the influence of a previously colonial power in Canada. Indeed, Cameron makes this comparison directly: “Just as Langland judged mediaeval London and found it based on profiteering, Birney put a future Vancouver on trial with much the same result” (335). While I accept this comparison, I think that it is in the last scene that we finally witness Birney facing the future with his arms open to the uninhibited and naturally developing cultural and nationalist future of a postcolonial Canada.

Unlike a trial over the damming of a river, this radio drama instead presents a trial for the complete damnation of a major Canadian city. It opens with the Minister of History stating, “I hereby convoke, on this seventh day of May, Nineteen Whatever-it-is, ...a Public Hearing to consider objections to the proposal to — eliminate the said Metropolis. Notice of objection has been filed with my Ministry, perhaps understandably, by the Metropolis itself” (*Damnation* 231). He then asks a Mr. Legion to begin stating his case for the city. This depiction of a trial is timely and significant to the

concurrent Canadian crisis of nationalism in a number of ways. First, like the fear—or acceptance, in the case of George Grant—of the cultural ruin of Canada, Birney’s play reflects this sense of urgency to save the country from future annihilation. The loss of a unique nationalism is allegorized by the physical destruction of the nation-space itself, which reproduces the true gravity of the threat as it was seen by the culturati. Without a true ideological community creating a national consciousness in the tradition of Smith, nationalists were forced to help construct a modern Canadian nationalism—a sole voice—to present to the world. Faced with the issues of nationalist construction—Anderson’s paradoxes surrounding the imaginary—the country chose to fight, like Mr. Legion, for the survival of a concept. A new flag, dictionaries, collections of literature, and more, were acts of manufacturing cultural artifacts—producing ghosts—in an effort to save the patriotic idea of Canada as it moved away from the British identity of the past and worked to escape the overpowering American identity of the present. In this way, one can see each one of Mr. Legion’s interrogations to find support for the survival of Vancouver working like each instance of government-funded nationalist media.

Second, the Minister of the Future states, “The Future has the right, you know, to damn” (*Damnation* 234), as he explains that it is the Ministry of History who has given this right to the Ministry of the Future. Just as Birney pulls the structure of this play from the oldest tradition of English literature in order to comment on the state of Canadian nationalism moving into the future, here too it is the dead—the selected ghosts—who are brought forward in time to comment on the present condition of Vancouver. Captain Vancouver, Sk’-wath-kw’-thlath-kyootl the Salish chief, and the keeper of a saloon named Gassy Jack all come back from the dead in order to judge the fate of a

society with which they are completely unfamiliar. This act is not that far from the arbitrary construction of a nation—the collection of ghosts—by a small group of culturati who can in no way see the entire scope of Canadian culture. In both cases, the voices of the few are brought, in a way, out of their context in order to decide the fate of something foreign. Both the trial and the Canadian nationalist movement worked to create a concrete sense of cultural history in order to decide the fate of the future and it is the Woman—a witness from the present who is called to testify—who finally unravels this logic by exposing the paradox within.

The Woman opens her testimony by stating that her “name is Anyone’s” (*Damnation* 266) and she then represents the whole of the current population of Vancouver. During the course of her argument for this Canadian city, the Woman eventually turns the interrogation around and de-materializes Legion, the defense attorney, labeling him a “living ghost” (268). As one person representing an entire population, he is truly a living ghost as he attempts to build a case for the existence of Vancouver based on his scrambling efforts to mould the voices of the past. Looking to the past, unable to speak to the present, and existing as one man to represent a legion, he lives in the colonial tradition of Canada and is thus a living ghost. The Woman says to him, “Your name is not Legion — mine is.... And only in your absence can I speak” (268), which echoes the fact that it is only through the silencing of the culturati’s constructed Canadian voice that the true and varied voice of the vast present Canadian national space can be recognized and heard. Indeed, Anderson writes of a certain existence of assumed amnesia within the accepted memory of the modern imagined nation—likening events such as the American Civil War to a conflict between brothers

instead of “two sovereign nation-states” and likening figures such as William the Conqueror to one of the founding fathers of England (201). In order to move beyond the imagination, a nation must also move beyond these modern reconstructions of the past. The Woman reiterates this idea of nationhood when she says to the prosecuting attorney, “How could I know, without the threat of death, I lived?” (271). She, like the Canadian nation, cannot depend on selected voices from the past to define her existence. Rather she has to live each day as an individual within a dense and diverse community, aware every moment of the fact that the singular identity of this community is a work of the imagination, and yet she continues to live and hold onto a sense of self. According to Cameron, she shifts the trial to a more human—and, as I argue, a more individual—level (335) as she is without a prescribed identity, but is only able to truly exist as an individual in this way. While the Ministry of History keeps the skeleton of Vancouver’s past, the Woman of the current Vancouver holds the key to its future (271). Through this interpretation, one can conclude that it is only the present voice of Canada that can answer the question “who is Canada?” and the lack of ghosts that Birney exposes in “Can.Lit.” becomes irrelevant as he moves from looking to and gathering from the past, to facing the future with his arms open.

Found to be “too cerebral for most listeners” (381) and untranslatable when Birney’s agent attempted to help him find a German translator (Cameron 347), *Damnation of Vancouver* is a work based in questions that begin as soon as the defense attorney desperately asks who wants to attack Vancouver—who is behind the threat. Birney continues these questions of identity in his novel *Down the Long Table* as it opens on the trial of Gordon Saunders. Yet, in the end of both works, Birney seems to come to the

conclusion that a definite answer to these questions is not what is most important, but rather the ability for voices to answer and continue to answer with the strength and variety of the truth of the present and the hopes of the future. Like the Woman in *Damnation of Vancouver*, Gordon closes *Down the Long Table* by thinking that he “had not made his history either but had lived it...he was a man alive” (298) and it is from this life that he has the voice and the power to speak—not for the entire nation, but for himself in the present. Unlike the Senator who “spread[s] tenderly the scraps of the history he had not made but sought to re-make” (*Down* 298), Gordon no longer attempts to change the political identity of a country, but rather seeks to live and voice his identity in the present and leave the construction of ghosts to the interrogations of the Senator.

Birney was a man who worked with the CBC, was published by the NCL, and was featured in documentaries by the NFB. He was no stranger to the nationalist movement in Canada. However, while he may have began by trying to help answer the question of a singular and unique Canadian identity as is reflective of Anthony D. Smith’s definition—concerned with the lack of cultural ghosts of a great Canadian past—Birney eventually came to the point where he truly embraced the Trotskyist philosophy of artistic freedom within a nation and followed it as it gave an ever-evolving and diverse interpretation of nationalism. Rather than focusing on the entire country, Birney became important instead to Western Canadian writing as he started the University of British Columbia Creative Writing Programme and, with his own writing, “introduced a sense of colossal space and profound bonding—both affectionate and disturbing—with a unique territory” (Cameron 554). Throughout his career he worked to advance Canadian literature and supported numerous Canadian writers as he looked to

the future, rather than the past, to answer the question of Canada's identity. However, he too eventually became a ghost of the Canadian past as his famous poem "Can.Lit." was placed on a bookmark for the Toronto Public Library, along with his photo, with the caption "Experience Canada!" Birney collected a number of these and sent them to friends with the note, "just a bookmark now" (Cameron 547) and indeed his life did leave a lasting mark during this era of the country's history as he helped to redefine the Canadian nationalist movement through his writing and cultural influence. Faced with the question "who is Canada?" Birney turned, with arms open and with hope, toward the ever-changing voices of the future.

### CHAPTER 3      PHYLLIS WEBB

The question about the nature of something awakens at those times when that, whose nature is being questioned, has become obscure and confused, when at the same time the relationship of men to what is being questioned has become uncertain or has even been shattered.

– Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?* (43)

While living in Paris, Phyllis Webb was told by a psychiatrist that she had “questioning eyes” that could perhaps make some people uncomfortable (Munton 82). Perhaps then it could be reasoned that Webb’s focus on the function and implication of the question and the act of questioning comes from a place that is fundamental to her very psyche and—as I will prove—to “Canadian Spirit” that was constructed after the Second World War. “The Question as an Instrument of Torture” is a talk that Webb wrote for a series on evil for the CBC programme *Ideas*, and was broadcast in May 1971. In this talk, she says, “I begin with an academic mystery, and, since all mysteries finally take shape in the form of questions, I must ask why, in the study of language, has so little attention been paid to the role of the question?” (31). As I have shown thus far in this thesis, Canada became plagued with the question of “who is Canada?” in an attempt to carve out its own nationalism in a postcolonial space and amid an expanding global ideological crossfire. Canadian members of the government and the cultural elite worked indefatigably to both find and bolster a unique Canadian voice as the country moved away from its British past into a future as a unique and sovereign nation. However, during the entire course of this effort, I have found no indication that anyone ever stopped to consider the very question that they were all occupied with answering. Given the complications of nations within nations as I touched on in the last chapter, the

paradoxes nestled within the very fabric of a nationalist construct, and the contradictions within this uniquely Canadian construction that I will discuss further in this chapter, it is surprising that I found much debate over the contents and processes of nationalist construction but almost none around the very impetus that drove this massive movement. No one stopped to question the question until Webb did.

Using “The Question as an Instrument of Torture” as a frame to guide this chapter, I will delve into Webb’s exploration of the question and its direct ties to the Canadian nationalist movement of the mid-to-late twentieth century. Moving through her definitions of the role of the question—as it is used to seek the truth, to create a trial and judgement, and to torture—I will map Webb’s own perspectives on Canadian identity onto the larger questioning of nationalism in Canada. In addition, I will be drawing upon the quiet collection of *Naked Poems*—a “small volume of small poems,” in the words of Webb, which she wrote in 1963 with the support of a Canada Council travel grant (Butling 238). I will also refer to Webb’s Kropotkin poems, which were inspired by the anarchist Marxist Peter Kropotkin and about which she says in an interview with Smaro Kamboureli, “I’m not sure where my sort of mystical sense of belonging to Russia comes from.... It also has a great deal to do with my utopian visions when I was younger. It was a struggle to enter and then have to reject that dream of a just society” (38-9). Like Birney, Webb had a political and an idealistic connection with the philosophy of the USSR during an era when this was not a popular stance that I will discuss further in a moment. It is through these poems—these questions to the established poetic form and Canadian political ideology—that Webb investigates the

larger question that drove the Canadian nationalist movement after the Second World War.

In 1969 Bill Vazan and another artist created two opposite curves in the sands of the Atlantic and the Pacific beaches of Canada, thus putting the entire country in parentheses (“Phyllis Webb’s Canada” 105). As a symbolic representation of the effects of the nationalist movement, this work of art was discussed by Webb with adoration and appreciation for all that it revealed. It is by taking this giant step back and viewing the nationalist movement as a giant stick drawing brackets around a massive country that one can have a true perspective of the monumental nature of this incredible undertaking. By moving the gaze from the micro to the macro—spatially, culturally, and temporally—Vazan reveals the Canadian nationalist movement from the largest and most basic perspective—that of the question itself. Who is Canada? From this position Webb is then able to turn around and study the question itself and ask her own questions in return.

Webb describes herself as “a snarling writer of letters-to-the-editor, which I never write, a supporter of causes I never join ... a voter who has never voted for a winning candidate, and a law-abiding anarchist.... Spiritually ... a French-Canadian separatist; in fact and in flesh a pure-bred west coast WASP. I’m a card-carrying Canadian” (“Phyllis Webb’s Canada” 106). Before acquiring these many self-definitions, Webb was born in 1927 in Victoria, British Columbia (Miki 12). By June 15, 1949, she ran (and lost) as the youngest CCF candidate for Oak Bay, Victoria, BC (Miki 12). The next year she moved to Montreal where F.R. Scott introduced her to the poets associated with the Montreal little magazines (Hulcoop 17), and it is here that she began to act upon her interest in the

scene of Canadian poetry. According to Lorna Knight, “Between 1951 and 1955, the young poet Phyllis Webb was preoccupied with the lot of the poet and the state of Canadian publishing. In 1951, at the suggestion of Birney, then professor of English at the University of British Columbia, Webb designed a questionnaire to gather information,” which she mailed to a long list of Canadian poets (43). During this process she found an apparent lack in the audience for Canadian poetry (Knight 48) and from there began to work toward the development and promotion of Canadian culture. During the 1950s she lived in Paris on a Canadian Government Overseas Award and then worked for McClelland and Stewart and CBC radio in Toronto (Miki 12). By the 1960s, she had travelled to New York, San Francisco, and Russia on Canadian grants and hosted a series of programs for CBC television on Canadian writers including F.R. Scott, Dorothy Livesay, Margaret Atwood, and bpNichol (Miki 13). After all of this, it can be quite easily reasoned that Webb had a hand in the nationalist movement of culture creation; however, as she developed as a writer and a thinker, so too did her approach to the question of nationalism change.

