“You Can’t Get There From Here”:
Small-Town Ontario, Nostalgia, and Urban Memory
in Works of Selected Ontario Writers

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the role of memory in the construction of small-town Ontario in the work of a number of Ontario writers. After an initial overview of the vexed position the small town holds in Canadian and Ontarian cultural discourse, this dissertation then examines the role of distance - temporal, spatial, and cultural - in memorial reconstructions of small-town pasts, and claims that this distance is essential to nostalgic visions of the small town. This dissertation does not discuss the small town as merely an idyll or anti-idyll, but analyzes the effect of something Leo Marx calls the “pastoral design,” defined as the “larger structure of thought and feeling of which the ideal is a part” (24). The effect of this structure is most apparent in Stephen Leacock’s Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town, and this dissertation argues that Leacock’s Mariposa is the product of melancholics daydreaming of a better small-town past in order to soothe their contemporary urban anomie; by ironically playing with the temporal distance responsible for Mariposa’s “kinder, gentler” ethos, however, Leacock reveals the decidedly ambivalent effect the urban sphere has on its own nostalgic image. Chapter Three examines Sunshine Sketches’ influence on Deptford in Robertson Davies’ Fifth Business; Deptford is at once an acknowledgement of, and departure from, Leacock’s Mariposa. The unstable portrayal of the town suggests that Deptford is no complement to an urban sphere, but is shaped by the same processes of modernity affecting the city. In Chapter Four the dissertation discusses Alice Munro’s Lives of Girls and Women, specifically how narrator Del Jordan collapses the distance between her present and past, and how Munro’s text undermines the values attendant to rural and urban space. Finally, Chapter Five identifies the presence of a rural-urban binary in two texts by Jane Urquhart. For Urquhart’s characters, the small-town past is a solemn object of loss, but is
ultimately a construct that can only be a reflection of the mourning or remembering self.

This dissertation reads these small-town narratives as sophisticated statements on the role of urbanization in memories of a personal and social past, and on the vexed position of the rural and local in an increasingly cosmopolitan world.
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Chapter One

Projecting Difference: Small-Town Ontario and the Urban Experience in Leacock, Davies, Munro, and Urquhart

The small-town setting is an undeniably common feature in Canadian literature and has become emblematic of a national literary canon. For some critics this setting evokes a national experience, while for others it symptomizes a national atavism. The small town has often been read as a figure representative of an amiable cultural identity, particularly those towns set in Ontario and in texts by Stephen Leacock and Robertson Davies. The proliferation, variety, and regional distinction of small-town narratives demand that they not be dismissed as indicators of colonial anxiety, parochialism, or a fixation on the past. Far from simply offering nostalgic visions of a better bygone era, small-town narratives, including those by Leacock and Davies, offer complex depictions of memory’s role in processes of identity formation, and of the imagined divide separating rural and urban experience. This dissertation reads a number of small-town narratives as sophisticated statements on the role of urbanization in the imaginative shaping of a personal and social past, and the vexed position of the rural and local in an increasingly cosmopolitan world.

The small town is an integral part of both social and literary history, and its role in continental expansion in the nineteenth century helps to explain its presence in Canadian and American literature. Geographers refer to it as the “‘basic building’ block of our settlement system models” (Hodge qtd. in Everitt and Gill 252), and its relation to an “earlier social condition” leads critics such as Northrop Frye to read the small-town literary setting as a feature of the pastoral myth (Frye “Conclusion” 238-239). Michael
Bunce discusses the small town’s “prevailing” cultural image as one part of a North American lifestyle ideal, while Anthony Hilfer’s comments suggest that the small-town myth is continental, as the allure of the American small town involves a “myth of community,” a type of surrogate for the agrarian ideal (7). The fascination of the North-American small town lies in its associated “desirable way of life” (Bunce 36), and Bunce singles out Ontario’s characteristically settled landscape as particularly accommodating of this notion (36).

In his discussion of small-town Ontario in literature, W.J. Keith provides a definition of the small town that does not rely on figures of population, but on the aura of cohesiveness that rests at the heart of its appeal: “small town’ means any cohesive, distinctive, yet relatively compact human community” (148). Hilfer, similarly, provides a definition based on “emotional and attitudinal terms […] the small town is where people know each other as opposed to the faceless metropolis” (6). Its knowable limits suggest that the small town is an intimate space within which one can feel kinship with one’s neighbours and the community as a whole. Raymond Williams’ discussion of rural village life alludes to its association with authenticity: “it is still often said […] that a country community, most typically a village, is an epitome of direct relationships: of face-to-face contacts within which we can find and value the real substance of personal relationships” (165). Although the British village concerns Williams, his characterization nicely encapsulates the larger myth of the small town as the organic community, as a
place dominated by natural virtue, familiarity, and, most importantly, as a part of a rural
sphere that provides a stark contrast to urban life.¹

However, the idyllic myth of the small town is only one side of a more
comprehensive reputation. Depictions of the small town are often patterned on a larger
dichotomy of contrary yet complementary associative values that imaginatively and
ambivalently shape the rural and urban spheres in literature. Williams’ landmark study,
*The Country and the City,* distills the classic rural and urban associations. He says of the
country that it “has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and
simple virtue [but also] of backwardness, ignorance, limitation” (1). The city, on the
other hand, “has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication,
light [but also] of noise, worldliness and ambition” (1). The rural sphere can be both an
idyll and an anti-idyll, and Williams’ delineation reverberates through W.H. New’s
“city/non-city binary,” a dichotomy he places at the heart of a Canadian political and
cultural “dynamic.” The city can represent “wealth, power, noise, violence,” but also “the
acquisition of new values and sophistication” (*Land Sliding* 156). The “non-city binary,”

¹ Certain authors, such as Alice Munro and James Reaney, make a distinction between
the rural and the small town, between farmers and townsfolk, through their intimate
knowledge of differences in behaviour and education. This dissertation conflates rural
and small town into one non-urban polarity because it is more concerned with a structural
relationship between the urban sphere and its imagined antithesis, often a conglomerate
non-urban polarity. The distinction between rural and small town is a hard one to make.
While Munro and Reaney make it in terms of class markers, sociological studies make
the urban/town/rural distinction based on population figures, which suffer from the
appearance of arbitrariness (see the fluctuating population-based definitions provided in
Hilfer 5, Everitt and Gill 252-253, Dasgupta 183). This study appreciates Keith’s
definition of the small town as a “cohesive, distinctive, yet relatively compact human
community” (148) because it allows the conceptual boundaries of the small town to
encompass both townsfolk and farmer, not only because the small town is a service
centre for these farmers, but also because farmers are a distinct, though often patronized,
part of that human community. My usage of “rural,” therefore, refers to both the town
proper and to its spatially and socially marginal residents.
a category in which he includes the small town along with “farms, rural communities […] and] sometimes extends only gesturally into ‘wilderness,’” commonly reflects “old values, family, purity, peace, stability […] but also ethical and aesthetic stasis, an uninformed literalism, and a naïve willingness to accept facile political truisms” (156).

The literary small town is part of a critical binary involving the imagined contrast of country and city, which are separated not only by space, but also by vastly different experiences - social, cultural, and environmental - that appear as inherent conditions of each polarized site. As literary tropes, neither country nor city can exist without the other, and each has a part in the conceptual formation of its alternative.2

While a majority of Ontarians, at one time, did inhabit farms and small towns, most no longer hail from places such as Orillia, Thamesville, Formosa, and Wingham; yet their literary counterparts found in Mariposa, Deptford, Shoneval, and Jubilee speak to the evocative, influential place small-town Ontario holds in a literary canon and a cultural imaginary. The first three of these literary towns are distinct products of the contrast between rural and urban associations, and the texts in which they appear postulate a discernible divide between small-town life and that of the urban sphere; in each, the rural and urban spheres constitute antitypes. While in Leacock’s Mariposa, from *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, and Davies’ Deptford, from *Fifth Business*, a destabilizing irony accompanies the contrast of rural and urban life, the most recent depiction of small-town Ontario studied here, *The Stone Carvers* by Jane Urquhart, presents rural and urban life as a sincere binary; life in Shoneval is corrupted by a

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2 Bunce makes a similar point in arguing that “pro-countryside sentiment,” which incorporates the aesthetic and social qualities that inform conventional notions of the rural sphere, is the product of the processes of urbanization and industrialism (Chpt. 1).
technological modernity, which degrades the town’s basis for uniqueness, its pre-modern traditions and cultural unity. Because they exist in opposition to an urban sphere, Mariposa, Deptford, and Shoneval possess experiential and cultural limits that demarcate their very rural-ness. The exception is Alice Munro’s Jubilee from *Lives of Girls and Women*. The town possesses no readily discernible urban contrast, and, as such, life in Jubilee is complex, varied, multivalent: in other words, not easily abstracted nor enclosed by conventional rural associations.

This dissertation argues that the contrast between rural and urban life in these texts is the product of urban narrators who reconstruct small-town Ontario from an urban space and time. However, to suggest that these urban narrators are simply nostalgic for a rural past would not acknowledge that very rarely do they posit an uncomplicated social ideal within their versions of the small town. Mariposa, for instance, a town consistently contrasted with its nameless urban counterpart and cited by numerous critics as an image of the Canadian past *par excellence*, neither functions nor fails to function as an ideal, but circumnavigates one through the narrator’s unrelenting irony. Mariposa can be read in the light of Leo Marx’s “complex pastoral,” a subgenre of the pastoral that “manage[s] to qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony to a green pasture” (25). Identifying Mariposa as an example of a “complex pastoral” thus raises questions about why and how it is constructed as such; what ‘malaise of modernity’ does Mariposa soothe for those wealthy club men deep in the heart of the city, and what are the ramifications of the town’s eventual dissolution in the final chapter? This dissertation is not so much concerned with discussing the type of idyll or anti-idyll represented in individual small-town texts as it is in examining something
Marx identifies as the “pastoral design,” which he defines as the “larger structure of thought and feeling of which the ideal is a part” (24). What does the narrator “feel” about his or her present condition, and how does his or her reconstruction of small-town Ontario address or reflect it?

At first glance, Mariposa constitutes a small-town ideal that provides a direct contrast to its urban counterpart. The image of the town, however, dissolves and is revealed to be a construction of those in the corresponding city; it exists only across an impenetrable temporal-spatial gap from the urban centre, and the text ends with the melancholic club men’s unresolved longing for a now absent small-town past. The “memories” ostensibly responsible for Mariposa are, in fact, projections from an urban sphere onto a time and place distant enough to maintain the desired fantasy. The degree of distance - spatial, temporal, and cultural - between the narrator and his or her subject plays a crucial role in establishing the particular nature of small-town Ontario, not only in its most influential manifestation, Mariposa, but also in Deptford, Jubilee, and Shoneval. This dissertation examines how narrative distance accommodates the aestheticization of a small-town Ontario experience, as well as how and why various forms of an urban modernity and alienation prompt a narrator to construct a small-town past as something essentially different, often something essentially better. The myth of small-town Ontario can only be maintained across a distance. It is the product not simply of a narrator’s rural memories, but also of the dominance of an urban modernity that entices a narrator to construct its conceptual alternative.
The small town’s place in Canadian literary criticism is largely composed of two competing strains of discourse: one discusses the small town’s critical place in Canadian identity and society; the other, which is largely a response to the first, questions the link made between small-town literature and cultural identity. Some critics see small-town texts as documentaries of a national past, while others argue that the small town has a role in maintaining a fantasy of that past. To some extent, this debate is conducted according to the language of the cultural idyll and anti-idyll, but rarely has the tenor of this debate in Canada reached the same pitch as that in the United States, where there are clear lineages of idyllic and anti-idyllic small-town literature. Far more prevalent in Canada is the debate over the small town’s importance to a Canadian identity, a status contemporary cultural commentators reject in their lamentations over the dearth of urban representations in Canadian literature. Academic critics, meanwhile, suggest that it is now time to shift the focus away from the “Canadian” small town and scrutinize the possible regional variants.

In 1953, Hugh MacLennan observed that post-war Canada “is still a nation of small towns” (181) because a “small-town psychology” (181) still guided public consciousness in the increasingly urban society. The most significant aspect of this psychology, MacLennan points out, is an intimacy with human nature, which, he adds, assists in the production of great works of art: “Halifax or Peterborough has a better chance of producing a Balzac than London or New York” (177-178). Just as New and Williams elucidate the duplicitous rural and urban associative values, MacLennan

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3 Hilfer argues that until the turn of the twentieth century American small-town literature largely supported the myth, while after the turn of the century writers began to take a more critical look at the small town.
identifies an inherent dualism in the “small-town psychology”; while it is distinctly tolerant of difference and humanist in outlook, it can also germinate intense modesty and fear of gossip (181). The notion of an active cultural influence of a small-town past reverberates through the criticism of subsequent decades. More recently, Keith provides an explanation, of sorts, as to why the small town may carry national significance: “A small town […] is made up of a series of loose confederations that maintain a reasonable but sometimes strained coexistence. This may explain why, in Canada, it comes close to qualifying as a national symbol” (151).

During the 1960s and 1970s, the small town flourished as the subject of critical studies, and a number of M.A. theses from this era explore its cultural and literary legacy. Verna Reid (1972) and Cheryl Joanne Hall (1979) both view the small town in Canadian literature as a figure representing a retreat from modern urban society. Reid regards much of small-town fiction as “tinged with a nostalgic mood, and the small town is seen as a symbol of home and, therefore, an ideal environment” (Reid 2). Both Hall and Reid remark on the tendency of Canadians to see the small town as a grounding legacy that is invoked during times of alienation (Reid 4, Hall 26). Reid reiterates this point in an essay entitled “The Small Town in Canadian Fiction” in which she suggests that the small town “contains […] a key to self-understanding, and like Mariposa, it is invested with the aura of innocence that clings to an earlier and seemingly better world” (181). Monica Warr (1976) sees potential for national unity in the small-town figure, as all regions of the country, both French and English, can locate a common identity in a small-town past; therefore, Warr suggests that the potential for an elusive national solidarity rests on this aspect of common history (96). Ines Balciunas (1968) focuses exclusively on small-town
Ontario and concludes that its depictions range from the nostalgic, to the realistic, and to the critical. By affirming that there is no concurrence on “its nature and role” (100), Balciunas contradicts a problematic simplification that he says allows other writers to speak of “small-town Ontario” as if that phrase denotes a consistent tract of associations.

More established critics, such as Clara Thomas, lend approbation to the suggestion that the small town serves as an icon of a common past. Thomas argues that a certain type of fictional town is emblematic of a Canadian cultural identity; these towns adhere to neither the pastoral nor anti-pastoral tradition, but rather “soar beyond the boundaries of literary convention” (“The Town” 212) by providing readers with a historically authoritative view in which “we can recognize the truth of the past which is in them” (212). “[F]or so many of us,” Thomas states, “a town was the point of departure into a wider and more sophisticated world” (211). Particularly representative texts, she says, provide a window onto a time when English Canada possessed a stable and unambiguous identity rooted in the small town (219). On the other hand, the American small-town tradition, she argues, is dominated by the anti-idyll. It is within this lineage that Thomas places W.O. Mitchell’s Crocus, Sinclair Ross’s Horizon, Margaret Laurence’s Manawaka, and Davies’ Salterton. These “progeny” of the American tradition are “metaphors for loss, loneliness, constraint and hypocrisy,” themes that have become “clichéd” when explored through the lens of the small town (212). The exemplary Canadian towns, on the other hand, are places in which “we can move, and even grow, within their circumferences” (212).

These are Elgin from Sara Jeannette Duncan’s *The Imperialist*, Mariposa from Leacock’s *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, Deptford from Davies’s *Fifth Business*, and George Elliott’s unnamed town from *The Kissing Man*. 
David Cook supports Thomas’ characterization of an American literary tradition, as he argues that the “romantic ideal” of nineteenth-century literature, in which “the small town [was portrayed] as a desirable place to live” (vii), gradually succumbed to a reevaluation through which it became a symbol of stagnation, entrapment, and defeat (vii). Similarly, Hilfer argues that at one time the small-town myth, the town as the ‘great good place,’ dominated American writers’ attitudes, but a “revolt from the village” (3) occurred in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century led by writers such as Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis. Lewis’ Main Street was particularly influential in changing Americans’ understanding of the values represented by the small town (Miller 432). Keith makes a similar claim for Mariposa, calling the town “the epitome of the Ontarian (and Canadian) small town in the popular imagination” (155). Yet far from making a critical, unforgiving examination, Leacock renders a decidedly forgiving, eminently humane narrative. Where Lewis sees constriction, conformity, and ugliness, Leacock appears to perceive a kinder alternative to modern urban life. Even his satiric jabs are part of “a larger and more inclusive understanding, one which lightly (and often unexpectedly) reveals the sublime or noble in the midst of imperfection” (MacDonald “Measuring” 102).

There is hardly critical consensus on the literary towns that Thomas identifies. Linda Hutcheon alleges that during the 1970s, “most frequently and most powerfully, the

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5 Arthur Vidich and Joseph Bensman document the survival of the ideal in American small-town residents’ self-perception in the mid-twentieth century. They are distinguished from urbanites, residents say, by their proximity to “nature and the soil,” their inherent “genuineness” and sociability, and their access to those wholesome “rural virtues” that provide a good life (30-46). Vidich and Bensman argue that much of this self-perception is fallacious, even hypocritical, and that the local culture of small towns in modern society is rarely “historically indigenous,” but rather dominated by “contemporary mass society” (87).
small town in Canadian fiction came to represent a limited and limiting society from which protagonists yearned to escape” (*Canadian Postmodern* 197). Hutcheon’s comments imply that Canada’s own “revolt from the village” occurred much later than it did in America. She also places Davies’ Deptford trilogy securely under this critical umbrella, a stark contrast to Thomas’s kinder appraisal. Hutcheon’s assertion follows a conventional interpretation that reads the small town either as an idyll or an anti-idyll, a place of stability or a place of constriction. In doing so, she delimits the potential for novel or unconventional interpretations. Williams warns against this type of easy identification of convention in rural literature, since, when “looked at in their own terms,” rural texts reveal “quite different values [that] are being brought to question” (12). The “small-town myth” and the “village revolt,” or the idyll and the anti-idyll, are critical precepts that encourage a particular mode of reading, and they provide conventional methods of analyzing small-town texts, methods that have preexisting conclusions on the role and the function of the small town.

Thomas claims that the four exemplary small towns transcend the binary of the “naïve pastoral” and the anti-idyll (212), but she does not note that all four are set in Ontario; she unintentionally raises the spectre of regional difference in an argument maintaining the towns’ national significance. Staunch localist James Reaney insists that Ontario has a culture distinct from other regions, and he maintains that that culture is shaped by the local environment and is reflected in Ontario’s literature (“Ontario Culture and – What?”). Frank Davey asserts that literary Ontario is often an “invisible” region that has repeatedly passed itself as a representative of a “Canadian nationalism” (“Towards the Ends of Regionalism” 6). Herb Wyile has similarly called for increased
regional awareness in discussions of the “ubiquitous” small-town narrative in order to complicate the “larger national literary culture” that this narrative only appears to define (“Strategic Regionalisms” 85). Davey and Wyile warn against the elision of provincial-national difference, a blurring of boundaries made frequently in discussions of Mariposa and, to a lesser extent, Deptford.  

Douglas Mantz is particularly effusive in recognizing Mariposa not as a geographical “home” for Canadians, but as a conceptual one. He reads *Sunshine Sketches*’ final train journey from city to country as a psychological allegory that depicts the process of thinking about “home,” as opposed to a physical return. The “Envoi” essentially “turns back the clock of history collectively as well as individually, back through the stages of the national past which lies behind the biography of every Canadian” (99). Gerald Lynch argues that Leacock actively cultivated a connection between his Ontarian small town and national identity, as, in his final chapter of *Sunshine Sketches*, Leacock “insistently portrayed the connection between the home place as small-town Ontario and identity – individual, communal, and national identity” (*The One* 182). Guy Vanderhaeghe, however, is adamant that Mariposa cannot constitute a symbol of a national past, because, to someone raised on the Prairies, the town is “strange and exotic” (18). By suggesting that Leacock captured a “particular time, place, and people,” Vanderhaeghe attempts to counter the claims of national relevance made on behalf of Mariposa, but he still assumes that Mariposa reflects a past reality on a more local scale.

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6 D.M.R. Bentley also argues that Ontario is an “important cultural and poetic entity (probably since the middle of the nineteenth century the most important such entity in the country), and it deserves to be discussed with the same geographical and historical awareness that has in recent years been brought to bear in discussions of other Canadian regions such as the Maritimes and the Prairies” (“Geopoetics” V).
Other Leacock critics limit their comments to “small-town Ontario,” but, like Thomas, each locates a degree of social verisimilitude in Leacock’s depiction of the past. Douglas Bush, for one, finds a striking degree of correspondence between his own small-town memories and Mariposa, and he locates a moral exemplar in the small-town folk of Ontario’s past: “In little Ontario towns many people had an old-fashioned, wholesome steadiness, integrity, and dignity, a good share of what bourgeois intellectuals now stigmatize as ‘bourgeois virtues.’ And, whatever the cultural deficiencies, gentility was not altogether lacking” (174). While Mordecai Richler acknowledges that “Leacock’s take on life in Mariposa is filtered through rose-tinted glasses” (229), he laments the decline of small-town Ontario from the ideal it embodies; the towns of today, he states, have lost institutions resembling those harboured by Mariposa, only to be replaced by “a McDonald’s, a video-game centre and possibly even a massage parlour” (228). In a text noted for its irony and embellishment, these critics locate within it an element of sociological or psychological truth. The assumption of social decline over time allows critics to maintain their arguments affirming the historical verisimilitude of small-town fiction, while at the same time explaining why the towns’ real-world models no longer correspond to their fictional representations. Munro makes us realize, however, that small-town Ontario has always been home to the bordello, the bootlegger, the bank, and the Baptists. This may be the reason why Munro’s texts are rarely celebrated as visions of a collective past; there has even been active resistance to her versions of history.

Deptford possesses a reputation akin to Mariposa’s; it has been called a background of “conventional Canadian attitudes and behaviours” by Patricia Monk (Mud 13-14), and a reflection of the “general anti-hierarchical spirit of the Canadian village” by Barbara Godard (“World of Wonders: Robertson Davies’ Carnival” 272). Although reticent to suggest that Deptford constitutes a social ideal, Godard and Monk still discuss Deptford in terms of its national verisimilitude.
particularly in her hometown of Wingham ON whose residents have questioned the accuracy of her small-town depictions and have accused Munro of sullying the town’s good name (Thacker “Connection” 215-216).  

In questioning the existence of a conglomerate Ontario identity in the late 1960s, Arthur Lower states that Ontario is patterned by pockets of loyalty based on people’s identification with individual small towns (68). Yet certainly today Ontario is one of the most industrial and urbanized of the provinces. David Lowenthal, however, suggests that the memory of a past can be more influential in shaping self-perception than the present reality: “Remembering the past is crucial for our sense of identity […] to know what we were confirms that we are” (The Past 197). And it is exactly this phenomenon that Robert Thacker identifies when he argues that Ontario’s past, or rather its literary past, provides it with a sense of identity in the present: “a province grown urban and sophisticated believes itself rural and simple […] Ontario prefers to see itself a place of small towns […] formed and informed by the sway of Elgin, Mariposa, Deptford and their like” (“Connection” 213). The literary small town, Thacker continues, acts as an imaginative fulcrum between conceptions of the past and the perceived social state of the present: “the small-town ethos is a legacy, an inheritance which helps to explain the present by assessing and redefining the past” (“Connection” 213).  

As Ontario becomes ever more urbanized, the impetus for remembering “rural roots” or “getting back in touch” with rural origins, however those may be defined, becomes that much more intense.

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8 Charles Foran has recently suggested, however, that time has dispelled any “lingering animosities” in Wingham towards Munro, and that the town has now come to celebrate its attachment to Munro’s writing (“Alice in Borderland”).  
9 Hilfer recognizes a similar pattern in American literature and society: “The village represented what Americans thought they were, what they sometimes pretended (to themselves as well as others) they wanted to be” (4).
heritage, along with its imagined identity and vague ethos, becomes more malleable, even more influential, as the economic and demographic importance of the rural regions decreases, an idea that I explore in relation to Urquhart in Chapter 4.

Thacker casts the issue in terms of a dichotomy; denizens of an urban space look to a rural past, in his argument a fictional rural past, in order to locate a type of guiding ethos. Peter Baskerville’s examination of social shifts in early-twentieth century Ontario supports Thacker’s proposition of a type of filial deference between Ontario’s cities and its countryside. Ontario’s once dominant rural areas experienced a decline around the turn of the twentieth century as the population migrated to the burgeoning industrial centres. The rise of Ontario’s cities, however, instigated a type of rural renaissance through which the protection of rural values became a distinct part of public discourse and political policy (Baskerville 157). Ontario’s characteristically settled landscape, its

10 This assertion is based on the arguments of a number of thinkers, such as David Harvey, Doreen Massey, Lucy Lippard, and Lowenthal. See Harvey, “Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination,” in which he outlines how a “collapse” of “space-time,” really the idea that distance and duration have a decreasing influence on society and the economy, results in a “population [that] clings to place and neighborhood or to nation, region, ethnic grouping, or religious belief as specific marks of identity” (427). While Massey challenges Harvey on the reasons for, and dangers of, the rise of place-based identities, she also admits to a contemporary “recrudescence of some very problematical senses of place, from reactionary nationalisms, to competitive localisms, to introverted obsessions with ‘heritage’” (Space, Place, and Gender 151). Lippard comments on an urban “yuppie” exodus to the countryside, the reasons for which she attributes to an “urge to live rurally, to have a local life,” a contemporary phenomenon that “has been resurrected from the sixties countercultural ‘back to the land’ movement” (152). Lippard goes on to state that “Rural suburbs are a contradiction in terms; rather than mediating between city and country, they deny both, perpetrating a fake rural life [...] Sentimentality about small-town living rapidly gives way to urban demands for convenience and comfort; urban escapees want solitude, authenticity, a good cappuccino, and a nearby health club” (152). Finally, Lowenthal is the harshest critic of what he calls the “Heritage Crusade,” a movement that tries to preserve, or, more appropriately, invent continuity between the past and the present, a movement that has a special fondness for rural life because it is deemed to be perpetually “at risk” (Heritage 6).
compact pattern of agricultural towns and industrial cities, hints at a particularly profound and fecund imaginative connection between its urban and rural regions. While Thacker’s and Baskerville’s analyses suggest that urban Ontario reveres the influence of its rural social and cultural precursor, this dissertation perceives an alternate phenomenon: the rural sphere is more readily shaped by urban voices. As Peter Marinelli states, “Pastoral is therefore written from a point of view that we may call sophisticated. Nostalgia cannot be the emotion of those who are not conscious of having experienced a loss, and shepherds therefore do not write pastoral poetry” (9). The urban voice, similarly, often controls representations of small-town Ontario, yet this voice rarely offers an unreflective nostalgic perspective on a rural past.

Critics of small-town literature seem to insist that rural texts are strictly about the depiction of rural regions, as opposed to an exploration of the conceptual relationship between the country and the city. Douglas Coupland and Russell Smith have challenged the continued presence of the small town in Canadian literature by questioning not its historicity, but rather how well it reflects a contemporary social reality. While the small town in Canadian texts may have, at one time, adequately executed a socially mimetic function, Coupland and Smith insist that focus must now shift to urban writers tackling Canada’s present. Coupland, for one, maintains that the small town is an archaic trope of an outdated literary establishment. “CanLit,” disparages Coupland in his New York Times blog, “is the literary equivalent of representational landscape painting […] It is not a modern art form, nor does it want to be. Scorecards are kept and points are assigned according to how realistically a writer has depicted, say, the odor of the kitchen the narrator inhabited as a child […] and the quirks and small intimate moments of rural Ontario life”
(“What Is CanLit?”). Coupland not only conflates form with content here, but also assumes realism to be the sole intent of canonical Canadian literature. Smith, on the other hand, attributes declining reading rates in Canada to the notion that no contemporary author is willing to tackle Canada’s contemporary urban realities, which hold juicy prospects for fiction writers; they prefer instead to write “turgid ruminations on family, loss and memory” (G and M, Dec. 11, 2002, R2). Coupland and Smith, however, do not recognize that many small-town texts are already indirect and sophisticated statements on processes of urbanization, and rather than an overarching concern with realism, many small-town narrators, particularly Leacock’s, remain aware of the stylistic and aestheticizing effects of the distance between an urban voice and its rural subject.

Similarly, the editors of Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities track a marked movement of interest towards urban studies and representations in Canadian literature: “No longer are we content to engage in thematic studies which privilege the wilderness, rural areas, or the small town as the place upon which Canadian identity is constructed” (6). This dissertation points out, however, that small-town texts are often dominated by urban voices, which, far from locating a definitive collective identity in the small town, often display a problematic anxiety over the experience offered by an urban life. Munro’s texts even challenge the conceptual rural-urban dichotomy that still functions as a critical lens used to examine the social representative-ness of Canadian literature; her writing proposes that spatial categories possess no inherently distinctive
characteristics, and that the nature of experience and identity is not determined by space.\(^{11}\)

While advocates of literary urbanity challenge what they see as a mimetic function performed by literary representations of the small town, Eli Mandel proposed a similar challenge in the late 1970s by stating that the literary small town rarely, if ever, concurred with a social past. Mandel argues that small-town life is rarely the sole focus of small-town literature, and Mariposa, the most influential of Ontario’s literary small towns, “exists only as a version of a town that we in the cities think we remember. Mariposa is not a place; it is a state of mind. It is the dream of innocence that we attach to some place other than here and now” (114). Mandel appears to challenge Thomas’ statements on the historical “truth” in small-town Ontario texts by asserting that Mariposa is constructed by memory mixed with desire: “[Leacock] plays on this dream of town and city: the city as an image of the small-town mind; the small-town as an image of the city mind. And in so playing, he gives us a clue as to how in poem and story, town and city are metaphors” (115). Mandel’s comments allude to how, in *Sunshine Sketches* at least, the dominant image of the country or the city is the product of reciprocal longing; Mariposa as small-town archetype emerges not simply from depictions of small-town life, Mandel suggests, but is sculpted from across the spatial and conceptual distance.

\(^{11}\) Glenn Willmott argues something similar in *Unreal Country*. The rural and urban binary is an illusion in modern Canadian novels. Willmott consistently displays how the rural, or rather regional, experience in modern novels is shaped by the same “modern modes of production and class-social structure” (152) that shape its urban counterpart. The rural-urban binary in the modern Canadian regional novel, Willmott argues, is illusory, as the rural is, in fact, an “uncanny” double of its urban counterpart, an “invisible” city. This dissertation, however, is not so much concerned with the economic structures of small-town life as it is with the aesthetic and experiential contrast constructed by urban melancholics.
between small town and city. A “process of perception” has as significant a role in Mariposa’s representation as does Leacock’s representation of “place” (115).

By over-emphasizing the “what” that these small-town narrators construct, critics largely pass over “how” these narrators construct it: that is, the “process of perception” that Mandel claims is responsible for Mariposa’s characteristic ethos. For that reason, this study remains uneasy with the types of broad cultural statements made on behalf of the small town’s culturally representative or non-representative status. The small town may be a “ubiquitous” setting in Canadian literature, but the nature of its representation depends on the distance - temporal, spatial, or cultural - that separates the narrator from a small town. For instance, temporal-spatial distance allows Leacock to state the following about small-town Ontario in his autobiography: “the little Ontario town grew till the maples planted in its streets overtopped it and it fell asleep and grew no more” (Boy 109). Proximity to her subject, on the other hand, allows a Munro narrator to explode Leacock’s image: “The street is shaded, in some places, by maple trees whose roots have cracked and heaved the sidewalk and spread out like crocodiles into the bare yards” (“Walker Brothers Cowboy” 3). Leacock’s narrator’s “detached perspective” (Keith 167) allows him to cast the small town as part of the past, a quiescent thing enclosed by the shroud of its own entropy. Munro’s narrator, who “presents the small town […] with total immediacy” (Keith 167), stands under that canopy of leaves and shatters the integrity of Leacock’s static image. Where Leacock sees stagnation and repose, an enclosed, somewhat mournful image of finality, Munro sees continued, possibly malignant growth.