Webb asks in “The Question as an Instrument of Torture,” “[I]s there any language, or has there ever been a society in which the interrogative form did not exist? In the beginning was the word, but was it followed by a question mark?” (33). This connection between nationalism and language—bringing to mind the links that Anderson made in *Imagined Communities*—remained a constant theme in Webb’s work and its response to the Canadian nationalist movement. In this opening remark, she questions whether there is any space at all between the existence of a society—a nation—and the immediately posed question of self-identification. Is it possible for

humans to exist without questioning and qualifying this very existence? And is this interrogation then increased exponentially when a group of individuals are grouped together into, ostensibly, a single classification of identity? While she was living in Montreal, Webb lived at one of the metropolitan centres of the Canadian culture movement that, according to Louis Dudek, “began to show distinct signs of self-doubt and reorientation” (113)—that is, self-doubt brought upon by self-questioning. Webb studied these questions during her time at CBC radio when she devoted six shows on *Ideas* to Professor Maurice Cranston who spent two of these shows discussing the “groundbreaking ideas of Lévi-Strauss, in particular Lévi-Strauss’s articulation of the interconnections between language and culture” (Butling 247). These ties are inherent in the very definition of culture as one cannot easily articulate culture without the use of language. It is language that binds groups in society and—as is the case in Canada—it is language that divides. During the start of the Cold War, Canada felt pressed by a colonial past and the anxiety surrounding overwhelming American media infiltration to redefine and broadcast Canadian identity on a global scale in order to protect the Canadian nation-space and to present the voice of Canada as separate and unique from any other place on the earth. Thus, nationalism and a nationalist construct exist purely because of language—because of the single question, “who?”

### **3.1 Searching for the Truth**

First and foremost, Webb describes the role of the question as that which is used in the search for truth. In “The Question as an Instrument of Torture” she writes that Socrates—the master of the question—is “tender, playful, loving, insistent, artfully innocent, and ruthless in the pursuit of the Truth. He is the Intellectual Inspector

General who bears no resemblance to the Grand Inquisitor. His aim was truth, not victimization” (33). In the context of the Canadian nationalist movement, at first glance the question is simply a search for the truth of identity. As Grant would declare in *Lament for a Nation*, it was a genuine drive for the presence of a unified nationalism that led Diefenbaker to adopt his (highly American) form of federalism, which placed universal rights over that of nations within nations (21). After discussing various government strategies and committees to bolster nationalism—like the Massey Commission—one could go so far as to describe these tactics as akin to Socrates’s ruthless pursuit of the Truth as the national government worked with the culturati to find and support a unique Canadian voice as the country moved into a new era.

As a part of this effort, Webb was hired by CBC radio in 1964 and served as program organizer for *University of the Air*, later called *Ideas* (Butling 237). In fact, Webb put her career as a poet on hold for five years while she held this position (Butling 238) and, in effect, stopped creating poetry in order to help create alternate forms of culture. During her time with the CBC, Webb aided with the creation and care of a disseminated ideology. “Intellectual Inspector General” rather than “Grand Inquisitor,” Webb sought again and again with every *Ideas* show to answer the question “who is Canada?” just as she attempted to answer the question of Canadian poetic identity. The very names—*University of the Air* and *Ideas*—epitomize her ambition to teach the nation about its own new modern identity. What is constructed nationalism—in the tradition of Anderson—but the planting of ideas into the imagination? Except, at this point in her career these notions were believed to be garnered truths.

There was, however, a contradiction in the aims of programmes like *Ideas* and of the CBC itself. While attempting to create an identity that fit in the evolving and modern world, the CBC struggled with what can be called the imperial father figure and thus the navigation of Canada's power and position in a postcolonial era. CBC radio attempted to move forward and away from the older British models of nationalism, like that of the first BBC director John Reith who acted in the name of independent broadcasting guided by public interest (Boyle 251). However, this put the government organization in an interesting situation as it still tried to retain this previous sense of national unity created by a more publically oriented model, despite the apparent need for the culturati to move one step ahead in order to autocratically guide mass opinion into a new sense of government-created nationalism. As a cultural entity in Canada, the CBC was charged with protecting and propagating a Canadian nationalism within a framework established in the past by previous nationalisms, but with an eye toward the future of a new and modern concept of nationalism. Jody Berland illuminates this conflict well as she summarizes the both nationalist and modernist principles within the report of the Massey Commission:

[An] antipathy to the dominance of American commercial and popular culture...; an agreement that art and artistic works would inhabit an autonomous professional world, accountable only to juries of professional peers who could judge artistic value in its own terms; the belief that national subjects were...united by shared cultural beliefs and values, nurtured by the country's art; [and] the arguably countering belief that art ought to be disengaged and free from local

traditions, community standards, politically motivated strategies of representation or other “idiosyncrasies.” (17-18)

Somehow, in her attempt to answer the question of Canadian identity and to thus seek the Truth, Webb had to both help to create the borders around Canadian culture while also allowing these borders to be crossed at any time by new modernist works of Canadian art. She was hired to help question and seek out the Canadian Truth by means of a government-supported organization that was charged with “promot[ing] an identifiable Canadian culture with programming that [was] critical of that very identity” (Butling 243). In this way, the role of the question in Canadian identity becomes more complex as Webb’s job moved from simply attempting to answer to answering within a prescribed set of uneven parameters as the country moved out of one tradition while simultaneously creating a somewhat oxymoronic concept of a modernist tradition.

Eventually Webb quit her job with the CBC. In the opinion of Pauline Butling, Webb quit because she was disenchanted by the nationalist movement, as seen when in a letter she refers to the National Museum as “The Great Canadian Coffin” (247). She may have become disillusioned with a search for the truth of Canadian identity within a set of traditional parameters, or perhaps she tired of the very concept of a modern nationalism; however, Webb herself has also hinted at the ties between this cultural construction and a form of imperial father figure. Because her own father left when she was only a child, Webb is thought to have tried to replace him with other male figures like Birney or Kropotkin, which then bled into her role at the CBC as she slated eighty percent of the content in a male voice (Butling 240). Just as the CBC—and thus the aims of the Canadian government—worked to escape an imperial father figure in its aim to “define

and affirm an independent *Canadian* identity” (Butling 242; italics in original), so too did Webb’s search for truth in response to the question of national identity lead her to escape her own father figure. In the act of quitting, Webb chooses to respond to the question of “who” with silence. Brenda Carr also notes this act of passive resistance within the feminist framework of “A Question of Questions”—a poem that she says stands as a “marshalling of contempt power [citing Ronald L. Goldfarb’s *The Contempt Power*], through which she asserts a self and destabilizes the Authority who ‘writes the question mark on [her] body’” (70). Through her silence, she denies the question on her very being as it no longer pertains to the truth of identity. Instead, because of the government-instated limitations and continued traditions surrounding any attempt at an answer, the question is no longer an idyllic search for truth, but rather it becomes a form of trial and a threat of judgement.

### **3.2 Trial and Judgment**

Webb eventually moves past the question as merely a means to seek truth and delves into the idea of the role of the question as an action of judgment and the conservation of authority. She writes, “In our own time many teachers are dependent on having their questions answered not because they need to know the answer...but to maintain power and position” (“Question” 38-39). Rather than asking the question for the sake of finding the truth, the question is asked for the sake of disseminating an already fully constructed idea of truth in order to establish a cultural point of power. Instead of asking “who is Canada?” in order to find truth in the answer, the question is now asked in order to test and judge those who do not answer in a manner deemed correct—those who do not fall within the ideological, the cultural, or even the linguistic

borders of the modern construct. As seen in Diefenbaker's fall from power or the start of the Quiet Revolution, various truths were being constructed and reconstructed across Canada thus bringing the idea of a unified nationalist concept closer to Anderson's theory of the imagined nation.

In direct response to this imagined nation, Webb's Kropotkin poems stage a reaction to an ideological trial. After her recognition of and escape from male cultural and conceptual dominance, Webb began to experiment "with new forms, [send] the fathers to Lethe, [challenge] authority, and [develop] a social critique of all modernist impulses" (Butling 244). As "the chief theoretician of communist anarchist ... frequently dubbed a 19th-century aberration," Peter Kropotkin was a Russian prince and a personal aide to Tsar Alexander II who believed in one of the most "idealistic of all political philosophies" ("Script" 101). One can begin to see what drew Webb to this figure and his unwavering strength within his own personal truth of identity; however, eventually Webb recognized Kropotkin's anarchism as simply another "male utopian theory" (Munton 85) that she left behind as she removed herself from the definitions and ideologies of the fathers. Of these poems, once they were begrudgingly published, Webb writes, "The Kropotkin Poems' revolve ... centrally around power, the problem of power ... and I think the theme is failure. The failure of so much—one's own personal life failures, the failures of societies to live without repressive authority, the seeming unevolvingness of political and social life" ("Script" 101). Though she leaves him behind in her feminist journey away from the power of the father, in "Poems of Failure" Webb refers to Kropotkin as "the Prince"—as the very seat of a monarchical and often unquestioned power. As she addresses him, she writes,

is there a shadow following the  
hand that writes  
always? or for the left-handed  
only?

I cannot write with my right

I grasp what I can. The rest  
is a great shadow (I.14-20)

Here the shadow represents many things. First and most simply, the shadow is the lingering influence of the imperial father figure—both on the writing and psyche of Webb and, in a larger sense, on the nationalist movement of Canada. No matter the movement into the modern cultural age and the experimentation with methods for culture creation, the CBC—like a father figure—still clung to certain aspects of the inherited nationalist traditions as it attempted to facilitate a new Canadian identity to fill the gap left by the colonial past. Second, the shadow is that of the question. As a member of any society and more specifically a member of the Canadian government-supported *culturati*, Webb is compelled to face and answer the question “who is Canada?” constantly and, while she grasps what she can of a unique and unifying answer, the shadow of the question always remains. No longer looking for truth, the question instead is a trial and she is constantly in fear of a judgment if she answers incorrectly.

*Wilson's Bowl* was inspired by a series of letters, between a University of Victoria librarian named Lilo Berliner and a professor of anthropology at the University of British Columbia named Wilson Duff, which were left on Webb's doorstep by Berliner before she committed suicide (“Notes” 88). “Wilson's Bowl” was actually a petroglyph bowl that Berliner found on Salt Spring Island, between Vancouver and Victoria, and dedicated to Duff (“Notes” 88). Scholar of First Nations artifacts and author of the book

*Images: Stone: B.C.: Thirty Centuries of Northwest Coast Indian Sculpture*, Duff indirectly influenced Webb's definition of the Canadian identity by shifting her perspective beyond the living voices so that she may hear the parts of Canada left for dead—the forgotten ghosts. Because of this, in “Poems of Failure” Webb then brings to the forefront the third shadow that haunts her: that of the Canadian past before imperial history.

To be reconciled with the past  
is redemption but unreal as hell  
if you can't recall the beginning  
and of time, who can get back there?

Redemptive anthropologists, archae-  
ologists, bones, stones, rings of  
trees ...” (I.28-34)

When answering the question “who is Canada?”, Webb here begins to fight against these shadows of colonialism and of the question as trial and returns back to her search for the truth. She posits that redemption is only found in connection with the past as she makes her way back via the only means available to her: by way of the artifacts left behind. Webb writes, “I often think that in our search for a Canadian identity we fail to realize that we are not searching for definitions but for signs and omens.... I'm not good at book history.... But recently I have been going into a different past for a few lessons. I have been studying stones” (“Phyllis Webb's Canada” 109). Here again she speaks of “studying stones” and perhaps, in response to the trial of the question, Webb manages to again escape completely through a connection to a Canadian identity that dates before the age of modern definitions—to an age of signs and omens, or revealed truths. She writes in the poem “Kropotkin,”

Consider the dead  
for whom we make elegies  
how they differently  
instruct us. (1-4)

Through the voices and the artifacts of the past, again she returns to a space of seeking truth through the question. With her ever-inquisitive eyes, Webb continues to try to answer the question of Canadian identity—this time from outside the prescribed borders of government and inherited nationalist tradition.

After wading through the role of the question as a trial and emerging as victor, Webb writes in “Poems of Failure,”

I sew two pieces, one purple  
one red, together, attach another making designs  
as I go. Mapping it into some kind of crazy  
poncho. I am absorbed in the fitting together  
of pieces.” (IV.5-9)

Here she now embodies the role of the creator of truth. Pulling royal purples and the reds of liberty into her mix, she stitches together a truth of Canadian identity amid the many shadows of history and modernity. These lines are telling with reference to Webb’s style of a unifying Canadian truth in that she describes the designs as haphazard and crazy; however, she remains “absorbed”—dedicated to the role of the question of identity and her role as one appointed to answer. Rather than allowing for some colours—some voices—to be edited out of the Canadian fabric, Webb, ever the idealistic anarchist, turns the trial of the question on its head as she attempts to create a unifying and all-encompassing truth to transcend any nationalist construction.

### **3.3 Interrogative Torture**

Finally, Webb discusses the question as a brutal means of torture, citing in “The Question as an Instrument of Torture,” the well-known phrase: “to be put to ‘the

question” (39). To explore this last role of the question, I will now turn the discussion toward a different collection, *Naked Poems*. The reaction to *Naked Poems* when it was published was not very positive. In an effort perhaps to completely break the bonds of traditional poetic structure, Webb created a volume that she claims was “born out of great struggles of Silence” (qtd. in Van Herk 175). With so much of this silence—seemingly empty white space—on every page, critics claimed that it was a “waste of money.... More ‘unfleshed than naked’...[and] too much on the side of silence” (Hulcoop 22). However, after attempting to create a quilt from the diverse pieces of Canadian identity and faced now with the incessant question continuing to pose itself and thus becoming an instrument of torture, Webb is left with one last effort to answer the question and create Truth—this time from within utter silence. The question has evolved from the more simple “who are you?” to “the metaphysical why are you?” (“The Question” 32) and, to answer this, she must strip her ideologies and self-perceptions completely in order to stand silently within a space of pure self-examination in order to, once again, find the Truth.

As the question becomes an instrument of torture, it becomes subversive, natural, and as forgettable as the heartbeat (“The Question” 31). Mirroring this image of the continuous and yet easily ignored, Webb writes in the poem “Non Linear,”

I hear the waves  
hounding the window:  
lord, they are the root waves  
of the poem’s meter  
the waves of the  
root poem’s sex. (71-76)

Like the rhythm of the heartbeat, the waves rush in and out, crashing against the window until they become embedded within the very pulse of the poem. The question of identity

repeats itself because its language is inherent to the very nature of the individual within a societal group. In fact, it can be said that it is this incessant torture of questions that leads to the revisiting and the redefinition of cultural and national truth. Hulcoop writes that the root poem's sex "is no longer masculine in *Naked Poems*" (42) because Webb has broken free of the Canadian male tradition and redefined the "I" in her writing. Here too the changing role of the question—from the seeker of truth, to the trial, to the torture—continuously shook Webb's conceptions and beliefs until she could take a step back and see her reliance upon both colonial tradition within her acts of culture creation and upon father figures within her very consciousness. Like the unbroken rhythm of the waves, Webb writes in "Poems of Failure," "what does not change is / the will to change" (II.4-5). To exist is to define one's self as existing and changing within language—to ask "who?"—just as the existence of borders around the Canadian nation impel the government and culturati to answer this same question. And Canada is hardly a static nation. It is an ever-evolving society—moving through time, cultures, and languages—constantly changing and redefining the truth of Canadian identity due to the persistence of the question. Though the modern movement of nationalism relied heavily on the ideological traditions of the imperial father, it was only through the continuous will to change this that Canada was able to move one step into the new concept of nation.

"Though it sounds paradoxical," Webb writes, "[t]he power of the ordinary over the extraordinary summarizes the history of torture" ("Question" 35-36). In this way, perhaps nationalism itself is a manifestation of torture. Through the power of the ordinary—the common question inherent to the very linguistic structure of humanity—the extraordinary—Canada as an ideological, political, cultural, physical, and temporal

concept of a nation united—is ordered and regulated. It is the power of the question that gives our minds the very ability to conceptualize any notion of nationalism as we look at the space between arranged and generally accepted borders and ask, “who is Canada?” Rather than focusing on the answer to this question, as Birney began to do, Webb takes a step back, turns around, and examines the question itself in order to discover its role in the creation of modern Canadian nationalism. She ends her final poem in *Naked Poems*—“Final Questions”—with an interrogation of the question itself:

I am trying to write a poem

*Why?*

Listen. If I have known beauty  
let's say I came to it  
asking

*Oh?* (24-29)

Here the silence between the last two lines is palpable, separated in Webb's collection by the last turn of the page. Even her last attempt to answer the truly metaphysical question of “*Why?*” and consequently her expression of reverence for the question, is not left standing untouched. It is the question that takes the last breath of Webb's collection, closing the last page of the last poem, but opening Canadian identity up to an infinite state of play in its creation of unending associations of hypothetical truths. By ending this collection with an unanswered question—an unanswerable question really (how does one answer to “*Oh?*”)—Webb in essence gives her poetry and thus her physical and linguistic acts of construction over to the power of question. As Canadian identity and nationalism is thus left unanswered, it is in the sea of infinite possible answers that Webb

has at least a slight chance of viewing the Truth. She no longer relies on her own constructive powers, but rather gives her power over to the dynamic role of the question.

Of Canada, Webb writes, “My Canada is unreal estate, a fantasy that changes as I change. I can’t fix it” (“Phyllis Webb’s Canada” 106). After turning to view the very question of Canadian identity and moving through the various roles and functions of this question within her consciousness, Webb ultimately embraces the untamable and truly unfathomable reality. When speaking of self-questioning, Webb writes, “A dialogue begins and can make a sweet and beckoning music, or, if the voices become confused, or if we are hopelessly unable to answer the questions proposed bitterness, dismay, dread, even madness may result when split off portions of the self question and badger other split off portions of the self in the cruelest fashion” (“Question” 44). This image of the perpetually fragmented self brings to mind a truly innovative *Ideas* program created by Glenn Gould. In it “[v]oices of a geographer, a socialist, a Department of Northern Affairs official, a Canadian Northern Railway surveyor, and a nurse who live in the North are montaged together within musical motifs in a ‘soundscape,’ a form that Gould pioneered in this and other CBC *Ideas* programs” (Butling 245). Here, through the power of the question, the modern Canadian identity is presented in as truthful a form as possible as fragments coalesce into a chaotic whole—truly a collection of voices layered like instruments in the score of a modern symphony—that exists as an interconnected unit, but never completely harmoniously. Constantly changing, shifting, and evolving, this incarnation of the Canadian nation-space—presented in a way that truly separated itself from the imperial concepts of nation creation—is Webb’s closest brush with the Truth as she hands the entire construction over to the power of the question “who is

Canada?” “Canada is a whole bunch of parentheses,” Webb writes, bringing back to mind Vazan’s enclosing lines in the sand on both coasts of the country. She continues:

[E]motionally we are all caught in the embrace of those inhibiting arms. Even Canada’s role as mediator in international disputes can be seen in terms of this image. The magic of the event was the psychological revelation that once we see, feel, and make external the bind we’re in, the tides can come in and wash it away. (“Phyllis Webb’s Canada” 105)

In order to both exist and function within a modern human construction of socio-political nation-spaces, Canada too must recognize the parentheses that contain truth within the conceptual binds of a community imagined. Through her role in the Canadian culturati, Webb helped create the parentheses that contain the scope of Canadian identity and yet it is through her shift to examine the question of identity itself that she gains a new perspective of these brackets as binds. It is the question—inconstant and inherent—which finally takes control over the attempts to answer, shows the chaos of truth beneath the human linguistic construction of nationalism, and ultimately removes the borders completely. It is the relentless question that opens the concept of a united Canadian identity up to the chaos and diversity of the modern Canadian reality.

## CHAPTER 4      LEONARD COHEN

The ghost is a crucible for political mediation and historical memory.

—Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters* (18)

*Beautiful Losers* is a novel that utilizes a metaphor of translation—the “ordinary eternal machinery” (*Beautiful* 217) of ritualistic translation as it exists both within and beyond language—to comment on the construction of our human identities and—as I would like to propose—on the modern construction of Canadian nationalism. Set in 1960s Montreal and following the lives of an unnamed folklorist, his wife Edith, and their friend F., the novel alludes to the Egyptian trinity of the married siblings Isis and Osiris and their son Horus. In this myth, Seth murders his brother Osiris, drowning and dismembering him. Isis then travels the world as a kite gathering the pieces of her husband—all but his phallus, which was eaten by the fish of the Nile. She then reconstructs Osiris, fashioning a new golden phallus for him, and they conceive their son Horus—the god of rebirth (Mojsov xix-xx). From this myth, Cohen draws parallels to the story of his characters who embody it as representatives of culture creation in Canada during the Cold War and Quiet Revolution. Through this extended allusion to the Osiris myth, an ancient identity is brought through destructive layers of translation into a modern era of revolution in order to reflect not only the violent conflict inherent in Canada’s mid-century redefinition but also the timeless nature of this process of reconstruction—or retranslation—as it exists in ritual acts.

After the Second World War, Canada was working to recreate itself as a nation separate from England and distinct from the United States—through flags, dictionaries,

literature, mass media committees, and legislation. Simultaneously, by the 1960s, French Canada was struggling to maintain what it defined as its distinct identity through language laws, literature, flags, and other aspects of what became known as the Quiet Revolution. Each nationalist group saw their cause as an imperative—an act of desperation to save a community from annihilation—to protect a collection of symbols from the loss of their significance. However, this is not a unique struggle. Throughout history groups of people—variations on the concept of nation—have fought in innumerable ways to preserve themselves, their symbols, and their construction of identity. “The State deals in symbols,” F. says to the folklorist as he plans to blow up the copper statue of Queen Victoria on “the north side of Sherbrooke Street” while smearing the rubble with his own blood (143). Within the Canadian historical context, this is a move highly reminiscent of the Quebecois novelist, filmmaker, and revolutionary Hubert Aquin, who was also arrested for the illegal possession of a firearm after issuing a 1964 press release announcing that he planned to go “‘underground’ to work for independence through terrorism” (Smart). F., like Aquin, takes part in Quebec’s revolution, but for the sake of the revolution itself—for the sake of the system of it—for the sake of the larger machine. F., as an Osiris figure, is trying to reveal this tradition of identity translation to the folklorist and to then help him transcend this human mechanistic construct—to be reborn through F.’s self-sacrifice. He tells the folklorist to aim for the present while wielding universal memory by “fuck[ing] a saint” (12); thus F. guides the folklorist beyond the human System (with a capital S) of constructed differentiation through the universal connection within the abject. He tries to bring the folklorist beyond the individual ideological connections that support the machine of

conceptual nationalism so that he can see and understand this process of building an imaginary shell around a nation-space and then re-enter and reconstruct the concept of national identity with the aid of this knowledge. In *Beautiful Losers*, Cohen demonstrates the deconstruction of identity, life on the border of identity, and the subsequent reconstruction of a more universal identity from within the bounds of national ritualistic definition. After Earle Birney attempted to create a Canadian identity from a perceived ghost-less canvas, and Phyllis Webb questioned the very question of this nationalism, Cohen takes one step further away from Birney's construct and interrogates the System of defined nationalism itself—the machine that created Webb's question. Through this narrative of revolution—of the abject, of technology, and of transcendence—Cohen breaks open the very idea of constructed nationalism as it exists in conflict with a modern society. He points out that there are indeed ghosts who have been lost under the borders of translation, and that this overlying construct is just one in a parade of reincarnations that Canada as a nation should strive to leave behind as it reconstructs a more ideal machine—moving toward a pure truth in identity. Though he cannot abandon the concept of nation, in *Beautiful Losers* Cohen seeks to redefine it completely.