Leacock’s and Munro’s narrators utilize two very different “processes” of perception. Leacock’s urban persona is separated from the small town by a distance that
Jonathan Steinwand states is central to nostalgia: “Because nostalgia necessarily relies on a distance – temporal and/or spatial – separating the subject from the object of its longing, the imagination is encouraged to gloss over forgetfulness in order to fashion a more aesthetically complete and satisfying recollection of what is longed for” (9). It would be a mistake, however, to suggest that *Sunshine Sketches* is simply a nostalgic text, as Leacock consistently and ironically plays with the distance that separates his narrator from Mariposa. The temporal, spatial, and cultural gap separating his narrator from the small town is very much a part of the narrative structure of other small-town texts. Of course this distance is only rhetorical, built into the narrative structure itself, but it, in turn, effects a certain type of small-town past, one that seems to offer an imagined alternative or innocent precursor to modern urban existence; the obverse, represented by Munro’s narrative technique, transcends the effects of memory to question the urban-rural dichotomy, as well as the associative values that dichotomy contains.

Keith states that “[f]or most Ontario writers, the small town about which they write is a version – sometimes idealized, sometimes satirized – of the community in which they grew up” (163). This is perhaps the reason that Frye states that a *Bildungsroman* influence has “an unusual intensity for Ontario writers: the best and most skilful of them, including Robertson Davies and Alice Munro, continue to employ a great deal of what is essentially the Stephen Leacock *Mariposa* theme, however different in tone” (“Culture and Society in Ontario 1784-1984” 182). All of the texts studied below contain a recognizable structure of memory in which the text’s deictics establish distance between a narrator in the text’s present and his or her reconstructed rural past. Three of
the four authors write about the small town in which they grew up. Leacock (b. 1869) was raised in the vicinity of Orillia, the model for Mariposa; more importantly, he returned to Orillia every summer throughout his career, and eventually retired to his home on Old Brewery Bay on Lake Couchiching. Davies (b. 1913) spent the first few years of his life in Thamesville, and shortly thereafter moved to Renfrew. Both towns find their way into Davies’ fiction: Thamesville as Deptford, and Renfrew as Blairlogie. This dissertation is concerned with Davies’ best-known small-town depiction, Deptford as it appears in *Fifth Business*. Munro (b. 1931) grew up in Wingham, and after a long stint on the west coast moved back to rural Ontario where she currently resides. Munro has famously discussed Wingham as her model for Jubilee from *Lives of Girls and Women*, a text that constitutes Munro’s most extended examination of a small Ontario town. The final chapter examines two texts by Urquhart (b. 1949): *The Stone Carvers* and *Map of Glass*. Neither text renders a town in which Urquhart was raised, but both depict small Ontario communities for which she feels an affinity. Shoneval from *The Stone Carvers* is modeled on Formosa, a small Ontarian agricultural community that possesses a distinctive German-Catholic history in an area that is largely British-Protestant. *Map of Glass* takes as its setting a small community in Prince Edward County on the north shore of Lake Ontario.

Appearing in 1912, Mariposa is, as Keith states, the “epitome” of small-town Ontario, and its reputation extends beyond the confines of literary anthologies and academic courses. Lynch claims that Mariposa has an inescapable influence on any short-story writer who sets his or her work in a Canadian small town (*The One* 183), and its status as a “Canadian classic” (Spadoni vii) is undisputed. Mariposa’s central role in a
Canadian canon has engendered a sizable amount of critical work, and much of this criticism attempts to pin down the identity of the narrator by exploring his insider/outsider status in relation to the town. The steady irony of the narrator’s persona introduces duplicity to his identity; he is both a Mariposan and an urban resident, both part of and apart from Mariposa. This urban-rural dichotomy is not only reflected in his identity and his ironic tone, but also in the text’s form. As Chapter Twelve opens, gone is the lighthearted, carnival atmosphere of Josh Smith’s election victory during which the torch-lit streets of Mariposa are packed by revelers; it has been replaced by the melancholic atmosphere of a deep, dark urban club. Mariposa is now referred to through memory only. This movement in time and space has palpable effects on the narrator’s tone. The Mariposa Express, however, can traverse the temporal-spatial distance between the rural-urban polarities; as the train exits the city and approaches its final destination, the narrator similarly begins to adopt the characteristic ironic tone that defined the text’s first eleven chapters. The journey, however, is imaginary, and the concluding paragraph of the text reveals that the narrator and his companion have never left the urban club; by implication, the final chapter proposes that the narrator was never in Mariposa, and that the sketches are the product of men whose sense of alienation in the urban present cause them to long for an imagined rural past.

The imaginary train journey is a truncated trip in time and space, and Mariposa’s inaccessibility ensures that the town’s characteristic ethos is secure. Furthermore, as the train, an envoy of memory, chugs from the time and space of the city to that of the small town, Leacock reveals how the separating distance allows one’s memories to become more “aesthetically complete and satisfying” (Steinwand 9). However, Leacock is not
simply content to pull back the curtain to depict the operations of nostalgia, as he also makes particularly complex statements on the detrimental influence of the urban sphere on rural life. Josh Smith, neither a small-town nor urban character but someone emerging from the hinterland “back north,” introduces a third geographic-temporal space that counters the intratextual threat to Mariposa posed by an urban economic modernity. Only through Smith’s surreptitious influence does Mariposa remain an essentially innocent antithesis to the degraded urban sphere; Smith protects the vulnerable Mariposa from real-world consequence, and maintains the town as a functional antitype to the nameless city.

Second only to Mariposa in terms of its significance to small-town Ontario’s literary reputation is Davies’ Deptford. Davies was a Leacock scholar who produced a short biography and study of his works in *Feast of Stephen*. The cover of the volume itself more than hints at an affinity between these prominent men of letters since it gives equal standing to both names. The illustration by Graham Pilsworth is an ink drawing of both men shaking hands with Davies staring out at the reader as if the current comic laureate is re-introducing us to the previous one. Beverly Rasporich recognizes further continuity between the two as she sets both Leacock and Davies within a Canadian comic tradition of “conservative morality and intellectual idealism” represented best through the “literate gentlemanly comic” personae of Leacock’s books and Davies’ comic alter-ego Samuel Marchbanks (“The New Eden Dream” 229).

*Fifth Business* appeared in 1970, fifty-eight years after *Sunshine Sketches*, yet at this point Davies was considered to be past his prime, and Judith Skelton Grant

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12 Its long introduction was previously published as simply *Stephen Leacock*, part of McClelland and Stewart’s New Canadian Library series.
comments that had it not been for the writing of his latter years, “Davies would have been
remembered only as a minor figure in Canadian literature” (398). *Fifth Business* re-
launched the writing career of Davies, whose previous series of novels was written in the
1950s, and who had, during the 1960s, settled into a busy life as Master of Massey
College. This second phase culminated in both Booker and Nobel nominations in 1986
(Grant 644). Both Leacock and Davies were, in their own times, sought after literary and
cultural authorities, and, importantly, their most significant works are not only set in
small-town Ontario, but have also given it wide cultural recognition.

*Feast of Stephen* is essentially Leacock reinterpreted through Davies’ pen, and
Davies sets Mariposa within the context of conventional “schools” of small-town writing,
which he describes as the innocent or idyllic vs. the corrupt or anti-idyllic.13 Leacock,
Davies asserts, “tried very hard to keep his Sunshine Sketches sunny” (*Feast* 15). In *Fifth
Business*, Dunstan Ramsay essentially replicates Davies’ critical assertions: “Once it was
the fashion to represent villages as places inhabited by laughable, lovable simpletons,
unspotted by the worldliness of city life […] Later it was the popular thing to show
villages as rotten with vice […] Our village never seemed to me to be like that” (15).
Dunstan’s narration indirectly cites Leacock’s text through its contrast of small-town
conventions, one of which Davies saw Leacock not only utilize, but also come to
dominate. Dunstan suggests that his version of the small town will both reference and

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13 The entire passage reads: “Descriptions of small-town life have become commonplace,
especially in the literature of this continent. In Leacock’s day they tended, with a handful
of notable exceptions, to look on the sunny side of village and rural life and to accept the
widely-held view that small-town people were kindlier, less corrupt, and more chaste
than dwellers in great cities. Since then, of course, a school has arisen which portrays
small towns, very profitably, as microcosms of Sodom and Gomorrah in which
everybody but a handful of just men and women are deep in corruption, especially of the
sexual order” (14-15).
transcend the convention. In the guise of his alter ego, Marchbanks, Davies once claimed that *Sunshine Sketches* is “one of the finest, if not the finest, book ever written about Canadian life” (*Papers* 65). If here he confirms the notion that *Sunshine Sketches* provides an accurate depiction of the social life of a Canadian past, it is an attitude he later comes to revise in his own text on small-town Ontario.

Of course there are recognizable similarities between *Fifth Business* and *Sunshine Sketches*. Successful, literate, urban men looking back to their small-town childhoods narrate both texts. Dunstan’s remarks on the small-town conventions acknowledge his awareness of the earlier text, even though he claims to depart from the earlier text’s standard. Dunstan’s efforts, however, never quite succeed, as his depiction of Deptford is unstable; at points the town of his childhood represents a real and malignant force in his life, while at latter times it resembles the conventional, benign Mariposa. Cultural distance comes between Dunstan and Deptford, distance protracted by the First World War and his experiences with the British gentry. During his hero’s return to Deptford, this distance results in a slight shift towards Mariposan convention in his portrayal of the town. However, by eventually renouncing the temporary cultural distance established between himself and his home town, between his own cosmopolitan erudition and Deptford’s rusticity, Dunstan successfully resists a “process of perception” that constructs the small town as innocent antitype; this renunciation constitutes an allegorical leave-taking of Mariposa’s cultural and literary hegemony, its conventional method of aestheticizing a distant rural experience.

One year after the publication of *Fifth Business*, Munro’s lengthy depiction of small-town Ontario appeared in *Lives of Girls and Women*. Munro is so closely
associated with rural Ontario that critics have dubbed a certain portion of its western expanse “Alice Munro Country.” *Lives* is narrated by Del Jordan, who spends her childhood and adolescence in Jubilee during the 1940s and early 1950s, a period long after that explored by Davies and Leacock who depict small-town Ontario before and shortly after the First World War. *Lives* is Munro’s most extended examination of a single community, as the text, an “episodic novel” as she calls it (Struthers “Interview” 14-15), consists entirely of Del’s experiences in Jubilee over the course of a decade.

While critics often attach national import to Davies’s and Leacock’s towns, they view Munro’s towns in a far more localized context. Her writing is highly regarded for its sociological accuracy: “Her stories,” says John Weaver, “[…] create evocative chronicles of rural and small-town Ontario” (381), and Munro herself is “a remarkable interpreter of Ontario’s cultural history, in particular small-town social structure, community values, the migration to the cities, religious culture, sexuality, and the fantasies of adolescents” (381). Her portrait of the small town is complex, consisting of innumerable social layers. As such, Jubilee lacks a unifying, defining ethos that summarizes its collective moral or social voice as is provided to Deptford and Mariposa. Del’s narrative voice cannot disconnect from Jubilee’s social, religious, and aesthetic limitations through an ironic approach to the town, as she recognizes both its formative and continuing influence on her; the irony of Davies’ and Leacock’s narrative voices expresses their relative freedom from their small-town past, while Del’s narrative approach suggests that the small-town influence cannot be easily summarized as, for her, its extent is not fully knowable.
Where Leacock and Davies present a male experience, Munro explores the vastly different realities faced by women growing up in a small town or rural area in the mid-twentieth century. Despite an ostensibly similar narrative conceit to that used by Davies and Leacock, Del’s small-town experience cannot be compartmentalized into one phase of her growth, as she recognizes Jubilee’s effects to be fundamental to the core of her continuing identity. As such, Del neither recounts her small-town childhood from a temporal distance, nor narrates it in the present first person, but through a shifting hybrid of both. Del does not maintain a narrative division between past and present, between remembering subject and remembered object, as her narrative voice, according to Thacker, “is the means by which past and present commingle” (“Dialectics” 37); she is both “observer and participant” (43), relaying “childhood experiences” through “adult understandings” (46). By forging the child and adult experience into a unified perception, Del’s narration contains little recognizable division between an urban present and rural past, a division with a recognizable consequence for the depictions of Mariposa and Deptford. Instead, the very same forces that have molded her community’s landscape are Del’s primary artistic influences. The narrative technique that Munro thus confers to Del approaches organic continuity between the artist and the landscape upon which members of her community have sketched their lives: a far cry from the unfailing affection the former Mariposans have for a place that they see as both remote and irretrievable. Munro’s “episodic novel” questions the divide (experiential, conceptual) between rural and urban spheres that is both built and maintained by earlier small-town Ontario texts;

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14 Davies is also somewhat misogynistic. Deptford is ruled by the collective morality of its women, which is exclusionary and intolerant. It is from these moral dictates that the more independent Dunstan must free himself.
Munro’s suggests there is no essential difference between rural and urban spaces, since space is shaped by epistemological constructs, the very things that also shape an artistic apprentice.

Urquhart acknowledges Munro’s influence, since Urquhart’s personal conversations with Munro have helped shaped her writing, particularly how she conceives and writes of the past (Wyile “Confessions” 60). Urquhart is deeply familiar with Munro’s work, and in 2003 McClelland and Stewart entrusted her with selecting the stories and providing an “Afterword” for its New Canadian Library edition of Munro’s best, titled No Love Lost. Rural Ontario, Urquhart admits, is her foremost artistic influence: “Ontario is the landscape that I know best, the landscape that provides me with some sense of reality […] my visual memory bank is stocked with images of rural Ontario” (Wyile “Confessions” 82). While both Munro and Urquhart set a large portion of their work in rural Ontario, and while Urquhart acknowledges Munro’s influence, vast differences exist between how each author constructs small-town Ontario. Munro even suggests that her settings are incidental, only secondary to her work’s themes (Struthers “Interview” 33). Urquhart, however, actively explores rural Ontario as a theme in itself, and much of her work depicts the province’s rural past as a more idyllic time and place that was gradually corrupted by technological modernity. In stark contrast to Munro, Urquhart’s writing appears to reify an essentialist divide between rural and urban experience, between the pre-modern past and the degraded present. Like Mariposa, Urquhart’s rural communities offer a value-laden contrast to an alienating urban sphere; unlike Leacock, however, Urquhart does not undermine this binary through self-aware irony that problematizes this idealization.
Urquhart has been accused of a conservative “nostalgia for pre-modern times” (Branach-Kallas *Whirlpool* 173), and while her two most recent works do little to counter that criticism, they are not mired in irresolvable longing. Klara Becker, the depression-era protagonist of *The Stone Carvers* (2001), endlessly recounts her idealizations of Shoneval’s distant past to alleviate feelings of loss, which are caused by the disrupting effects of technology on the town’s cultural traditions and her personal life. Klara overcomes her melancholy by externally solidifying her memories in a memorial, a structure that comes to symbolize a new national affective community. A modern nation has been forged by collective loss, and this community has replaced prior heterogeneous cultural traditions. Urquhart’s modern urban reality is defined by what it is not, which is the cradle of continuous cultural practices; those, Urquhart suggests, experienced their final manifestation in the small towns prior to the First World War. *Map of Glass* (2005), on the other hand, somewhat revises that rural-urban binary. Like Klara, Sylvia Bradley longs for the stability she recognizes within a rural past, yet unlike Klara, Sylvia has no first-person experience with the object of her longing. The histories she constructs through the material remnants of the past are, ultimately, self-projections. Even though she imagines herself to be in touch with local history, her story of the local past is unfettered from any past reality. Like Leacock, Urquhart makes a rather subtle, shrewd, perhaps unintentional observation that the notion of rural difference is the product of melancholic, alienated figures whose search for something comprehensible or secure in the past will only reveal echoes of their own voices.
Chapter Two

Memory, Urban Hegemony, and the Temporal Dichotomies of Stephen Leacock’s
Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town

In the winter and spring of 1912, the Montreal Star published the original
versions of the twelve sketches that constitute Stephen Leacock’s Sunshine Sketches of a
Little Town. The British, American, and Canadian editions of the book appeared within
the year. Twenty-first century readers may view these sketches as humorous portrayals of
an insular small town as it really was, an idealized but nonetheless accurate depiction of a
bygone way of life in the early-twentieth century. Although this collection of
interweaving stories is ostensibly set in the early 1910s, Leacock creates a sense of
ambiguity around the temporal placement of events. The shifts in setting and narrative
voice in the final chapter further add to this ambiguity since they imply that the previous
eleven sketches are retrospectives (Zichy 52). This chapter argues that the nature of
representation within the sketches characterizes them as manifestations of memory,
particularly urban memory, and not as chronicles of a specific or generalized community
contemporaneous to the time Leacock was writing. As Donald Cameron notes, “Mariposa
was a good place to be a child [but]…a bad place to be an adult” (“Ironist” 169-70). The
appeal of Mariposa rests largely on its temporal and spatial displacement into a vague
distance.

This temporal ambiguity has not gone unnoticed. Gerald Lynch states that
Leacock’s Mariposa is the past and represents for the author a “qualified ideal” of his
Tory humanism (Humour 7). Desmond Pacey points out that the political and social
views of eighteenth-century writers Burke and Goldsmith informed Leacock’s Toryism: a
comprehensive but anachronistic social outlook that admires organic communities (181).
Other critics see *Sunshine Sketches* as a response to social change and as a eulogy for a fading way of life. Ramsay Cook claims that Leacock wrote *Sunshine Sketches* during a period of mass emigration from rural to urban areas that occurred because of increasing industrialization, and the book is thus a celebration of a recent past (qtd. in Robertson 37-38). Peter A. Baskerville notes that at the turn of the century, urban populations swelled, but rural populations saw no similar growth: “Four out of every five Ontarians had been born in Canada, and most […] had grown up in small-town or rural Ontario” (157). An ever-expanding industrialized and urbanized Ontario replaced the agricultural community’s social and economic centrality during the early part of the twentieth century. The market for a nostalgic rendition of a rural Ontario past would have been quite large in 1912, and Leacock may have been capitalizing on the shared yearning of the transplanted urbanites.

While the farms and small towns stagnated, a corresponding “support for traditional rural ways swelled” (Baskerville 157), even resulting in the election of a rural political party, the United Farmers of Ontario, to Queen’s Park in 1919 in order to “uphold the verities of rural life” (157). This election appears to have stemmed from a diffuse nostalgia; the celebration of a way of life follows its decline or death, and, therefore, the ensuing enthusiasm is a type of self-conscious revival. When considering these social events in the context of Leacock’s social perspective, we can see Mariposa’s communal whole as a fictionalized community idyll set against its faltering or disappearing counterpart in the provincial political and social life of the time; the apparent vitality of the community and the desire of all residents to remain at “home” in Mariposa make the community something of an anachronism, something of which
Leacock no doubt was aware. This version of Leacock’s social perspective would thus have us read the work as a simple pastoral, a reflexive reaction against urban industrialism. This view, however, does not account for the book’s complexity, nor for Leacock’s own well-known skepticism regarding rural nostalgia. As he wryly comments in another work, when urban dwellers seek to rebuild the rural childhood home, that reconstruction is done “not with an ax but with an architect” (Boy 49); in Leacock’s usage, the architect becomes a metaphor for the idealization accommodated by temporal distance, the idealization that rounds the hard edges of past experience. As the following discussion will argue, retrospective stylization invariably leaves its impressions on reminiscence.

Mariposa is not the hometown of solely the Mariposans; many feel that the town reflects a type of Canadian cultural origin. Douglas Mantz explores Mariposa as the conceptual home for Canadians, a type of “psychic root” whose “formative psychological influence” has helped shape the identity of both individuals and a nation (97). Mantz bases his reading on Mariposa’s surrounding landscape of bush and water; these constitute, claims Mantz, the “lowest common denominators” of Canadian landscape and thus are a part of all Canadians’ experience (99). Therefore, the train trip from the city to Mariposa in the final chapter, “L’Envoi,” is a trip into the personal and national pasts for both the narrator’s auditor and the reader. Mantz and Lynch read Mariposa as something of a past ideal that no longer existed in Leacock’s time, but was partially formed, according to W.H. New, from his “childhood observations of individuals in

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15 In Stephen Leacock, Humour and Humanity, Lynch refers to the narrator’s companion as his “auditor,” and this chapter will follow Lynch in that regard.
Orillia” (*A History* 131), further suggesting that Mariposa’s ethos belongs to Ontario sometime in the late-nineteenth century.

A corresponding strain of criticism to that concerning the historicity of Mariposa is the work of critics who discuss Mariposa’s verisimilitude. The impulse behind this criticism seems to stem from a need to justify the attractive depiction of this, in Leacock’s own summation, typified small Ontario town (“Preface” *Sunshine Sketches* xvii), and validate the notion that, yes indeed, the roots of Ontarian culture and identity lie here. This vein of criticism often conflates the book’s idealizations with either the critic’s personal memories, or personal and popular conceptions of life in turn-of-the-century Ontario. The appeal of Mariposa’s apparent past-tense veracity is too strong to resist for Mordecai Richler, who laments the passing of those small-town institutions that make up a great part of the social life in Mariposa, only to have been replaced “by a McDonald’s, a video-game centre and possibly even a massage parlour” (228). Richler implies that Mariposa is an accurate reflection of small-town life in the early-twentieth century, a life that has since experienced a decline only to reach the present, degraded state. In “Small-Town Ontario,” Douglas Bush compares remembered incidents from his childhood in a small town along the St. Lawrence River to the Mariposan experience in a charming attempt to authenticate Leacock’s comic portrayals. Bush’s account seems to emanate from a desire to validate Leacock’s exaggerated depictions of the town and its characters. Yet both Richler and Bush overlook the book’s rose-coloured, retrospective quality that hints at Leacock’s own self-conscious nostalgia as one creative source. These critics appear to have projected their own small-town nostalgia into the discussions of the book’s historical reality, treating the text’s ironic depiction of small-town nostalgia, a
“pastoral idyll treated satirically,” says Hugh Hood (qtd. in Keith 157), as a sincere commemoration of a bygone way of life.

Bush’s personal retrospection helps distinguish one of the central artistic methods of the book: that is, the apparent filter of temporal distance between the narrator and Mariposa, which then has a softening effect on the town’s descriptions. Lynch identifies “temporal distance” as one of the fundamentals of Leacock’s theory of humour as it allows “past disappointments [to be] forgivingly perceived” (*Humour* 54). *Sunshine Sketches*, Lynch concludes, “enacts all that Leacock hoped for from humour” (56). Temporal distance allays or dispels any harshness associated with remembered events; a self-interested deception in the present becomes, in retrospect, a laughable hoodwinking executed in the most magnanimous of community spirits, and even the dupe is in on the joke: *bonhomie* prevails. Even though Leacock’s narrator is often part of the action and often narrates in the present tense, he has knowledge of future events; his awareness of the community transcends the simple present tense. During the Mariposa Belle excursion, Dr. Gallagher decides to give his collection of arrows to the Mariposa Mechanics’ Institute: “they afterwards became, as you know, the Gallagher Collection” (44). Another incidence of prolepsis within the third chapter has the narrator discussing the excitement caused by the marine accident, although the “disaster” has not yet occurred in the narrative. This suggests that the narrator feigns his immediacy, and he is, in fact, recounting these events from a temporal distance. The narrator’s position in the final chapter certainly supports this view; Francis Zichy uses the final chapter to claim that the narrator “has been looking back from the first” (52). Lynch has also commented that the “temporal-spatial distance” between the city club and small town results in an “incorrect”
vision of Mariposa as “the ideal ‘home’ or as an untroubled idyllic community” (*Humour* 115). This chapter departs from Lynch and argues that temporal-spatial distance is essential, indeed required, in maintaining the portrait of Mariposa provided in the first eleven chapters, as, simply put, there is no “real” Mariposa beyond what exists in the projected fantasies of the urban club men.

Perhaps this concern with both the narrator’s perspective and the historical reality of Mariposa is a method of discussing one of the book’s major generic attachments: the pastoral tradition. Beverly Rasporich cites Frye’s well-worn “Conclusion” to the *Literary History of Canada* to suggest that “this romantic caste of mind which seeks solace in the past – and most particularly, in the pastoral past – is an integral part of the Canadian, and Leacock’s literary imagination” (“Sentimental Humour” 182). Rasporich goes on to note that in the history of Western literature, the “pastoral design has traditionally reasserted itself in response to change,” particularly the industrial revolution (182).

As do other critics, Rasporich places Leacock’s work into a consolidated pastoral tradition without distinguishing the various branches of that tradition as identified by Leo Marx. The simple or sentimental kind of the pastoral is more often found “widely diffused in our culture” and is characterized by “[a]n inchoate longing for a more ‘natural’ environment [. . . and] the contemptuous attitude [. . .] toward urban life” (5). Works written in the literary or complex kind “do not finally permit us to come away with anything like the simple, affirmative attitude we adopt toward pleasing rural scenery [. . . and they] qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony to a green pasture” (25). Marx states that the former is more a feature of “culture at large,” and that the latter often constructively contends with this cultural
impulse by complicating yearning in order to “enrich and clarify our experience” (11). In some respects, various Leacock critics have focused too heavily on the first of the two when discussing *Sunshine Sketches*. They locate within Leacock’s book the uncomplicated longing the simple mode suggests, particularly for an image of turn-of-the-century ‘organic’ small towns that, through Leacock’s book, have been treated as cultural models for a type of national identity. Critics, particularly Richler and Bush, adopt a legitimist perspective that perceives *Mariposa* as a more proper example of a national ethos flourishing before the triumph of urbanization, an ethos of which only warm embers remain. These approaches marginalize the text’s more sophisticated statements on the relationship between the past and the present, and between the country and the city.

Raymond Williams has traced the endlessly retreating image of the happier rural past, and he uses writers’ propensity to locate the terminus of the “Golden Age” in the previous generation as the starting point for his critical text *The Country and the City* (12); “when they are looked at in their own terms,” Williams argues, these happier rural pasts “have some actual significance” beyond rural nostalgia (12). Idealizations of the recent past often stem from, and contribute to, a perpetual sense of loss within the present, and David Lowenthal helps to explain why the past lends itself to this type of sympathetic perspective: “No one ever experienced as ‘the present’ what we now view as ‘the past’, for hindsight cannot clarify today as it does yesterday; the past as reconstructed is always more coherent than when it happened” (“Nostalgia” 29). Memory and narrativization both enclose and circumscribe a past, rendering it eminently comprehensible, ordered, and safe. *Mariposa* itself is depicted according to this type of
historical consciousness; that is, its appeal can be defined only after the fact, as its characteristics belong to the soft palette of the retrospective. But we should not forget that the town is also a comment on that artistic method.

To begin addressing the narrative’s retrospective quality and issues relating to the urban and rural divide, I would first like to discuss the narrator. Locating both his identity and his temporal perspective is key to my sense of the remainder of the book. The ultimate urban identity of the narrator suggests that the source for Mariposa’s construction rests not within those “broad” streets of Mariposa, but rather within the melancholic club deep in the heart of the city.

The Narrator

Cameron’s look at the book’s irony includes this summation: “The narrator is naïve, unsophisticated, baffled by such abstractions as election issues; a Mariposan to the core, even something of a Booster, he usually seems quite unaware of moral issues” (‘Ironist” 168). Cameron goes on to alter that estimation by suggesting that “Leacock evidently conceived of the narrator as an intelligent man feigning simplicity” (170). Lynch perceives three different narrators within the book: the narrator of the introduction; the narrator of the “sketches proper” (Lynch’s phrase for the first eleven chapters); and, the narrator of the final chapter. He states that these three different personae emerge as a result of “an interest bordering on obsession with the reader’s perspective on and knowledge of ‘Mariposa’” (Humour 57). Ina Ferris further suggests that the narrator and auditor in the final chapter are actually one person and that the entire chapter is really a self-address (179).
The criticism suggests polyvocality within *Sunshine Sketches*’ narration, and I want to adhere to this critical assertion. First of all, to address the “Preface,” I agree with Lynch that the voice is Leacock’s. He added this “Preface” to the sketches in its book form. As it refers to concrete details in Leacock’s life, we must separate this persona from the “Mariposan” voice of the sketches proper who claims specific knowledge of the town. Turning to the narrator of the sketches proper, I want to suggest that his is a disunified voice that is wholly conscious of his varying but simultaneous personae. The narrator’s treatment of the town suggests he is an outsider, an observer rather than a participant; the narrator’s core voice is that of an urban dweller who ironically appropriates and performs the voice of an authentic Mariposan, rather than that of an authentic Mariposan who has knowledge of the cosmopolitan world. The narrator reveals this core voice in the final chapter, “L’Envoi.” Like his auditor, he is a club-dweller, but unlike his auditor, nowhere in the final chapter does he reveal any personal connection to Mariposa. Rather, it is his auditor and his auditor’s club companions who have their Mariposan roots revealed to them. The narrator, however, controls the nature and the tone of the reminiscences, as he guides his auditor through both remembered scenes and the final imaginary journey.

Although the narrator poses as a Mariposan throughout the book, even referring to his interaction with the townsfolk, particularly with Jefferson Thorpe (33) on at least two occasions, he subtly distances himself from the Mariposans’ expressed ignorance or belief in outright falsehoods. During the height of Smith’s battle to regain his liquor license, one of the main arguments the narrator puts forth on Smith’s behalf is the celebration of other cultures’ relationship with alcohol: “look at the French and the
Italians, who drink all day and all night. Aren’t they all right? Aren’t they a musical people?” (17-18). The next paragraph starts with “I quote these arguments not for their own sake, but merely to indicate the changing temper of public opinion in Mariposa” (18). Should the reader confuse the expressed sentiment with that held by the narrator, the reader is mistaken since the misguided summation of different cultural nationalities is something in sole possession of those Mariposans arguing on behalf of Smith. The act of “quoting” distances the narrator from the comic ignorance of these fallacious arguments; what remains unstated in this moment of irony is his recognition of the Mariposans’ reliance on cultural stereotypes that, although articulated by the narrator, are in no way held by him.

A similar instance of quoting comes in Chapter Six with Judge Pepperleigh’s decision against the insurance company. After Pepperleigh has given his ruling, the narrator comments on the issues surrounding the verdict: “Just what the jurisdiction of Judge Pepperleigh’s court is I don’t know, but I do know that in upholding the rights of a Christian congregation – I am quoting here the text of the decision – against the intrigues of a set of infernal skunks that make too much money, anyway, the Mariposa court is without an equal” (81). The humour of the sentence rests in the notion that a “Christian congregation” has a right to defraud an insurance company because the ethical reputation of such urban companies is degraded in the eyes of the Mariposans. The nature of the organization being defrauded legitimates the fraud, the illegality of which does not concern the court. The irony of the sentence makes the perspective of the narrator different from that of the Mariposans; the implication is that he recognizes the court’s decision as contrary to the rule of law, something that the Mariposans can conveniently
disregard when the town is threatened by external forces. Although intended for humorous effect, these acts of quoting allow the reader to peer behind the narrator’s appropriation of a Mariposan veneer, as the narrator himself adumbrates an alternate but covert personality, one able to recognize Mariposan ‘small-mindedness’ and distance himself from it.

The narrator’s comic asides, often based on the contrast of his implied superiority to the inferior knowledge of the Mariposans, suggest that the implied reader, in order to get the full range of comic possibility, also possesses a greater range of reference than the Mariposans. In the discussion of Mariposa’s shifting national allegiances during cultural days of celebration, the narrator mentions Mariposans’ enthusiasm for the Fourth of July, which is based on their own indirect or tangential American connections: “Then on the Fourth of July there are stars and stripes flying over half the stores in town […] Then you learn for the first time that Jeff Thorpe’s people came from Massachusetts and that his uncle fought at Bunker Hill (it must have been Bunker Hill, - anyway Jefferson will swear it was in Dakota all right enough)” (37). Similarly, through free indirect discourse the narrator appropriates Thorpe’s geographic imagination in Chapter Two during the height of the banana-lands frenzy: “Anyway, they didn’t hesitate [to take Thorpe’s money], these Cuban people that wrote to Jeff from Cuba – or from a post-office box in New York – it’s all the same thing, because Cuba being so near to New York the mail is all distributed from there” (30). These references rely on common geographic knowledge, but they transcend the historical and topographical awareness of the Mariposans, or at the very least of Thorpe, the most loquacious but least informed character in the book.
This contrast of urban erudition and rural simplicity is a common component of the narrator’s irony and a large basis for the book’s humour (Keith 157). Karla El-Hassan states that the humour is largely based on the “incongruities between the real and the ideal” (173), or as Lynch states, “Sunshine Sketches is best approached on its own terms as a treatment of the incongruities between appearances (or illusion) and reality” (Humour 58). And yet it is the urban perspective so often favoured as the “real,” as it reveals the “ideal” constructed through rural self-deception and ignorance; the narrator’s irony, however, leaves this revelation for the most part implied. Ferris supports the idea of the rural performativity of the narrator’s voice, as she notes that while it “stumbles over ‘eggnostic’ and ‘Gothy’ [it] can also handle ‘theodolite’ with ease and casually slip in a reference to the Iliad” (180). Cameron’s first characterization of the narrator as ignorant and unsophisticated would have us laughing at him, yet Cameron’s altered depiction to that of an “intelligent man feigning simplicity” better reflects the reality that we are most definitely laughing along with the narrator.

The narrator periodically offers windows through his ironic narration that further reveal the depth of both his and the Mariposans’ character; while the bulk of the narrative combines irony and pathos, these brief sections rely more heavily on pathos, momentarily shedding the indeterminacy of the tone’s ironic cloud. The windows still reflect the narrator’s superior knowledge, but they also introduce a great sensitivity, a sensitivity that is as much a part of his personality as is the winking joviality.

The irony of the narrator’s portrayals relies on the reader’s knowledge of the well-known rural type: ignorant, good-natured, laughably earnest, and unselfconsciously moral. During these windows, though, the narrator peels back a character’s typified
description, and the subsequent characterization transcends archetypes. These windows suggest a fleeting and brief realism within the narration, and one of the clearest instances comes at the end of the chapter describing the Whirlwind campaign. It is the sad duty of Mullins to inform Dean Drone of the fundraising campaign that, despite the initial high spirits of optimism, fails miserably:

I saw Mullins, as I say, go up the street on his way to Dean Drone’s. It was middle April and there was ragged snow on the streets, and the nights were dark still, and cold. I saw Mullins grit his teeth as he walked, and I know that he held in his coat pocket his own cheque for the hundred, with the condition taken off it, and he said that there were so many skunks in Mariposa that a man might as well be in the Head Office in the city.

The Dean came out to the little gate in the dark, - you could see the lamplight behind him from the open door of the rectory, - and he shook hands with Mullins and they went in together. (73)

The narrator seldom relates details regarding temperature and light, but in this case these details contribute to both the pathos and immediacy of the scene. What is only insinuated earlier becomes fully displayed; these windows clarify the narrator’s perceptiveness and sensitivity, but they also further reveal the artifice of his Mariposan identity, the ignorant and provincial booster who winks at the readers to let them in on the joke. The Mariposans’ characterizations also benefit from these moments of narrative lucidity, as they now transcend character archetypes; what prevails is a sense of realism infused with pathos. While the ironic indeterminacy establishes distance between the Mariposans and the reader, these windows of realism bridge that emotive distance and the narrative becomes rather evocative. Furthermore, these windows lack any sense of Mariposa’s idealization, suggesting that that can occur only in the absence of proximity.

While the previous passage contains the narrator’s mention of the city as the negative type against which Mariposans measure their town, the more important thing is
what follows in the subsequent chapter: Smith’s use of arson to dissolve the financial threat facing the town, and the reestablishment of the narrative’s sense of temporal distance through his protection of the town from real consequence. Despite the narrative’s brief foray into realism, which equates to a conveyed emotional intimacy, the reestablishment of the narrator’s irony subsequently thrusts the momentarily individuated characters back into generic convention. The narrator only briefly reveals emotional depth within the Mariposans, but he also only briefly displays his capacity to recognize it, which suggests that the greater part of his persona rests just out of sight, below the surface of his narration; he performs the rural type, but his irony and windows of realism notify the reader that he, indeed, transcends any easy categorization.

The final chapter fully reveals what before was only suggested. The narrator now emerges in his full present-tense identity as a perceptive, sensitive urban dweller whose view of the past is both celebratory and melancholic; Mariposa has come to an end, and, as a result, it gains an associative forlorn affect, while its place in the personal trajectories of the club men becomes contextualized, ordered, more meaningful. If, as Zichy claims, the narrator has been looking back all along, the final chapter displays the process whereby the narrator moves from a unified urban to an ironized rural perspective, but interestingly, that metamorphosis is accompanied by a temporal shift, implying that a rural perspective, whether authentic or appropriated, belongs among images of the past.

The Train Ride Back

The final chapter, “L’Envoi. The Train to Mariposa,” is the work’s first and only full departure in setting and narrative tone. The addressee is no longer the generic reader, but rather the narrator’s companion in what are now the definite surroundings of a city
club for wealthy men. In this chapter, Leacock alludes to the importance of certain influences in the literary construction of Mariposa that have, up to this point, gone unacknowledged; those are nostalgia and memory. While serving as a trip into the cultural past, the final train trip back to Mariposa also reveals the extent to which memory affects the construction of the previous eleven sketches. It is the omniscient narrator who guides and instructs the auditor in “correct” ways of remembering his own past.

Ferris’ look at the final chapter of *Sunshine Sketches* questions the continued and “rather tired” debate regarding the generic classification of the work, and she states that this debate “continues to invoke a tradition of formal realism inappropriate to Leacock’s book” (178). Ferris is correct to question the application of realist standards to what is essentially a nostalgic fantasy; however, the full departure in setting and narrative tone at the beginning of the final chapter alerts us to our extraction from the world of the benign past into the world of the urban present, which for a short duration does appear to be rendered in a realist mode. This stylistic contrast highlights the idyllic qualities within the preceding eleven chapters. The town is a place where both labour and consequence are absent, and relaxation, ease, good humour, and pleasure take precedence: “[i]n Mariposa there aren’t any business hours and the excitement goes on all the time” (*Sunshine* 128). W.H. Magee feels that “no evil or tragedy worthy of the label is possible in the small town of the story” (“Local Colourist” 38). Carl Spadoni, however, points out that Mariposa is not entirely without its shadows, and he notes the springtime presence of drunk shantymen, the suicide of Fizzlechip, and the death of Pepperleigh’s son in the Boer War as examples of the book’s darker shades (xxxiv), all instances that I would
consider windows through the ironic narrative veneer. Yet Spadoni goes on to note that “[i]n spite of the many faults manifested by the characters in his book, all is forgiven by the narrator, and Mariposa is regarded as an exemplar of the good life” (xxxv).

The final chapter introduces a frame for the previous eleven, as the reader now learns that the preceding narrative has been a story likely told to the club men. The chapter begins with the voice of the now melancholic narrator whose emotive state is an appropriation and reflection of that of his auditor. The narrator, auditor, and reader have left Mariposa for good, and while the town now is part of the narrative’s past, its status as the lost home for the auditor becomes more significant; despite his present domicile in the “costlier part of the city” (142), Mariposa is a home for which the auditor still yearns. Yet the auditor has lost knowledge of his home, and more importantly, he has forgotten one of the methods of its access: that is, the train to Mariposa. It was at one time, along with Mariposa itself, a very real part of the auditor’s self and identity: “Years ago, when you first came to the city as a boy with your way to make, you knew of it well enough, only too well” (141). The narrator introduces the train only when Mariposa proper is not the subject of the narrative, and the train becomes the physical vehicle by which the auditor can attempt to revisit his childhood home. It also serves as the vehicle through which the auditor can revisit Mariposa through memory, as the very sight of it transports his thoughts back to his past.

Contributing to the melancholic tone is the juxtaposition between the lightness of the preceding eleven chapters, particularly with the final tremendous joke of Smith’s election victory - “Mr. Smith, of course, said nothing. He didn’t have to, - not for four years, - and he knew it” (140) - and the absence of both the town and the methods of its
access at the beginning of the twelfth: “Strange that you did not know of it [the train], though you come from the little town – or did, long years ago” (141). These lines mirror the opening of the first chapter, but while the first chapter introduces Mariposa, the final chapter introduces Mariposa’s absence; the town has now become lost to spatial and temporal distance. The auditor’s relationship with the present, however, is unfulfilling, even though he has met most of the youthful aspirations of his younger rural self. The present has not become what he imagined; the house he had once planned to build in Mariposa would have been “much finer, in true reality, than that vast palace of sandstone with the porte cochere and the sweeping conservatories that you afterwards built” (141-42). This comparison of a past might-have-been with his present reality paradoxically equates the imagined past to “true reality,” implying that the auditor’s actual urban life has veered into artifice or metaphysical falsity.

The cuisine of the club also proves inadequate when compared to the wild game caught and eaten in the auditor’s youth: “Ask your neighbour there at the next table whether the partridge that they sometimes serve to you here can be compared for a moment to the birds that he and you, or he and some one else, used to shoot as boys in the spruce thickets along the lake” (142). As the references move further back into the auditor’s past, that past becomes grander as the specifics of the event, such as who attended, become secondary, while its emotive quality, perhaps embellished by memory, takes precedence. The auditor’s inability to distinguish who accompanied him on his partridge hunting expeditions only speaks of the generalized quality of his memories; they are memories formed as much by cultural expectations of childhood as they are by
personal experience. For the auditor, the present has become inadequate when compared to those memories of a distant, inaccessible past.

Lowenthal explains this type of historical consciousness in *The Past is a Foreign Country*. As the past is as they say “history,” it therefore gains an appearance of being complete and stable, and thus an associative illusion of safety develops: “Nothing more can happen to the past; it is safe from the unexpected and the untoward, from accident or betrayal. Because it is over, the past can be ordered and domesticated, given a coherence foreign to the chaotic and shifting present. Nothing in the past can now go wrong” (62).

Our versions of the past can offer refuge, but accessing a personal past relies on a medium that is subject to a high degree of degradation: memory. Lowenthal paraphrases Ian Hunter’s description of the characteristics of recall from Hunter’s work *Memory*, which concludes that memories are poor determiners of historical events’ characteristics: “We mask diversity and collapse countless earlier images into a few dominant memories, accentuating any impressive characteristic and exaggerating its splendour or fragility” (*The Past* 208). The past is malleable; its evocation in abridged versions counteracts contemporary ennui or anomie, as these versions offer comprehensible, consoling images.

The men seek out that type of solace in their oak paneled, lamp-lit club: a sanctuary of comfort away from the chaotic vagaries of business, decorated in the timeless, comfortable aesthetics of urban clubs. The club is a most auspicious place in which to carry out these types of nostalgic reminiscences against which the present’s inadequacies become more apparent. No wonder the narrator pleads with the auditor to refrain from asking his neighbour about his boyhood fishing experiences as the
whopper’s magnificence could not be contained in a single “long dull evening in this club” (142). Leacock here establishes the importance of memory for his entire work; the reader comes to understand that the grandeur of the auditor’s childhood events corresponds to the aura of retrospective “splendour” permeating the previous eleven chapters. Memory determines the narrative’s tone and technique. The imaginary trip upcountry aboard the Mariposa Express is an attempt to revisit the source of these memories. While the attempt ultimately fails, the trip is particularly interesting as it documents a process of re-appropriating the affect of retrospect.

The auditor begins both the chapter and his trip aboard the Mariposa Express lacking knowledge of his own past. He no longer remembers the existence of the train to Mariposa, a method of physically gaining access to the town. His childhood memories are similarly degraded, and to access his personal, yet also conventional memories requires the narrator’s mnemonic prodding: “But if you have half forgotten Mariposa, and long since lost the way to it, you are only like the greater part of the men in this Mausoleum Club in the city […] Ask him [the neighbour] if he ever tasted duck that could for a moment be compared to the black ducks in the rice marsh along the Ossawippi” (142). The auditor is in a passive position, and rather than being able to recall scenes from his own past, it is the narrator who provides them. Similarly, when the narrator and auditor begin their journey aboard the Mariposa Express, it is the narrator who reveals the identity of the Mariposans and explains their idiosyncrasies to the auditor:

That man with the two-dollar panama and the glaring spectacles is one of the greatest judges that ever adorned the bench of Missinaba County. That clerical gentleman with the wide black hat, who is explaining to the man with him the marvelous mechanism of the
The auditor’s ostensible personal past becomes a narrative product for which he then becomes a consumer. As the train moves farther from the city, however, the idealizations of the train and countryside become more intense, and we realize that the auditor is not traveling into his personal history at all, but into the generalized, communal images formed from typified conceptions of the rural past.

The urban present only alluded to in Leacock’s book, the world outside the club, is that fallen world against which Mariposa is constructed. Its commuter trains contain people “standing thick in the aisles” (142), while the city itself is full of “roar and clatter” (143). Here again tactile details position the reader in close proximity to the narrative events. In contradistinction, as the train to Mariposa exits the city and travels through the outlying farmsteads, the narrator venerates the open countryside, and the distance between the auditor/reader and the narrative object is reestablished: “The city is far behind now and right and left of you there are trim farms […] There is a dull red light from the windows of the farmstead. It must be comfortable there […] only think of the still quiet of it” (143). “There” is the farmhouse perceived from a distance; the unsaid “here” is ostensibly the train seat, but it is in reality the leather armchair in the club. Spatial distance serves as the equivalent to temporal distance; observing the farmhouse from the seat of the train is parallel to remembering Mariposa as both function only across an interchangeable spatial and temporal gap. Yet the “there” of Mariposa and the farmhouse, perceived through the distant, longing gaze provides a contrast to the “here,” which is within the noise and “rush and strain” of the city. Despite evidence to the
contrary, the narrator himself is unable to traverse this distance as he can never quite shed his urban identity in the present.

The train trip to Mariposa is disguised as an actual trip taken by the auditor and described by the narrator. We first see the train as an object of Mariposa within the city, and the narrator’s description here disregards that proper perspective he states is necessary to see Mariposa properly; that is, we need to inhabit it for about six months (3). If we have come fresh to Mariposa from a cosmopolitan centre, we “are deceived. [Our] standard of vision is all astray” (3). The narrator’s perspective is “all astray” in the early parts of the final chapter as he sees the train to Mariposa as diminutive, tucked away in its corner of the station “puffing up steam” (141) in order to take its primary commuters home to the suburbs and the golf grounds. As the train pulls away from the city, the narrator provides a running commentary on its metamorphosis from an electric commuter train to the grand Mariposa Express: “But wait a little, and you will see that when the city is well behind you, bit by bit the train changes its character” (143). These lines serve a dual purpose; they anticipate the further transformation of the train, but they also anticipate the transformation of the narrator, from that of omniscient and melancholic guide of the club men who feeds back to them idyllic scenes from their own childhood to the re-adoption of his former Mariposan persona, the performer of the Mariposan type.

The transformation of the narrator’s tone mirrors the transformation of the train. The train is in no real way special or even distinctive until it is distanced from the city and begins to shed its electric engine and the “trim little cars” carrying the commuters (143). Similarly, take the narrator outside of the city and the train becomes “the most comfortable, the most reliable, the most luxurious and the speediest train that ever turned
a wheel” (144). Just as the train sheds the markers of its city identity, the narrator sheds his urban perspective, and the train regains the splendour belonging to recalled images of the past; the narrator, in approaching Mariposa, begins to adopt that “standard of vision” necessary to transcend the appreciation of its “mere appearance” (2). Contrary to the narrator’s advice to spend six months in Mariposa, to see Mariposa properly one needs to see it from a temporal distance, in retrospect from the armchairs of the urban club; the train thus becomes an embodiment of memory’s affect.

With the revelation of the narrative frame in the final chapter, the auditor also becomes the retroactive source of, and consumer for, the prior eleven chapters of narration; however, the narrator’s address does not become specific until the eighth paragraph, and the second person “you” serves as an address to the generic reader. This same “you” appears in the first sentence of the book and serves as the object of the narrator’s address throughout. Before the clarification of the narrator’s specific auditor in the club, the small-town experience is discussed as a national phenomenon; the rural small town becomes the normalized site of the better past. Here Leacock is utilizing one of the common tropes of western literature: the rural ideal as an image of a happier childhood. On a larger scale, the idyll does not simply offer images associated with a personal childhood, but also images we associate with a social past: a nascent, more innocent social state. Significantly, a collective nostalgia reflective of Marx’s simple pastoral, which produces images of a better past, says more about the present in which it was created than about the past that it creates.16

16 Bunce helps explain the efficacy of images of the countryside ideal and their association with childhood; children’s literature, “rural upbringings,” and family
When the auditor finally pulls into the town’s station, he has almost reached his spatial and temporal destination, his childhood: “How vivid and plain it all is. Just as it used to be thirty years ago” (145). Before the illusion dissolves, the narrator, auditor, and reader are on the cusp of entering the Mariposa of the sketches proper. With an extra-textual implication, Lynch states that this Mariposa resonates with a national collective: “Mariposa is the place from which many affluent city dwellers migrated, the community which they have partly forgotten, and the ‘home’ towards which they nostalgically yearn. Mariposa is the Canadian past, at once individual and collective” (Humour 57). Mariposa as concept relates to cultural, national, and personal origins; it is perceived as a type of wellspring from which a cultural identity flows and takes shape. This national angle is also taken up by Mantz: “Leacock’s train journey turns back the clock of history collectively as well as individually, back through the stages of the national past which lies behind the biography of every Canadian” (99). These comments, were they written today, should include the caveat that this is the past of many, as opposed to all, white Anglo-Saxon Ontarians rather than Canadians.

What Lynch and Mantz’s comments do is situate Mariposa as an originary point for Canadian cultural identity; unconsciously or not, their comments regarding the national aspects of the historicity of Mariposa thus place the town firmly into the simple pastoral tradition in which the origins of any self-identified group belong to a kinder, gentler past. Mariposa, then, functions as consolation for the modern industrialized and commercial nation and not just for the reminiscing titans of capitalism. But these comments overlook the retrospective stylization of the town’s literary construction; they

vacations create, Bunce argues, cultural associations between the countryside and childhood (63-68).
seem to confuse the golden glow of recalled origins for ‘real’ origins themselves.

Particularly significant is the dissolution of the last chapter’s fantasy as the train almost arrives at its goal. That goal is ostensibly Mariposa, and just as the entire train journey is a reappropriation of the retrospective tone, the destination will also reacquaint the narrator and auditor with the town’s quintessence, its ultimate and final significance in terms of cultural meaning and identity, be it personal, provincial, or national; this goal, however, proves utterly allusive.

The final journey is a metaphor for memory itself. It gestures towards unified meaning, a platonic form that guides all subsequent manifestations of culture, a form which our reminiscences, working in tandem with cultural expectations, can only sketch in outline thus providing fodder for latter-day cultural mimesis; in this case that mimesis is the narrator’s performance of the Mariposan type. Memories may gesture toward the suggested unified meaning of a cultural origin, but transcendent meaning can only be deferred, even as memory appears to approach it. The train to Mariposa, as well as the retrospective affect the journey engenders in the narrator’s tone, expresses a Derridean signifier for which Mariposa itself is the endlessly deferred signified.17 The solace the club men ostensibly receive from their memories is thus always inadequate, resulting in the failure of the imagined journey and the work’s melancholic ending. W.J. Keith sees the ending as a statement that “You can’t go home again; the pastoral ends conventionally in the contemporary city, after all” (160). But it is an ending more in line with Marx’s complex pastoral because it serves as a complication of childhood longing

17 For a discussion of the indeterminacy of the narrative tone resulting in the “impossibility of a resolution of the ‘text’” (108), see Ed Jewinski’s “Untestable Inferences.”
and the inability of such yearning to provide solace, to root identity to what is thought of as an immanence: the stability of identity stemming from early experience. Within the shell of a complex pastoral, Leacock writes in the language of the simpler pastoral, but the final chapter reveals that the text is, in fact, a comment on the longing experienced within the “culture at large.” The remembered splendour of the rural past, what is essentially an experiential exemplar for contemporary urban society, is an inextricable aspect of the vehicle of memory, which helps in the emulation of its destination even though memory never manages to reach it.

The apparent main tension in the book, comic as it is, rests between the contrasted attitudes and customs deemed inherent to the rural and the urban, the classic antitheses. The narrator is largely responsible for this surface structure, and as his narration of Mariposa emanates from the urban present, the dichotomy of country and city forms in retrospect from an urban perspective. However, Leacock’s narrator seems unwittingly to provide a glimpse of a pre-pastoral landscape, one further north along those temporal train tracks; the image of the far north displaces Mariposa’s originary associations as it suggests that within the book there exists another temporal-spatial relation than the simple past-present dichotomy of the country and the city. It is difficult to determine whether the narrator is aware of the unsettling effect these northern allusions have on the stability of the existing country-city binary. Lynch characterizes Mariposa as the “typical Canadian town between city and hinterland” (*Humour* 57), and with these allusions to the northern hinterlands, which always rest on the margins of the text, the predominance of the country-city dichotomy dissolves, and an alternate subtextual tension between the urban and the hinterland develops.
Geographic Temporality of Ontario in *Sunshine Sketches*

The final chapter of *Sunshine Sketches* ends in the industrialized city that in both this work and Leacock’s subsequent *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich* represents the present (Lynch *Humour* 121). Tom Marshall suggests that the final chapter “becomes the bridge between the books” (86), as it moves the reader from the small town to the city. Critics, however, have paid little attention to the third region in *Sunshine Sketches*: the northern hinterland. Lynch highlights Mariposa’s “medial position” (*Humour* 62) between city and wilderness, but he does not elaborate on the third region’s significance. The importance of this area develops in tandem with the character Josh Smith. During Smith’s liquor licensing battle in chapter one, we learn that he is from “the lumber country of the Spanish River, where the divide is toward the Hudson Bay, - ‘back north’ as they called it in Mariposa” (10). “Back north” is not the phrase of the narrator, but of the Mariposans. While “back home” is really the Mariposa of the past for the urbanites, the unending forests and lakes of “back north” represent a past preceding that embodied by Mariposa, one beyond the town’s offered “middle landscape.”

Mantz alludes to this landscape of wood and water as indicative of a national common experience, but it is also that out of which Mariposa is built. We can view the north as an earlier step on the linear developmental scale adumbrated by those critics who recognize the influence of the Mariposan past in the urban present; what, therefore, is the influence of the past prior to Mariposa within the text?

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18 Marx states that the appeal of the pastoral “middle landscape” rests in its combination of the wild and the tame, and its amalgam of the contrasting values of “art and nature” (71).
In *The One and the Many: English Canadian Short Story Cycles*, Lynch discusses Leacock’s use of the small Ontario town as an image of a kinder past, “a more communally responsible past” (35) that Leacock thought should inform Canadians in the present. Lynch argues that the urbanites’ relationship with Mariposa represents an archetypal tension of identity between “place of origin” and the individual (31), a theme Leacock actively cultivates through his portrayal of Mariposa as a Canadian “home place” that informs “individual, communal, and national identity” (182). Lynch uses the small town’s place in the short-story cycle as evidence of its conceptual standing as a place of return, as a home that emanates a core or rooted identity. He particularly advances *Sunshine Sketches* as the beginning of a Canadian small-town tradition and as something of a “home place” itself: that is, not only as the model of a Canadian tradition of short-story cycles, but also as the first text that “most insistently portrayed” the small town as the “home place” with which Canadian protagonists identify (182).

Lynch’s “home place” recalls D.M.R. Bentley’s theory of the baseland/hinterland dichotomy articulated in *The Gay Grey Moose*. Through his readings of Canadian poetry, Bentley concludes that the hinterland suggests openness, disorder, lack of population, and north and inspires open-ended forms and themes related to freedom. The baseland suggests habitations, order, structure, and south/east, inspiring themes related to order within established forms. Lynch’s “home place” and Bentley’s “baseland,” the latter incorporating the urban and rural south, both suggest an originary space from which Canadian writing and identity emerge. Lynch’s formulation, however, splits Bentley’s baseland in two, as contained within is both Lynch’s “home place,” the small town, and the non “home place,” the urban sphere. Bentley’s theory explores a dichotomy
analogous to one I would like to introduce. Mariposa occupies the site resting between
two polarized, contradictory non-“home places.” Mariposa as “home place,” its apparent
benevolence and kinder ethos, is the site of competition for which the contradictory
influences of these opposing geographic-temporal locales, the city and the hinterland,
fight for control.

Josh Smith comes from that poorly defined geographic region located somewhere
“back north.” This phrase implies his movement from the north to the south, but it does
not refer exclusively to spatial movement; it also refers to the movement through
landscapes that contain temporal associations. In this case, “back north” refers to a
landscape that is of a different, earlier temporality than Mariposa, which is then different
from that of the city. The allusions to Smith’s place of origin and the final emergence of
the city as the “theatre of memory” (a phrase I borrow from Raphael Samuel) in which
Mariposa forms offer an outline of the real dichotomy operating in the book: that of
distant past and urban present, pre-civilized hinterland and conceptual forefront of
settlement.\(^{19}\)

While the urbanites in their club nostalgically idealize their imagined rural
heritage, Mariposans do not similarly idealize the step prior to their golden age; one
exception is Judge Pepperleigh’s strong suggestion that his daughter Zena read *Pioneers
of Tecumseh Township* (93). Mariposa is a construction of the collective memories of
those in the club, the consensual “home-place” of nostalgic men, and thus there is a
corresponding lack of historical consciousness in the Mariposans, which, as Lowenthal

\(^{19}\) This is how I see this dichotomy operating in the book and am well aware that the
landscape contained fully developed Indigenous civilizations prior to the arrival of
Europeans.
explains, is to be expected: “one thing absent from this [the nostalgic] imagined past is nostalgia – no one then looked back in yearning or for succour” (“Nostalgia” 29). Leacock’s subtle inclusion of the northland both works to undermine the notion that the Mariposa of the past is a static ideal, and draws attention to it as a nostalgic reconstruction dependent on a series of negative forces operating within the urban sphere. To the men in the club, Mariposa serves as a fountainhead of individual and cultural identity, yet the hinterland stretching behind and beyond Mariposa, in both a social and historical sense, modifies the club men’s veneration of the town, as, in its new context, it becomes an unacknowledged node on the trajectory of urbanization and industrial development, not its antithesis or antidote. The virtual invisibility of this third area accommodates undue attention to the imagined importance of Mariposa-as-origin. The nostalgic reconstruction of Mariposa is a narrative that imagines its own cultural origins as something exceedingly, even fallaciously, innocent; Mariposa might be seen as a pastoral obstruction since its golden glow conceals its own cultural and social antecedents. Furthermore, while Mariposa constitutes a wish image for the urbanites, Smith reveals the decidedly ambivalent influence they have on Mariposa

**Temporal Landscapes/Temporal Values**

Smith is one of the few characters who cannot call Mariposa “home.” Lynch provides us with a rather harsh critical assessment of Smith who “does not belong to Mariposa” (*Humour* 76). He acts out of self-interest and places the desires of the individual over the needs of the community.20 Glenn Willmott, however, defends Smith, portraying him as more of a father figure to certain characters: “Lynch […] passes over

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20 Lynch develops this reading of Smith throughout the third chapter of *Humour and Humanity.*
Smith's entirely humane interaction with a more conspicuous employee, Billy, his desk clerk, whom he protects from the infectious financial craze in ‘The Speculations of Jefferson Thorpe’ with a good action that is hard to construe as anything but paternal” (54). While Willmott claims that Lynch sees Smith’s influence on Mariposa as ultimately “deleterious,” paving the way for the type of plutocracy seen in Arcadian Adventures, Willmott notes that Smith’s effect on the town is, in fact, “neutral” (54). R.D. MacDonald provides a similar evaluation of Smith: “he seems content, despite his boisterous dress and slick ways, to accomplish little more than a return to the previous equilibrium” (“Small-Town Ontario” 64). Smith does have an impact on the town, but one that does not irrevocably alter or damage the nature of the town’s social makeup. Smith’s actions are essentially corrective to the town’s ethos, as he helps prevent the dissolution of critical niches by other external, harmful influences.

I will venture to call Smith a self-interested humanist, one not above seeking out a dollar, but one not willing to do so to the detriment of others. While Smith’s actions disregard the letter of the law – it is unlikely the illiterate Smith could decipher that letter anyway - the system dictating his activities seems improvised, even contradictory, as it incorporates equal parts altruism and self-interest. Aside from Willmott’s already noted observation of Smith’s protective, paternal role, there are other instances in which Smith’s actions outline his uncodified system of practice; Smith seeks to make money, but his other actions counter avarice as his defining feature. For instance, in relation to Thorpe, Smith acts as something of a guardian angel who helps rescue him from financial ruin (34). Lynch suggests that Smith acts as deus ex machina who excises consequence in
certain chapters (*Humour* 96), but Smith’s covert act of charity comes immediately after the description of Thorpe’s own planned beneficence (33). Thorpe’s plan to use his mining-stock windfall to build a home for “the incurables” germinates from his direct opposition to the urban practice of charity, represented by Carnegie and Rockefeller who, in Thorpe’s words, give to those who “‘don’t want it’” (32): professors and research institutions as opposed to the poor. Thorpe’s conviction regarding proper recipients of charity seeks a fiscal balance. His urban intimations are reflected in his stock-market dabbling, but his naïve altruism serves as an example of his inability to thrive in the worldly urban sphere of commerce and experience; Thorpe’s ultimate aspiration does not reflect a technologically or economically progressive outlook. Yet his altruism saves Thorpe when Smith seems to reflect back to him his own ethical *modus-operandi* when urban crooks swindle the barber. Smith’s subsequent act, masked as a business exchange (34), puts Thorpe’s philanthropic ideals into practice.

Smith also resolves Dean Drone’s financial difficulties. In this instance, it is hard to determine what Smith’s personal motivations are for setting fire to the Anglican church in the chapter “The Beacon on the Hill” other than a genuine desire to help a person in desperate financial straits. Smith gains nothing from this act, and rather puts himself and his position in the community at risk as he becomes an object of interest at the trial investigating the possibility of insurance fraud. He may be the sole benefactor from the failed Whirlwind campaign (Lynch *Humour* 94), but he is also Drone’s solution to that failed campaign. Drone’s innocence or ignorance of finance positions him as a

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21 In the case of Thorpe, Lynch comments: “Of the many ironies in this sketch, one of the most telling is that Jeff’s failure and loss is – from the narrator’s point of view – his salvation” (*Humour* 76).
victim who is completely incapable of independently finding a resolution, something left to the more than capable hands of Smith.

Smith’s actions are not just neutralizing, but they are also fiscally leveling and corrective to the detrimental influence of the city. Urban institutions and characters pose as the real threat, and Smith’s interventions restore a financial balance in favour of those townspeople who have been stung by their interaction with the city; his desk clerk Billy, Thorpe, and Drone all receive a type of surreptitious assistance from Smith, whose actions are either out of the public eye, or performed at night since in the case of arson anonymity is essential. These deeds also appear to emanate from Smith’s instinctual impulse to assist those without the necessary insight or nerve to deal with the offenses of modernity, be they actual crimes or bureaucratic disregard. Thorpe is threatened by actual criminals, while Drone is threatened by an unfeeling financial sector whose concern extends only to numerical figures as opposed to individuals.

Smith defuses these urban threats through a value system that appears oppositional to that which extends from the city. The urban influences either disregard individual circumstances through codified and bureaucratic systems or, in the case of Thorpe’s defrauding, ignore the individual altogether since money is the coveted object. Smith’s concern for the individual transcends any codified system of response (Smith’s hands are never tied by red tape), including the law, and he places capital gain underneath the person it affects; the individual determines Smith’s actions, as opposed to a predetermining system dictating his response. An example is that the rooms in his hotel have no set price but go “according to the expression of their [the clients’] faces” (11), while he holds no real allegiances to a particular type or class of clientele: “Anybody was
free of the hotel who cared to come in. Anybody who didn’t like it could go out” (11). He sees the individual void of trappings of class or status and possesses an instinct for business, but more importantly he possesses an instinct for people; this may translate into a sense of the slap-dash within his business practices, not to mention his politics; he goes from being an ardent free-trader to a tariff man in the space of a breath (130). Yet his charitable activities demonstrate that this system is not always put towards his own self-advancement. Rather than posing as the threat to the organic community of Mariposa, he preserves the organic community by allowing at least two Mariposans to maintain their critical niche within that community, to remain “separate and so different – not a bit like the people in the cities” (28). Smith functions as an improvising saviour who maintains Mariposa as the embodiment of a kinder past.

Smith emerges from the past landscape of the hinterland; he is an anachronism, an illiterate, larger than life personality, a “pragmatic frontiersman from the north” (MacDonald “Small-Town Ontario” 64), and a near incarnation of retrospective mythologization himself. He embodies a distinct contrast to the city, within which operates a system that subverts the individual; it contains the processes of modernity to which Mariposa has not yet been lethally exposed. Smith’s actions, conscious or not, maintain the position of individuals within Mariposa, while the city eviscerates individuality through prescribed urban niches and production-line employment. Individuals construct Mariposa from the bottom up, while the city subsumes individuals into a top-down social edifice.