While the issue of translation had a very direct impact on the social and political climate in Canada in the decades after the Second World War—encompassing not only the tension between the English and French-speaking populations, but also a number of other linguistic minorities including the First Nations—for the purposes of this chapter I will focus instead on the process of translation as a metaphor for the process and result of the modern Canadian nationalist movement starting at the onset of the Cold War. The practice of translation itself is surrounded by various opinions regarding the primary goal

of the translator and the translation. Should we bring the reader to the text, or the text to the reader? Is everything translatable, or is nothing? In the introduction to her translation of Sophocles's *Electra*, Anne Carson writes, "Translating is a task of imitation that faces two directions at once, for it must line itself up with the solid body of the original text and at the same time with the shadow of that text where it falls across another language" (41). Here we see, from the perspective of the translator, the truly difficult and at times impenetrable space between the structures of two languages. Emily Apter writes, in *The Translation Zone*, about this space as a war zone as each language is closely tied to the concept of nation—borrowing from Benedict Anderson's concept of the role of language and the imagined community as subsequently both open and closed. Apter goes on to suggest with reference to Edward Said that, while this zone can encompass a new facet of comparative literature, there are still abstract concepts, such as "life," that remain an "untranslatable singularity" (251). Bringing this into the Canadian context, Sherry Simon writes in *Translating Montreal* that Montreal embodies modernity in that it sits on this zone between languages—between identities—giving a "sensation of doubleness that occurs as a result of the ghostly presence of languages haunting one another" (218). Standing on this line between languages, one stands on the line between different containing structures of "life" and thus between realities contained within structures of the imagination. As a nation moving more completely into a postcolonial space after the Second World War, Canada moved through what Douglas Robinson outlines as the "three sequential but overlapping roles" of translation in postcolonial studies: first serving as the "channel of colonization," then as the "lightening-rod for cultural inequalities continuing after the collapse of colonialism," and finally as the "channel for

decolonization” (31). French and English both entered the Canadian nation-space as colonizing forces, then—as I will illuminate in this chapter—translation served to reveal the cultural inequalities for various nations and cultures within the nation, and finally—as Cohen demonstrates in *Beautiful Losers*—the mechanics of translation ultimately undermine the accepted nationalist and neo-colonial structures in Canada to open up the space between hegemonic languages—the zone of translation—in order to allow the truth of Canadian identity to have its voice heard. As languages are brought into what Lawrence Venuti calls a “foreignizing translation” (147) in order to highlight cultural differences between the text and the dominant linguistic nationalism, the very structure of this nationalism, deconstructed as the “foreign,” is found to exist within the familiar. These foreign voices come from within the imagined community—just as Cohen’s characters loudly and at times violently make their voices heard—and thus the very homogeneous structure is shattered. Ultimately, as Tejaswini Niranjana writes in *Siting Translation*, the role of translation within civilizations is to bring identities “‘to consciousness’ of ‘Spirit’” (3) and “to inscribe heterogeneity, to warn against myths of purity, to show origins as always already fissured” (186). The process of translation—and re-translation—in a modern Canadian nation-space works to bring the reader to the original text, rather than the text to the reader, and subsequently reintroduces the “Spirit”—Birney’s forgotten ghosts—of Canadian identity back into the collective memory, nationalism, and imagination. Using translation as an overarching metaphor for this chapter, this disruptive and destabilizing force is found to be mirrored in the actions of F., the folklorist, and the constantly reincarnating figure of Isis as they live in Montreal—the translation zone of Canada—and work to redefine the construction of

linguistically based nationalism from a state of imagined homogeneity to a heterogeneous reality.

Cohen wrote *Beautiful Losers* during the decade of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec. After the era of Maurice Duplessis—marked by the influences of Catholicism and Cold War ideology (Whitaker and Hewitt 84)—the Quiet Revolution served to redefine French Canadian nationalism as both secular and as still separate from the “other” of English Canada. As the Canadian national government worked to build an encompassing Canadian identity as separate from England and the United States, the Quiet Revolution stood as a voice of what Benedict Anderson calls “sub-ness” within the imagined community of Nationalism-with-a-big-N (5). This fracturing was then further exacerbated by the fact that the citizens of Quebec struggled to define themselves as French, Canadian, or French-Canadian during this era (Laureandea 258) and in 1963, three years before the publication of Cohen’s second novel, the Pearson government created the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, thus officially recognizing two nations of two founding peoples (Igartua 164) in order to subsume this sub-nation within the borders drawn around the Canadian national community. However, this commission completely avoided any facet of First Nations’ history and modern presence, ignored the concept of a diverse and encompassing identity, and thus became just another cycle of the machine of identity re-translation that Cohen exposes in *Beautiful Losers*.

Although his career as a musician really did not begin until the end of the 1960s, he did not receive his first honorary degree from Dalhousie University until 1971 (“1892-1999 Honorary Degree Recipients”), and he was not inducted into the Order of Canada

until the early 1990s (“Order of Canada”), Cohen was handpicked by the Canadian cultural elite to help build a representation of Canadian national identity early in his life. During end of the 1950s, after his first book of poetry, *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, had been published and his second, *The Spice-Box of Earth*, was accepted on the spot by McClelland and Stewart, Cohen dropped out of graduate school, stopped working for his family’s factory, and worked for the CBC (Reynolds 24). By 1960 he was receiving government funding, the result of a memorable episode that involved a drug-influenced serenade from a wheelchair as Cohen and a friend rolled around the Canada Council offices (39-40). In November 1962 Cohen was chosen by the CBC to go to Paris to represent Canada in a radio panel that would discuss “the state of crisis in Western culture” (Nadel 115), and in 1964 he was on a reading tour of Canada with Irving Layton, Earle Birney, and Phyllis Gotlieb (129). Filmed by Don Owen, this tour eventually inspired the 1965 NFB film *Ladies and Gentlemen...Mr. Leonard Cohen*, which was constructed after the personalities of Birney and Gotlieb were found to be uninteresting on camera, scenes with Layton were cut, and footage from Don Brittan was added (Reynolds 50). Given a “limited cinematic release” (51), this documentary was funded by the government of Canada through the NFB as a part of the movement to create and capture Canadian culture—as outlined by the Massey Commission’s *Report*. By choosing Cohen as both an artist and a personality, these filmmakers of the cultural elite presented a specific face and voice of Canada in order for it to be disseminated to the public via mass media. Through publications, grants, and film, Cohen quickly became a government-supported force behind the creation of a defined national identity and, in

the year that this NFB film was released, he began work on his second novel, *Beautiful Losers*.

In March 1966 *Beautiful Losers* was published and received quite a range of criticism. Written as “a redemptive novel, an exercise to redeem the soul,” according to Cohen (qtd. in Reynolds 53), this work was marked within Canada by reviews of disgust due to its graphic sexual content; it was, for instance, simply dubbed “verbal masturbation” by the *Globe and Mail* (Reynolds 53). However, in the United States, the *Boston Globe* claimed, “James Joyce is not dead. He is living in Montreal under the name of Cohen,” (“Interview”). The reception of this novel, read and reviewed internationally, reflected an ideological conflict that Cohen described in a television interview for the CBC with Adrienne Clarkson as “an old old war and I think that I’d join the other side if I tried to describe it too articulately.” While this phrase (“old old war”) does have larger implications of the political climate, I believe that it also refers to this conflict—the automation—of identity reconstruction within society and specifically within Canada. By describing this constructed identity—this border—he would assume the language of this identity and thus would be seamlessly translated into it simply through this act of recognition. Just as F. guides the folklorist away from the structure of manufactured nationalist concepts in order to ascertain and re-write the truth of a diverse Canadian identity, so too did Cohen consistently try to remove his consciousness from exterior constructs in favour of an interior “Pure Event” (*Beautiful* 108) or “Clear Light” (197). In this same interview, Cohen tells Clarkson about a singer who is “not tied down to anything.” In response she asks, “Does that help to sing?” To which he answers, “I think it helps with everything.”

#### 4.1 Deconstructing the Palimpsest

The humming and sputtering of the Canadian machine of national identity run throughout the entire plot of *Beautiful Losers*. This machine was constructed with layers of political agenda from the national government and the culturati over a spectrum of varied cultural voices from Anglophones, Francophones, First Nations, and other minority groups in Canada after the Second World War. Consequently, this identity ostensibly became a forced translation of the national truth—a mechanism created by the Canadian government to embody a unified national presence and perspective within the mass media of the early Cold War. By the 1960s, this ambition had moved beyond differentiation from American and British influence to also encompass the inclusion of Francophones and First Nations in a blanket Canadian identity. “The state deals in symbols,” F. tells the unnamed folklorist (*Beautiful* 143), and after Birney claimed that Canada had no ghosts—no foundations upon which Canada to redefine itself as a cultural entity—carefully chosen and even fabricated symbols became the cogs in what Cohen presents as the machine of Canadian identity. Taking a step past Smith’s ethno-symbolic approach, Anderson states in *Imagined Communities* that these connections and symbols do indeed create a community based on the human power of imagination. The unnamed folklorist of Cohen’s novel epitomizes this theory as he writes the history of the A——s from his constructed Canadian perspective. He attempts to name and therefore translate this First Nations tribe into the Canadian nationalist agenda, thus creating a palimpsest that obliterates the real under layers of moulded language and identity. However, even in this written translation, the tribe stands as a linguistic gap—a space within the very linguistic sign of identity—serving as the first resistance and the

source of the subsequent reconstruction of the machine of Canadian identity. Starting with this break in the translation, Cohen uses the scholarship of the folklorist to guide this national identity away from the fabrications of the 1940s toward what he calls the “Clear Light.” It is only through the reconstruction of the machine that the damage of translation can be reversed.

In a March 2012 lecture given at Saint Mary’s University, titled “Variation on the Right to be Untranslatable,” Anne Carson stated that translation is a “spectacular violence”—a “catastrophe” and a “black hole” that creates a something that is nothing as the truth of one language is cast into the foreign structure of another. When viewing the evolution of Canadian identity after the Second World War as a process of translation in *Beautiful Losers*, the character Edith perfectly embodies an original language succumbing to the new language of Canadian identity. Cohen writes, “Edith was having trouble with her body: it kept changing sizes, she feared that it might be dying” (175). Here, as a member of the First Nations A\_\_\_\_\_s tribe, she is pressed into the construct—the machine—of Canadian culture creation and, as her body is forcibly altered, her presence begins to disappear from the Canadian landscape. It is important to note that Edith is aware of what is happening to her body and that it is her body that might be dying and not her entire self. Like the meaning inherent to the original language, Edith’s essence—a facet of the truth of Canadian identity before the 1940s movement to construct a single defined nationalism—does not cease to exist, but rather becomes a ghost buried under new symbols and re-written history. More recently Canadian writer Gail Scott wrote, “As for Aboriginal cultures, count the times you hear people saying, ‘Everyone in this country is from somewhere else.’ The Aboriginal presence is often erased or treated like

folklore. The fact that more research is being done on translation may help raise some of these issues. But will anyone want to hear?” (190). It is this trend of erasure—this time under the modern Canadian identity construct—that Cohen depicts as the “ordinary eternal machinery” (*Beautiful* 217). Over and over again identities are lost under redefinition—retranslation—until the truth is obliterated by this perpetual motion. As Canada worked to separate itself symbolically and nationally from the United States and Britain in order to protect its culture from the bombardment of influential mass media, the country failed to recognize the effect that this movement had on the presence and identity of the subcultures of Canada.

Ultimately Edith does die after crawling through the sub-basement and into the bottom of an elevator shaft where she is subsequently “squashed” (*Beautiful* 7) due to an unfortunate accident of a food delivery boy. The act that finally kills Edith in this novel serves as a representation of the larger contemporaneous extra-narrative movement to consume the inherently Canadian identity of the First Nations and replace it with a modern construction under a new national flag. Just as her body is crushed within the basement of the building, so too was the existence of a First Nations’ identity smashed under the new layer of the Canadian cultural palimpsest. Because her very self did not fit into the parameters of the new Canadian identity, she is destroyed like a nuance lost in translation. As Carson elaborated in her lecture, the destruction from the act of translation rests in the process of universal truths moving from the alphabet of one language into the cliché of another (“Variation”), thus this truth is smothered by an exterior construct that is not conducive to its existence. Edith—the synecdoche of First

Nations culture—is thus squashed beneath the nationalist movement—crushed under the newest cycle of late modernity that subsequently forgets the ghosts in the basement.

Edith is not the sole victim of Cohen's machine of Canadian identity. Before her, Saint Catherine Tekakwitha is said to be "Mangled Every Hour In Mysterious Machinery" (*Beautiful* 58) as she defies having a flag put over her face, defies rape, and mutilates herself regularly until she dies by her own hands. After Edith dies, Mary Woolnd, F.'s nurse, is literally torn apart by the jaws of police dogs as she yells, "Run! Run F. Run for all of us A——s!" (240). Later, an unnamed female driver picks up F. as he hitchhikes and, when she drops him off, F. says to her, "Good-by, darling—Good-by. Have a magnificent crash" (251). Because of this pattern of violent deaths for multiple female characters as they exist without overlap throughout the course of the narrative, I am led to suggest that these women are all reincarnations of a single figure—who often calls herself Isis—whose repeated death is again a representation of the destructive nature of the machine of Canadian identity. Thus this shift in national identity is given its proper role in the history of Canadian space. Not simply one act of forced translation, the Canadian identity construct is presented by Cohen as a consistent pattern of evolving national linguistic authority that violently rips apart an untranslatable space as yet another constructed cliché is built over the continually silenced ghosts. However, while Catherine is mangled, Edith squashed, Mary ripped apart, and the unnamed driver destroyed in a crash, each of these deaths is—in varying degrees—the product of each woman's own volition. The final car crash is described as "magnificent" and, because Cohen chooses this particular adjective, and because each woman plays a role in her own demise, this pattern of death can be seen as more than an unstoppable cycle of identity destruction.

Because of the way in which Cohen describes these deaths, one begins to realize that these characters are far from passive cogs within the machine.