For average Mariposans, however, the city is also an attractive, cosmopolitan world they never cease to emulate. The city contains the potential but ultimately
ineffectual solutions for Drone’s financial difficulties, as “[u]p from the city” come the
costumes for the Girls’ Auxilliary bazaar (64), the magic lantern for Drone’s lecture on
“Italy and her Invaders” (64), as well as the conceptual basis for the failed Whirlwind
campaign (Chapter 5). The city possesses various sophisticated necessities, such as the
brass beds Smith installs in his hotel (11), as well as the architect who designs the “caff”
(15). It also represents for the Mariposans the site of erudition and culture, sometimes
valued as in the case of Smith’s “caff,” but sometimes scorned as in the case of Pupkin’s
suspected poetic rival in love: “It was one of those regular poets with a solemn jackass
face, and lank parted hair and eyes like puddles of molasses. I don’t know how he came
there – up from the city, probably” (104-05). One person’s dazzling wordsmith is
another’s semi-talented, pretentious poseur; Pupkin’s scrutiny of the poet reflects the
other side of Mariposans’ notions of the city as the site of corruption and inauthenticity.

Smith is distinctly aware of Mariposans’ ambivalence towards the city, which he
exploits to make money. His “caff” is “like what they have in the city – a ladies’ and
gents caff” (15), something Darrell Norris calls a “crude and transitory facsimile of
metropolitan taste” (134). Smith can distill the essence of the city and transfer it into the
“caff,” turning it into a temporary urban or cosmopolitan ideal;\footnote{Lynch also wittily comments that “Mariposans fall down, figuratively, before this
gilded ‘caff,’” which Smith has “shaped” from the Mariposans’ “golden dreams of city
life” (Humour 70).} the “caff” is symbiotic
as from it Mariposans receive a great deal of sensual pleasure, while Smith’s attachment
to it rests on its potential material benefit. He displays an equally dexterous ability at
distilling the essence of the countryside for those in the city, from which many holiday
visitors seek out fresh air and the lake in Mariposa. These are the visitors to whom Smith

\footnote{Lynch also wittily comments that “Mariposans fall down, figuratively, before this
gilded ‘caff,’” which Smith has “shaped” from the Mariposans’ “golden dreams of city
life” (Humour 70).}
appeals when he advertises his hotel and “caff” as a “Summer Pavilion advertised in the
city as Smith’s Tourists’ Emporium, and Smith’s Northern Health Resort” (15); the
campaign, needless to say, is immensely successful as the urban tourists soon arrive
“with fishing rods and landing nets pouring in on every train, almost too fast to register”
(15).

The hotel transforms; for those in the country, it typifies what can be found in the
city, while for the urbanites it possesses the attributes and benefits of a country lifestyle. Smith is able to abstract urban and rural quintessence to satisfy the expectation of an ideal. As Smith’s origins lie outside of this perceived rural-urban dichotomy, he is able to manipulate self-consciously the various affective idealizations at play within, what becomes with the presence of Smith, the false dichotomy of small town and urban centre. The hotel’s remodeling in order to serve rural and urban desires becomes a commentary on the hollowness of that urban-rural dichotomy, as here a single site serves distinct, even oppositional purposes. Similarly, the final chapter displays the urban club men’s capacity to remodel the town, but theirs is through retrospect; the first eleven chapters are the sum total of their memories. It is only the Mariposans who lack the voice with which to render their town. Smith’s manipulation of the town’s affect is thus a temporary intratextual displacement of the urban pole’s power of representation over Mariposa within the very text decided by the urbanites. Through its various incarnations, Mariposa becomes a site of contention. This struggle for influence occurs through the contest for the town’s

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23 Again, Lynch reads this passage as evidence of Smith’s readiness to take advantage not only of the Mariposans, but of anyone he can: “Smith demonstrates his ability to exploit the illusions of city dwellers with regard to the benefits of a northern holiday as readily as he manipulates the illusions of the semi-rural Mariposans with respect to city life” (*Humour* 70-71).
sentiment, as both poles of the real dichotomy of hinterland and urban sphere manipulate this malleable space, offering to Smith a material benefit, while offering metaphysical consolation to the urban dreamer.

Judge Pepperleigh’s court is another site that highlights Mariposa’s liminal position, its status as a “middle landscape” built from the contrasting values of Smith and the city. It is where the forms of the city, jurisprudence, the subversion of the individual to process, and the sequence of objective legal proceedings (or at least the appearance of such), meet the values of Smith, the transcendence of individuals over a system, and instinctual morality restoring financial balance/equilibrium. The mixture of influences comes through in Judge Pepperleigh’s decision against the insurance company that, rightfully so, has cried foul over the fire that burns the “Church of England Church” to the ground:

Protest from the insurance people? Legal proceedings to prevent payment? My dear sir! I see you know nothing about the Mariposa court, in spite of the fact that I have already said that it was one of the most precise instruments of British fair play ever established. Why, Judge Pepperleigh disposed of the case and dismissed the protest of the company in less than fifteen minutes! Just what the jurisdiction of Judge Pepperleigh’s court is I don’t know, but I do know that in upholding the rights of a Christian congregation – I am quoting here the text of the decision – against the intrigues of a set of infernal skunks that make too much money, anyway, the Mariposa court is without an equal. Pepperleigh even threatened the plaintiffs with the penitentiary, or worse. (81)

The goal of Smith’s act is to assist the naïve Dean Drone in overcoming his financial burden. The ends of Pepperleigh’s decision are to protect Smith from legal retribution, and to ensure that the abundant insurance funds find their way into the hands of Drone. Smith’s influence as financial leveler is legitimated by Pepperleigh’s decision, as his court is one of morality, although not necessarily legality. Under the guise of
jurisprudence, the formal aspect of Mariposa’s intimations towards urbanity, Pepperleigh gives a decision that is explicitly opposed to the tenets of jurisprudence based on the affective content of the hinterland influence.

In both the urban club and Mariposa, the past, or more correctly the imagined past, serves as the corrective balm for present injustice and/or malaise. However, just as the urbanite cannot re-enter the gates of Mariposa in the final chapter of the book, so too is the Mariposan barred from those trains heading north into the mining country at the book’s opening:

It is true that the trains mostly go through at night and don’t stop. But in the wakeful silence of the summer night you may hear the long whistle of the through train […] Or, better still, on a winter evening about eight o’clock you will see the long row of the Pullmans and diners of the night express going north to the mining country, the windows flashing with brilliant light, and within them a vista of cut glass and snow-white table linen, smiling negroes and millionaires with napkins at their chins whirling past in the driving snowstorm. (4)

Although these trains head into the north country, they are an object of the cosmopolitan world, and it is not the past that the Mariposan desires, but the promise of urban refinement represented by the trains. But here we have an idealized representation of urban wealth analogous to the idealization of community solidarity projected through urban conceptions of Mariposa; both representations are from the perspective of an outsider who can perceive that other world only from a distance. This instance of Mariposans’ yearning is another narrative window similar to those revealing the emotional depth of the town’s inhabitants, and it suggests that the ironic veneer the narrator constructs around Mariposa does not match the reality to which the text only alludes; a type of longing is indeed present in this town, a town that, by all other
accounts, is completely self-satisfied. It is perhaps a rare image of Mariposa that does not emanate from the urban club, but is, in fact, an image of small-town ennui contemporaneous to its urban counterpart.

This image offers a rare occurrence in which the worlds of the club dweller and the Mariposan come into contact. That person staring longingly into the train windows from the railway siding is excluded from the cosmopolitan world, just as the auditor staring out the train window is barred from that final image of Mariposa; each desires but is prohibited from the world of the other, and the space that lies between this visual contact is the distance that allows for both the idealization and the protraction of perceived difference. Yet as the eyes of the Mariposan and club dweller meet through the transparent barrier of the pane of glass, this image offers a perfect metaphor of the relationship of these two spaces; the train continues north into that ignored third but no less essential landscape, as the two players involved in this age-old division long for, but are barred from, the imagined world of the other. Yet this mutual exclusivity of these two spaces presents a false representation of their real interaction, since it disregards the urban pole’s control over the nature of rural representation and the suggested growing urban economic influence over the small town and hinterland.

These prohibitions from landscapes embodying an imagined ethos indicate that these spaces do not and did not exist in time and/or space as they do in either memory or imagination. The train trip taken in the final chapter is illusory, as the train itself serves as a type of fantasy time machine; apart from those previously discussed windows in the narration, Mariposa is seldom represented in the present, as indeed it exists mainly in memory, in a pastoral reconstruction. However, the edges of that pastoral reconstruction
are frayed by the creeping influence of a distant, urban modernity that Smith temporarily deflects before he makes his own journey to the city as an MP. In Mariposa itself, the trains heading north are not entering the past from which Smith emerged, but an altered landscape that is now connected to the main sphere of commerce in the city because of its potential for economic development. Smith’s hinterland no longer exists as the north-country frontier of the distant past, but has become mainly a resource supplier for modern industrialism and part of the domain of the wealthy capitalist. On the very fringes of the text, this exploitative relationship dissolves the real dichotomy of hinterland and urban sphere into a synthesis of vast material gain transferred along that mainline north-south railroad. Those trains, luckily, ignore the Mariposa of the text, but because that Mariposa is a retrospective construction, we might conclude that within the hidden Mariposa of the actual present, its bypass no longer offers safe harbour. Its main contribution now is to offer the wealthy capitalist an image of his idealized origins.

Smith within Mariposa offers a humourous parallel to one of the book’s main themes: the imagined past as a touchstone against which contemporary errors and crimes are measured. This relationship of the valued past to the degraded present is explicit in the last chapter and incorporates only the recent past of Mariposa and the urban present. Yet the distant past of the hinterland north expresses a largely hidden, but no less corrective, influence through Josh Smith. Unlike Smith’s effective efforts at restoring some “equilibrium” to the town, the image of Mariposa dissipates before the very eyes of the auditor, suggesting that the ability of Mariposa’s compensatory representation to establish a moral balance in the city has become compromised in the age of increasing wealth disparity and inequality rooted in the city.
Smith actively mitigates the negative influence of the urban sphere and temporarily preserves Mariposa as its moral and experiential counterpart within the very text the urban men have constructed through memory. The duplicity of the urban influence on places like Mariposa is best represented through the character Pupkin Sr., who simultaneously longs for yet despoils the landscape in which he wants to recognize an idyll. The narrator’s portrait of Pupkin Sr. incorporates biting irony:

His own longing – and his wife shared it – was for the simple, simple life […] Pupkin senior often said that he wanted to have someplace that would remind him of the little old farm up the Aroostook where he was brought up. He often bought little old farms, just to try them, but they always turned out to be so near a city that he cut them into real estate lots, without even having had time to look at them. (102)

Pupkin Sr.’s experiences suggest that rural nostalgia can both justify and conceal the real impact of the city’s influence on the country. Interestingly, both Smith and Pupkin are outsiders to Mariposa, yet their contrasting influence illuminates the real dichotomy of hinterland and city that grapple over Mariposa’s financial control, but also, and more importantly, for Mariposa’s characteristic ethos, its requisite “purity, peace, and stability” (New Land Sliding 156). Pupkin Sr. is a character lifted straight off of Plutoria Ave. from Arcadian Adventures. He is the true capitalist whose economic activity drains the small town of its vitality because of the availability of jobs in his, or someone else’s, burgeoning factories. He is oblivious to his real impact on places like Mariposa. In spite of its humour, the text hints at the dangers to Mariposa stemming from the dominant urban economy, the more egregious transgressions of which Smith effectively counters. Characters like Pupkin Sr., however, dominate Leacock’s subsequent text, yet a countervailing influence equivalent to Smith is absent. If viewed in a continuum with the
earlier text, *Arcadian Adventures* contains a much darker, far more cynical summation of an unchecked urban plutocracy, an influence that within the imaginative borders of Mariposa is still effectively stalled.
Chapter Three

Saying Goodbye to Mariposa: Robertson Davies’s Deptford and the Small-Town Convention

Stephen Leacock’s Mariposa, observes Gerald Lynch, is a type of “home place” for Canadian literature and identity (The One 182), a label suggesting that the town’s significance transcends its canonical place in literature and enters a realm touching on a cultural imaginary: “acknowledged or not, [Mariposa’s impact] may be unavoidable for any writer using the genre of the short story cycle and a Canadian small-town setting after 1912” (183). Mariposa’s influence on identity is both intertextual and extratextual, claims Lynch, as Leacock’s book “most insistently portrayed the connection between the home place as small-town Ontario and identity – individual, communal, and national identity” (182). In reflecting on Leacock’s centrality within a “Canadian literary sensibility,” Frank Birbalsingh argues “it would be hard to imagine Canadian literature being what it is today without his writing and its example” (195). Leacock’s rendering of Mariposa as a ‘typical’ Canadian small town, no doubt, offers readers an attractive, imaginary, even fantastic ideal of a “home place,” whose iconic status and broad recognition is unmatched in Canadian literature; it is paradigmatic of a type of small-town fiction with which many subsequent texts are in conversation. Robertson Davies’s Deptford Trilogy is no exception, and Robert Thacker, Clara Thomas, and W.J. Keith all read Deptford and Mariposa as progeny of the same lineage. With an almost exclusive focus on Fifth Business, this chapter proposes that Deptford is a simultaneous product and rejection of Mariposa’s influence. Through his distinctly ambivalent memories of Deptford, Dunstan Ramsay explores the nostalgic small-town archetype for which
Mariposa serves as a template, and his final departure from the small town constitutes an allegorical exodus from Mariposa’s aesthetic and cultural influence.  

At least a superficial link between the towns can be found in their similar temporal settings, says Clara Thomas, as Dunstan’s recollections of his childhood “encompass the same time period to which the novels of Duncan [Sara Jeannette] and Leacock were contemporary” (221). Thomas points out further similarities among the three: “it [Fifth Business] is set in Southern Ontario and its total tone and makeup is specific to the past of this country, at a time when such towns played a keystone part in the country’s development” (221). What Thomas means by the “total tone and makeup” of the novel may be clarified by W.J. Keith’s comments on the “detached perspective” of Leacock’s and Davies’s narrators: “They have widened their own horizons and look back at the town in question with affection or amused irony or occasionally with disgust, but certainly from outside” (167). While these critics read the past through these literary constructions, Robert Thacker deciphers their influence on Ontario’s self-regard in the present, as the province “persists in seeing itself – through its literature, the stuff of myths – as a place of small towns […] the small-town ethos is a legacy, an inheritance which helps to explain the present by assessing and redefining the past” (“Connection” 213).

24 It should be clear that this chapter will not consider Mariposa as a Jungian or Frygean “archetype.” In A Smaller Infinity: The Jungian Self in the Novels of Robertson Davies, Patricia Monk offers a thorough exploration of Davies’s work in the context of Jung’s influence. If Mariposa is a manifestation of an unconscious pattern or deep cultural symbol, it is not my goal to discuss it as such. Rather, Mariposa is an archetype in a culturally conscious (or for the Canadian context, a culturally self-conscious) sense, in that it constitutes a prototype for subsequent literary renditions of small-town Ontario; some suggest that Mariposa has a permanent status as intertext, intended or not (see Lynch’s discussion of Alice Munro’s Who Do You Think You Are? in The One and the Many 182-185).
This cultural approach is common. For instance, Douglas Mantz reads Mariposa as an image of “psychic roots” (97) for a Canadian nation: “Leacock’s train journey turns back the clock of history collectively as well as individually, back through the stages of the national past which lies behind the biography of every Canadian” (99). Not surprisingly, this cultural reading echoes through the criticism on *Fifth Business*; Patricia Monk, for example, summarizes Deptford’s social perspective as a “background of conventional Canadian attitudes and behaviour” (*Mud* 14).

As the melancholic last chapter of *Sunshine Sketches* implies, the text’s tone is influenced by, and also alludes to, the fading importance of the small town in early twentieth-century Ontario; as the final image of Mariposa fades, and the club men and reader come to realize that the town may have been no more than a mirage of reminiscence. The early part of the twentieth century in Ontario was a period of general emigration from the small towns to the increasingly industrialized cities (Baskerville 157); with the decline of the countryside came the clearer definition and increased appeal of ‘rural values,’ a trend on which Leacock both capitalizes and comments. Thomas appears to commit the same error as other critics of Leacock’s work: that is, to confuse the lighthearted, ironic, jovial tone of the book with an accurate distillation of the spirit of the age, an age thought to be defined by the vitality of organic communities as opposed to their decline. It is a further error to read Deptford as an homage to the popular conception of that age and to its literary predecessor, as a profound tension exists between Deptford and Davies’s protagonists, all of whom experience acute anxiety as a result of the identity and moral confines the village erects around individuals.
The willingness to read similarities between *Sunshine Sketches* and *Fifth Business* glosses over some important differences. The most prominent features of Leacock’s text are his sensitive character portrayals and the unanimity and collectivity of those characters, all of which contribute to a tone that oscillates between hilarity and sentimentality. Early critiques of Davies’s *Fifth Business*, on the other hand, concentrate on the characters’ “moral imperatives” (Reid “The Small Town” 179), and Deptford’s “practical common sense and […] solid reliance on material, down-to-earth reality” (Bjerring qtd. in Lennox 24). Deptfordian sobriety provides a sharp contrast to the well-oiled exuberance of the Mariposans.

Deptford, argues R.D. MacDonald, is a “revised” version of Mariposa, and the towns’ similarities lie in their subtleties as opposed to their surfaces: “In *Fifth Business*, one finds little or nothing of Leacock’s loving evocation of the surfaces of Mariposa. A similar ironic whimsy is at work in *Fifth Business* but the play of imagination is more darkly sinister than that of Leacock, perhaps even darker than Davies himself suspects” (“Small-Town Ontario” 74-75). MacDonald argues that neither Boy Staunton nor Dunstan Ramsay evolves beyond their small-town consciousnesses; Staunton remains the unconscious bully and a representative of the small-town mind, while Ramsay’s apparently enlightened world view, gained through his years outside of Deptford’s restrictions, is in fact a continuation of his boyhood “conscious bullying.” Thus, neither has advanced beyond his early village identity. The narrative is then a product of Dunstan’s “devious and conscious logic” (“Small-Town Ontario” 67), an attribute that

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25 The cover of a slim study of Leacock, issued by the New Canadian Library and written by Davies, visually imparts a connection between the two as the illustration shows Davies and Leacock shaking hands while Davies appears to be slapping Leacock’s back.
shapes and molds the reader’s perception of the narrator through Dunstan’s utilization of “silences, unbroken spaces, deliberate confusions, and ambiguities” (“Small-Town Ontario” 66). While Thomas vouches for Deptford’s apparent “authenticity” through Davies’s historical fidelity to his own small-town childhood, MacDonald disputes ‘reality’ as the wellspring of Deptford’s creation; rather, that imaginative source rests in Dunstan’s own fanciful self-perception. Verisimilitude is a defining feature of neither Mariposa nor Deptford, yet the nature of their fantasy is oppositional; Mariposa is an atemporal ironic ideal celebrating collectivity, while Deptford is introduced as the staging area for a lifelong friendship/battle between Staunton and Dunstan.

A more fruitful avenue of comparison is through one of the books’ other similarities: their shared narrative premise. While the final chapter of Sunshine Sketches reveals that Mariposa exists only in the collective memories of melancholic urbanites, each of the Deptford novels consists of the reminiscences of successful men who spend their formative years in small-town Ontario: the narrative of Fifth Business consists of a letter Dunstan Ramsay has written to his former headmaster at Colborne College; The Manticore is largely made up of the writings and reminiscences of David Staunton while undergoing Jungian psychoanalysis; finally, World of Wonders, while narrated by Ramsay, is dominated by the voice of Magnus Eisengrim (Paul Dempster), a childhood resident of Deptford who was kidnapped by carnies. Mariposa and Deptford are products of memory, but in Davies’s novels retrospect is often unaccompanied by longing. If nostalgia is largely responsible for Mariposa’s allure, its alternating absence/presence in the Deptford novels marks an important difference between the two towns; the varying
renditions of Deptford reveal more about the development of the reminiscing subject and the influence on his “process of perception” as opposed to the reminisced object.

Monk states that a central concern of Davies’s “*telos*” is “an understanding of the nature of human identity” (*Infinity* 17). She later states that one of Dunstan Ramsay’s central struggles is “towards self-knowledge and individuation” (83). This process is often situated in terms of escape from the physical and moral restrictions of Deptford. Monk identifies the Jungian process of “individuation,” or the development of the autonomous self, as a recurring theme in Davies’s novels, and argues in *The Smaller Infinity* that this process in *Fifth Business* occurs largely through Dunstan’s evolving “religious belief” (79). Using Monk’s identification, this chapter examines the relationship between Dunstan’s process of individuation and the evolving nature of his childhood memories of Deptford. While an analysis of Mariposa reveals that town to be an inaccessible, retrospective ideal, an analysis of Dunstan’s relationship to Deptford reveals the town to be the product of a developing, reminiscing subject. In *Sunshine Sketches*, the general trend is towards a return; Mariposa offers both the reader and the club men of the final chapter a passive, static, and contained rural ideal situated in a generalized recent past. Deptford’s influence, however, proves far more persistent as it has an active role in the psyches of its residents. While the village represents only a limited place along his trajectory of esoteric achievement in the field of hagiography, Dunstan’s psychic escape from Deptford is never quite successful, and he must synthesize his current individuated self with the undesired, collective values of Deptford, what are really presented as the physical, spiritual, and moral confines placed on the individual and enforced by the village collective. Through a process of escape and self-
discovery, Dunstan must negotiate the residue of his Deptford past with his evolving present; if Mariposa is the past perfect, Deptford is the past progressive.

As Dunstan narrates his own journey, we must keep in mind MacDonald’s suggestion that he has constructed the narrative by way of “devious and conscious logic” in order to appear in the best possible light, or David Williams’ point that throughout his autobiography, Dunstan constructs and assumes his own “mythic role” (90). Dunstan’s struggle to negotiate the residue of his childhood results in shifting retrospective visions of the town, which, in effect, serve as alternating foils to best highlight the present state of his psychic individuation. As these versions construct a process of small-town escape, they can be read as Davies’s own symbolic attempt at escaping from the cultural archetype epitomized by Mariposa. If Leacock’s town is read as a “home place” of Canadian fiction and cultural identity, then *Fifth Business* draws attention to the mode of memory responsible for that type of exegesis, and can be read as an allegorical leave-taking of Mariposa’s cultural and literary hegemony.

Any canon of Canadian literature would contain a surfeit of characters who spend their early years in small towns, only to escape later from their moral and cultural restrictions: Jubilee, Hanratty, Manawaka, Blairlogie etc… the list of towns could go on. It is not my purpose to explore ‘escape’ as a theme in general as these towns all bear idiosyncrasies that might make such a thematization pointless. Rather, my purpose here is to explore the connections between the aesthetics of Dunstan’s shifting representations of Deptford and his own psychic individuation, as well as the broader connotations of his eventual reliance on, and abandonment of, a small-town archetype as embodied by Mariposa.
Dunstan Ramsay’s Deptford

In the opening section of *Fifth Business*, Dunstan addresses a central problem of autobiographical writing: “Can I write truly of my boyhood? Or will that disgusting self-love which so often attaches itself to a man’s idea of his youth creep in and falsify the story? I can but try. And to begin I must give you some notion of the village in which Percy Boyd Staunton and Paul Dempster and I were born” (15). With this attempt at disregarding childhood nostalgia, Dunstan declares that happy childhood memories often emerge during the intervening years between youth and adulthood, a temporal span that can allow the past to become in one’s imagination both benevolent and stable (Lowenthal *The Past* 62). While this interim is responsible for the nature of Mariposa’s representation as is suggested by the sketches’ final train journey back through time and space, Dunstan wants to avoid the trap of idealization; his narrative may be a retrospective, but he wants it to be one unfiltered through this common method of falsification.

By further prefacing his description of Deptford with the following remark, Dunstan reveals his awareness of small-town life as a popular theme already thoroughly explored in literature and other cultural media:

Once it was the fashion to represent villages as places inhabited by laughable, lovable simpletons, unspotted by the worldliness of city life, though occasionally shrewd in rural concerns. Later it was the popular thing to show villages as rotten with vice, and especially such sexual vice as Krafft-Ebing might have been surprised to uncover in Vienna; incest, sodomy, bestiality, sadism, and masochism [...] Our village never seemed to me to be like that. It was more varied in what it offered to the observer than people from bigger and more sophisticated places generally think,
and if it had sins and follies and roughnesses, it also had much to show of virtue, dignity, and even of nobility. (15-16)\(^{26}\)

Combined with his earlier remark concerning autobiography, Davies has established a narrative voice whose asserted honesty claims to provide the ‘straight dope’ on a well-established convention in Canadian literature by disregarding trends and fashions; through Dunstan, Davies acknowledges the existence of small-town representational conventions, and thus attempts to situate his own portrayal beyond them. If the small-town type is popularly associated with this country’s cultural foundations,\(^{27}\) then particular versions sketch an author’s nostalgic, critical, or condemnatory cultural perspective. Dunstan suggests that his narrative possesses no ulterior agenda other than to represent accurately his small-town childhood.

This passage also sketches a “problem of perspective”\(^{28}\) that perhaps rests at the core of familiar small-town portrayals. The small-town convention that makes use of “laughable and lovable simpletons” is a veiled reference to Mariposa, and as the final chapter of Leacock’s text reveals, the creative source for Mariposa is the urban club. Stylized versions are the creations of, and products for, those from “bigger and more

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\(^{26}\) Davies adds to this summation in *Feast of Stephen*, his book on Stephen Leacock: “a school has arisen which portrays small towns, very profitably, as microcosms of Sodom and Gomorrah in which everybody but a handful of just men and women are deep in corruption, especially of the sexual order” (14-15).

\(^{27}\) This notion is particularly apparent in discussions of both *Sunshine Sketches* and *Fifth Business*. For Leacock’s text, see Douglas Mantz and Gerald Lynch (*Humour, The One*). For Davies’s text, see Patricia Monk (*Mud*) and Barbara Godard (“Carnival”).

\(^{28}\) Raymond Williams uses this phrase to refer to the common practice of associating a receding rural past with disappearing traditions and the “timeless rhythms” of an agricultural past: “Is it anything more than a well-known habit of using the past, the ‘good old days’, as a stick to beat the present? It is clearly something of that, but there are still difficulties. The apparent resting places, the successive Old Englands to which we are confidently referred but which then start to move and recede, have some actual significance, when they are looked at in their own terms” (12).
sophisticated places.” Dunstan maintains that these literary conventions are really
generalizations produced by those with insufficient knowledge of small-town life, or by
those whose distant perspective, across time and space, allows them to think they see
what they want to see. This problem of spatio-temporal distance is also something
Dunstan ironically draws attention to when he discusses the smaller village located near
Deptford: “We did, however, look with pitying amusement on Bowles Corners, four
miles distant and with a population of one hundred and fifty. To live in Bowles Corners,
we felt, was to be rustic beyond redemption” (18). By ironically drawing an analogy to
Deptford’s own tendency to patronize smaller, distant locales, Dunstan claims to be
aware of, and to have transcended, distance’s simplifying effect, a claim supporting his
own representational and rhetorical reliability. His initial claim is that Deptford is a
village depicted by a village voice, one that provides a contrast to Mariposa’s consolatory
or “fashionable” social aesthetics. However, Dunstan’s initial proposed mimesis of
Deptford life is one he cannot maintain as Deptford’s representational in/stability relies
on his self-identification with the village; that “problem of perspective” responsible for
the creation of conventional representation comes to influence Dunstan’s descriptions of
town life as he begins to identify with those “bigger and more sophisticated places.” This
phenomenon is particularly striking during Dunstan’s return to Deptford after the war.

The novel opens with an early-winter scene involving two boys sledding in the
late afternoon in the days immediately following Christmas. Despite initial appearances,
which resemble a type of Kriehoff-ian idealization, Dunstan refuses to infuse it with a
warm retrospective glow; he is not recounting a happy memory, but an incident that
comes to define the remainder of his life:
My lifelong involvement with Mrs. Dempster began at 5:58 o’clock p.m. on the 27th of December, 1908, at which time I was ten years and seven months old. 
I am able to date the occasion with complete certainty because that afternoon I had been sledding with my lifelong friend and enemy Percy Boyd Staunton, and we had quarreled, because his fine new Christmas sled would not go as fast as my old one. (9)

The details of time and place, details that MacDonald feels belong to a “police report” (“Small-Town Ontario” 66), reveal the magnitude the event takes in Dunstan’s later consciousness, but these details, applied to what might otherwise be an idyllic memory, lend the scene an atmosphere of parodic gravity; how could such an apparently innocent scene be subject to this type of narrative treatment? The “police report” minutiae imply that this is no nostalgic memory, as its precision reveals that Dunstan’s grasp on his own past is as vivid as his present perception.29 The exact detail of time and place negates any sense of temporal distance separating the narrator from the events, a marked difference from the generalized nature of Sunshine Sketches’ opening, which constructs a sense of ambiguity around the town’s placement in time; this ambiguity accommodates Mariposa’s broad appeal, as particular regional or temporal details can be glossed-over. The specificity of Dunstan’s narrative, as he recounts particular events from over sixty years previous, focuses on the individualized nature of his experiences, highlighting their singularity of both time and place. The reader is not invited to identify with this initial description of village life in the same way one is encouraged to see his or her own past in Mariposa.

29 With regards to Dunstan’ narrative reliability, Monk argues that Dunstan’s childhood “is presented with a great deal of naturalistic and psychologically plausible detail, so that Ramsay is established as a careful and reliable narrator” (Mud 26).
Dunstan intends to capture the distinctiveness of life in Deptford; this is a story about individuals, he makes us believe, not about character-types. Davies seems to want to right a wrong by providing a view of village life based on verisimilitude, a view of village life that is both interesting and mundane, as opposed to one based on a preconceived agenda. Dunstan sketches town life through unadorned details: one private banker, two doctors, a dentist with an unhappy domestic life, and a veterinarian “who drank” (16). The private life of the village is a little more colourful. For instance, Dunstan’s story of the old Athelstan woman, “who used from time to time to escape from her nurse-housekeeper and rush into the road, where she threw herself down, raising a cloud of dust like a hen having a dirt-bath, shouting loudly, ‘Christian men, come and help me!’” (16), is both pathetic and absurdly funny. These details allude to a darker side of village life, a side that reveals (even revels in) unmentionable psychological aberrations tinged with prohibited erotic desire; here, Davies refuses to mitigate private eccentricities that Leacock either excludes or turns into an element of his comedy or sentimentality (see Judge Pepperleigh’s brusque approach to his wife, *Sunshine Sketches* chapter 7). The Athelstan woman’s behaviour and the exclusion of the First-Nations soldier in the town’s war commemoration (88) seem to be part of Davies’s agenda in *Fifth Business*, which incorporates the bad and ugly with the good: “Though he did not turn the town’s bigotry into a cause, he made sure that it was part of the record” (Grant 21). What is more important than the contents of Dunstan’s narrative is the impression of it as “record” as opposed to story; it is how Dunstan both conceives of and constructs his narrative.

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30 Judith Skelton Grant tells us this story is based on events from Davies’s own boyhood experiences in Thamesville, ON (11).
Deptford’s Dunstan Ramsay

Although Dunstan’s narrative initially concerns Deptford’s inimitability, the town itself does not accommodate individuality. Dunstan attributes Deptford’s often narrow and intolerant perspective to the influence of the village’s settlers: “[W]e were all too much the descendants of hard-bitten pioneers” (23-24). This offering explains Deptford’s lack of an aesthetic sense, but it also helps explain the town’s pious exclusion of those not involved in the same dominant improving-by-cultivation philosophy of which practicality, self-denial, and moral orthodoxy are descended traits; the perceived strength of character derived from this pioneer lineage constitutes one surface of a Janus-faced philosophical heritage, the other surface reflecting a restrictive morality and literal mindedness. Dunstan diagnoses this lineage long after he has both felt and left its imperatives, yet his narrative reveals to what extent the village’s moral heritage played a chafing but determining role in the making of his identity prior to his initial departure.\textsuperscript{31}

This small-town moral norm marks the core difference between the nature of Mariposa’s ethos and that of Deptford. Mariposa’s moral lenience reflects the source of the town’s construction, the urban sphere; the retrospective image of the town seems to offer leisure opportunities to the wealthy urban dweller, much like the fishing and hunting camps of the north or a steamship voyage to Europe. Mariposa is the fantasy of childhood, perhaps conjured to soothe temporarily some metaphysical ache or feeling of

\textsuperscript{31} John Watt Lennox reads a division between Deptford and Dunstan through linguistic signifiers, as voice occupies Lennox’s discussion of the “division between the ‘homespun’ or the plain speaker and the social civilized being” (29). Therefore, he sees Dunstan’s struggle against Deptford largely in terms of class, as his “careful, magisterial voice” (28) claims “international citizenship” and is set off by Davies’s “satiric use of the Canadian voice,” possessed by those who remain in Deptford: a juxtaposition Lennox claims “perpetuate[s] a traditional, graceless dichotomy in Canadians’ view of themselves” (29).
urban alienation, but it also contributes to the diversity of experience available to the
urban plutocrat; this one is accessed not through money, but a nostalgic memory. The
small-town fantasy in *Sunshine Sketches* is an experience not of any specific past, but of
an agglomerated cultural childhood, and it is the product of the collective memories of
the wealthy deep in the heart of the city. As it is the product of leisure time, those idle
hours spent at the club, it offers other possible existences in which complex moral
confrontations and alienation cannot exist. Mariposa offers a fantasy in which identity
exists in perfect harmony with place, a fantasy that is projected onto the past and
subsequently becomes an exuberant and glossy, but finally impossible, historical model
for the present. The indeterminacy of Mariposa’s eventual melancholic dissolution into
ephemeral fantasy can be interpreted as Leacock’s refusal to allow the leisure class its
desired simulation of a childhood idyll. This may be read as a manifestation of Leacock’s
well-known dislike for that class’s profligacy, a dislike on fuller display in his subsequent
*Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*.

While Deptford is similarly reconstructed through memory, its main ontological
thrust is towards the closing off of experiential possibility. It is a product of neither
recreation nor yearning; instead, the source of the village’s ethos is a circumscribing past,
an overbearing moral heritage. The past weighs heavily on Deptford. Monk suggests that
notions of good and evil in Deptford “are determined wholly by convention and are
defined in the context of an extremely conservative attitude to life in general and an
extremely puritanical morality by a mixture of fear and practicality” (*Mud* 67). Monk
calls this attitude “Deptford morality.” Dunstan’s lack of nostalgia for his childhood is
partly the result of his ability to place Deptford into an historical trajectory, a sequence of
events that contains a before (pioneer ancestry) and an after (post-WWI Deptford), unlike Mariposa’s static and temporally contained ideal.

Tension between the rural past and urban present, therefore, exists entirely within Dunstan’s psyche; the dichotomy’s polarities are represented by the moral imperatives of the village’s forebears and the more cosmopolitan life Dunstan reads about and yearns for in his books. His mother subscribes to the historically sanctioned proscription of unconventional intellectual activity and is a practical embodiment of the town’s “pioneer” morality, wholly disapproving of Dunstan’s increasing idiosyncratic intellectualism; the result is a fearsome domestic tension in the Ramsay household. This domestic tension suggests that Deptfordian identity is modeled on a convention different from that found in Sunshine Sketches; it is “a limited and limiting society” (Postmodern 197) wholly opposed to Mariposa’s welcoming bonhomie. The controlling impetus for these constrictions is ostensibly the past. Unlike the experiential freedom the urban present projects onto the Mariposa past, Deptford projects onto itself experiential limitations ascribed to its revered ancestry; in Deptford the absent, imagined moral past circumscribes the moral present.

Deptford’s deference to its forebears presents the major obstacle to Dunstan’s personal, social, and intellectual individuation. This struggle mainly involves Mrs. Ramsay’s disapproval of her son’s wholly-conscious attempt at becoming a “polymath,”

32 Like Monk, F.L. Radford reads the book in terms of its Jungian influence, particularly Dunstan’s relationship with mother figures. Quoting Jung’s Symbols of Transformation, Radford writes, “the Jungian pattern is centred on the theme of individuation typified in the myth of the Hero and the Mother, in which every obstacle on the ascendant path of the hero ‘wears the shadowy features of the Terrible Mother, who saps his strength with the poison of secret doubt’ while every victory ‘wins back again the smiling, loving and life-giving mother’” (66).
which includes his interest in saints and his fumbling cracks at mastering some simple examples of sleight-of-hand; for Dunstan, these exemplify the larger world outside of Deptford, particularly cosmopolitan Europe. Mrs. Ramsay’s anxiety about her son’s divergence from a modest historical norm is liberated in a flood of psychic energy and resentment after an incident of Dunstan’s cheek: “She cried too, hysterically, and beat me harder, storming about my impudence, my want of respect for her, of my increasing oddity and intellectual arrogance – not that she used these words, but I do not intend to put down what she actually said – until at last her fury was spent” (33). Mrs. Ramsay’s anger is enflamed by Dunstan’s developing personality, his lack of “respect,” and his refusal to acquiesce to the dictates of the previous generation. His behaviour is aberrant only according to the behavioural norms of Deptford’s practicality, the internal sweep of the village’s history.

Mary Dempster’s transgression with Joel Surgeoner reveals Mrs. Ramsay’s full adherence to the collective values of the community, and it also reveals Dunstan’s inability to subscribe to the town’s moral code, which neglects the mystery of the spirit in favour of the demonstrability of the flesh. Monk sees Mrs. Dempster’s experience as prefiguring Dunstan’s own increasing moral independence: “his gradual departure from Deptford’s standards towards independent judgement of what is good and what is evil […] is exemplified by Mary Dempster” (Mud 69). Like all Deptford women, Mrs. Ramsay feels she had “standards of decency to defend” (45); this encapsulates the generalized female opinion that ostracizes the Dempsters. Mrs. Ramsay’s intolerance clashes with the earlier impression Dunstan creates about his family as the “literary leaders of the community” (17), a description alluding to their independence of mind. Yet
Dunstan’s parents have also been characterized for their “‘severe emotional empiricism, [and rejection of] any notion of spirituality or the mystical,’” and they seem a fitting extension of Deptford itself whose inhabitants are “‘firmly rooted in practical common sense and a solid reliance on material, down-to-earth reality’” (Bjerring qtd in Lennox 24); their literary distinction amounts to very little against the sway of moral orthodoxy.

Because she conflates her religious beliefs with the dictates of Deptford’s literalism, what John Bligh calls an adherence to “law” as opposed to “grace” (581), Mrs. Ramsay, like the majority of Deptfordians, does not appreciate the nature of what she opposes. Dunstan, however, is developing a nascent understanding of the metaphorical in reality, what Monk refers to as the “numinosum” (Infinity 80). Dunstan’s initial sympathy for Mary later develops into his belief that her act was a Christian miracle resulting in the saving of a lost soul, and although Dunstan struggles against Deptford’s religious understanding during the length of his adult career, he must first extract himself from the consequential grasp of this blinkered comprehension. During this process, Dunstan is aware that the Dempsters’ expulsion from the town serves as a warning to those who would transgress Deptford’s conception of normality. The initial stages of Dunstan’s movement towards something “bigger and more sophisticated,” really a spiritual understanding whose basis lies outside of Deptford, is further fraught with difficulty since he is still very much a part of the town and experiences acute emotional anguish as a result of this tension.

Through her eventual ultimatum, Mrs. Ramsay demands that Dunstan clarify his loyalty, something Dunstan conceives of as a type of identity proscription: “she was so anxious to root out of my mind any fragment of belief in what I had seen, and to exact
from me promises that I would never see Mrs. Dempster again and furthermore would accept the village’s opinion of her” (57-58). To resign himself to the town’s opinion would compromise Dunstan’s growth: “She did not know how much I loved her, and how miserable it made me to defy her, but what was I to do? Deep inside myself I knew that to yield, and promise what she wanted, would be the end of anything that was any good in me” (58). Yet to his mother, this choice would symbolize his final acquiescence to the collective morality of the village, or a normative standard derived from custom.

A fatalistic streak underlies Mrs. Ramsay’s ultimatum; she is really demanding that Dunstan comply with the moral outlook conveyed by his received station in life. His refusal would cast off the yoke of historical and cultural determinism; by resisting the influence of the synchronic collective, Deptford in the present, he would also resist the diachronic demands of Deptford’s collective historical voice. He opts for a third choice: “the next day I skipped school, went to the county town, and enlisted” (58). His military service allows Dunstan at least to delay his mother’s demand to accept his place in Deptford’s moral fold. This third choice initiates his European education, which only succeeds in protracting the existing intellectual/cultural distance between the increasingly cosmopolitan Dunstan and the parochial Deptford. Yet upon his return, this distance results in his temporary utilization of the imagined rural-urban conventions as typified by the rural-urban dichotomy in Sunshine Sketches; however briefly, Dunstan flirts with those small-town conventions he initially claims to transcend.
Dunstan’s Second Education: Something “Bigger and More Sophisticated”

While Dunstan is fairly reticent about his combat experience, he is rather effusive about his recuperation from the war. This period mainly takes place at the home of the Marfleets, an upper-middle-class English family: “How my spirit expanded in the home of the Marfleets!” says Dunstan. “To a man who had been where I had been it was glorious” (76). This last line of course refers to the trenches of France, but “where [Dunstan] had been” includes small-town Ontario, and the permissive atmosphere of the Marfleets’ home helps heal Dunstan’s physical wounds acquired in France, but also those invisible wounds acquired in Deptford. His first taste of cosmopolitanism comes in the form of a genteel, frivolous, even sensual intellectualism that provides a direct experiential contrast to his first sixteen years in Deptford. During his stay with the Marfleets, Dunstan experiences his “sexual initiation” alongside his first notable cultural event, and he comments on their likeness: “I see that I have been so muddle-headed as to put my sexual initiation in direct conjunction with a visit to a musical show […] the two, though very different, are not so unlike in psychological weight as you might suppose. Both were wonders, strange lands revealed to me in circumstances of great excitement” (77-78). The two events appear similar in “psychological weight” to Dunstan because their symbolic content, what really amounts to their emphasis on sensual and aesthetic pleasure, is antithetical to Deptford’s ethos, what Monk describes as its corporeal notions of good and evil: “Deptford’s ideas of good […] manifest an old-fashioned Puritanism whose cardinal virtues are prudery, prudence, and hard work […] Deptford ‘good’ […] is life-denying […] it is essentially the world of thanatos, or anti-life” (Infinity 92).

Dunstan’s cultural initiation is a fitting counterpart to his transgression of Deptford’s
moral barriers because, just as intellectual paucity and chastity are his lot at home, experiential and epistemological possibility within this new place helps reveal the spiritual pleasures existing within and beyond the carnal encounter.

Mrs. Marfleet, the Honourable, embodies the oppositional ethos of this new physical and conceptual space and is a binaristic counterpart to Mrs. Ramsay: “The Honourable was a wonder, not like a mother at all. She was a witty, frivolous woman of a beauty congruous with her age […] and talked as if she hadn’t a brain in her head. But I was not deceived” (76). She is the perfect contrast to Dunstan’s existing icon of motherhood, and his experiences with the Marfleets revise the previous dichotomy between Dunstan’s “conjuring,” really just his naïve conception of the sophisticated life, and Deptford’s corporeal practicality. Now Dunstan’s psyche negotiates the gaiety and frivolity of the Marfleets’ home (middle-class English life), and the lingering asceticism of Deptford. The home of the Marfleets and the village of Deptford rest at opposite ends of a cultural spectrum, situating the Marfleets as representatives of an urban polarity analogous to the one in *Sunshine Sketches* that provides a productive contrast to Mariposa; the Marfleets give Dunstan a taste of the larger world, and much like the Mariposans are drawn towards the supposedly more expansive world of the urbanites, Dunstan is attracted to the permissive luxuriousness of the British middle class.

While much of *Sunshine Sketches*’ appeal stems from the humourous and ironic contrasts of urban and rural life, Daniel Coleman finds an analogous phenomenon occurring between two nodes on the imagined cultural continuum of Empire; Coleman’s model would suggest that the rural-urban dichotomy apparent within *Sunshine Sketches* really involves the past and the present of the same conceptual line of socio-cultural
development. The relationship between colonial centre and colony, says Coleman, produces anxiety within the “settler-colonist” who has internalized his colonial subjectivity; this anxiety involves a feeling of “belatedness” resulting from the colonist’s inability to adopt adequately to the imperial centre’s model of “civility” (16), which itself stems from a belief in civilization’s mono-linear trajectory. This conceptual timeline both produces and justifies the instructive posture adopted by the cultural and administrative centre, as it invariably conceives of its colonial possessions as following behind in its cultural-temporal wake. What I would really like to take away from Coleman’s text is his suggestion of a cultural chronology inherent to the physical and philosophical space resting between colonial outpost and centre, a phenomenon similar to that within the rural past – urban present33 dichotomy. Dunstan is a descendant of those “hard-bitten pioneers” who finds himself in the colonial centre, and the Marfleets personify the “British model of civility,” or normative standard for Anglo-Canadian cultural identity (Coleman 5). If we follow the logic of Coleman’s reflections, Dunstan’s sexual and cultural initiation represents the “updating” of his cultural temporality, as these firsts are part of the experience of place. What has previously been expressed as a cultural dichotomy between the urban present and rural past, or centre and margin, Coleman suggests, can also be expressed as two ends of a cultural continuum that only appear antithetical.

Therefore, Dunstan’s implied engagement to Diana Marfleet offers him a hybrid identity that synthesizes divergent elements of the cultural continuum/polarity. The potential marriage between the daughter of old-world petits bourgeois and the descendant

33 In the rural past – urban present dichotomy, the former is associated with cultural origins. In Coleman’s model, the site of origins has been reversed since the cultural influence flows from the imperial centre. However, if one reads Mariposa’s defining ethos as really the product of the urban sphere, the two cultural models are similar.
of new-world pioneers reveals Diana’s romantic hopes for their future life, which will combine elements of both worlds: agrarianism and gentility. Dunstan, however, harbours no misconceptions about agricultural life:

a life with Diana was simply not for me. As girls do, she assumed that we were drifting toward an engagement and marriage […] it was clear she thought that when I was strong enough we would go to Canada, and if I did not mistake her utterly, she had in her mind’s eye a fine big wheat farm in the West, for she had the English delusion that farming was a great way to live. I knew enough about farming to be sure it was not a life for amateurs or wounded men. (80)

Diana’s “delusion” springs from the deliberately romantic tales of the Canadian West used to lure English settlers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, but this idealized rural existence is one that Dunstan’s childhood experience could never allow him either to internalize or perform. What Dunstan characterizes as a particularly “English delusion” is really a misconception more representative of the Marfleet’s class, as it is shared by a number of wealthy urbanites in *Sunshine Sketches*; Pupkin Sr., for instance, a particularly ensconced member of the urban elite, longs for the “simple, simple life […] some place that would remind him of the little old farm up the Aroostook where he was brought up” (102). Similarly, the club men stare longingly through the train window at the passing farm seen in the fading twilight during the final trip to Mariposa, while the narrator intones, “it must be comfortable there” (143). Rural nostalgia in both *Sunshine Sketches* and *Fifth Business* relates to the experiential distance between the classes, a distance that Diana longs to cross, but one that Dunstan knows accommodates embellishment and projection. As Dunstan has emerged from the “belated” rural periphery, he knows something of farming’s hardships and restrictions that for Diana remain quaint and romantic, safely resting across the experiential divide.
His “escapes” from Deptford and Diana are crucial to Dunstan’s process of individuation, yet these also represent departures from the roles each mother figure has devised for him: “I know how clear it is that what was wrong between Diana and me was that she was too much a mother to me, and as I had had one mother, and lost her, I was not in a hurry to acquire another […] If I could manage it, I had no intention of being anybody’s own dear laddie, ever again” (80). “Dear Laddie” is Mrs. Ramsay’s pet name for Dunstan, and it suggests how her expectations, based largely on her own cultural past, inhibited Dunstan’s internal process of self-development.\(^{34}\) He fears that Diana will similarly project onto him identity prescripts that clash with his process of individuation, a fear of hemming-in made explicit when he says about Diana: “But I was not blind to the fact that she regarded me as her own creation” (79-80). Evading a marriage to Diana continues the process by which Dunstan circumnavigates the boundaries of a cultural narrative as opposed to developing within its parameters, suggesting Dunstan strives to be entirely of his own making.

His journey has an iconoclastic aura as it involves his successful negotiation of the conventional cultural identities of a British colonial mentality; although Dunstan escapes maternal figures, he is symbolically eluding the sway of a cultural lineage. By first escaping the role small-town Ontario holds for him, and subsequently escaping a partnership to one of his own culture’s elite, he navigates and seemingly rejects a rural-urban dichotomy that mirrors the provincial-cosmopolitan dichotomy inherent to

\(^{34}\) Radford reads Diana as an ambivalent figure in terms of Dunstan’s individuation: “Ramsay’s Diana is both the Pieta [the Terrible Mother’s opposing figure] and the Terrible Mother. As nurse and comforter she is the former; perceived by his mother-ridden psyche as his new creatrix and would-be possessor, she is the latter” (70).
He has experienced both the “old values” and “sophistication” that the rural and urban spaces offer, and his departure from both displays desire for total self-fashioning. The symbolism of such a journey aligns with the Promethean vision of Canada during the Trudeau era, perhaps reflecting the cultural context out of which Davies was writing.

Dunstan recognizes that socio-cultural roles, much like small-town conventions, are products of “bigger and more sophisticated” places, or more appropriately, both are products of those whose representational authority out-shouts any intrinsic identity possessed by the thing itself. However, one role Dunstan appears satisfied with is his designation as war hero. Given to him by the King, the powerful hub of the colonial centre, the Victoria Cross represents the completion of his second apprenticeship, this time in a place much “bigger and more sophisticated” than Deptford. The Victoria Cross symbolizes a new experiential divide established between Dunstan and Deptford, a divide that temporarily affects his portrayal of the village upon his hero’s return. Dunstan’s ‘second education’ hampers his ability to describe Deptford as an insider, as one whose propinquity to the village affords a precise appraisal.

Dunstan’s Return and Deptford’s Distance

Dunstan survives the war only to discover that both of his parents have died during the flu pandemic, and his rather callous response to their deaths suggests that he feels relief that he will no longer have to negotiate the moral norms of Deptford.

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35 Grant sees parallels between Dunstan’s journey and the development of the Canadian nation: “As he traced the stages by which his hero gains self-knowledge as he moves from the village to the city, from 1917 to 1970, he created a story in which many Canadians recognized their nation’s own struggle toward self-recognition and national identity” (Grant 480-81).
according to his mother’s wishes. His attachment to the town is now severely limited, and his physical and psychical escape from Deptford now appears to be a matter of Dunstan’s choice alone. Dunstan’s cultural distance from the village is revealed through the town’s altered, conventional representation, and his return demonstrates his increasing cosmopolitanism through the narrative’s temporary resemblance to Mariposa’s narrative tone and description; this later description of village life marks Dunstan’s emphasis on the distance, intellectual, emotional, and cultural, between himself and Deptford. Monk interprets Deptford as a “background of conventional Canadian attitudes and behaviour” that clashes with “Ramsay’s new attitudes and behaviour” (Mud 14); yet only after Dunstan’s return from the imperial centre do his “new attitudes and behaviour” clash with what might be called “convention.” This tension results in a temporarily benign Deptford of a comic nature characteristic of Mariposa, as he now sees and describes the village as someone who is more familiar with small-town types than with the idiosyncrasy of a particular settlement.

Dunstan first describes his grand tour of the village immediately upon his arrival as “the strangest procession I have ever seen, but it was in my honour and I will not laugh at it. It was Deptford’s version of a Roman Triumph, and I tried to be worthy of it” (86). His designation as war hero by the fulcrum of the colonial centre, King George V, is a role Dunstan has accepted, but is also a role about which he remains self-aware, and this split subjectivity accounts for Dunstan’s tendency to condescend to the village’s rituals and simultaneously resist that impulse. The procession appears odd to Dunstan because he now sees it as a provincial anachronism, as only a simulation of the imperial centre’s
grand rituals: this may exemplify Deptford’s “belatedness,” but it also reveals Dunstan’s new distance from the town.

The town has changed during the war years, a change reflected in the village’s new interest in international affairs. Dunstan regards this new internationalism as one possible reason for his latest estrangement from the town: “I had little idea of what four years of war had done in creating a new atmosphere in Deptford, for it had shown little interest in world affairs in my schooldays. But here was our village shoe-repair man, Moses Langirand, in what was meant to be a French uniform, personating Marshal Foch” (85). What has changed more than the village itself is Dunstan’s perspective, enhanced by his own vast experience in the larger world, and revealed by an altered narrative tone that has acquired an element absent from his earlier descriptions of Deptford. He sees the town now with that fond kindliness of the sort present in Sunshine Sketches: “There were two John Bulls, owing to some misunderstanding that could not be resolved without hurt feelings. There were Red Cross nurses in plenty – six or seven of them. A girl celebrated in my day for having big feet, named Katie Orchard, was swathed in bunting and had a bandage over one eye; she was Gallant Little Belgium” (85).

As Dunstan’s experiences have increased his cultural distance from Deptford, his reliance on literary convention similarly increases. Gone is the town’s small and quiet dignity, best displayed in the dead-serious search for the missing Mrs. Dempster: “But if Mrs. Dempster was lost at night, all daylight considerations must be set aside. There was a good deal of the pioneer left in people in those days, and they knew what was serious […] I was surprised to see Mr. Mahaffey, our magistrate, among them. He and the policeman were our law, and his presence meant grave public concern” (41-42).
Dunstan’s involvement in this search marks his official recognition by his mother “as a man, fit to go on serious business” (41). The lack of irony in his recollection mirrors the pride he feels that this event, with its great significance to the whole community, marks his coming-of-age: a good indication of his previous cultural propinquity to Deptford’s rituals and markers of maturity.

Keith claims that both Leacock and Davies write of the small town “from a detached perspective. [Their narrators] have widened their own horizons and look back at the town in question with affection or amused irony” (167). In Fifth Business, however, it is only Dunstan’s description of his triumphant return to Deptford that marks the beginning of his bemused irony and detached observation of the village’s spectacles, celebrations, and rituals. This is best displayed by his ironic appreciation of the (very) local talent performing at the ceremony held in honour of the returning soldiers. It may be genuine, but his condescending affection is directed more towards the performers than their talent. Muriel Parkinson’s singing voice is affecting, but Dunstan considers her songs “shrieked (for her voice was powerful rather than sweet)” (88). The humour of Murray Tiffin is perhaps funnier for its intractable parochialism and good nature than for the wit of the actual jokes: “Then Murray got off several other good ones, about how much cheaper it was to buy groceries in Bowles Corners than it was even to steal them from the merchants of Deptford, and similar local wit of the sort that age cannot wither nor custom stale” (88). Prior to his departure for war, Dunstan describes Bowles Corners as “rustic beyond redemption,” yet after his return Deptford appears that way as well, as Dunstan’s new frame of reference extends to the stages of London’s West End.
Dunstan’s narrative becomes most like Leacock’s in his treatment of Deptford’s gifts for its Veterans; these railway watches are valued for their practicality and further reveal Deptford’s inability to condone luxury. This pragmatism now becomes an element of fun as it no longer represents an effective opposition to Dunstan’s developing personality: “These were no ordinary watches but railway watches, warranted to tell time accurately under the most trying conditions, and probably for all eternity. We understood the merit of these watches because, as we all knew, his [the Reeve’s] son Jack was a railwayman, a brakeman on the Grand Trunk, and Jack swore that these were the best watches to be had anywhere” (89). This passage contains a slip into free indirect discourse, a common characteristic of Leacock’s narrative, through a subtle break from Dunstan’s elevated diction in the latter half of the quote; the break is made up of elements of the Reeve’s presentation speech. But the irony of the preceding passage rests in the insinuation that Deptford’s luminaries most likely got the ‘family discount’ when procuring these keepsakes, a situation that does not necessarily diminish their authentic gratitude for the Veterans’ efforts, but rather comically re-emphasizes the village’s thrift. A similar duplicity occurs in Dunstan’s review of the Member of Parliament’s attitude towards the allied nations of the First World War: “Then the Member of Parliament was let loose upon us, and he talked for three minutes more than one hour […] hinting pretty strongly that although Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Wilson were unquestionably good men, Sir Robert Borden had really pushed the war to a successful conclusion” (89). His speech contains those types of inflated cosmopolitan comparisons that are ubiquitous in *Sunshine Sketches*; the real nation of consequence is not those grand industrial and
military powers, but the relatively diminutive Canada, a boast perhaps suitable for the
mouth of Mr. Josh Smith.

Through this irony, Dunstan reveals his increased emotional and cultural remove
from Deptford. Just as the foibles of the Mariposans are rendered through an ironic
distance that mitigates consequence (Magee “Local Colourist” 38), Deptford now appears
as a provincial village of diminished significance to the hero/narrator, and as a refuge
from the horrors of modern warfare. Mariposa’s bucolic character is the product of the
urban sphere, its representational source. The distance between the retrospective gaze of
the narrator and Mariposa consists of a spatial-temporal gap that accommodates
idealization, and the description of the town can only be that of a non-, or perhaps one-
time, resident. This same process now occurs in Dunstan’s review of his hometown; he is
simultaneously looking back at Deptford while he is looking at Deptford. As Dunstan’s
psyche is no longer fully subject to Deptford’s restrictions, his version of the town
displays a corresponding shift towards the innocent, and despite his stated awareness of
small-town conventions, the town now appears to be a place “inhabited by laughable,
lovable simpletons, unspotted by the worldliness of city life” (15): a characterization
suggesting Dunstan is no longer a fully integrated member of the community.

This narrative shift implies that the dominant tone of Sunshine Sketches, that
which helps construct the Canadian cultural archetype, is possible only for those narrators
who can put that “home place” into a context that also includes life after the small town.
When the small-town influence is impotent or exists only in memory, a narrator is then
free to project onto that influence associations with bucolic or provincial naivety, or what
Davies terms elsewhere Canada’s “myth of innocence” (Provocative 275). In the initial
chapters of *Fifth Business*, however, Dunstan recounts his experiences with the real, imposing, and even menacing influence of naivety’s ugly cousins: ignorance and intolerance. During his return to Deptford, a time when he is free to escape the village’s influence, the town temporarily appears backwards, charming, harmless, and colourful; Dunstan’s situation now mirrors that of the club men in *Sunshine Sketches*’s “Envoi,” as his material independence offers him freedom of mind, values, and opinion. As the phrase “home place” entails subsequent experience, Mariposa as ‘cultural archetype’ is suitable only for a “culture of experience;” its rural simplicity is an urban projection of an imaginary loss. Dunstan’s unsettled narrative tone offers a type of meta-critique on a conventional rendering of small-town childhoods, as his journey outlines the process of psychical, cultural, and temporal detachment from one’s origins, and their subsequent, idealized retrospective.36

However, Dunstan’s utilization of this “fashion” only amounts to a brief foray into convention. After the comical proceedings of the official welcome-home ceremony, Dunstan provides an “inversion” or “anti-masque” of the dominant archetype of small-town Ontario: a portrayal that steps out of the sunshine and into torchlight. Immediately after the official proceedings at the courthouse, the members of the village gather outside and the atmosphere acquires a palpable difference: “here the crowd was lively and expectant; children dodged to and fro, and there was a lot of laughter about nothing in particular” (91-92). That is until “down our main street came a procession, lit by the flame of brooms dipped in oil – a ruddy, smoky light – accompanying Marshal Foch, the

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36 This is not to say that Leacock was unaware of this process. As he wryly notes in his sketches toward an autobiography, *The Boy I Left Behind Me*, nostalgics often rebuild their rural childhoods “not with an ax but with an architect” (*The Boy I Left Behind Me* 49).
two John Bulls, Uncle Sam, Gallant Little Belgium, the whole gang dragging at a rope’s end Deptford’s own conception of the German Emperor, fat Myron Papple” (92).

Ultimately, the town burns and hangs the Kaiser in effigy. Barbara Godard calls this collection of Deptfordians a “carnival mob” and also refers to their activities as a reflection of the “general anti-hierarchical spirit of the Canadian village” (“Carnival” 272). This scene also displays an inversion of the earlier moral imperatives that the village received from its pioneer forebears. While the village may still demand moral conformity, that unanimity now more clearly revolves around a muscular and rancorous political identity.

Dunstan’s description of these unofficial events lacks the “bemused irony” of his earlier description of the ceremony. During the anti-masque, Dunstan “watches them with dismay that mounted toward horror” as he realizes this “symbolic act of cruelty and hatred” is perpetrated by “my own people” (92). The symbolic act is an inverted manifestation of the same impulse that ostracizes the Dempsters, which precipitates the first of Dunstan’s crises. While the exclusion of the Dempsters is ostensibly based on collective Christian norms, the hanging of the Kaiser is a grotesque parody of those norms; both involve an individual punished by a collective as the result of that individual’s moral or military transgression. Each retributive act has the same effect on Dunstan, disgust and horror, as both reflect the dark side of the imperatives of unanimity, whether it is moral, political, or national; the majority revels in both its dominance and its opponent’s defeat. What before was portrayed as Dunstan’s moral unorthodoxy as a result of his refusal to acquiesce to “Deptford morality” is, during the anti-masque, fully articulated as direct opposition to the collective and unconcealed cruelty that is another
part of such unexamined conformism. At this moment, Dunstan would most like to distance himself from the actions of his fellow townsfolk, yet this moment marks the reaffirmation of his shared identity with the town by calling the Deptfordians “my own people.” Dunstan thus rejects the special role into which he has been thrust, that of hero, as he can no longer be a representative icon of what he is witness to. By rejecting this role, Dunstan negates the heroic status that both distinguishes him from the rest of Deptford, and renders him beholden to it through that role’s attendant obligations. This rejection also dissolves the narrative’s slip into Mariposan convention, as Dunstan can no longer maintain the cultural/temporal distance resting between his imperial identity and the peripheral village; Dunstan and Deptford’s colonial roles dissolve.

The instability of Dunstan’s temporary “bemused” distance from the town points to the instability of the very archetypes it helps construct; the village before Dunstan’s eyes is composed of complexities, some noble and some sinister. His earlier desire to escape the clutches of “Deptford morality” first turns into a simplistic re-view of village life and characters, which then translates into his more mature realization that, as his own origins rest within this village, to render it with anything less than an understanding of its complexity is doing the village and himself a disservice. The archetype represented by Sunshine Sketches emerges from a colonial mentality that perceives out-of-the-way places as the antidote to modern anomie; Dunstan discovers differently, and the dissolution of that archetype in his own narrative signals his transcendence of an immature flirtation with a colonial mentality that condescends to the imagined periphery. To write of small-town Ontario with a kindliness generated through one’s cultural,
temporal, or spatial distance from it is to write of it falsely, and, at least for Dunstan, this narrative technique cannot maintain itself in the presence of its literary subject.\(^{37}\)

Dunstan’s mature individuation can thus account for his Deptfordian past and his place within its historical lineage. This individuation does not reject origins by seeking a solitary place outside of a heritage, but rather incorporates them into his current subject position, a realization Dunstan later confirms when speaking to the formerly homeless man with whom Mary Dempster had sex, Joel Surgeoner: “What Surgeoner told me made it clear that any new life must include Deptford. There was to be no release by muffling up the past” (122). The small-town archetype is a type of “muffling up” of the past as it conceals or resists historical complexity, and can be used to justify a belief in one’s current moral infallibility through a nostalgic approach to the past (see Pupkin Sr. from *Sunshine Sketches*). Dunstan’s complex realization deflates this attractive piece of Canadian vernacular history, and suggests the capacity for evil is inherent in human nature as opposed to a specific time, place, or culture.