In *Beautiful Losers* there are numerous instances in which characters exist without names. Just as the driver toward the end of the narrative is unnamed, so too is the folklorist. F. exists as simply an abbreviation and the A——s—an entire tribe of First Nations people—are left with a hole in the centre of their linguistic representation. As I have established, these characters live as ghosts within the Canadian landscape and Canadian identity. Existing within the modern nationalist construct of the 1960s, these characters do not fit into the new representation—their truth does not translate into Canadian nationalism as redefined by the culturati—and they subsequently cease to exist within the dominant language. They are erased. Rather than become translated, they choose to become what Carson refers to as an untranslatable space; this is not, as she proposes, a forced or submissive act (“Variation”). Though the folklorist, F., the driver, and the A——s exist without names, they are not forced out of basic linguistic representation, but rather *refuse* to be named within the machine of Canadian identity. Rather than allow themselves to live within the cliché of a reconstructed nationalism, these characters remain untranslated—a purposely created gap within the confining and controlling language of modern Canadian identity construction. This protest against linguistic dominance is seen again when the reincarnated Isis figure reveals her identity more than once, but only speaks her name in the more ancient Greek language—the language of the conquerors of Egypt, led by Alexander of Macedon (Mojsov 102), who integrated the Egyptian gods into their own mythology until 391 when Theodosius forbid all pagan cults in favour of Christianity (Mojsov 119). All of these characters, by

positioning themselves outside of modern linguistic definition, choose to exist as ghosts beneath the dominant nationalist culture. They choose to guard their names—to exist as nameless entities—in order to actively protest the machine.

Along with the representation of First Nations erasure in modern Canadian identity, Cohen uses the character F. to depict the struggle for a Francophone presence within the new national—and as Frank Davy would argue, postcolonial—construct, which came to a head during the decade in which *Beautiful Losers* was released. The folklorist writes of F.'s death, “F. died in a padded cell, his brains rotted from too much dirty sex. His face turned black, this I saw with my own eyes, and they say there wasn’t much left of his prick. A nurse told me it looked like the inside of a worm. Salut F., old and loud friend! I wonder if your memory will persist” (4). Just as the Isis figure is repeatedly and violently killed in order to represent the loss of First Nations identity under layers of Canadian constructs, F. too comes to a brutal demise as a metaphor for the plight of French Canadians leading up to the October Crisis. Not only does he live without a name, he reportedly dies lacking both his mental capacity and his phallus. This follows the Egyptian myth of Horus, whose phallus is removed and fed to a fish after Set, Isis’ brother, murders him (Mojsov xix-xx). Like Set, Canadian national identity writes F. out of its history. Depriving his memory of both the legitimacy of human thought and the basic symbol of his masculinity, the Canadian national machine squashes him—erases him—just like Edith. Though André Laurendeau admonishes the separate racial classification of Francophones in the “blue pages” of the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission’s report from 1963 (Igartua 211), this was a fairly common linguistic practice during the era of *Beautiful Losers*’s publication. This dehumanizing

technique, used during the height of the conflict between Anglophones and Francophones, is reflected in the reported death of F. While the folklorist does see F.'s face turned black, the rest of the account is purely hearsay and thus, through language, the identity and memory of F.—of the Francophone—is written over and covered, like the First Nations, under the palimpsest of the Canadian culturati after the Second World War. However, like Horus, he too is rebuilt and thus the national mechanism begins to deconstruct as F. forces his way back into the construct of Canadian truth—writing himself back into history.

F.'s movement of resistance against the machine occurs numerous times in the course of *Beautiful Losers*—from his lessons to the folklorist to his participation in protests. However, F.'s larger goal becomes clear in the first section of the book when he buys a factory, brings the folklorist to see it, and then starts to have a conversation with folklorist after turning on the machinery. “He loved to talk against the mechanical noise,” the folklorist writes of F., and this is just what F. does for the entire novel. Forced into the role of Canadian ghost—erased and destroyed from the accepted construct of Canadian nationalism—F. then moves to take control of the machine. By owning the factory and speaking over the noise, from within the noise, he is moving to take control of the linguistic machine of cultural definition and to subsequently deconstruct it. Existing as one of Carson's gaps within translation, F. does not accept his new position as ghost under the Canadian cultural palimpsest and finds a way to both resist being erased from history and gain control of the machine of historical construction. He uses his position as a ghost to easily slip into the heart of modern Canadian nationalism and there make his voice heard.

## 4.2 On The Borders of Identity

In her book *Negotiating with the Dead*, Margaret Atwood writes, “Dead bodies can talk if you know how to listen to them, and they *want* to talk” (163). *Beautiful Losers* is a novel filled with dead bodies and the subsequent haunting of their ghosts. These voices surround the unnamed folklorist specifically because he is the writer of Canadian history. “Connect nothing” (18), F. tells the folklorist, and the core of his lesson rests in this statement. After F. reveals the inner workings of the machine of Canadian culture to the folklorist, he tells him not to draw any conclusions; the structure of recorded Canadian history and nationalism is unhinged and F. knows that at this point the folklorist must spend some time on the borders of identity before recreating a new structure within the language of his written cultural histories. When asked if he wants some colored pencils—not long before his recorded death—F. replies, “As long as they don’t marry our erasers” (159). F. here is a sort of Gothic figure, bringing the folklorist beyond the edge of the Canadian construct into a space of an unstructured nation, filled with ghosts and the discarded untranslatable gaps. The folklorist is removed from borders of modern Canadian consciousness—outside of the societal norms—and F. allows him a pencil, but denies the eraser; thus, the ghosts are free to exist as the folklorist records the facets of Canadian identity that exist beyond national consciousness. In *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, Maggie Kilgour writes of the possible connections between the Gothic and reality in that the Gothic “exposes the Gothic reality of modern identity, and by failing to represent an adequate solution it forces its readers to address them in real life, thus (ideally) using literature to encourage social change” (10). This is exactly what F. is trying to accomplish as he both reveals the mechanisms that exist all around the folklorist and then removes

him from them. By placing the folklorist on this border, F. shows him how to move beyond the Canadian cultural construct as it began to be outlined in the 1940s, to move beyond the interrogation of this construct, and to put himself in a position to rewrite the history of a nation without the use of an eraser—without accepting the destruction of translation.

As F. takes the folklorist beyond the borders of the construction of accepted Canadian identity, he does more than simply speak over the machine; he also teaches the folklorist to study closely each cog of the machine. An avid movie-goer, F. sits with the folklorist and, rather than watching the film, he looks up at the light saying, “As it floated and danced and writhed in the gloom over us, I often raised my eyes to consult the projection beam rather than the story it carried” (*Beautiful* 237). Here, instead of looking at the projection—the construct—F. instead looks up to the process of projection—the inner workings of the machine of nationalism. Resting on the border of cultural construction, F. teaches the folklorist how to move outside of the production of the culturati—literally looking away from a film perhaps produced by the NFB. While looking up, F. says that he begins to “formulate the question and it begins to torment [him] immediately: *What will happen when the newsreel escapes into the Feature?*” (237). What will happen when the border between the construct of the machine and pure fiction begin to blur? The border of the construct is unstable—filled with ghosts and gaps—and yet it is only from here that F. and the folklorist are able to stumble upon a new perspective and thus an aspect of the truth of Canadian identity. It is only from this border that they can experience what Barbara Godard calls “desire zigzags” (139)—spontaneous connections with the “other” that break apart the prescribed bounds of

identity. By moving the gaze of the folklorist from the film to the action of projection, F. begins to move the perspective of written history beyond the modern Canadian cultural agenda.

These lessons about the modern construction of Canadian identity move beyond examining the machine itself and extend into the interrogation of specific cogs of its construction. Resisting the aspect of the Canadian construct that forgot the First Nations presence and resented the Francophones, F. also stood in opposition to the sexual politics that existed in the decades after the Second World War. In doing so he engages in a homosexual relationship with the folklorist—again on the borders of the culturati’s construct—thus showing the folklorist yet another perspective from outside of the machine. After a sexual experience, they have a conversation and the folklorist says,

—I don’t feel in the least guilty.

—You do. But don’t. You see, F. said, this isn’t homosexuality at all.

—Oh, F., come off it. Homosexuality is a name.

—That’s why I’m telling you this, my friend. You live in a world of names. That’s why I have the charity to tell you this.” (*Beautiful* 19)

Again, through sexuality and linguistics, F. is trying to open the eyes of the folklorist to the constructions around him—to the power of names to define what is and what is not. Just as F. looks at the projection beam and not at the projection, so too is he trying to bring the folklorist to see truth of the linguistic nature of cultural construction. After a lifetime within the machine of national identity, it is understandably hard for the folklorist to completely remove himself from it; however, it becomes obvious that F.’s seed is planted when the folklorist later asks, “What was F.’s part in that lovely night?

Had he done something which opened doors, doors which I slammed back in their frames? He tried to tell me something. I still don't understand. Is it fair that I don't understand? Why did I have to be stuck with such an obtuse friend? My life might have been so gloriously different" (20-21). Though he resists, the folklorist here begins to accept that the machine around him may be an arbitrary construction. He does not know how to process the information, but at the most basic level he begins to see borders—the linguistic construction of names and identity that exist like the shadows of Platonic Forms.

F. is surrounded by an almost constant state of hypersexuality. Aside from his relationship with the folklorist, he also has sexual encounters with Edith, the nameless driver, and countless others. Toward the end of his recorded life, F. writes, "See me at this moment of my curious little history, nurse leaning over my work, my prick rotten and black" (*Beautiful* 159). While it has been acknowledged that "the figure of the 'Indigene' ... was disseminated through gothic tropes of savagery, sexuality, and primitivism" (Sugars and Turcotte viii) and F.'s connections with Canadian First Nations is established in *Beautiful Losers*, I would like to suggest that these are moments of the abject that again disrupt the machine of Canadian identity, rather than simply instances of negative stereotyping. Julia Kristeva writes that instances of the abject consist of "[c]urious primacy, where what is repressed cannot really be held down, and where what represses always already borrows its strength and authority from what is apparently very secondary: language" (13-14). In this vein, F. continues to write in his letter, "You saw my worldly prick decayed, but now you see my visionary prick.... Edith was a promoter of sex orgies and a purveyor of narcotics. Once she had lice. Twice she had crabs"

(*Beautiful* 159). Just as F. tells the folklorist to bring memory into the present by fucking a saint (12), so these moments of hypersexuality—of the abject surrounding F. and the reincarnations of Isis—are instances in which these ghosts are pushing their way back into the Canadian construct of national identity. F. embodies the abject as he defies repression, breaking through the surface of language and naming. Through this hypersexuality, F. combats the progress of the cultural construction, states his existence within the Canadian space, and gives a voice to all ghosts over the noise of the machine. F. accomplishes all of this while outlining his entire vision for the folklorist who wields the pen of Canadian history.

F. tells the folklorist, “We who cannot dwell in the Clear Light, we much deal with symbols” (*Beautiful* 197), and F. does just this through the use of blood imagery. One of the first scenes with F. that the folklorist recounts is a moment when F. paints a model of the Akropolis red “like so many Canadian Mounties” (10). “I could not take my eyes from the tiny brush which he wielded so happily,” the folklorist says. “White to vicious red, one column after another, a transfusion of blood into the powdery ruined fingers of the little monument” (10). This imagery is not limited to F. as Edith at one point coats “herself with deep red greasy stuff” (15) and her nails are red as she does the Telephone Dance with F. (30). Catherine Tekakwitha is watered by the “blood of martyrs” (16) and later, during a feast in Québec, she spills her wine and it spreads to cover everything:

Wails and oaths resounded through the purple hall as faces, clothes, tapestries, and furniture displayed the same deep shade.... Before their eyes these drifts of spring snow darkened into shades of spilled wine, and the moon itself absorbed

the imperial hue. Catherine stood up slowly. —I guess I owe you all an apology.  
(104)

These acts of being covered in red—in blood—are physical incarnations of Smith’s concept of *ethnies*; however, while Smith defines this nationalism as an “ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its member deem to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’” (9), the act of painting over skin and cultural monuments highlights Anderson’s theory that nations are nothing more than imagined communities—thin layers of superficial colour. As Edith covers herself in paint and as Catherine is covered in the blood of martyrs, they are both symbolically subsumed under the Canadian construct—painted into the imagined community. F.’s use of this symbol, as he paints the Akropolis, shows yet again that he has deconstructed the machine of nationalism, seen the cogs of its creation and function, and is now working from within the machine to change the definition of Canadian nationalism. He coats this European symbol of the Akropolis in his own blood—reclaims it—and thus reinstates Canadian ghosts back into the national construction of identity and history.