The instability of Dunstan’s retrospective also hints at the increasingly difficult distinction between the provincial and the cosmopolitan in the modernizing post-war world. Dunstan’s description makes special mention of Deptford’s new interest in global affairs (85), a result, perhaps, of the ongoing technological dissolution of the divide between the rural and urban spheres in an age of rapid communication. Particularly revealing of this nascent modern homogeneity is the behaviour Dunstan witnesses in both cultural centre and outpost. Immediately after the war, Dunstan watches a disturbing

\(^{37}\) This line of thinking would suggest that the narrative tone of *Sunshine Sketches* is maintained only because the image of Mariposa dissolves before the narrator and his auditor can reenter the village.
spectacle in London: “I saw some of the excitement and a few things that shocked me; people, having been delivered from destruction, became horribly destructive themselves; people, having been delivered from license and riot, pawed and mauled and shouted dirty phrases in the streets” (77). These depictions of post-war rampage indicate that both imperial centre and periphery are affected by, and respond to, the same global events, news of which is now transmitted instantaneously along trans-Atlantic cables. Deptfordians and Londoners fight in the same war and celebrate its conclusion in similarly degraded fashions. Deptford’s insular identity has been replaced by its own self-identification with a type of “imagined community,” a community whose centre of influence is situated beyond the borders of not only the town, but also the nation; the town’s moral imperatives are now determined not by the village elders or its own particular past, but by the demands of the larger international community into which it now imagines itself. The increasingly globalized experience reflected in post-war Deptford resists the tangibility of rural difference, as modernity collapses the spatial relation upon which rural and urban “associative values” are based; the distance between the rural and urban spheres can no longer maintain the mirage of difference, as modernity degrades the very effect of distance. This process, though, does nothing to eliminate the rural nostalgia of those seeking a more innocent antitype to modern, urban experience; it is a nostalgic impulse, however, that Dunstan has overcome.

Deptford’s pioneer morality has been replaced with an influence whose stress on the collective is perhaps even stronger, and whose reach extends to any who have access to modern forms of communication. Dunstan’s new “horror” is the expression of an individual against the calcification of a political-cultural identity, and not simply against
Deptford’s collective moral voice. His sentiment may be based on a culturally elitist impulse, but it is a message of critical and independent thought that will be crucial to that dark age of political polarities about to begin, an age of extremes that is replacing Deptford’s moral conformism with a seemingly more potent message of post-war nationalism; it similarly relies on cultural myths to support its manufactured sense of inherent righteousness. Dunstan’s inability to gaze lovingly upon that small village from which he emerged is the type of sober historical consciousness needed to think clearly about the “biggest outburst of mass lunacy” (171) the first war precipitates, and to resist the pull of ideologies that will soon plunge the globe into an even larger conflagration than the one Dunstan was fortunate enough to have survived.
Chapter Four

The Orchard and the Hollow: The Artist as Community in Alice Munro’s Lives of Girls and Women.

In 1971, one year after the publication of Robertson Davies’ Fifth Business, Alice Munro’s Lives of Girls and Women was released. Initial sales, Munro tells John Metcalf, were disappointing, and Davies’ novel vastly outsold Munro’s in the early years of the 1970s (prior to Lives’ U.S. publication).38 These figures suggest that Munro’s vision of a small-town childhood, even though ostensibly patterned on an established genre of Canadian fiction, did not suit a public’s palate more accommodated to either Stephen Leacock’s populist mixture of humour and pathos, or Davies’ affectionate censure. Although these qualities are largely absent in novels emerging from a Canadian modernism, novels that depict the desperation and sexual awakenings of life in rural regions such as Ernest Buckler’s The Mountain and the Valley and Raymond Knister’s White Narcissus, these texts attempt to maintain the conventional binary that segments the rural experience from that of the urban.39 In these later novels, the small town or poor farm is a spiritually and physically restrictive place that must be abandoned for more expansive regions, those that can accommodate psychological and artistic growth. In the lineage of small-town fiction prior to Munro, the line separating the rural and urban experiences appears solid. Munro, however, blurs this line by abandoning both sides of

38 For Fifth Business’ sales figures, see Grant 484-485. For Lives’, see Metcalf “Conversation” 62.
39 Glenn Willmott, however, argues that Buckler’s rural region “uncannily repeats” an urban experience, as rural regionalism in the modern Canadian novel is an extension of urban modernity. By incorporating Marxist geographers’ understanding of capitalism’s creation of “relative spaces” - urban, rural, and hinterland - Willmott reads the rural as not a pastoral urban antitype, but as a satellite of urban modernity that, in Canada at least, has always been dominated by modern economic systems of trade and industrialization (Unreal Country 152-153).
the rural-urban associative value binary; the rural past and urban present are neither contrary nor complementary in Munro’s narrative, and her depiction of space appears uninformed by a lengthy aesthetic tradition.

Munro’s work has been described as a “Bildungsroman” (Howells Munro 33), a “whole book story sequence” in the tradition of Joyce’s Dubliners (Gurr qtd. in Howells Munro 33), a “[m]emoir, autobiography, novel, [and] collection of short stories” (Metcalf “Conversation” 60), and an “episodic novel” by Munro herself (Struthers “Interview” 14-15). In her interviews, Munro acknowledges her childhood experiences in Wingham Ontario as the “emotional” inspiration for the text, just as Leacock’s childhood near Orillia and Davies’ short time in Thamesville ostensibly served as their models. Leacock’s and Davies’ critics often read Mariposa and Deptford as symbolic portraits of a small-town past that informs a current of national identity. These national parallels are absent from Munro’s criticism; the socio-cultural aspect of her work is strictly identified with a specific region of southern Ontario.

Critics marvel at the “photographic realism” (Robson 139) of her documentation of the province’s counties bordering Lake Huron: “Alice Munro defines rural Southwestern Ontario, and specifically Wawanash County […] in much the same manner as Faulkner […] Welty […] Flannery O’Connor and Carson McCullers [all recreate portraits of the southern United States]” (Robson 138). In his analysis of the social aspects of Munro’s work, John Weaver suggests that the autobiographical details within Lives “are further reason to trust her material” (384) and praises her writing for its

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40 In W.J. Keith’s Literary Images of Ontario he states “Mariposa is, of course, the epitome of the Ontarian (and Canadian) small town in the popular imagination” (155). He also includes Davies’ own comments on Deptford as a representative of “‘those ingrown Canadian places’” (167).
sociological accuracy: “her work is a cultural resource for Ontario. Readers enjoy the stories. Critics can praise their style. And all who have a regard for Ontario’s past must celebrate the accomplishments of Alice Munro as a chronicler of deep feelings and changes” (400). However, Munro resists the primacy of place in her writing, what constitutes her “roman du pays” (Weaver 384), as she considers the regionalist content secondary, even unintentional: “I never think I’m writing a story about Wingham or I’m writing a story about a Southwestern Ontario small town. Ever. I just use that stuff because it is familiar to me […] I’m not concerned with any kind of comprehensive picture” (Struthers “Interview” 33). Yet a comprehensive picture develops nonetheless.

Robert Thacker provides perhaps the best response to Munro’s attempts to “disavow” the importance of small-town Ontario to her work: “Munro’s fiction closely defines Ontario as a fictional place […] to Munro [,] place is a part of the whole tale she tells: to her, place and character are inextricably connected in story” (“Connection” 214). In order to construct her characters, Munro must establish the land to which they are attached. Her “photographic realism” may accurately depict the region’s society and topography, but this realism also complicates a rural trope that in the work of Leacock and Davies provides a background for the physical and psychological journeys of the characters. The proximity of Munro’s narrators to the places they describe, therefore, helps them resist the influence of an existing rural-urban associative value binary, as her narrators see the small town for what it is, not what a tropological convention dictates. In Munro’s stories, place does more than simply act as a parochial starting point for nationally symbolic characters who then shape those origins through recall. The relationship between Munro’s characters and place is subtle, active, shifting, and
symbiotic, and, despite her suggestion that regionalism is an unintended byproduct of her stories, she does acknowledge that place is an important component of her texts: “I am certainly a regional writer in that whatever I do I seem only able to make things work [...] if I use this [...] this plot of land that is mine [...] I should be able to write a novel about somebody living in Don Mills [...] but I’m not” (Metcalf “Conversation” 56). Place is imperative for Munro’s writing, and it operates as the mortar for the pieces of her plots and identities of her characters. As Thacker puts it, Munro has “made texts out of Huron County, Ontario” (“Introduction” 2), a statement that refers to her detailed realism, while also alluding to the importance of examining her portrayal of place in any study of her work.

Unlike Uncle Craig, Munro does not simply chronicle the history of Huron County through a “linear, historical discourse, accurate but unshaped and written unselectively” (Smythe 123); she constructs narratives not of people’s history in place, like Craig, but of the relationship between people and place. Despite its overtures to geographic specificity, a representation of place can assume a universal significance, says Beverly Rasporich: “The creation of place, in fact, is a vehicle for sympathetic bonding between the reader and the writer’s fictional world, offering, at the very least, the illusion of shared, hence universal, experience” (Dance 122). In attempting to understand the status of place in Munro’s fiction, with particular focus on the potential role of a rural-urban dichotomy, this chapter will first focus on the perspective of the narrator in Lives of Girls and Women. What is the role of temporal and spatial distance resting between Del’s narrative’s vantage point and her narrative’s subject, and how does it affect the tone of her small-town depiction? In the previous two chapters, this distance was shown to shape
the nature of small-town retrospective according to a convention. In Munro’s text, however, there is no clear distinction between then and now, there and here. Del’s narration is a shifting mixture of past and present; her voice seemingly disregards time and space. This chapter argues that Del’s narrative technique is composed of different historical perspectives that she garners from her artistic and epistemological models. These influences are distinguished by their vastly different historical consciousnesses, and while they coalesce to form Del’s voice, her perspective on her past and present, they are the very same forces that shape the texture of Wawanash County’s landscape, Huron County’s fictional stand-in. Thacker’s characterization of Munro’s stories as making “texts out of Huron County” alludes to the importance of the author’s personal memories of that landscape, conjured across a spatial-temporal distance; this chapter, on the other hand, discusses the intricate attachment and formal influence existing among the obscured boundaries of landscape, history, and artist within the text itself.

**Del Jordan(s): Narrator(s)**

This section begins by sketching the arguments of other critics concerning the style of Del’s narration in order to establish a critical framework for what follows. It focuses primarily on those theories that either locate a split in the temporal fabric of Del’s narrative, or identify a dialectic in the composition of her retrospective; identification of these features helps distinguish some formal elements of Munro’s novel from those of Leacock’s and Davies’. In *Sunshine Sketches*, a definitive time and place materialize from which the narrator constructs the town, and by the end of the book Mariposa is revealed to be a product of the collective nostalgic, melancholic memories of the successful businessmen who recollect from the text’s present deep in the heart of the city.
The narrator is a companion to these men, and he instructs them in appropriate methods of retrospect, methods that utilize the temporal gap to idealize generic memories. In *Fifth Business*, Dunstan Ramsay reveals his temporal location, his text’s present, from the outset; he is an elderly man of cosmopolitan experience recalling significant events for the benefit of his former headmaster. The story of his past is interpreted by his present self. The past and the present in both texts remain distinct, and, as in all retrospectives, the present holds a hegemonic interpretive position. Laurajane Smith contends that the influence of the past shifts since “it can never be understood solely within its own terms; the present continually rewrites the meaning of the past” (58); its influence, therefore, is always reinterpreted “through the dominant discourses of the present day” (58-59), often to address the “needs of the present” (58). Mariposa is a necessary counterpart to the strained nature of urban life, providing the solace of an imagined stable past to the actual present; it is safe to assume that Mariposa would appear much different had it been recollected under different circumstances. Similarly, Deptford’s narrow parochialism provides Dunstan with the retrospective justification he needs when reviewing his life of solitary, idiosyncratic pursuits. The relationship of the past and present in Del’s narration, however, is far more complex, as, indeed, Del’s past is difficult to differentiate from her present.

Del’s recollections of Jubilee and Wawanash County possess no easily distinguishable benefit for the reminiscing narrator. W.J. Keith suggests that while Leacock and Davies write of the small town from an outsider perspective (and it should be noted that their outsider perspective applies to both temporal and spatial concerns), Munro writes from a rural perspective with “total immediacy” (167). If this “total
immediacy” stretches the bounds of retrospective plausibility, many critics resolve Del’s uncanny recall by positing a “doubleness” in her narrative voice: that is, the doubleness of perspective and time involved in Del’s autobiographical persona. Some suggest there are two Dels simultaneously narrating her past experience (Orange, Moss, Thacker), as there is little distinction made between Del’s past and present voices. The adult thoughts of Del the narrator intermingle with the childhood experiences of Del the narrated, as the adult and child are virtually unmediated by a temporal or experiential gap; “memory” would not be the best word to characterize Del’s narration. John Orange employs Margaret Laurence’s idea of “a double sense of present time” in his analysis of Munro’s narrative voices: “the narrator, often the implied writer of the story after he or she has reached maturity, describes an event as experienced by a child or adolescent but written in the style of an adult who is more detached and judicial than the child could have been at the time of the event” (86). Del’s later commentary may isolate her earlier experiences to a specific location and period, but the time and place from which that commentary emerges remains ill-defined and unknown.

Thacker theorizes about Del’s technique: “Throughout Lives of Girls and Women, Del Jordan, its narrator, treads a fine line between the two points of view […] Her older voice seldom intrudes overtly; instead, it is subtly present to instruct, clarify, and expand the younger narrator’s pronouncements […] These covert intrusions] embody the older Del’s knowledge” (“Narrative Dialectics” 56). Thacker labels Del’s narrative technique “a dialectic between past and present, between experience and understanding” (58). This “commingling” of periods resists the influence of a spatio-temporal gap on memory, as there is little distance between narrator (narrating subject) and narrated (narrative object).
The effect of this distance is central to the appeal of Mariposa, and as the final train journey navigates the distance between present and past the process of the town’s aesthetic shaping is revealed; Leacock draws attention to the malleability of memory, the distortion of objects when viewed from a temporal distance. This distortion appeals to Dunstan when he revisits his own hometown after extending his circle of reference to the grand locales of the wider world, but is something he ultimately rejects. In all three texts it is possible to approximate the years in which the stories take place, but apparent only in Leacock’s and Davies’ is the duration of time that separates the narrators from their pasts. The temporal synthesis in Lives conceals the narrator’s present position, thus obscuring the growth of the child into the adult that is commonly rendered as the journey from rural beginnings to urban achievement; Del’s past remains unenclosed by the “dominant discourses of the present day” (Smith Heritage 59), which render it thoroughly comprehensible only through the context of a current understanding.

A contrastive reading helps put Del’s narrative style in relief. Consider this passage from Fifth Business in which Dunstan weighs his guilt immediately after describing the circumstances around the central snowball: “Ah, if dying were all there was to it! Hell and torment at once […] the more time that passed, the less I was able to accuse Percy Boyd Staunton of having thrown the snowball that sent Mrs. Dempster simple. His brazen-faced refusal to accept responsibility seemed to deepen my own guilt, which had now become the guilt of concealment as well as action” (55). The ironically elevated diction of Dunstan the narrator comically marginalizes the guilt experienced during his childhood; the narrator patronizes his earlier self, mitigating his earlier shame
through the context of his vast later experience. Dunstan pats Dunny on the head and clucks "there there."

In recounting a similar instance of juvenile misbehaviour, Del does not comically exaggerate her sensations when biting her cousin Mary Agnes during Craig’s funeral, but renders those physical sensations through a comprehensive immediacy that accounts for momentary, shifting, and fleeting sensations:

Being forgiven creates a peculiar shame. I felt hot, and not just from the blanket. I felt held close, stifled, as if it was not air I had to move and talk through in this world but something thick as cotton wool. This shame was physical, but went far beyond sexual shame, my former shame of nakedness; now it was as if not the naked body but all the organs inside it – stomach, heart, lungs, liver – were laid bare and helpless. The nearest thing to this that I had ever known before was the feeling I got when I was tickled beyond endurance – horrible, voluptuous feeling of exposure, of impotence, self-betrayal. (57)

Del relates the intensity of the emotion through detailed simile and understanding, but there is no questioning of the depth and legitimacy of this feeling through the diminishing effects of the intervening years, those resting between event and remembrance. Instead, Del characterizes the exact nature of emotion, an understanding that could only result from contemplative distance; this retrospect does not necessarily recount, but relates by translating the emotional intensity of a child into the understanding of an adult. Del simultaneously “experiences and understands.” John Moss calls this technique Munro’s “double vision” in which “[t]he child feels the affairs of life directly while the adult ponders and even enjoys their causes and their consequences. By relating a situation

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41 This is not to say that Dunstan did not feel his guilt acutely throughout his life; my purpose is to reveal the narrator’s approach to his younger self.
through the double vision of her narrator, Munro makes both event and memory immediate to the reader with the disarming clarity of personal experience” (57). This narrative technique does not necessarily destabilize the generic tropological equation of childhood and the countryside (Bunce 63-68), but it does complicate the “innocence, peace, virtue” commonly identified with both. Del’s countryside accommodates complex childhood experience in which the child understands both significance and consequence through a purposeful mélange of past and present. In Munro’s narrative, Jubilee and Wawanash County are not products of retrospection in the traditional sense, but they are landscapes described through Del’s ostensible transcendence of distance. The subject-object relationship of the city and country seen in previous texts, and an integral part of the pastoral design, is stretched beyond the point of recognition in *Lives*.

Rasporich comments on the general movement within Munro’s stories, from rural past to urban present: “[Munro is praised for] the chronicle of the realistic psychology of a central female voice, which, originating in a small-town past, fights to shake free of conventional sexual roles in order to achieve independence and maturity in a modern, urban context” (*Dance* xii). Rasporich may be too easily placing a retrospective template onto Munro’s texts, as the linear movement she alludes to is hard to definitively trace in *Lives*: Del’s narrative seemingly transcends the temporal poles and perspectives of the urban-rural binary to which Rasporich alludes. The temporal “dialectic” within Del’s narration results in no apparent movement from the past, no tracing of the young rural self towards the narrator’s present urban position. Rather, the temporal synthesis reflected in Del’s unique perspective suggests that her narrative already contains the product of
that process: “Del is fully formed from the beginning. This is not a novel about what makes her” (Moss 61). Jubilee is not something Del reconstructs across a spatio-temporal gap after shedding the psychological and social restrictions of her rural upbringing, but something she simultaneously “experiences and understands.” The simultaneity of Del’s various perspectives adumbrates a type of first-person primitivism operating within her narrative; she experiences a bodily and intellectual continuity that reduces the interpretive dominance of her experiential and psychological present.

Del’s experience of time then obfuscates the operation of an urban and rural polarity within the text, a significant break from the general trend in small-town fiction. There is little beyond the “covert” indications of Del’s adult life to suggest the presence of an urban alternative to which the rural inhabitant has gradually made her way, in terms of both geography and culture. With the entirety of her artistic vision comes an extratextual tension with her literary predecessors, since Jubilee is a site that accommodates experience atypical of the small-town myth or archetype represented by Mariposa and toyed with in Fifth Business; Jubilee is not simply reconstructed through memory to

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42 I use “primitivism” with reference to the effect of time on Del’s narrative. Her ability to convey her earlier states appears unaffected by chronology and sequence. Time appears not to move Del in the present farther and farther away from her past selves. This experiential/temporal simultaneity reflects Michael Bell’s discussion of the “primitivist” portrayal of time in D.H. Lawrence’s The Rainbow. “[T]ime,” says Bell, “is conceived in its psychological aspect, that is to say, as it impinges on the individual’s possibly varying state of mind, rather than as a fixed and objective category” (15). Del, of course, charts her progression from childhood through adolescence, her linear growth, but how she represents that experience appears to transcend the effects of linear, “objective” time; its passage does not appear to increase Del’s sense of distance from her past self.

43 That is except for the university entrance exam for which Del is seen studying. However, at the end of the text her attendance at university remains in question, and while the book ends with Del’s subsequent movements remaining indeterminable, she does resolve to live a life of independence. The end of the “Epilogue” alludes to the direction of her artistic life more so than it does her thoughts on the location that can accommodate that artistic life.
address some present need. Her voice does not locate a divide between the rural past and urban present, as Del’s narration obscures the line upon which those types of relations are built.

**Place and Historical Perspective**

As Thacker says, “the small-town ethos in Ontario gains its primary importance as a myth – that is, as a falsehood which is somehow true” (“Connection” 213). The ethos is constructed through the falsifying lens of retrospect. Dunstan’s “problem of perspective” is a reflection of this myth, as it detracts from his ability to establish a stable and accurate version of Deptford, to resolve the Mariposan ideal with the Deptfordian reality. The associative complement that the small town of the past provides to the urban centre of the present is absent in *Lives* because of the distinctive perspective of the narrator. Locating the geographical and temporal source of Del’s narration is difficult, and, as her present “time and place” is concealed, a rural-urban dichotomy cannot develop through Del’s small-town retrospective; as such, Jubilee is not constructed as a ready contrast to urban life, but as a complex place that remains uninfluenced by the enclosing conventions of those rural associative values.

Munro generally writes of a period after the large-scale emigration to the industrial cities, and of an area that, having experienced a flurry of activity in the late-nineteenth century, had subsequently “entered its present slow decline” (*Lives* 31); the inhabitants of Jubilee were left behind a generation ago by their more ambitious cousins and are more likely to hang around, moldering from a sense of “perverse pride,” much like Del’s cousin Ruth McQueen. Leacock and Davies both write of a period before urbanization established its cultural dominance over the stagnating small towns, but also,
and more importantly, they write of characters yearning for larger fortunes in the booming cities; Jubilee, however, is that stagnated small town, complacent, proud, slightly masochistic. It is, in fact, an unwelcome reminder of the degree to which the nation’s business is located in the urban centres. Munro offers a vision of a more recent small-town Ontario past, one falling after that period in which critics locate a communal image of national import.

The specificity of place involved in Munro’s writing is another factor that resists parallels to a national past. While some critics laud Munro’s accurate vision of the local (Howells, Weaver), others offer accounts of readers within her depicted regions who feel her stories are not really so accurate after all, but rather “scandalous gossip” (Howells Munro 3), or skewed versions of the past (Thacker “Connection” 215). Other critics argue that Munro’s writing possesses universal appeal since its documentation of rural-Ontario townscapes transcends regional and national concerns: “Fairgrounds, grandstands, racetrack oval, mills, hostelries, floods, house plots – all are timeless features of human communal life; there are no garages, drive-ins, or strip malls to suggest organic discontinuity” (Martin and Ober 139). These features are hardly “timeless,” nor do they suggest “organic” features of the civilized society, as Martin and Ober seem to mistake the townscapes of yesteryear with innate manifestations of human civilization itself.

The significance of Munro’s accurate depiction of place fully develops when viewed in relation to Del’s artistic technique, since an organic continuity exists between the landscapes of Wawanash County and her narrative style; the very same influences shape both artistic technique and topography. The landscapes of Wawanash have been
inscribed with a language of settlement, and Del’s characteristic fusion of past and present is really a synthesis of the different historical consciousnesses that have shaped that landscape. Struthers has called the text a “portrait of the girl as a young artist” (“Interview” 25), a comment signifying that this story documents the development of not only a life, but also an artistic approach: a Künstlerroman. Similarly, in her study of the text’s intertextuality, Barbara Godard calls Lives a “pastiche” of its “literary progenitors”: “By the end of the novel, the hero has found the vocation of writer which has all along been her latent authentic self” (“Female Aesthetic” 49). The pastiche may be intertextual, but the text reveals that Del’s artistry emerges from her encounters with those historical perspectives that dominate the psychological and physical landscape of Wawanash County.

Uncle Craig, Del’s first artistic model, is an amateur historian of Fairmile township, “a custodian of tradition [and a] patriarchal figure” (Howells Munro 39). His perspective on history is authoritative, and his reverence for, and solemn attitude towards, the region’s past outline a respectful approach that he then prescribes to Del’s own relationship with familial forebears. That respect demands an accurate sense of chronology, as a precise knowledge of the linearity of events is an important component of his reverence for the past. When a young Del asks a question that betrays her ignorance of sequential time, Craig becomes irritated: “He was displeased with me not on account of any vanity about his age, but because of my inaccurate notions of time and history” (29). As Weaver states, Craig “sponsors Del’s initial awareness of history and, in his desire to pour everything into his history, he even has a sense of common lives, but
he cannot select and evaluate” (382). The facts in his historical work tick by like seconds on a clock, with no sense of an overarching or unifying frame.

Not only does Craig’s acute sense of chronology inform his written history, but it also overwhelms it. Weaver suggests that Craig’s historical perspective occupies one pole of a dichotomy of “historical inquiry,” the other pole taken up by “the creative soul who wants to record the concrete but also the passions” (382). Craig’s methods involve simply the recording of detail, “a collector who, at worst, reifies facts and artifacts without ordering their meaning” (382). He embodies a negative artistic example for Del; his consciousness of the past, as Catherine Sheldrick-Ross argues, requires a surfeit of particulars but possesses “no sense of design, no way of revealing the significance of these ordinary facts” (122). Like most of Munro’s artist figures, Del’s task is to provide a sense of permanence to the order she perceives in her subject, which in this case is the past (Sheldrick-Ross 121). Del rejects Uncle Craig’s historical model, reasons Karen Smythe, in favour of one more selective and one that can transform facts into art (124). While Craig may not fictionalize or reconstruct the past according to his own purposes, he also fails to interpret it, and as a result his history lacks coherence. His reverence for the past is rooted simply in images of precedence and does not stem from any significance or meaning within those images, as he can decipher no unifying message within his pathological recording; Craig betrays his anxiety that the potential for meaning and order in the past exists, but so far his compulsive recording has been unsuccessful in uncovering it.

Weaver modifies his notion of an artistic dichotomy of “historical inquiry” when even he acknowledges Craig’s influence on Del through her desire to “record the
concrete.” Weaver’s reading suggests that Del’s artistic method does not form from a
total rejection of Craig’s artistic example, but that a constructive influence exists between
uncle and niece; Del explicitly relates her attraction to Craig’s historical compulsion in
the “Epilogue.” The covert voice of the adult Del dominates in her outline of the
difference between her adolescent artistic method and that of her later life:

It did not occur to me then that one day I would be so greedy for
Jubilee. Voracious and misguided as Uncle Craig out at Jenkin’s
Bend, writing his History, I would want to write things down.
I would try to make lists. A list of all the stores and businesses
going up and down the main street and who owned them, a list of
family names, names on the tombstones in the cemetery […] The
hope of accuracy we bring to such tasks is crazy, heartbreaking.
And no list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every
last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on
bark or walls […] held still and held together – radiant, everlasting.
(253)

Beyond ordering the minutiae of her past life, Del wants to preserve those momentary
flashes in which she perceives the order of fleeting experiences, and also to synthesize
these moments to provide her past life with a sense of coherence. Godard marks this
passage as Del’s movement from an oral to a written tradition (“Female Aesthetic” 56); it
also marks both Del’s acceptance of Craig’s project in principle, and her decision to
supplement his methods.

Del’s eventual artistic method contrasts sharply with that she employs in the
outline for her adolescent novel, sketched in the final chapter. This novel, while based on
life in Jubilee, finds its form through Del’s thorough familiarity with genres of fiction
rather than through her truthful observations of the town. The adolescent novel,
constructed according to the precepts of genre, is ostensibly about the town’s noteworthy,
yet collapsed family the Sherriffs. Del, however, realizes the mimetic shortcomings of
her tale: “I did not pay much attention to the real Sherriffs, once I had transformed them for fictional purposes” (248). In an instance in which her adult contemplation merges with her youthful experience, Del’s suggestion that her ultimate artistic vision will aim for an impossible accuracy comes only after a meeting with one of the real Sherriffs, Bobby, who has spent much time in a mental hospital. This meeting is an artistic revelation for Del as she comes to reject the dishonest prerequisites of imported generic forms that direct the artistic eye and circumscribe observation (Smythe 127-128). Del’s subsequent attraction to Craig’s compulsive accuracy, his voracious veracity, is balanced by her recognition of the Sisyphean futility of simple documentation.

Craig’s approach to the past is laboured, and its drudgery registers on his body. In describing Craig’s office, Del takes special notice of a photograph on his wall, and imparts the parallels that exist between these photographic figures and Craig himself: “Several men in shirtsleeves, with droopy moustaches, and fierce but somehow helpless expressions, stood around a horse and wagon” (28). The physical exhaustion of these men’s lives is symbolized by the “droop” of their mustaches; the “helpless expressions” on their faces betray otherwise stoic countenances as only so much posturing. That physical depletion is echoed in Del’s description of Craig: “One of his eyes was blind, and had been operated on but remained dark and clouded; that eyelid had a menacing droop. His face was square and sagging, his body stout” (29). Much like his ancestors now tacked to his wall, Craig is weighed down by his task. The unselective recording of historical fact produces a weighty, voluminous manuscript constructed through the same blind work ethic required to clear land; each recorded fact is analogous to another felled tree, yet Craig fails to realize that his purpose is not to establish a field of facts. His effort
exhausts and counteracts whatever artistic invigoration is required to shape his tome. Similarly, the family tree he compiles may be an “intricate structure of lives supporting us from the past” (31), but through Craig’s comprehensive methods of “historical inquiry,” it becomes a cumbersome edifice bearing down on the survivors, demanding tribute, Craig imagines, through precision.

Craig is unselfconscious enough to continue the plodding labours of his forebears, and he fails to recognize a cautionary significance in his documented litany of tragedies; emulation of the past, a past marked by failure and disappointment, is the only purpose Craig takes from his work. When Del finally provides a selection of Craig’s history at the end of “Heirs of the Living Body,” she reveals a record of futility, death, and defeat (61). Craig’s own death also comes long before he completes his labour, and thus he fails at his task of ordering “a great accumulation of the most ordinary facts” (31). This pattern of failure bespeaks the real lineage of the region, as the settlers’ and Craig’s task is nothing less than to establish a full external model of their comprehensive ideal of order. Craig, then, carries on a tradition in which the realization of the futility of one’s efforts is avoided only through death. Del’s ultimate refusal to continue Craig’s project is a refusal to carry out an enumerative surveying of the past. Her artistic decision at the end of the book reveals her ambivalence towards a cultural heritage for which Craig serves as a model, and this decision displays her desire to be both part of a historical tradition, and also outside of it by serving as its artist. By keeping one foot along the community’s historical trajectory (or historical rut) and one foot outside of it, Del feels a part of this lineage, but can also observe it from across an established distance.
“Heirs of the Living Body” is a key to understanding the origins of Del’s artistic technique. In a lecture to her daughter, Addie Jordan constructs a symbolic cyclical alternative to Craig’s staunch linearity. In discussing Craig’s death, Addie states “[s]o we say, Uncle Craig is dead. The person is dead. But that’s just our way of looking at it. That’s just our human way. If we weren’t thinking all the time in terms of persons, if we were thinking of Nature, all Nature going on and on, parts of it dying – well not dying, changing, changing is the word I want, changing into something else” (47). Addie’s musings propose a transcendence of death through the merging of individuals; by connecting the human to a natural cycle, she revises Craig’s linear understanding of time through which he plots human progress. While Craig remembers and reveres the dead, Addie suggests that the living embody the dead. Addie presents an alternative structure of family as an organic continuity that flourishes despite the demise of individual parts; the organic whole merges individuals through time, a notion that echoes in Del’s later decision to continue with but alter Craig’s history, to accept his project but revise his artistic methods. This image of the family as an organic whole stands in stark contradistinction to that of Craig and of Del’s aunts as Del’s father makes clear: “they do have a different set of notions, and they might easy be upset” (49). They revere the primacy and integrity of the individual who, after death, survives in memory, but also in the emulation of his or her life’s work by the living. This is something encouraged by Del’s aunts when they bequeath to her Craig’s manuscript: “‘Maybe you could learn to copy his way’” (62), they tell Del, lines that, in fact, caution Del against echoing Craig’s plodding deference to both history and family.
Craig, Elspeth, and Grace see both history and family as a linear narrative; their historical perspective has, at its core, an assumption that the trajectory of familial and regional “progress” will experience an eventual culmination, an apex that will retroactively provide meaning to all previous events and experience. This perspective is distinctly opposed to the cycles of the family body charted by Addie. The guiding principle of Craig’s history mirrors Sylviane Agacinski’s distillation of a western conception of time; epochs form only in retrospect, and it is the belief in the end of time, the millenarian design that rests at the heart of understandings of progress, that provides all preceding history with a sense of purpose (4). Historical order can form only in retrospect, and, despite Craig’s best efforts at accounting for the smallest of details, providing his regional history with a sense of meaning eludes him since that history is ongoing; no matter how comprehensive it may be, its underlying pattern incorporates an endlessly deferred signified, only an expectation of future meaning.

In an apparent acknowledgement of her mother’s musings on natural metamorphosis, Del is able to incorporate Craig’s method of “historical inquiry,” the “crazy, heartbreaking” “hope of accuracy” (253), into her own distinct, “synthetic” narrative style. Del comes to document her own life not as a linear narrative seen from a present vantage point, but as a shifting organic whole whose composite parts she can simultaneously experience and understand. Del inherits Craig’s overt concern with detail, but to understand the entirety of her experience, its final, formal meaning, she must complement her inheritance with an alternative historical epistemology, one that denies the primacy of linearity and allows her to perceive order within a life in progression. While Addie’s theory initially raises the spectre of a possible alternative relationship with
family, temporality, and a type of genetic memory, it is only through Del’s relationship to Garnet French that she accesses that alternate understanding of time, family, and the individual.

Primitivism, Simultaneity, and Continuity

The depiction of Garnet French and his thoroughly countrified family reveals Munro’s flirtation with primitivism. Rasporich sees Munro’s primitivism within her depiction of the rural landscape as she locates a conceptual divide that separates Jubilee from its outlying environs: “The Flats Road, and bush beyond, are symbols of primal energy and sexuality, its chaos and danger. The town, in its intricate design, is representative of order, reason and control” (Dance 138). Inside the town line, Rasporich implies, rest hierarchies that establish tradition and regulation, but outside of this line rests a primeval disorder; she identifies a town-country dichotomy that involves more than simply those associative values identified by Raymond Williams and W.H. New. While Rasporich recognizes inner divisions within that rural sphere defined by Williams and New, she still sees Munro’s depiction of place adhering to a dichotomous structure of complementary associative values. Nora Robson echoes but slightly modifies this argument:

[in Munro’s fiction there are two main types of landscapes, urban [which Robson suggests is represented by Jubilee] and rural; but also important is the zone in between, where several of her adolescent protagonists live. For example, Del Jordan lives ‘at the end of the Flats Road’ […] Del’s house symbolizes her existence in a limbo between two societies, urban and rural. (140)

The “limbo” of the Flats Road that Robson identifies as the middle ground between the urban and rural begins to break down the notion that Munro’s depiction of landscape adheres to a binary. Dichotomies of urban-rural, civilized-primitive, and ordered-chaotic
only appear to frame Munro’s primitivistic conception of landscape, since, on a closer look, the rural landscape surrounding Jubilee offers no symbolic counterpoint to the town itself.

In one sense, this complication of a spatial binary echoes what Thacker calls Munro’s narrative “dialectic” of past and present. Del’s narrative technique treats her life as a continuum that she experiences as a simultaneous whole, whereas in *Sunshine Sketches* a past-present dichotomy is maintained largely because of the inaccessibility of an imagined small-town past to a present urban reality. Just as Del’s narrative transcends the past-present structure of retrospective narratives, so too does she disregard the complementary spatial associations of the previously discussed texts; Munro renders experience exclusive to neither urban nor rural areas, nor to adult nor childhood consciousnesses. Robson may complicate the urban-rural binary in Munro’s texts by identifying a middle ground, yet this chapter sees a further destabilization of the binary in Munro’s text, particularly through her depiction of the French family. This family has a greater significance in the text than to simply provide an associative counterpoint to the townsfolk of Jubilee, and when examined in relation to Craig, we see emerging the influence both have on Del’s narrative technique.

What occurs beyond the boundaries of Jubilee proper, I suggest, only *seems* shaped by Del’s primitivism. On the Flats Road one evening during the height of her relationship with Garnet, Del notices her misshapen shadow as the sun sets behind her: “I watched this strange elongated figure with the faraway, small round head […] and it seemed to me the shadow of a stately, unfamiliar African girl” (231). The shadow, or in other words the outline or shape of her body, allows for Del’s self-observation at strictly
the level of form. Here, beyond the borders of the town, Del finds that form unfamiliar and distorted. This recognition alludes to her current situation with Garnet; she has temporarily abandoned a life of the mind with her friend Jerry Storey for a life of the body with Garnet, and this moment of crepuscular reflection intimates Del’s awareness of not only this migration, but also her lack of familiarity with a life ruled by sensation as opposed to thought.

The shadow spread out before her offers Del an image in the abstract of the nature of the life she could expect with Garnet, in which sensation may trump thought but would constitute a type of performance for Del. Del’s primitivist use of the connotative content of “Africa” to elaborate on the primacy of the body speaks of the state of ethnographic paradigms in rural Ontario in the late 1940s. If indeed Munro locates the “primal energy and sexuality” and the “chaos and disorder” of the “primitive” beyond the borders of Jubilee, then she betrays her attraction to the idea of the primitive as a representative of the unconscious mind and the hazards of, and attraction to, human impulse. But as Del projects the “primitive” associations merely onto her shadow, onto a distorted image of herself, she is, in fact, self-consciously playing with literary self-perception, with the tendency to aggrandize personal situation and identity that, in this case, is heavily

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44 I think here Munro is self-consciously playing with the types of primitivist notions expressed in many modernist works of the early-twentieth century, notably those of T.S. Eliot and D.H. Lawrence. In *T.S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide*, David Chinitz suggests that for modern primitivists, Africans were thought to be connected to those original rhythmical rituals upon which all culture and religion is based, but from which modern societies have strayed. While this fallacious expression is based on discredited notions of cultural evolution, the modernists felt that their project involved a sort of cultural triage. Del, a well-read teenager in rural Ontario in the 1940s, someone who reveals her familiarity with modernist literature (175), projects onto her shadow an image of an “African girl,” a result, perhaps, of her familiarity with modern primitivist theories, and her precocious willingness to use them to self-dramatize her life.
influenced by her love affair with Garnet. She is not simply writing of her experience, but writing about perceiving herself in the process of experiencing. Neither is it her physical location, the Flats Road, that entices these types of associations, but rather they emerge from Del’s tendency to view her life through genre precepts and literary convention. This passage begins to reveal the source of the associative qualities of the various corners of Wawanash County, as these possess only the associative connotations that have been projected on to them by their inhabitants.

Locating a primitive/modern split along Jubilee’s town line is an easy generalization of Munro’s topographies. Munro is too complex a writer to simply follow in a primitivist vein that in the 1960s would have been out of fashion and, more likely, challenged due to its overt racism. Beyond the “ordered” pattern of Jubilee’s streets, which in the Manichean constructs of Rasporich and Robson denote order and control, rests the chaos of the French household, yet Uncle Craig also lives outside of Jubliee’s perimeter at Jenkin’s Bend; if anything, Craig is a stalwart of order, control, reason, and precise (Western) chronology. Unlike the pattern apparent in the fiction of Leacock and Davies, landscape does not inform character in Munro’s text, as there are no characteristics naturalized by the discursive categories of the rural and urban; parochialism and urbanity are traits belonging to individuals, not landscape. The inhabitants of Wawanash County provide whatever associations the land and town may possess, and thus, in Lives, it is the people who shape the physical and connotative makeup of the land, not vice versa.45

45 Further evidence of the lack of a town-country, order-chaos binary comes from Aunt Moira’s depiction of Porterfield: “not a dry town like Jubilee, it had two beer parlours
This reading contrasts with those of others, such as Rasporich’s claim that a “landscape of gothic mind” related to Frye’s theory of the “deep terror in confronting the frontier and a northern land” (Dance 136) exists within the landscape of Wawanash County. However, all land in Lives has been inhabited and, in many cases, abandoned by the hands of humans, thus sketching onto the landscape the faint outlines of failed human intentions: “It was the same with the history of the county, which had been opened up, settled, and had grown, and entered its present slow decline” (31). This is no frontier, and confrontation occurs not between cowering settlers and a fearsome, inanimate landscape, but between the remaining inhabitants and the failures of their forebears; the land’s illuminating spirit emerges from its deep texture of dashed hopes. In reading Munro’s stories, we enter a landscape in which the late-Victorian optimism of Sunshine Sketches has stagnated long ago, as exuberance and hope have decayed into the melancholy of a waning stability; Munro’s Wawanash County is an old landscape, a landscape darkened by a long history of declining settlement. Here, the rural areas provide no corrective counterpoint to the fluidity, anomie, and vagaries of city life as the rural areas themselves are shifting entities replete with their own malaise; there is no hint of Jubilee, despite its name, presenting an ideal, pastoral or otherwise.

The primitivist inflection of Munro’s characters is unconnected to topographic boundaries in the landscape. For instance, Del first encounters Garnet at a Baptist revival at the Town Hall, the centre of the community. The ceremony itself is characterized by its collective impulses in which the body is to be moved by the Holy Spirit and merge with the sensations of others. The rhythms of the preacher’s sermon are more important in facing each other across the main street, one in each of the hotels […] From behind her darkened front windows she had watched men hooting like savages” (40).
establishing a bodily continuity among the crowd than his actual words: “And some of your ropes can’t take much more! Some of your ropes are almost past the point of no return. They are frayed out with sin, they are eaten away with sin, they are nothing left but a thread! Nothing but a thread is holding you out of Hell!” (212). The sermon pulsates and it is during this very sensual and even sexually cathartic ritual that Del is attracted to Garnet entirely through physical impressions: “I smelled the thin hot cotton shirt, sunburnt skin, soap and machine oil […] He put his hand on the back of the chair about two inches from mine. Then it seemed as if all sensation in my body, all hope, life, potential, flowed down into that one hand” (211-212). Garnet’s presence takes Del out of her usual conscious activity, which would have been to analyze the words of the Preacher:

Ordinarily I would have been interested in listening to this and in seeing how people were taking it [...] But my attention was taken up with our two hands on the back of the chair [...] his hand covering mine. When this was achieved he lifted it from the chair and held it between us. I felt angelic with gratitude, truly as if I had come out on another level of existence. I felt no further acknowledgement was needed, no further intimacy. (213)

These furtive movements towards romance produce physical euphoria in Del, a sensation that resists the conscious mind’s examination and limitation of its affect. Garnet’s actions constitute a surrogate proselytizing as his body has produced in Del a feeling of spiritual transcendence that the rhythms and words of the sermon were powerless to produce. This euphoria transcends the individual and results from entering a type of “primitive cultural totality” (Chinitz 73), which the Baptist revival both represents and produces; Garnet’s touch initiates Del into this bodily collective. As they hold hands, Del may refuse the sheet music with the printed words, but her participation in the ritual is no longer subject
to her conscious decision: “I remembered the words and sang. I would have sung anything” (214). Despite the appearance of initiating a romantic intrigue, Garnet’s attentions have “caught, bound borne away” (214) Del into the massed collectivity of the gathering: “Negroes led us, all of them except the little black man exhorting, drawing out voices upwards with their arms. Singing, people swayed together” (213).

This first contact does not produce a verbal exchange, but ends with Garnet leaving and “joining a crowd of people who were all going down to the front of the hall, responding to an invitation to make a decision for Jesus” (214). Del is left alone, but left desiring a conduit into a type of sensation that will, again, submerge the primacy of her conscious mind. This has been one of her baptisms, as the title of the chapter suggests, as it is her first experience of the non-individuating passions of the collective human body, where she has felt the pull of the rhythms of ritual for which the proximity of Garnet serves as a surrogate.

What Del craves through her relationship with Garnet are the imperatives of the body, which are first presented as part of a religious ritual. Later, during their first “approaches to sex” (218), Del experiences a feeling similar to that felt during the Baptist ceremony, a “floating feeling, feeling of being languid and protected and at the same time possessing unlimited power” (218). The pleasures of the body provide this feeling of protection as they allow Del to experience something akin to the transcendence of objective time and the individual self. While Addie stresses the importance of individual distinction and accomplishment, Del’s relationship with Garnet involves something more akin to the biological; she no longer feels the threat of remaining undifferentiated, as

46 The mention of the word “revival” suggests a return according to a cyclical rhythm, and associates Garnet with something other than the linearity of Del’s relatives.
simply part of Jubilee. By submerging her conscious mind into the warm ocean of a gratification that can only come from the merging of one body with another, she temporarily retreats from her conscious identity; Del’s mother Addie may characterize this as a “softening of the brain” (220), but Del’s relationship with Garnet also limits the demands, perhaps even tyranny, of individual consciousness, experience, and distinction.

Soon Del is attending Garnet’s “Baptist Young People’s Society,” and her observations of those in attendance focus almost exclusively on the physical. Those associated with Garnet are defined by their physicality and provided with only a limited individuality. Caddie McQuaig is “hefty and jovial,” Ivan and Orrin Walpole are a pair of “monkey-faced brothers […] who do gymnastic tricks,” “Holy Betty” is a “big-busted, raw faced girl,” and a number of unremarkable girls from the Chainway store remain indistinguishable except for one, Del “could not remember which,” who is identifiable only for her apparent past pregnancy (216). Overtones of class colour Del’s depictions: “I smiled at everybody but was jealous, appalled, waiting only for all this to end” (217). The real difference between Del and the Baptists is that their deviant physicality relegates them to a barely individuated and debased horde. These figures are clear examples of the “backwardness, ignorance, [and] limitation” (Williams Country 1) of the anti-idyllic rural associative values, yet their physical anomalies are equal parts town and country, not simply inbred farmers as Davies might insinuate; this ‘other side’ of Wawanash County cannot be located geographically.

Wawanash County has been shaped by its generations of inhabitants, and the land itself does not readily reflect a complementary urban-rural binary. Even though the
fringes of the county seem sheltered from the main current of modernity, the landscape simply mirrors the historical epistemology of its inhabitants. During her trip with Garnet into the depths of the Jericho valley, Del remembers her mother’s thoughts on this isolated part of the county:

I had driven the road to Jericho Valley before, with my mother. In some places it was just wide enough for the truck. Wild roses brushed the cab. We drove for miles through thick bush. There was a field full of stumps. I remembered that, remembered my mother saying, ‘One time it was all like that, all this country. They haven’t progressed here much beyond the pioneer stage. Maybe they’re too lazy. Or the land isn’t worth it. Or a combination of both’. (221)

The road to Jericho Valley is not a trip back to an earlier period of the county’s development, but a corridor offering an exit from those other parts of the county that reflect a chronological sense of progress, such as the ordered, cultivated land documented in Craig’s text; Jericho Valley has become detached from a linear sense of order and time. The field of stumps is the only indication of settlement, but even that was abandoned before it became tenable for agriculture. Apart from these echoes of a possibility, the land has slipped back into a pre-modern, even atemporal existence outside the dominant chronology of the surrounding land as a result of human neglect.

Members of Garnet’s family, aside from the matriarch, remain loosely differentiated. Names as markers of individual identity are unimportant to Garnet and his family. James Carscallen comments on Del’s perception of Garnet’s reality as a “‘world without names’” (45), and contrasts Garnet with Jerry Storey who lives in a “world with names […] but without things” (45). Del’s introduction to Garnet’s family does not

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47 Carscallen’s comments on Garnet’s “world” are reminiscent of Michael Bell’s description of the primitive sensibility as an inability to make a distinction “between the inner world of feeling and the external order of existence” (8). Garnet’s impulsiveness,
involve the nominal markers needed to distinguish one member from another: “He did not introduce me to anybody. Members of his family would appear – I was not sure which were members of his immediate family and which were uncles, aunts, cousins – and would start talking to him, looking sideways at me” (222). The precision with which Craig renders his family tree is absent among the Frenches, who remain numerable (“[t]here were twelve people around the table” (226)), but whose hierarchical family structure remains hazy, almost unimportant. For Craig “it was not the individual names that were important, but the whole solid, intricate structure of lives supporting us from the past” (31). While the names plotted along Craig’s family tree are secondary, its structure pinpoints the individual’s relationship to linear history, a chronology absent from Del’s impressions of the French family. Craig’s tree possesses an intricate syntax in which an individual’s position accrues meaning through its relational antecedents, and that meaning, while ostensibly precise, lacks satisfactory signification because the narrative of the family is incomplete. The lines drawn from one individual to another configure his family tree much like a linguistic analysis of grammatical structure. Indeed, the family is much like a sentence in which coherent meaning is constituted of individual parts progressing linearly from left to right, from the past into the present: a fitting symbol for Craig’s understanding of the past, which exists in language and unfolds as narrative. With the Frenches, however, no such possibility of precise meaning exists.

In Garnet’s family, structure and individuals are subordinate to a collectivized, non-hierarchical mass. In much the same way that Del’s narrative voice disregards a division between past and present, the Frenches appear unconcerned with a hierarchy of his history of violence, and his sensuality define his character, suggesting his inner world of feeling transcribes itself, with little filtering, into his external surroundings.
temporally bound familial sequence, of keeping precedence and subsequence separate, a situation extending into their near-primordial living arrangement. They live in a house “down in a hollow, with big trees around so close you could not get a look at it as a whole house” (221). The lack of a clear perspective renders impossible a complete survey of their physical situation. Any fields or fences, markers of historical progression that construct a temporal linearity of the land, are hidden, and the house in which the Frenches live is literally merged with the surrounding landscape; the lack of these milestones obfuscates the past, dissolving a sense of chronological progress. I am not trying to suggest that the Frenches are “one” with the natural surroundings, but rather that their relationship with both history and landscape remains undefined or, at the very least, under-defined, because they have not clearly expressed it through the articulation of the present onto the surrounding landscape. The Frenches have an unstructured, and thus an unarticulated, relationship with history and landscape in language; by language, I mean written and oral, but also the various signifiers that inscribe evidence of a presence onto the land. These inscriptions thus allow one to see the landscape as a text, and to read it as an unfolding narrative from the past into the present, and which also imply a future trajectory.48

As a result of their inability to maintain the temporal signifiers of inhabitation, the Frenches appear to inhabit decay:

Skeletons of a burned-out house and barn […] the house] painted yellow so long ago the paint was just streaks now on the splintered

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48 The patriarch of the Frenches is a symbol for their uncontemplated, unvocalized, and even unconscious relationship with history and landscape: “In the corner of the verandah sat a man in overalls, vast and yellow as a Buddha, but with no such peaceful expression. He kept raising his eyebrows and showing his teeth in an immediately fading grin […] later I realized it was a facial tic” (223).
wood [...] They took me through the empty stable and showed me how the barn was propped up with makeshift beams and poles [...] All the linoleum was black and bumpy, just islands of the old pattern left, under the table, by the windows where it didn’t get so much wear. (221-224)

This is disorder only according to a historical perspective that demands the reiteration of a human presence through material growth according and in deference to historically established norms. This disorder conflates past and present by failing to maintain the rigid structures of interaction with a landscape, which establish historical texture through the chronological sediments of activity. The vitality and fluidity of the Frenches’ alternative generational interaction, reflected in the irreverent pranks of the unnamed children and the gruff self-satisfaction and competence of the matriarch, is something to which Del is attracted: “[t]here is no denying I was happy in that house” (226). Her happiness results from the absence of forms that would dictate the nature of familial relationships.49

Decay results from a lack of maintenance. Maintenance is the reassertion of the present moment and denies the ravages and accumulation of time; it is also an expression of deference to one’s ancestors by tending to an established order, both in terms of culture and practices of labour. Fences, orchards, and cultivated fields constitute the syntax of a community’s expression on the surrounding landscape, and thus establish the

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49 I have resisted the temptation to draw out the parallels between the entire scene at the French home and Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. Del travels into the heart of the country through a narrow pathway, haunted by the abandoned outposts of civilization along the way (field of stumps), until she comes upon the primitive village surrounded by the wild. Del is drawn to this life, much as Marlow was simultaneously attracted to and repelled by the life of Kurtz. Del simultaneously questions and defends her feelings. Even Garnet’s mother’s stories of bodily mutilation at the hospital (“[s]he told me about an arm that was hanging from the elbow by a strip of skin” (223)) serve as the images of physical abominations, the heads on poles, that occur in this deepest part of the country.
signifiers of a region’s history: a chronology of human activity on the land. Maintaining these signifiers becomes as important in revealing one’s place in a linear structure as does the establishment and maintenance of a clear family tree. The lack of these expressions upon the land surrounding the Frenches’ farm denotes their lack of concern for expanding or even maintaining the temporal and physical boundaries of growth. By not reasserting the present moment onto the landscape, the Frenches allow the signifiers of a western temporality to decay, and they and their belongings blend into the atemporality of a non-chronology; a trip to the Frenches is a trip out of time.⁵⁰

**Wawanash County: The Orchard and the Hollow**

The landscape is inscribed with physical manifestations of, at the very least, two historical perspectives, two manifestly different understandings of the past; Del’s narrative is both influenced by and synthesizes the same influences, which can be termed the “orchard” and the “hollow.” The orchard behind Uncle Craig’s house at Jenkin’s Bend is a physical correlative of his consciousness of the past, a metaphor for his conception of time and history as mediated by language. While it possesses conscious synchronic order that has been grafted onto the landscape, it also exudes a western sense of progressive chronology through its suggestion of historical texture. The orchard possesses clear boundaries and requires regular maintenance; this maintenance will, over time, increase fruition, which can also be read as increased signification potential through an accrual of facts, a defining feature of Craig’s plodding history. This symbol finds fuller expression in Craig and Del’s compulsion to make lists, to pile up ordinary details

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⁵⁰ There is much to suggest that the rest of the county is struggling to maintain the expressions of a western chronology on the land, and particularly significant is Del’s characterization of the region in a “slow decline” (31).
of which the ultimate significance is evident only within a unifying but absent frame. The absence of this frame constitutes the major difference between Del’s retrospective narrative and those of Leacock’s narrator and Dunstan, as Del’s absent, under-articulated vantage point does not allow her to provide a definitive interpretation of the significance of her past for the present.

An orchard may comprise simply fruit and trees, but the formal symbol of the “orchard” is needed to unify these individual objects, which makes it an ideal, but impossible framing symbol for Craig’s compulsive documentation. He needs that symbolic purpose, that sense of anticipated culmination, to project a sense of order onto the past, yet in doing so any evident past meaning is nullified by the assertion of present intentions. Thus there rests in an orchard a diachronic signification in which the past is layered underneath a series of successive presents, the current one holding interpretive dominance. The formal significance of the ‘orchard,’ the framing symbol for Craig’s historical consciousness, can materialize only through one’s recognition of its limitations, its boundaries, boundaries which Craig cannot or will not perceive. Del alone can do this, while her uncle, to paraphrase an old adage, cannot see the orchard through the trees; Craig cannot discern a meaning in the past despite its multitude of signifiers.

Craig’s influence on Del is reflected in her compulsion to make lists. Here is her inventory of the Frenches’ dinner: “For supper we had stewed chicken, not too tough, and good gravy to soften it, light dumplings, potatoes […] flat, round, floury biscuits, home-canned beans and tomatoes, several kinds of pickles, and bowls of green onions and radishes and leaf lettuce, in vinegar, a heavy molasses-flavoured cake, black-berry preserves” (225-26); next is Del and Owen’s desire to list the objects in Uncle Benny’s
house: “Owen and I, going home, would sometimes try to name off the things he had in
his house, or just in his kitchen” (4); and, finally, here is Del’s description of the
Anglican Church: “They had no furnace, evidently, just a space heater by the door,
making its steady domestic noise. A strip of the same brown matting went across the back
and up the aisle; otherwise there was just a wooden floor, not varnished or painted, rather
wide boards occasionally springy underfoot. Seven or eight pews on either side, no more”
(97). Del’s catalogues show the influence of Craig who attempts to clarify the past
through compulsive list-making. He believes that an understanding of the past is possible
through a collection of names, a strictly linguistic understanding of the past; the
signification of that accumulating plethora of words, however, remains unknown,
endlessly deferred.

Del acquires a different understanding of time, heritage, and temporal relation,
allowing her to form an alternative relationship with her own past, suggesting that she has
escaped both from her family’s historically determined psychological ethos and from the
repetition of time-honoured but inadequate customs. This other relationship is
represented by the contrasting symbol of the “hollow.” The hollow in which the French
homestead is built is an external metaphor for their historical consciousness; it is an
unmaintained plot of land upon which any chronology that may have been sketched has
been allowed to dissolve. It possesses no definite boundaries, and no defined historical
texture sculpted by human hands, which continuously reassert a dominant ideology of
progress; it, therefore, connotes an indistinct linearity, a disorder of past and present.
One’s place in the hollow is not decided by the order established by one’s ancestry, as
that line from the past to the present is obfuscated; individual identity is subordinated not
by the “intricate lives supporting [one] from the past” (31), but by an atemporal human collective in which relation remains undefined.

Del’s refusal to be submerged fully into this collective is literally enacted in the baptism scene involving Garnet and Del. While this violent encounter marks the end of their relationship, it also marks the culmination of Del’s artistic apprenticeship. On her subsequent walk back into Jubilee, Del reclaims the individuating intellectualism that previously characterized her personality before she ‘descended’ into an unindividuating physicality with Garnet: “I felt my old self - my old devious, ironic, isolated self – beginning to breathe again and stretch and settle, though all around it my body clung cracked and bewildered, in the stupid pain of loss” (240). Del has been permanently altered, as her old self is newly conscious of the indelible influence of Garnet. Furthermore, the end of this affair has resulted in a new self-consciousness, one that allows her to observe herself while in the process of experiencing: “I was amazed to think that the person suffering was me, for it was not me at all; I was watching. I was watching, I was suffering” (241). While this is a fuller literary self-perception than was evident in Del’s projection of an image of an “African girl” onto her shadow, it also reveals that Del’s experiences have allowed her to enter into a life of the “self-created self,” a life that remains aware of the effect, both on the self and others, of “gesture [and] image” (184). The simultaneity of experience and understanding is the culmination of her artistic journey, as her life, now clearly the subject of her study, is rendered from a perspective that acknowledges the distance between the thinking and feeling selves, but also recognizes the inherent connection between the two. The mirror scene marks her new awareness of this distance, yet also displays how one affects the other; Del’s ironic
recitation of Tennyson’s “silly” poem “Mariana,” an attempt to marginalize her deep sense of hurt, only makes her “tears flow harder” (242). This scene may mark a division between her thinking and feeling selves, yet in a much more fundamental sense, they remain wholly integrated, fully symbiotic.

In recognizing the impossibility of the order she desires by simply making lists, Del has merged her Uncle’s pedantic method of “historical inquiry” with the simultaneity of experience suggested by the disintegration of boundaries implicit in the Frenches’ familial structure and associated landscape; Del’s fluid perspective is a personal literalization of the latter’s historical consciousness. By crossing temporal boundaries to revisit earlier incarnations of her self, Del simultaneously “experiences and understands” in a type of first-person ‘primitivism’; she has become a collective through time, rendering all personal experience through an unmediated, organic relationship with her selves, testing the limits of the past and transcending the representational biases of the present. The formal significance of these episodes does not emerge from an anticipated but endlessly deferred culmination, as the episodic nature of Del’s autobiography lacks a conventional climax that can retrospectively integrate preceding experience. The lack of a clear, temporally stable narrative vantage point reveals little about her current, remembering self, which then prevents an interpretive projection that renders past experience contingent on present understanding. Instead, the formal significance of these episodes comes strictly from the juxtaposition of one against the other, experienced in a type of primitive simultaneity, with the significance of each event immediately understood.
If there is a climax to the story, it is in the artistic and aesthetic decisions that Del sketches in the epilogue, a point implicitly supported by Struthers when he states, “I feel that the emphasis is on a portrait of the girl as a young artist, rather than a portrait of the artist as a young girl” (“Interview” 25). Del’s is not a narrative that reconstructs the past through retrospect, but a narrative that obscures the distance between the past and the present. Her methods are fully informed by those inhabitants that shape the landscape, and thus her artistic method reflects, or, more appropriately, approaches an organic continuity between the artist, her history, and the landscape upon which members of her community have sketched their lives; the person has become a manifestation of place.
Chapter Five

Past Dependencies: Consolatory Histories In Jane Urquhart’s Fiction

Largely set in what Margaret Atwood calls the “long past” in her *In Search of Alias Grace*, Jane Urquhart’s fiction utilizes a temporal gap between her narrators and small towns that is far more expansive than that found in Leacock’s, Davies’, or Munro’s texts. This gap assists Urquhart’s protagonists in locating consolatory images of stability and tradition in the rural past for which they yearn. While the symbolic relationship between past and present in Urquhart’s work mirrors that of Leacock’s, the wider temporal gap between narrative past and present suggests Urquhart’s rural communities are severed from any anchor of reminiscence; neither are her depictions accompanied by the type of self-conscious, undermining irony of Leacock’s narrator. The temporal distances involved in Urquhart’s narrative structures allow her characters to imagine the small-town Ontario of the distant past as the imaginative solace needed to counter a degraded modernity in which they bewilderingly find themselves. However, a study of Urquhart’s two most recent works, *The Stone Carvers* (2001) and *Map of Glass* (2005), reveals that while she ostensibly crafts comprehensible, nostalgic rural pasts, these histories serve as only temporary consolation; indeed, in her characters’ desire for something known and stable, their protracted longing for the past can result in a pathological projection of the self.

Critics suggest that Urquhart is not alone in her turn to the historical past, and that this interest reflects a larger trend in contemporary Canadian literature. In their discussions of *The Stone Carvers*, both Gordon Bölling and David Staines cite Atwood’s remarks on Canadian writers’ turn to the “long past” in fiction of the last several decades.
Bölling reiterates Atwood’s suggestion that writers are interested in “the very things that are not mentioned [...] the mysterious, the buried, the forgotten, the discarded, the taboo” (Atwood *In Search* 19) in order to reject “totalizing accounts of Canada’s history as a nation” (Bölling 295). Accompanying Urquhart in this task are writers such as Joy Kogawa, Michael Ondaatje, Rudy Wiebe, and Guy Vanderhaeghe, who all revise “traditional conceptions of Canadian history and establish a multitude of alternative versions of Canada’s past” (Bölling 295). Anna Branach-Kallas, on the other hand, suggests that Urquhart is in a “dialogue with the master narratives of the past [that does] not result in mere nihilistic deconstruction of national traditions, but in a creative ‘alternative’ reconstruction of the past” (*Whirlpool* 172). In bringing to light the historically veiled, Urquhart’s novels do not necessarily reject, but often revise, hegemonic narratives of a national past.

In his short exploration of Urquhart’s work, Staines modifies Atwood’s claim that “the past no longer belongs only to those who lived in it, the past belongs to those who claim it” (Atwood *In Search* 39) in order to assert that *The Stone Carvers* marks Canadian fiction’s entrance into “a new dimension where those willing to explore the past no longer see it as sectarian, but as uniquely whole, waiting now to be explored by the Canadian writer” (Staines 44). Staines’s extraordinary contention alludes to Urquhart’s depiction of German, Italian, Irish, and Aboriginal experiences in rural and urban Ontario. Her multicultural rural past presents an alternative to the anglophile Mariposa and the dour Presbyterianism of Deptford, or what, for some, represent the quintessence of small-town Ontario.
“Remembering the past,” says David Lowenthal, “is crucial for our sense of identity [...] to know what we were confirms that we are” (The Past 197). In that sense, the buried past presents an alluring cache of stories that, once illuminated, can both destabilize and enrich individual and collective identity in the present; with no history, as with no memory, there is no identity. Branach-Kallas identifies this theme in Urquhart’s fiction: “[Urquhart] suggests that memory is constitutive of our sense of personal identity; our awareness of ourselves as individuals requires continuous recollection of our past experience” (Whirlpool 65). The past that figures most prominently in Urquhart’s work is not the “personal past” that preoccupied writers in the 1960s and 1970s (Atwood In Search 14), but rather the “long past,” which Atwood defines as “anything before the time at which the novel-writer came to consciousness” (In Search 21). Urquhart’s texts, unlike those of Davies and Munro, disregard the durational limits of personal memory to explore the relationship between individuals in the present with a rural “long past.” And it is the past of “one single Canadian province, namely Ontario” (Branach-Kallas “Place and Self” 219) that Urquhart explores.

In reflecting on her own work, Urquhart recognizes its reliance on the history of the province and believes that her readers have come to expect her to “open up another chapter of Ontario history” (Bonner 79) with each successive book. The province’s rural landscape is her foremost influence, as she reveals in an interview with Herb Wyile: “my fiction will likely continue to be Ontario-based because Ontario is the landscape that I know best, the landscape that provides me with some sense of reality [...] my visual memory bank is stocked with images of rural Ontario” (Wyile “Confessions” 82). While this statement echoes Munro’s reflections on her own work, that she can only “make
things work […] if I use this […] plot of land that is mine” (Metcalf “Conversation” 56), Urquhart’s inspiration is far less dependent on specific place. Where Munro’s writing employs distinct “plots of land” (emphasis added) to which she feels an immutable attachment, Urquhart’s writing employs landscape; the latter term implies a broad view or distant vista in which a subject perceives recognizable order. Urquhart does not bring to her writing the same felt physical and experiential proximity to her rural subject as Munro, a fact that becomes more evident through a comparative contrast of their writing. Where Munro’s writing casts doubt on the imagined divide between rural and urban experience, Urquhart reifies the dichotomy of rural and urban associative values. Part of this chapter’s argument claims that spatial and temporal distance act as analogous framing devices in Urquhart’s writing; where one facilitates the appearance of a unified landscape, the other allows for a view of the rural past as the cradle of “old values, family, purity, peace and stability” (New Land Sliding 156). Urquhart explores these two parallel processes of perception in The Stone Carvers.