Just as the British and the French painted their nation over the land of Canada and Canadians painted a uniquely redefined nationalism over the same space after the Second World War, F. paints the nation yet again with his own blood—the blood of the forgotten ghosts of Canada. As Catherine’s spilled wine spreads to cover the earth, she offers the thought of an apology. This becomes ironic because the minds of the young First Nations children were symbolically painted in resident schools and, during the Canadian nationalist movement after the Second World War, many Inuit families were

forcibly relocated from Northern Québec to the High Arctic; however, it was not until over forty years after the publication of *Beautiful Losers*, in 2008 and 2010 respectively, that the Government of Canada officially apologized for these acts—these cogs in the machine of Canadian nationalism (“PM Cites ‘Sad Chapter’” and “Government of Canada Apologizes”). Just as the folklorist watches his mind sew “the world together...it goes through everything like a relentless bloodstream, and the tunnel is filled with a comforting message, a beautiful knowledge of unity” (*Beautiful* 17), the machine of modern Canadian identity also tried to paint the entire nation-space into one cultural identity, but F. yells, “Connect nothing,” because he recognizes the encompassing aims of Canadian nationalism and works to deconstruct this machine. He works to interrupt its motion and reinstate the individual voices of Canadian ghosts within the mind of the folklorist as he pens the nation’s history.

Initially, the folklorist’s reaction to what F. is trying to accomplish is negative and he wants no part in the rewriting of Canadian nationalism. “I’ve poisoned the air, I’ve lost my erection. Is it because I’ve stumbled on the truth about Canada? I don’t want to stumble on the truth” (*Beautiful* 37), the folklorist says, later adding, “I do not want to write this history” (61). F. reveals the true nature of recorded history, comparing it to a tune from a jukebox: “We loved it because we made it up ... we know that whatever happened to us was the most important thing that every happened in the world. History made us feel good so we played it over and over” (173-4). Here again F. reveals the truth—the mechanics—of constructed nationalism and history as he guides the folklorist to remove himself from this act of imaginative creation. In his letter to the folklorist, F. gives an invocation to history and completely exposes the machine of nationalist creation

as he cites footnotes within footnotes (201-2). F. brings the ghosts of history back into the Canadian narrative as he exposes the layers of history that have been eradicated under the layers of nationalist red paint. He breaks down the modern construct of the Canadian nation and initially the folklorist resists participating in the destruction of the machine that he helped to create. The folklorist, as a citizen of an imagined community, does not want to remove himself from what he has accepted as a “beautiful knowledge of unity.” He does not want to accept the ghosts that undermine his constructed Canadian consciousness.

The folklorist begins to transform, however, after F. too becomes a ghost within Canada. Once the construction of the national palimpsest moves to cover both F. as well as Edith, the folklorist is directly touched by the actions of the mechanism and subsequently puts himself under the posthumous tutelage of F. in order to continue the process of deconstruction and uncover the truth beneath the imagined community. F. compares himself to Oscotarach of Huron mythology, who removes the brains of the dead as they are prepared for immortality, and tells the folklorist, “The surgery is deep in progress, darling” (*Beautiful* 196) as the illusory boundaries of the modern Canadian construction are slowly lifted. Like F., the folklorist descends into the abject in order to find his pure identity, unadulterated by the nationalist machine. After accounts of constipation, urination, burns, and blood, the folklorist reads a letter from F. that tells him, “You have been dipped in the air of our planet, you have been baptized with fire, shit, history, love, and loss. Memorize this. It explains the Golden Rule” (159). The folklorist, writer of cultural narrative, is here literally baptized—reborn—as he moves

outside of the borders of nation into the space of forgotten ghosts, existing in a space of pure truth of identity and history.

As a writer of mythology, the folklorist is removed from Canadian nationalism not only through the deconstruction of history and identity, but also through the breakdown of the very structuring force of language. As he lives outside of the machine in the abject truth of his existence, the destruction of his previously constructed conscious state manifests itself in the breakdown of his communication as he writes incoherently, “Eeeeddddiittthhhh yug yug sniffle truffle deep bulb bud button sweet soup pea slit rub hood rubber knob girl come head bup bup one bloom pug pig yum” (*Beautiful* 68). The folklorist, as a figure of Canadian culture construction, is sent into a state of complete linguistic play as he moves outside of the nationalist machine and loses the prescribed structure of identity on which he relied. This is the completion of the process that F. began and urged the folklorist to continue. Language, the frame around any expression of identity, is here completely removed from its grammar of domination and thus the building blocks of nationalism are lost. The folklorist is no longer able to manufacture an imagined community as he follows the example of F. and voluntarily gives up the very tool of his trade and thus the ability to continue to fabricate a modern Canadian nation.

No longer able to use the language of Canadian nationalism, the folklorist then tries to translate himself into the language of truth. “Phrase-book on my knees, I beseech the Virgin everywhere” (*Beautiful* 146), he writes as he tries to communicate with Catherine Tekakwitha—the central character of his research on the First Nations tribe, A—s. The folklorist is lost on the borders of identity—in the spaces between the

layers of the nationalist palimpsest—and thus communication is almost meaningless. He cannot speak to this ghost who has been obscured by Canadian nationalism in the language of this construct and must find a way to talk to her in order to reach the truth of Canadian identity. He needs to have a conversation with her, rather than simply a one-sided historical account of her, and must thus find a new language that reaches outside of the construct. Now that he see the cogs at work creating an imagined community by painting and repainting over ghosts until an ideal Canadian identity is constructed, the folklorist must search for a new structure—a way to bridge the gap between the machine and the truth—in order to reconstruct nationalism. He must work within the machine in order to create a true nationalism without leaving his consciousness in a state of eternal play. After understanding and deconstructing the Canadian nationalist machine and then following F.'s guidance to remove himself from it, the folklorist is finally able to begin to reconstruct the machine and replace imagination with truth.

#### **4.3 Reconstruction of “Truth” within the Machine**

F. interrupts the “eternal machinery of the sky” (*Beautiful* 224) of Canada—the perpetual act of identity construction and retranslation—quite literally as he plants a bomb in Montréal:

BOOM! WHOOSH! All the parts of that hollow stately body which had sat for so long like a boulder in the pure stream of our blood and destiny—SPLATTER!—plus the thumb of one patriot.... There is a hole on Rue Sherbrooke. Once upon a time it was plugged with the rump of a foreign queen. A seed of pure blood was planted in that hole, and from it there shall spring a mighty harvest. (197)

In retaliation for the construction of a national identity that covered the First Nations, covered the Francophones, covered the ghosts, and thus staunched the blood flow—the living truth—of the Canadian space, F. destroys this barrier—this prescribed nationalism—and opens it up to an organic reconstruction without the intervention of exterior influence. In the crater where the statue of the Queen once was, F. plants a piece of his body like a seed. As a Francophone with ties to First Nations, F. leaves his thumb at the site of deconstruction and thus deposits the memory and truth of forgotten shards of Canadian identity to grow in the very land of the nation-space. From within the nationalist structure, F. begins to change the function of the eternal machine of Canadian identity and, after his death, the folklorist takes up in his stead.

Written as a series of letters and memories after F.'s death, *Beautiful Losers* opens with the folklorist asking, "Catherine Tekakwitha, who are you?" (1). Rather than interpreting his research solely through the lens of mid-century Canadian culture creation, here we see from the very start of the narrative that the folklorist is trying to speak directly to the silent history that exists under the layers of identity retranslation. This action can only happen because of F.'s work in deconstructing the nationalist machine and planting a corporeal part of himself into the Canadian land. Because F. reinstates the forgotten ghosts back into the national landscape and guides the folklorist to understand why he must do this, the folklorist is then no longer content to accept history and identity as it is constructed and recorded. Due to F.'s work against the nationalist machine and his sacrifice, the folklorist can become an active interrogator of the construct around him—questioning the accuracy of the identity based upon a prescribed history—and move forward wielding a pen to rewrite the Canadian truth. No

longer content with Birney's ghostless Canada, the folklorist is taught by F. that there are many ghosts and he need only to listen to hear their voices and replant them into the Canadian narrative. It is due to F. that the folklorist has learned to ask and thus rebuild truth within the machine.

The culmination of this reciprocal communication between the ghosts of the past and the current cultural construction is epitomized in the Telephone Dance. During this process, Edith puts her fingers into F.'s ears and he then claims that he is suddenly "listening to Edith" (*Beautiful* 30) and that they both "became telephones" (33). Edith becomes an "electrical conversation" (35) that goes through F. and he says he hears "Ordinary eternal machinery like the grinding of the stars" (35). F. hears the truth—the pure identity of Edith from within the machine of constant Canadian retranslation. Like the uncle from the A——s who heals himself by continually chanting, "I change I am the same I change I am the same" (139), Edith too exists in a space of constant redefinition. Just as the stars are born and reborn, the truth of Canada is continually retranslated, constructing a palimpsest of new truths that are created to appropriate and negate the previous constructed belief. With every new layer of the palimpsest comes a new identity of Edith if she is to remain a presence within the Canadian nation-space and not a silenced ghost. She changes, but she is the same. Her body may strain under the pressure of constantly being remoulded, but her voice remains constant and it is through the Telephone Dance that F. is able bring her genuine voice—the linguistic truth of her identity—back to the surface. F. works within the machine, using the machine to make this connection, and subsequently subverts the machine in order to deconstruct the nationalist façade of a unified and imagined community and to then reconstruct an

identity built upon the truth of diversity and history. Because of the Telephone Dance, other ghosts, like F., are able to re-enter the Canadian consciousness and nationalism.

The folklorist reports that—again reminiscent of Hubert Aquin and his first novel *Prochain Épisode*—F. died “in a padded cell” (*Beautiful* 4); however, his letter to the folklorist rewrites this death and transforms it into a violent escape. After understanding then deconstructing the machine of Canadian nationalist construction, F. guides the folklorist to follow him and then rewrite nationalism—bringing it out of the realm of the imagination and into a state of truth that gives voice to the ghosts that were edited from the nation-space. After learning and accepting this mission from F., the folklorist does just this as he collects his account of the lives of the ghosts he has known, includes the long letter from the direct voice of F., and brings F. back to life in the last section of this account—just as Osiris is given a golden phallus and is reborn. F. is no longer removed from within the frame of Canadian identity, but rather he transcends it and enters a space of pure truth that is not adulterated by the aims of translation. In the last section, the folklorist writes that F. “disintegrated slowly.... His presence was like the shape of an hourglass, strongest where it was smallest. And that point where he was most absent...the future streams through this point, going both ways. This is the beautiful waist of the hourglass! That is the point of the Clear Light!” (258). Here F. is brought back into the Canadian nation-space and yet, as he begins to disappear, he is moving beyond the identity construct and is condensing into a point of timeless and nationless truth—a point of “Clear Light”—that has been finally written back into the identity of Canada. The ghost of Canadian history does not simply become re-embodied, but rather re-enters the nation-space as an entity that is untranslated—free to live within its own

linguistic construct, beyond the realm of modern Canadian symbols and culture construction. When the folklorist shouts, “BECAUSE I NEED YOU, F” (144), at this moment the imagined community of Canadian nationalists recognize and accept the ghosts of Canadian history as a part of its identity.

After becoming a point of Clear Light, F. then transforms into a film projected in the sky:

Quickly now...he greedily reassembled himself into—into a movie of Ray Charles. Then he enlarged the screen, degree by degree...The moon occupied one lens of his sunglasses, and he laid out his piano keys across the shelf of the sky, and he leaned over [them] as though they were truly the row of giant fishes to feed a hungry multitude. (*Beautiful* 258)

Here the complete reconstruction undoubtedly occurs. First, F. as a ghost is now integrating himself into the machine of Canadian identity, rather than being forcibly translated. After becoming an embodiment of his true identity he is then able to reassemble *himself* into a film. He is not projected upon, nor is he projected, but he now actively projects from a place of “Clear Light.” Second, after a life of staring up at the mechanical act of projection, now F. is able to move beyond observation and into action. By projecting himself, F. works from within the machine of national identity and reconstructs it to project the truth. F. gives the silent ghosts a voice from inside of the machine and thus brings truth into the ordinary eternal machinery—“history and memory have been transformed into a state of timelessness” (Scobie 115). A “New Jew” shouts, “Somebody’s making it!” (259), and thus the eternal act of identity translation is revealed to the modern Canadian consciousness. Because what is being projecting is

vastly different from the previous hegemonic unity—the truth is now projecting itself rather than being covered by a projection—in this moment F. reveals nationalism as an imagined community and thus the entire structure of the machine is transformed.

In his final speech, the folklorist says, “I will spread His name in Parliament. I will welcome his silence in pain.... Alone with my radio I lift up my hands. Welcome to you who read me today.... Welcome to you, darling and friend, who miss me forever in your trip to the end” (*Beautiful* 260). With these words Cohen’s imagined reconstruction of the Canadian nationalist machine is complete. The folklorist, as a figure of the written and constructed Canadian national identity after the Second World War, here not only acknowledges F.’s existence, but also vows to project his truth. Through spreading his name in the language of modern nationalism and broadcasting his voice through the cogs of the machine, the folklorist reconstructs the process and purpose of nationalism. No longer projecting a constructed concept of imagined community from a place of superiority onto citizens of a nation-space, the projection now comes from the truth within the space and projects out. The concept of nation is no longer a palimpsest of constant retranslations covering a multitude of ghosts, but rather a reflection of authentic existence that can then truly represent Canada as it is disseminated internationally.

In 1969, three years after the publication of *Beautiful Losers*, Cohen released an album titled *Songs from a Room*, which included the song “You Know Who I Am.” Reflecting the novel’s use of the abject, themes of destruction and rebirth, and interrogations of identity, “You Know Who I Am” sings the reconstruction of the Canadian nationalist machine in its very chorus:

*You know who I am  
You've stared at the sun  
I am the one who loves changing  
from nothing to one (Stranger Music 142)*

Like the effects of staring at the sun, the folklorist is guided to stare into the face of the cultural construct around him, which subsequently destroys this structure of identity consciousness. He is forced to rebuild this machine from the inside out in order to release the truth from beneath the palimpsest. The third line, “*I am the one who loves changing,*” echoes the chant of the First Nations uncle—“I change I am the same”—as he reiterates his position within the machine of constant identity translation. By describing a change from “*from nothing to one,*” Cohen captures in one line the entire narrative of *Beautiful Losers*. With the movement after the Second World War to rebrand Canada under a united symbolic identity that stood separate from the United States and Great Britain, Canada was redefined by an imagined community and a new layer in the nationalist palimpsest was pressed over the ghosts of those who resisted translation. However, F. defies becoming a ghost and disrupts the mechanized retranslation. He defends his existence within the nation-space and takes his case to the folklorist—the writer of cultural history—in order to reinstate himself into the national identity. He changes from nothing to one as his unique identity is rewritten and reintegrated into a national identity built upon truth and cultural diversity. The message of transforming national identity reaches past the bounds of this narrative. While the Canadian federal government was building this new ethnosymbolic identity, Cohen was becoming an international figure and thus an internationally recognized Canadian voice. Due to the success of the NFB documentary *Ladies and Gentlemen...Mr. Leonard Cohen*—both nationally and internationally in the same year that Cohen published *Beautiful Losers*—it is

safe to say that Cohen not only worked to redefine the concept of Canadian nationalism, but also did so within the arena of mass media after the Second World War. After Birney sought to help construct the foundation of culture in Canada and Webb began to question the question of identity, Cohen interrogated the act of construction itself and did so on a global stage—seeking to reveal the what Anderson called the imaginary, resurrect the ghosts, and reconstruct the truth as a modern Canadian folklorist.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

According to Benedict Anderson, “since World War II every successful revolution has defined itself in *national* terms,” which he states are grounded “firmly in a territorial and social space inherited from the prerevolutionary past” (2). This includes both liberalist societies and, as an instance of “*anomaly*,” Marxist societies (3). Fraught with challenges of “sub-ness,” or divisions within the unity of this concept, nation and nationality are “notoriously difficult to define” and, quoting Hugh Seton-Watson, Anderson writes “that no ‘scientific definition’ of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists” (3). While the nationalist movement in Canada after the Second World War was by no means a revolution in the traditional sense, it did seek to delineate the borders surrounding a citizenry, a culture, and a voice in order to project a united Canada to the global community. Revolting against the cultural influences from the United States primarily within the Cold War crossfire of nationalism, Canada’s cultural elite sought to fight back with their own nationalist message; however, before they could propagate this concept, they were forced to define it. They were pressed to define Canada and to subsequently create a unified voice—free of Anderson’s concept of “sub-ness”—for a space that was thought to be completely lacking in ghosts. This nationalism was a subjective construction, created by a select group from the Canadian culturati, in order to answer the impossible question, “who is Canada?”

In his novel *Down the Long Table*, Earle Birney writes of a man named Gordon who floats both literally and politically across the nationalist borders of the Cold War, trying to find himself—to define his identity—as a young Canadian Trotskyist, only to

begin to sink into a political apathy with age. In his radio drama *Damnation of Vancouver*, Birney presents a trial for the fate of one of Canada's largest cities in which various voices from the past and present are called forward and questioned as to their opinion on whether or not Vancouver should be destroyed. These two works, along with select poems such as the often-quoted "Can.Lit.," reflect a much larger struggle to define Canadian Nationalism-with-a-big-N, as it is described by Anderson. As the cultural elite was compelled by academia and government-funded programs and committees to outline an overarching image and voice of Canada within the political climate of the Cold War, writers such as Birney struggled to both discover a single point of reference for an entire nation-space and to create this single concept of nation without forgetting the pre-European history of Canada. Exploring this difficult endeavour on an individual level in *Down the Long Table* and on a broader cultural and historical scale in *Damnation of Vancouver*, Birney wrestles with the idea of a single acknowledged concept of nation—an all-encompassing voice—as he tries to answer the question "who is Canada?" However, ultimately in both narratives, Birney fails to create this entirely singular and yet unified voice for the nation. Gordon eventually leaves his personal and political aims behind and puts his faith in man and in "the power, however denied, to achieve the grandeur of the thinking beast, to hope and to imagine, to adventure into change, to create beauty and to share it, and in self-denial itself to assert the importance of...separate selves and the inconsequence of...mortality" (Birney 298). In *Damnation of Vancouver*, the Woman persuades the participants in the trial for Vancouver to postpone their decision until judgment day, forgetting the sentiments of the past in favour of a persistent march into the future—however aimless and undefined it may be. While Birney famously writes of a

lack of ghosts in Canada as the nation grappled with self-definition, when faced with the question “who is Canada?”, he is unable to reply for the entirety of the nation and rather gives his answer by putting his faith in the force of humanity at present, turning a blind eye to the citizens of the past, and leaving the future responsible for the creation of Canadian ghosts. Though in *Damnation of Vancouver* the First Nations chief is questioned as to his opinion of the future of a city that rests on the land that used to belong to him, ultimately his voice is ignored as he is dematerialized and sent back into the forgotten silence of the past. In *Down the Long Table*, Francophone and First Nations’ voices are never heard. The question of a distinct Canadian nationalism is answered very loosely and superficially as the ghosts are ignored and the future is left to fend for itself.

Phyllis Webb does not begin to attempt an answer to this immense question, but rather turns her focus to the very act of asking—to the purpose and mechanics of the question. In her radio essay, “The Question as an Instrument of Torture,” Webb opens by asking, “[S]ince all mysteries finally take shape in the form of questions, I must ask why...has so little attention been paid to the role of the question?” (31). In the midst of the Cold War in which nations were in an almost purely ideological conflict of political and cultural identity, Webb moved the focus away from the importance of “who is Canada?” and instead chose to examine the question itself and the reason for its existence. She deconstructs the role of the question as she moves through the different forms of the interrogative and investigates the existence of the question in human society. Noting its ability to conceal and reveal, divide and rule (33), she then likens the question to the act of judgment, trial, and inquisition for the sake of position and god-like power in a group, but also within the individual. She quotes Heidegger’s *What is*

*Philosophy?* to illuminate the link between the act of questioning and the relationship between the one who asks and that which is being questioned. The interrogation begins when the nature of that which is in question becomes ambiguous and the connection to it is subsequently broken. During the era of Canadian nationalist identity construction, the resonating effects the Second World War along with the current Cold War cultural crossfire did just this—it broke down the apparent stability of the Canadian nationalist consciousness and led to this era of self-questioning. Through her study of the question, along with a selection of her more political poetry, Webb moves this analysis of Canadian nationalism past the study of the attempts to form a definitive and all-encompassing answer and brings emphasis to Canada’s reasoning for self-interrogation. Taking this step back, we begin to see beyond the Anglo-European frame of view and the idea of a singular nationalism is consequently and irrevocably broken.

Cohen tackles this idea of questions and answers surrounding nation and national identity—as a creation of the human imagination—in his novel *Beautiful Losers*. Just as Benedict Anderson traces the roots of nationalist construction back to the Age of Enlightenment and the influences of print-capitalism on the codification of vernaculars, Cohen reveals the mechanical system of identity and nationalism as it was constructed in Canada—not in place of missing ghosts, but as a constant redefinition, creating a palimpsest that covered an entire history of ghosts one layer—one translation—at a time. Cohen brings these ghosts—these fragments destroyed by translation—back to the surface of modernity and thus uncovers the construction process of the palimpsest of Canadian nationalism. He reveals the newest nationalist revolutions and retranslations of the 1960s as simply another one of Anderson’s “imagined communities” that exists as a

purely ideological construct surrounding a nation-space. Cohen tests the limits of “imagined communities” and attempts to create a place for truth in identity—beyond revolution and constructed nationalism—in modern Canadian society. He takes Webb’s deconstructed question of identity and uses it to lay bare the forgotten layers of nationalism that were lost under the uncertainty of an era.

With the analysis of Cohen’s novel, this thesis comes full circle in a retort to Birney’s original statement in the poem “Can.Lit.” that “it’s only by our lack of ghosts / we’re haunted.” Webb revisits this question of identity and because of this Cohen is able to respond to Birney that yes, indeed, there are ghosts who fill the entire Canadian nation-space and that the Canadian cultural elite should revisit their constructed representation of the Canadian voice. After the effects of the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission and during the Quiet Revolution, Quebec was both reconstructing and reaffirming its identity, English Canada was redefining its position both inside and outside of the national borders, and because of Expo ’67, these distinct cultures were brought together to present a unified Canadian nationalism to the world. As Erin Hurley points out, “Quebec-as-nation [within a nation] had to be constructed because it had no political reality...[and its] francophone inhabitants’ identification was linguistic, rather than territorial or statist” (33) before 1960 and the movement from generally self-identifying as French-Canadian to the more specific Quebecois. In the same light, English Canada was also symbolically reconstructing its nation during this time as a postcolonial space while also trying to avoid neocolonialism. Just as two islands were literally constructed for Expo ’67 (Hurley 36), representations of the bilingual nation of Canada were being built to be shown on a world stage. However, it took much

longer for Canadian nationalism to begin to truly include the culture and voice of the First Nations as this is currently still a constant struggle.

The analysis of the formation and purpose of Canadian identity—as a response to political pressures, as a complex and understudied question, and as a palimpsest of construction over layers of ghosts—continues today in the works of Canadian writers such as Gail Scott in her work *The Obituary*. In his definition of nationalism, Anderson raises three paradoxes: the “modernity of the nation to the historian’s eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists.... The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept.... [And t]he ‘political’ power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence” (5). During the Cold War era, with its fundamental ideological conflicts between nations, Canada was thrown into the competition to define and defend itself against outside influence and was thus thrust into all three of Anderson’s points of paradox. Canadian space had always existed, and yet the concept of its existence as a nation in its current state was (and is) relatively recent. Most who were born in the Canadian nation-space automatically self-defined as Canadian—whether or not this was recognized legally before 1977—but what did this truly represent for such an immense and diverse population? And finally, what gives the Canadian nation its importance and authority? After Birney worked to answer the question of Canadian nationalism, Webb deconstructed the question itself, and Cohen redefined the very structure of the answer, we begin to work within Anderson’s set of paradoxes in order to see the question “who is Canada?” in an entirely new light.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.  
2nd ed. London: Verso, 2006. Print.
- Apter, Emily. *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*. Princeton: Princeton UP,  
2006. Print.
- Aquin, Hubert. *Prochain épisode*. Ottawa: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1965. Print.
- “A Short History of NATO” *nato.int*. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, n.d. Web. 30  
June 2012.
- Atwood, Margaret. *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge  
UP, 2002. Print.
- Berland, Jody. “Nationalism and the Modernist Legacy: Dialogues with Innis.” *Capital  
Culture: A Reader on Modernist Legacies, State Institutions, and the Value(s) of Art*. Ed.  
Jody Berland and Shelly Hornstein. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2000. 14-38.  
Print.
- Birney, Earle. “Can.Lit.” *Ghost in the Wheels: Selected Poems*. Toronto: McClelland and  
Stewart, 1977. 49. Print.
- . *Down the Long Table*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1955. Print.
- . “List of My Correspondents about 1955.” Earle Birney Fonds, MS.Coll.13, 7.22,  
Special Collections Division, University of Calgary Library.
- Boberg, Charles. *The English Language in Canada: Status, History and Comparative Analysis*.  
Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. Print.

- Boire, Gary. "Canadian (Tw)ink: Surviving the White-Outs." *Unbomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism*. Ed. Cynthia Sugars. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2004. 221-34. Print.
- Boyle, Andrew. *Only the Wind Will Listen: Reith of the BBC*. London: Hutchinson, 1972. Print.
- Brydon, Diana. "Canada and Postcolonialism: Questions, Inventories, and Futures." *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature*. Ed. Laura Moss. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2003. 49-77. Print.
- Butling, Pauline. "Phyllis Webb as Public Intellectual." *Wider Boundaries of Daring: The Modernist Impulse in Canadian Women's Poetry*. Ed. Di Brandt and Barbara Godard. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2009. 237-52. Print.
- . *Seeing in the Dark: The Poetry of Phyllis Webb*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1997. Print.
- Canada. Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters & Sciences. *Report 1949-1951*. Ottawa: GPO, 1951. Web. 25 Oct. 2011.
- Cameron, Elspeth. *Earle Birney: A Life*. Toronto: Penguin, 1994. Print.
- Carr, Brenda. "Genre Theory and the Impasse of Lyric? Reframing the Questions in Phyllis Webb's Lyric Sequences." *West Coast Line* 25.3 (1991): 67-79. Print.
- Carson, Anne. "Translator's Forward: Screaming in Translation." *Electra*. Trans. Anne Carson. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. Print.
- . "Variation on the Right to be Untranslatable." Cyril J. Byrne Memorial Lecture. Saint Mary's University, Halifax, NS, 16 March 2012.
- Champion, C.P. *The Strange Demise of British Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2010. Print.

- Christian, William. "Was George Grant a Red Tory?" *Athens and Jerusalem: George Grant's Theology, Philosophy, and Politics*. Ed. Ian Angus, Ron Dart, and Randy Peg Peters. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2006. 39-61. Print.
- Cohen, Leonard. *Beautiful Losers*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966. Print.
- . Interview. With Adrienne Clarkson. *Take 30*. CBC Digital Archives. CBC, Toronto. 23 May 1966. Web. 16 May 2012.
- . *Stranger Music: Selected Poems and Songs*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993. Print.
- Collis, Stephen. *Phyllis Webb and the Common Good: Poetry/Anarchy/Abstraction*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2007. Print.
- Couture, Claude. *Paddling with the Current: Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Étienne Parent, Liberalism, and Nationalism in Canada*. Trans. Vivien Bosley. Edmonton: U of Alberta P, 1998. Print.
- "Cumulative List of Winners of the Governor General's Literary Awards." *Governor General's Literary Awards*. Canada Council for the Arts. n.d. Web. 9 Aug. 2012.
- Davey, Frank. "Beautiful Losers: Leonard Cohen's Postcolonial Novel." *Intricate Preparations: Writing Leonard Cohen*. Ed. Stephen Scobie. Toronto: ECW, 2000. 12-23. Print.
- Djwa, Sandra. "A Developing Tradition." *Perspectives on Earle Birney*. Downsview, ON: ECW, 1981. 32-52. Print.
- Dudek, Louis and Michael Gnarowski, ed. *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada: Essential Articles on Contemporary Canadian Poetry in English*. Toronto: Ryerson, 1967. Print.
- Duffy, Dennis. "Beautiful Beginners." *Leonard Cohen: The Artist and His Critics*. Ed. Michael Gnarowski. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976. 29-31. Print.

- Findlay, Len. "Is Canada a Postcolonial Country?" *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature*. Ed. Laura Moss. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2003. 297-99. Print.
- Fink, Howard. "Earle Birney's Radio Dramas." *Perspectives on Earle Birney*. Downsview, ON: ECW, 1981. 53-72. Print.
- Finnie, Andrew K. "History." *Radio Canada International*. Radio Canada International, 1996. Web. 28 Nov. 2011.
- Friskney, Janet B. *New Canadian Library: The Ross-McClelland Years, 1952-1978*. Toronto: Toronto UP, 2007. Print.
- Frye, Northrop. "Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada." *Literary History of Canada*. Ed. Carl F. Klinck. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1945. 213-51. Print.
- Gnarowski, Michael. "Introduction." *Leonard Cohen: The Artist and His Critics*. Ed. Michael Gnarowski. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1976. 1-10. Print.
- Godard, Barbara. "Writing from the Border: Gail Scott on 'The Main.'" *Gail Scott: Essays on her Works*. Ed. Lianne Moyes. Toronto: Guernica, 2002. 117-141. Print.
- Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Print.
- "Government of Canada Apologizes for Relocation of Inuit Families to the High Arctic." 15 Sept. 2010. *Media Room*. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. 18 Aug. 2010. Web. 16 May 2012.
- Granastein, J.L. "Canadian Forum." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historia-Dominion Institute. n.d. Web. 28 Nov. 2011.

- Grant, George. *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965. Print.
- Heidegger, Martin. *What is Philosophy?* Trans. William Kluback and Jean T. Wilde. London: Vision, 1956. Print.
- Horowitz, Gad. "Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 32:2 (1966): 143-71. Print.
- Hulcoop, John F. *Phyllis Webb and Her Works*. Toronto: ECW Press, 1991. Print.
- Hurley, Erin. *National Performance: Representing Quebec from Expo 67 to Celine Dion*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2011. Print.
- Igartua, José E. *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945-71*. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 2006. Print.
- Irvine, Dean. "Dialectical Modernisms: Postcoloniality and Diasperal in A.M. Klein." *Modernism/modernity* 18.3 (2011): 597-615. Print.
- . "Introduction." *The Canadian Modernists Meet*. Ed. Dean Irvine. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2005. 1-13. Print.
- Kambourelli, Smaro. "'Seeking Shape. Seeking Meaning': An Interview with Phyllis Webb." *West Coast Line* 25.3 (1991): 21-41. Print.
- Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- Knight, Lorna. "'With all best wishes, high hopes and thanks': Phyllis Webb, Canadian Poetry, and Publishing in the Early 1950s." *West Coast Line* 25.3 (1991): 43-53. Print.
- Kristeva, Julia. "Approaching Abjection." *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP. 1982. 1-31. Print.

- Lambertson, Ross. "The Black, Brown, White and Red Blues: The Beating of Clarence Clemons." *Canadian Historical Review* 85.4 (2004): 755-76. Print.
- Laurendeau, André. "Is There a Crisis of Nationalism?" *French Canadian Nationalism: An Anthology*. Ed. Ramsay Cook. Toronto: Macmillan, 1969. 257-70. Print.
- Lehman, Milton. "We Must Sell America Abroad." *Saturday Evening Post*, November 15, 1947. 26. Print.
- Litt, Paul. *The Muses, The Masses, and the Massey Commission*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992. Print.
- Lipset, S.M. *Agrarian Socialism – The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan: A Study in Political Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950. Print.
- Low, Wailan. "Earle Birney: Biography." *Canadian Poetry Online*. University of Toronto Libraries. 2000. Web. 17 Jan. 2012.
- McMahon, Patricia I. *Essence of Indecision: Diefenbaker's Nuclear Policy, 1957-1963*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2009. Print.
- McLeod, Les. "Irony and Affirmation in the Poetry of Earle Birney." *Perspectives on Earle Birney*. Downsview, ON: ECW, 1981. 130-57. Print.
- Miki, Roy, ed. "Phyllis Webb: A Brief Chronology." *West Coast Line* 25.3 (1991): 12-13. Print.
- Miller, Mary Jane. "Introduction." *Turn Up the Contrast*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987. 3-19. Print.
- Mojsov, Bojana. *Osiris: Death and Afterlife of a God*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. Print.

- Morley, Patricia. "The Young Turks: A Biographer's Comment." *Canadian Poetry* 11.1 (1982): 67-72. Print.
- . *The Immoral Moralists: Hugh MacLennan and Leonard Cohen*. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1972. Print.
- Morton, Desmond. *A Short History of Canada*. 6th ed. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 2006. Print.
- . *Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Labour Movement*. 4th ed. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1998. Print.
- Moss, Laura. "Is Canada Postcolonial? Introducing the Question." *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature*. Ed. Laura Moss. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2003. 1-26. Print.
- Munton, Anne. "Excerpt from an Interview with Phyllis." *West Coast Line* 25.3 (1991): 81-85. Print.
- Nadel, Ira B. *Various Positions: A Life of Leonard Cohen*. Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1996. Print.
- National Film Board of Canada. *Annual Report: 1966-1967*. Ottawa: National Film Board of Canada, 1967. Print.
- Nesbitt, Bruce. "The Political Prose of Earle Birney: Trotsky and the 1930s." *Perspectives on Earle Birney*. Downsview, ON: ECW, 1981. 174-83. Print.
- Niranjana, Tejaswini. *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. Print.
- Ondaatje, Michael. *Leonard Cohen*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970. Print.

- “Order of Canada: Leonard Cohen, C.C., G.O.C., B.A., LL.D.” *Order of Canada*. The Governor General of Canada. n.d. Web. 16 May 2012.
- Ostry, Bernard. “The Survival of Canada through Broadcasting.” *Visions of Canada: The Alan B. Plaunt Memorial Lectures, 1958-1992*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2004. 551-64. Print.
- “PM Cites ‘Sad Chapter’ in Apology for Resident Schools.” *CBC News*. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. 11 June 2008. Web. 16 May 2012.
- Potvin, Liza. “Phyllis Webb: The Voice that Breaks.” *Canadian Poetry* 32 (1993): n. pag. Web. 1 May 2012.
- Reynolds, Anthony. *Leonard Cohen: A Remarkable Life*. London: Omnibus, 2010. Print.
- Robinson, Douglas. *Translation and Empire: Postcolonial Theories Explained*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1997. Print.
- Scobie, Stephen. *Leonard Cohen*. Vancouver: Douglass and McIntyre, 1978. Print.
- . “Leonard Cohen, Phyllis Webb, and the End(s) of Modernism.” *Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value*. Ed. Robert Leckler. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1991. 57-70. Print.
- . “Magic, Not Magicians.” *Leonard Cohen: The Artist and His Critics*. Ed. Michael Gnarowski. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976. 106-10. Print.
- Scott, Gail. *Spaces Like Stairs: Essays by Gail Scott*. Toronto: Women’s, 1989. Print.
- Simon, Sherry. *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2006. Print.
- Slade, Arthur. *John Diefenbaker: An Appointment with Destiny*. Montreal: XYZ, 2001. Print.

- Slemon, Stephen. "Afterword." *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature*. Ed. Laura Moss. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2003. 318-24. Print.
- Smart, Patricia. "Hubert Aquin." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica-Dominion Institute. 2012. Web. 1 Aug. 2012.
- Smith, Anthony D. *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*. Cambridge: Polity, 2001. Print.
- . *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.
- Sugars, Cynthia and Gerry Turcotte. "Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic." *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic*. Ed. Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2009. vii-xxvi. Print.
- "The Art of Ideas." *Ideas*. CBC. CBLA-FM, Toronto. 12 May 2011. Radio.
- "The Early Years: 1920-1939." *History of CBC/Radio-Canada and Canadian Public Broadcasting*. CBC/Radio-Canada. n.d. Web. 28 Nov. 2011.
- Thesen, Sharon. "Phyllis Webb." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica-Dominion Institute. 2012. Web. 8 Feb. 2012.
- Trudeau, Pierre Elliot. *Federalism and the French Canadians*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1968. Print.
- Van Herk, Aritha. "And Silence is Also a Nakedness (an inter-text to *Naked Poems*)." *West Coast Line* 25.3 (1991): 175-84. Print.
- Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- Webb, Phyllis. "Notes to the Poems." *Wilson's Bowl*. Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1980. 87-89. Print

- . "Phyllis Webb's Canada." *Nothing But Brush Strokes: Selected Prose*. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1995. 105-110. Print.
- . "Script for Readings from 'The Kropotkin Poems' for *Anthology*." *West Coast Line* 25.3 (1991): 101-102. Print.
- . *Selected Poems, 1954-1965*. Ed. John Hulcoop. Vancouver: Talon Books, 1971. Print.
- . "The Question as an Instrument of Torture." *Talking*. Montreal: Quadrant, 1982. 31-45. Print.
- . *Wilson's Bowl*. Toronto: Coach House, 1980. Print.
- Whitaker, Reg and Steve Hewitt. *Canada and the Cold War*. Toronto: James Lorimer, Publishers, 2003. Print.
- Woodcock, George. "The Song of the Sirens: Reflections on Leonard Cohen." *Leonard Cohen: The Artist and His Critics*. Ed. Michael Gnarowski. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1976. 150-167. Print.
- . "The Wanderer: Notes on Earle Birney." *Perspectives on Earle Birney*. Downsview, ON: ECW, 1981. 85-103. Print.
- Young, Margaret. Government of Canada Publications. Law and Government Division. *Canadian Citizenship Act and Current Issues*. Ottawa: PDS, 1998. Print.
- "1892-1999 Honorary Degree Recipients." *Convocation*. Dalhousie University, n.d. Web. 25 July 2012.