Urquhart writes with a very particular understanding of the past, an understanding, she acknowledges, that has been influenced by personal conversations with Munro: “I remember once Alice Munro said something to me that I found intriguing: she said we write about the past because we can see it whole. We may not see it accurately, but we know what transpired, how events unfolded, whereas in the present you’re in the middle of it, you’re experiencing it; there’s no sense of completion, there’s no sense of […]” While Urquhart searches for her words, interviewer Wyile offers “Distance” to suggest how a retrospective gap assists in an understanding of the past as both stable and complete (“Confessions” 60). Urquhart’s comments echo Jonathan
Steinwand’s statement on the process of nostalgia: “Because nostalgia necessarily relies on a distance – temporal and/or spatial – separating the subject from the object of its longing, the imagination is encouraged to gloss over forgetfulness in order to fashion a more aesthetically complete and satisfying recollection of what is longed for” (9). While Munro may understand “wholeness” to imply both social and cultural comprehensiveness or complexity, the wholeness of Urquhart’s past is characterized more by cultural unity and idealization. In parallel fashion, the distance between club dweller and Mariposa in *Sunshine Sketches* facilitates a depiction of the town as a place free from “evil” (Magee “Local Colourist” 38), yet the temporal distances involved in Urquhart’s fiction produce a sober deference to, and solemnization of, the culturally holistic past for many residents of Shoneval, *The Stone Carvers*’s central small-town setting. Whereas Mariposa’s distance in time and space allows the careworn club dwellers to project onto it the spirit of a carefree world, the Shoneval of the distant past offers to an increasingly fragmented community a memory of a time and place bounded by tradition and ethnic memory.

Memory in Urquhart’s novels is often physically contained within the rural landscape itself: “The agricultural landscape, where you can see evidence of the past, interests me […] I probably should have been a historical geographer […] it’s a person who pays attention to marks made by previous human activity on the landscape” (Wyile “Confessions” 80). Urquhart both views and depicts rural Ontario’s landscape as a form of legible collective memory that can be reconstructed by reading human inscriptions: rail fences, barns, stone cairns, and fields. These legible texts, however, are perpetually threatened with erasure by the spatial effects of an encroaching urban modernity. Urquhart’s thoughts on the relationship between the rural and urban essentially
temporalize space. A rural past - urban present dichotomy forms in her work, which resembles that implied by Leacock’s description of the train journey in the final chapter of *Sunshine Sketches*:\textsuperscript{51} a journey out of the city is a journey into the past.\textsuperscript{52} The past, for Urquhart, is accessible through its artifacts, its inscribed memory, as she explains in a strikingly materialist statement: “the past as I knew it survived in a physical sort of way. It existed in barns and rail fences and Ontario gothic farmhouses, old woodstoves, and various other phenomena, all of which I’d had complete access to on my uncles’ farms and at my grandmother’s house in the village of Castleton” (Wyile “Confessions” 63). Farms, villages, and small towns exist on the fringes of Urquhart’s socio-cultural present, and they offer a physical refuge from the main current of modernity.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{51} Branach-Kallas’ reading of *Changing Heaven* contains a similar interpretation of Urquhart’s temporal associations of rural landscape. Ann Frear’s “passage from city to small town to village” is a journey from the present into the past; her journey ends at her grandmother’s “Victorian-like house” where “the past becomes tangible to the protagonist, stable and reassuring, familiar and comprehensible” (“Place and Self” 220).\textsuperscript{52} While Leacock sketches this temporal geography in his last chapter, he ultimately undermines it through the final dissolution of the train trip, revealing that that particular version of the small town is not only irrevocably lost to urban nostalgics, but also originates within an urban memory. Urquhart, on the other hand, maintains the dichotomy, and her statements on the matter suggest that it comes from personal conviction, since she has suggested that her one-time residence in a small town in rural Ontario is partially responsible for feeling “cut off from what’s going on today […from] contemporary life as it seems to exist” (Naves 9).\textsuperscript{53} Urquhart’s third novel, *Away*, contains perhaps the most explicit example of the rural past/urban present moral dichotomy in her work, mainly through the framing image of a limestone quarry situated on the north shore of Lake Ontario. The image is based on her own experience; her one-time summer residence was situated close to a cement factory whose quarry she watched consume “another few farms and fields and apple orchards” each year; the landscape of the past is sacrificed for the expansion of modern cityscapes (Wyile “Confessions” 72). Wyile interprets this figure as an image of “the urban eating the rural” (“Confessions” 72), an interpretation Urquhart substantiates by acknowledging it as a “metaphor in terms of disappearing history” (72). Wyile also aligns *Away* with the increased “speculative” dimension of contemporary Canadian historical fiction, a genre that departs from historical realism and displays “skepticism” about historical knowledge, but whose depictions of the past are “extrapolat[ed] from present circumstances”
The past and the natural world, argues Branach-Kallas, share an affinity in Urquhart’s work: “nature and the past represent essential elements of a holistic vision of the world [in Urquhart’s fiction]” (*Whirlpool* 66). The past in Urquhart’s fiction is an enclosed, stable site of consolation for a present that is both alienating and dislocating, and her characters often find solace in its physical or imagistic remnants: “the three-pronged ladders leaning against trees in autumn orchards, the arrival at barn doors of wagons filled with hay, the winter sleighs, the suppers held on draped tables outdoors in summer” (Urquhart *Map* 37). Branach-Kallas would suggest that these objects reflect a way of life rooted to natural cycles and reflect a more “holistic” existence in Urquhart’s fiction. Yet on further reflection, they can also be interpreted as simply aestheticized, disconnected images of past rural life upon which her characters project their desire for stability. The import Urquhart assigns to the material remnants of the past recalls what Laurajane Smith identifies as Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD), which “focuses attention on aesthetically pleasing material objects, sites, places and/or landscapes that current generations ‘must’ care for, protect and revere so that they may be passed to nebulous future generations for their ‘education’, and to forge a sense of common identity based on that past” (29). For Urquhart, rural artifacts can be instructive remnants that contain and confer a mere notional impression of an authentic and holistic life. Her aesthetically pleasing rural past possesses cultural precepts that convey vague ideals of  

(Speculative Fictions xii). And much as in Leacock’s text, *Away*’s rendering of the rural past is formed in the context of, and in contrast to, an increasingly accumulative modern rationality.
tradition, heritage, and community, and her novels echo Smith’s AHD by implying that a moral imperative inhabits the material of the past.  

Urquhart’s fiction marks a definite historical divide between the pre-modern and modern eras with the onset of the First World War, as the conflict killed off entire “chain[s] of inheritance” that had existed in families for thousands of years, essentially fragmenting the present from a contiguous history:

It really was the end of innocence in the sense that we moved into mechanized warfare, we moved into mass destruction in ways that no one had ever imagined. When I look at the history of the Western world, I really think the true industrial revolution began then, in the sense that suddenly it was possible to use machines in this way, in this horrible mass killing […] I don’t think it was going to be possible to look at the world in the same way after the First World War […] the line was broken, the chain of inheritance was broken. The father who would have taught the son how to apply the gold leaf to a painted ceiling was killed in the First World War. (Wyile “Confessions” 73-74)

Much as Virginia Woolf conceived of the First World War as the “line down the centre of the picture,” segmenting Britain’s cultural past from its present (Beer 53), Urquhart views the War as the end-point for an age-old cultural lineage, those who should have passed on the artisanal legacy now having fallen on the battlefields of Europe. This discontinuity of

54 Her treatment of the past is the reason many critics dissociate Urquhart’s fiction from Linda Hutcheon’s “historiographic metafiction,” or rather fiction that consciously interrogates the problems and processes of historical knowledge. Bölling notes that The Stone Carvers examines the “interrelatedness of present and past” (298), but also that while it “hints at the epistemological questions associated with historical representation, [it] is clearly to be distinguished from metafictional Canadian historical novels […] which extensively examine the problematic nature of historical knowledge” (298). Neta Gordon acknowledges history as Urquhart’s “inspiration,” but Urquhart does not “transform historical data into mere fodder for endless undertakings in skepticism [as she] employ[s] a realistic mode that eschews the playful use of the historical document in favour of a more generalized historical setting” (61). Finally, Wyile notices that Away lacks the “discursive heterogeneity and interrogativeness typical of the historiographical metafiction so prevalent in recent English-Canadian literature” (“History” 43).
physical heritage then prevents the transmission of its non-material links: “things such as memories, names, associations, stories, privileges, family traditions, memberships, and so on” (Graburn 69). Urquhart’s works often contain lamentations for the loss of these signifiers, and *Away* and *The Underpainter*, argues Branach-Kallas, advocate for “a conservative return to the past […] these texts] convey a much more profound nostalgia for pre-modern times, [and] a feeling of loss in the modern world” (*Whirlpool* 173).

While a similar sense of loss features prominently in her subsequent works *The Stone Carvers* and *Map of Glass*, Urquhart is careful to problematize their “nostalgia” for the holistic past. *The Stone Carvers* ’ main protagonist, Klara Becker, may long for a time prior to the First World War in which tradition presided over her isolated small town, but her longing constitutes only a temporary solution for a particularly modern alienation. By symbolically solidifying her increasingly distant memories in physical form, she transcends an isolating melancholy and enters into a new modern community that is both defined and united by loss; through Klara’s final transcendence, Urquhart portrays the ubiquity of personal and cultural loss in the post-war era as the catalyzing force that ultimately coalesces the rural and urban polarities into a modern, mournful nation. *Map of Glass*, however, presents a far more ambivalent, unresolved view on rural nostalgia.

This text suggests that in a modern world irreversibly separated from a culturally holistic tradition, rural nostalgia can only project fragments of the self onto an unknowable past; the pre-modern rural past that Urquhart’s characters feel they know is really one they have compiled from its silent, voiceless remnants.

**Communal Pasts, Multiple Narrators**
The Stone Carvers opens with an allusive description of the Vimy memorial’s construction “in June of 1934” (1). This preliminary narrative framing passage alludes to a time and place in a specific past that will take a more prominent role in the latter third of the novel. Ostensibly like Munro’s Lives, the deictics pointing to the narrator’s time and place remain only allusive. The narrator of The Stone Carvers initially recounts this past from an unrevealed narrative vantage point sometime after the described events; unlike Del, however, Urquhart’s narrator is omniscient. Whereas Del’s narration is limited to her own sensory and intellectual past, Urquhart’s narrator moves seamlessly through time and space to recount the experiences of a broad range of figures, both real and fictional. Urquhart’s narrator focuses mainly on one particular Ontario community, Shoneval, and does not claim to be a participant in the events of that community, unlike Leacock’s small-town persona within Sunshine Sketches. Rather, the narrator recounts this “long past” from a temporal position only faintly sketched by her description of the lingering effects of the battle for Vimy Ridge: “Almost a century later there would still be territorial restrictions on this land as active mines and grenades would occasionally ignite” (268). This is not a solitary incidence of prolepsis, since the narrator laments the later obscurity of both the monument and its creator, Walter Allward (381). The text’s present is the twenty-first century, and its primary past is the 1930s; as the story develops, though, multiple personae implicate multiple pasts.

The narrator’s gaze subsequently moves to the depression-era town of Shoneval in the text’s first of three sections, “The Needle and the Chisel.” This Ontario town, like many others during the time, is “in a state of decay usually associated with the decline of a complete civilization” (5). This description recalls Del’s thoughts on the Wawanash
County of the 1940s, “which had been opened up, settled, and had grown, and entered its present slow decline” (31). Both texts offer imaginative renditions of Leacock’s statements on somnolent small-town Ontario, which seemed to have expended its energy during a brief and productive flurry: “the little Ontario town grew till the maples planted in its streets overtopped it and it fell asleep and grew no more. It is strange this, and peculiar to our country, the aspect of a town grown from infancy to old age within a human lifetime” (Boy 109). In The Stone Carvers, Shoneval is introduced only after its settlement, growth, and decline, and a sense of loss is central to its depression-era ethos, just as the memory of more hopeful times haunts the streets of Jubilee, and saddens Leacock’s club men in the urban centre. W.H. New suggests that the non-city binary in Canadian literature, comprising “farms, rural communities, small towns” and even sometimes “wilderness,” represents “old values, family, purity, peace, stability, reliability, and space” (New Land Sliding 156), but so often the perceived loss of those attributes imaginatively shapes these locales.

The Shoneval first introduced is “tattered […] and sagging,” and its buildings are only mementoes of a happier time. With the degradation of the town’s physicality, its “culture [has also broken] down under the weight of economic failure” (6); the ruins of the village, its historic architecture and the “seldom-visited cemetery [where Shoneval’s] forebears slept” (6), may be fading into the irretrievability of a forgotten past, but so are those non-material things they represent: tradition, memory, and heritage. As most of Shoneval’s residents struggle in their present, preserving the collective past is an unnecessary chore, a superfluous extra for which the economic and emotional resources are unavailable: “not many villagers had the energy for the present, never mind the past”
The failure of Shoneval’s shared memory would suggest that its identity in the present is similarly fading, as indeed the “sloppy, half-finished attempts at twentieth-century industry” (5-6) indicate an increasing economic and architectural homogeneity with the outside world; in Urquhart’s texts, these modern forms of industry are part of a destructive modernity, erasing the heterogeneous signs of a local past. Disconnected from its ancestry, Shoneval has been set adrift in the world of modern economies.

Some do preserve the town’s past, such as Klara Becker, a “thirty-eight-year-old spinster who lived half a mile away from the village” (6), and the nuns of a nearby convent; all carry with them the story of Shoneval’s founding in what Allan Hepburn calls an act of “collaboration” (45). This act of preservation is also an act of unification that constructs a diachronic community between Shoneval’s past and present: “these women believed the story connected them, through ancestry, through work and worship, and through vocation to the village’s inception […] The nuns and the one spinster clung to the story, as if by telling the tale they became witnesses, perhaps even participants in the awkward fabrication of matter, the difficult architecture of a new world” (6).

Preservation and piety share allegiances here, and implicit in these descriptions is the sense of memory or “memorialization” as a “moral duty” (Cubitt 56), an obligation most in the town have neglected.

The communal act of narration links participants both to each other and to a past that they reconstruct through a type of “collective memory” (Bölling 298), a ritualized form of storytelling providing solace in the “confusion of the present” (298). Geoffrey Cubitt paraphrases Maruice Halbwachs thoughts on collective memory, and defines it as a largely “traditional, group-specific and predominantly oral” form of memory dependent
on continuity between group consciousness in the past and present (43). Klara and the nuns may not have experienced the founding of Shoneval, and therefore cannot possess individual memories of the period, but these stories have come into their possession by virtue of their status as full members of the community. The oral narrative of Shoneval’s past, increasingly all that remains of it, is entrusted to their stewardship, yet even these fragments of continuity are fading and must be continuously reiterated by their stewards to retain their influence.

After a brief introduction of the text’s primary past, the oral narrative of Shoneval’s origins begins; set between 1866 and WWI, it constitutes the text’s secondary past. At this point, rather than ceding full narrative control to Klara, the narrator merges her voice with those of Klara and the nuns in a collaboration that reflects the communal nature of this collective memory. Bölling argues that the story of the secondary past “borders on the edge of nostalgia” (297) because it readily blurs “fact and fiction”; a nostalgic past, argues Steinwand, offers “consolation” for a lost sense of “wholeness only vaguely recollected” (9). The function of this secondary past is to console Klara, as she acutely feels Shoneval’s cultural degradation as well as the loss of her lover in the war. Her need for stories of Shoneval’s earliest days is pronounced, and during the depression she frequently visits the nuns at the nearby convent “where her desire to tell, or be told, stories concerning Shoneval’s early days was indulged” (222). The embedded narrative’s story of cultural unity temporarily distracts Klara from her mournful, fragmented present.

The combination of fact and fiction in Shoneval’s secondary past resembles Urquhart’s own creative process, as she readily utilizes a similar amalgam: “the facts are points of embarkation for me,” she says, “rather than a final destination” (Wyile
“Confessions” 62). The Stone Carvers’ s opening line, “There was a story, a true if slightly embellished story” (5), offers a pithy, extra-textual overview for Urquhart’s own approach to writing about the past. Her utilization of the actual history of Formosa Ontario offered her “a very large space for the imagination to roam around in. That is where the fiction comes in, of course, to create a structure within which one can place the facts” (Bonner 81). The “slightly embellished story” of Shoneval’s past may be part of the text’s embedded narrative, but it also refers to Urquhart’s own creative process.

The tale of Klara and the nuns gives shape to the past, as all narratives do, but theirs does so with a profound intention: to imbue the past with a meaning that is absent, or thought to be absent, in the present. Cubitt writes that malleable, communal pasts provide the majority of people with a sense of meaning in the present:

> Collective pasts are fluid imaginative constructions. Only a small proportion of the texts, images or performances that we may speak of as offering representations of, for example, the past of a nation make any pretence of mapping that past as a coherent and detailed whole. For most people and for most purposes, having a sense of such a past is a vaguer and more impressionistic experience, at once elusive and allusive - less a matter of having the past precisely plotted than of possessing a few relatively central symbolic references [...] around which broader associations of meaning can be flexibly organized. (203)

These “symbolic references” are the plot markers allowing one to narrativize a past, to construct a coherent framework by linking disparate references into a fluid whole. Shoneval’s secondary past becomes a network of a few central events through which a narrative of personal and collective meaning is sketched. By extension, Klara’s journey to Vimy in the text’s primary past, the 1930s, provides the “symbolic references” for the twenty-first century narrator in the larger frame narrative. The symbolic importance of
Shoneval’s distant past alludes to the parallels that exist in the text’s larger frame narrative, which is solely the product of the twenty-first century narrator.

**Arrivals, Departures, and the Bookends of the Past**

The embedded narrative of Shoneval’s distant past alternates between town-founder Father Gstir’s arrival in the 1860s, and Klara’s childhood and adolescence prior to the First World War. The stories about Gstir come to Klara from her grandfather, Joseph, who also bequeaths to Klara the family trade: wood carving. These tales suggest that Shoneval has changed little between the time of its settlement and the War, as its way of life appears remarkably consistent between the town’s “long past” and the personal past of Klara’s adolescence. As the embedded narrative progresses, these two points begin to demarcate the beginning and end of the period for which Klara longs, the apogee of Shoneval’s established and unbroken way of life; during this period, Shoneval remained isolated from modern, urban influences, and maintained its fidelity to traditions imported from the old country, or at least this is how Klara reconstructs this era from the 1930s.

Gstir’s arrival in Shoneval marks the point at which the nameless settlement becomes a community, since Gstir’s influence catalyzes a common purpose and identity. As he comes across the clearing situated in a picturesque valley, Gstir has a moment of prescience as he gazes down upon the community-in-progress: “he also saw how it would be later, with crops and orchards growing in the cleared areas, and with painted houses and barns, and with gardens sprouting flowers. He beheld all that was there in front of him, and all that he believed would be there in the future, and he knew he was home”
Through this projection, Gstir imagines a thriving community in the future, a future in which he takes a pivotal role.

Father Gstir is the focal point for Klara’s tales, as he enables the collective (and collectivizing) effort required to construct a massive stone church, what becomes “the community’s place of worship” (136). The holy building is the product of the community’s first communal act, a community earlier characterized by internal segregation and external isolation. Urquhart is careful here to avoid the type of depictions that characterize “Folk” culture, as, although the settlers remain a faceless, huddled mass for which Gstir soon becomes leader, their lives are not yet linked to each other and to place by common tradition. Rather, their separate lives are characterized by labour and deprivation, by “shanties and huts that barely kept out the cold, greasy fireplaces, animals too sick to travel, buried babies, mud, and a bone-chilling fear of the dispirited native peoples” (104). They are an enfeebled lot, hardly the hearty conduits of a thriving culture.

Gstir’s first priority for Shoneval is to gather the parishioners for a Corpus Christi procession, which effectively produces the congregation needed for the massive church he hopes to raise. The settlers of the area are only too willing to participate in the “pageantry” of this “collective experience” (23) in order to temporarily escape the “labour that never ceased” (24) that waits for them at their homesteads. The procession establishes more than a congregation, and for the first time forges a fragmented local population into a community: “None of them had ever been to a fair, or a dance, or a strawberry social. Few had even spent time at their neighbours’ houses” (104). The

55 Ian McKay argues that “urban cultural producers” have constructed the idea of “Folk” culture as the “antithesis to everything they disliked about modern urban and industrial life” (4). The “Folk” become the “cultural core” who constitute the “essential and unchanging solidarity of traditional society” (12).
procession is a pivotal moment in Shoneval’s history, and its description is replete with
the “embellishment” that, according to Bölling, pushes this embedded narrative into the
realm of nostalgia. Temporal distance gives Leacock’s sketches their characteristic
embellished tone, and in Urquhart’s text this same distance helps shape a past, one in
which the Catholic church has become oddly permissive: one horse involved in the
Corpus Christi procession ultimately mounts another; the procession includes models for
not only a brewery, but also a brothel; and in a passage reminiscent of the continual and
inclusive parading of Mariposa, the Orangemen who travel to Shoneval to halt this
demonstration of Papistry inevitably become full participants, and stuffed with
“fellowship and food [announce] before leaving that they would return each June at the
feast of Corpus Christi” (108). The oblivious Gstir, “who had never seen an ‘orange
man,’ naturally enough believed that, if and when one appeared in his life, he would be
dressed in pumpkin-coloured clothing” (107), blesses the Orangemen as they take their
more than amicable leave. Shoneval’s secondary past resembles Mariposa’s in that
religious observance is emptied of its serious import, and is simply an extension of the
town’s bonhomie. Furthermore, potentially dangerous situations are defused of
consequence, and an atmosphere of fellowship pervades.

When the area’s young men begin slowly to assemble the stone church, a
contiguous community is built both alongside and through it, since the growing
community is unified by “work and worship.” When the day’s labour is complete, these
men bathe in the local creek: “Everyone in the village could hear the sound of their
laughter through open summer windows” (135). Even when not physically participating
in the church’s construction, the entire settlement is aurally implicated in the process,
reminded through sound of its significance to the present and future life of Shoneval. The construction of the church occurs only because of Gstir’s efforts, and its solidity comes to symbolize the integrity of Shoneval’s sentiment coalescence. Even after the death of this “spiritual leader,” his memory casts a long shadow over subsequent generations. Klara thinks to herself: “How beautiful the day was! Shoneval, finally at the peak of what Father Gstir had envisaged as its destiny” (89). Her thoughts may denote the full flourishing of Shoneval’s hey-day, but they also suggest that this period has been the work of generations inspired by the original vision of Gstir. Prior to the war, Shoneval’s identity and way of life appear established, rooted, and continuous, yet this ostensible security only prefigures the imminent fragmentation of the community in the post-war era.

The story of Shoneval’s earliest days represents, says Bölling, a type of “social memory” (299), and the narrative connects the village in the 1930s with an identity rooted in the past, but does so only as long as this story is sustained in living memory. During the Depression, Shoneval has largely discarded this past, and thus the town has become loosened from its history, dislodged from both the narrative and materiality of tradition. Laura Ferri argues that one of The Stone Carvers’ main themes involves “fragmentation in the present” (“Introduction” 11), and the enfeeblement of Shoneval’s tradition in the text’s primary past indicates that a process of cultural fragmentation has occurred at some point in the interim between the war and the depression. The first crack in the community’s cultural narrative occurs during the buildup to the First World War. Until then, those who grow up in Shoneval stay in Shoneval, and children apprentice in the occupations and trades of their forebears. The war presents the first opportunity for
Shoneval’s young men to leave the town, but it is an opportunity all but one decline. This solitary departure is all that is needed for the town to forge a link with the outside, modernizing world, which may contribute to the discontinuity of the town’s way of life, but ultimately provides the town with a connection to a larger national community; the outside world may be Shoneval’s serpent, but it is ultimately its salvation as well.

While only one of the town’s young men departs for war, Tilman Becker, Klara’s older brother, leaves Shoneval long before the war in order to wander Ontario’s rural roads. Tilman has been diagnosed with “wanderlust” by his grandfather, and his condition ostensibly threatens the chain of familial tradition, since his grandfather has plans of making Tilman the heir to the family trade. Tilman shows little interest (93). His condition is “almost common among boys in Bavaria” (95), Bavaria being Tilman’s ancestral “homeland,” and thus his wanderlust establishes a different type of continuity between the past and present. Although he may threaten a chain of continuity within the family, Tilman’s wanderlust is a manifestation of a type of ethnic memory whose source rests in the old country; it is an unconscious expression of a mythological past. In Ontario, certain natural barriers constrict his travels: the great lakes to the south and west, and the country north of Lakefield, where “the roads petered out in a tangle of bush” (62). Tilman’s wanderings, then, not only reanimate the folklore of the old country, but also infuse the landscape of rural Ontario with the echoes of a cultural myth. Klara eventually sees Tilman’s departure as “the part of us that is learning the world” (167), a characterization that conceives of the family as a unit, and Tilman as the appendage apprenticing outside of that unit. “Us,” however, also includes Shoneval, and his
experience will ultimately benefit both Klara and the town, as only his knowledge of “the road” allows Klara to make the pivotal journey to Vimy.

While Tilman’s departure from the community reflects a connection to the old country’s past, it also facilitates Shoneval’s entrance into a modern, national community. On the other hand, the departure of Klara’s lover, Eamon O’Sullivan, for war in 1914 is the direct result of modern technology’s siren song. During the summer of that year, Klara and Eamon carry out an innocent love affair. They rendezvous at a creek that is hidden from the rest of the village by “fallen logs […] and] branches of aspen and poplar that grew near the bank” (121). This near-prelapsarian garden is unsullied by any self-conscious lust, but rather the pond is the site of Eamon and Klara’s innocent “communion […] Though they couldn’t see each other or touch, they were connected by the pool and by laughter” (121). This brief utilization of pastoral imagery is subsequently shattered by the appearance of an airplane that has run out of fuel and is forced to land in a nearby field. The descent of this airplane references the original fall of the rebel angels: “The racket might have been made by a bellowing Lucifer angrily approaching earth after being thrown out of heaven […] This was the first time in Klara’s life that anything other than familiar, comforting sounds had entered her afternoons” (123). Klara’s life up to this point resembles the life of previous generations, and her character emphasizes Urquhart’s conception of pre-war rural society as the last manifestation of a continuous chain of cultural tradition. The pilot, sheathed entirely in leather, the skin of an animal not his own, is the agent of temptation that will eventually lead Eamon away from both Klara and Shoneval, a departure that reflects the imminent experiential shifts brought about by the war. As Klara regards the pilot as “one of the demons her grandfather had carved in a
“Last Judgment” (126), Urquhart establishes a correlation between the introduction of a technological modernity and the end of a way of life she equates to a near-prelapsarian innocence.\textsuperscript{56}

The airplane seems completely foreign in a place that continues the life of the town’s earliest settlers, a town in which the existence of the telegraph, railroad, automobiles, and even electricity remains in doubt. Its three telephones appear as the only practical connection to an outside modern world, and even these “everyone distrusted” (119). There is no significant difference between the Shoneval of 1914 and that of the late-nineteenth century; the mill, the brewery, and farming are the main sources of employment in 1914 as they were in 1867. Through Shoneval’s traditional past, Urquhart offers an image of a pre-industrial society in its last days during the build-up to the war, a time that Urquhart imagines as more holistic, and subsequently a time for which she possesses a particular longing (see Wyile “Confessions” 73-74 and Ferri “Conversation” 29). The airplane introduces a form of progress to a place that remains, \textit{prima facie}, timeless in the sense that it lacks indicators of a technical progression, and whose contact with the outside world is extremely limited. Although pre-war Shoneval is the product of Klara and the nuns’ consolatory stories, it is also the product of a broader nostalgia for the very idea of tradition that is characteristic of Urquhart’s texts.

\textsuperscript{56} This scene nicely illustrates Leo Marx’s discussion of the effects of the pastoral counterforce, that is, the introduction of the machine in the garden, which often comes across as “a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction. It invariably is associated with crude, masculine aggressiveness in contrast with the tender, feminine, and submissive attitudes traditionally attached to the landscape” (29).
The town’s isolation makes it exceptional; it is a type of holdout against the tide of not only a technical modernity, but also a political identity. Shoneval is relatively immune to the war rhetoric that has captivated the rest of the province:

All over Ontario boys were being worshipped and wept over as they covered themselves in khaki and marched toward a collection of similar brick train stations, part of a massive reverse migration [...] In the small, unimportant village of Shoneval there was an experience of a slightly different nature as only one young man, dressed in a red waistcoat far too heavy for the perfect weather, walked out of town without fanfare. (152-153)

In Shoneval, the influence of the community’s older generations is stronger than that of the larger political community: “nobody wanted to enlist because they had spent the Sunday afternoons of their childhoods listening to grandparents count their blessings – the most important of which was freedom from armed conflict” (136). Shoneval is an exception, a town not reluctant to perform its duty, but rather one that recognizes the primacy of “tribal” and cultural affiliations over political identities. It remains only on the fringes of a modern nation that compels its citizens through a collectivizing rhetoric: “for the first time they [the soldiers] felt themselves to be larger than life, a force so sweeping and elemental they were on the verge of forgetting their individual names. The word ‘we’ sprang so easily and so joyfully to their lips that the word ‘them’ would not be long to follow” (153). In Shoneval, the word “we” has held sway since the time of Father Gstir, and incorporates a collective far more unified than that modern national identity, which functions more as an expedient necessitated by crisis.

For Eamon, his ride in the airplane is a novel lark, but the experience leaves its mark, as, for the first time, he is taken outside and above the physical and cultural confines of the village. The airplane allows him to gaze down upon Shoneval from a
height, an incident that mirrors Father Gstir’s elevated view of the valley settlement upon his arrival. Yet unlike Gstir, Eamon sees the town from an unnaturally high distance, which confounds his view of the town and its people: “Klara had not waved, she didn’t tell Eamon this, but she had not waved. He had mistaken someone else for her. She had become interchangeable. He could not see her. This adventure had nothing to do with her” (127). While Eamon’s falsely empowering perspective allows him to see the town in its entirety, Shoneval has diminished in importance for this young man: “He told her that everything looked so small from that height he could have held Shoneval in the palm of his hand” (127). This novel perspective reduces Shoneval’s place in the world of technological marvels, of which Eamon has had a small taste, and the lens through which he now gazes at Shoneval only magnifies the town’s faults: “He could see that shingles were missing from the roofs of most houses […] Old Hammacher’s rows of corn weren’t straight” (127). Eamon’s new perspective is the product of modernity’s exacting heuristic, which critiques the seemingly archaic disorganization of traditional societies: their derivation from right angles and plumb lines. Both incidents of heightened perspective, Gstir’s and Eamon’s, allow for a comprehensive vision of Shoneval’s expanse (for Gstir in both time and space), and each marks a type of bookend between which is cradled a characteristically unified, continuous way of life, or so Klara’s narrative suggests. While upon his arrival, Gstir looks into the future at the earliest point of Shoneval’s existence, Eamon, on the cusp of his departure, symbolically gazes into a past that will soon be further disrupted by the long arm of a homogenizing modernity.

Klara synaesthetically witnesses the airplane’s real impact: “The noise shook the leaves of all the trees around her and seemed to leave visible fissures in the atmosphere,
lesions that affected Klara’s vision in a disturbing way, making her believe that she would never see anything whole again” (127). While Eamon is enthralled by the intoxicating sense of power as he looks down upon Shoneval, Klara, looking up at the airplane, sees only fragmentation in its wake. Both lovers are altered: Eamon’s distant view, both symbolically and literally, results from his extraction from the fold of tradition on the ground; Klara, who remains “anchored to their own village landscape” (125), perceives the airplane for what it really represents, which is the fragmentation of a unified and traditional ontology. Shoneval’s physical and temporal frame has been pierced, and Eamon’s subsequent departure for war suggests that a degradation of the town’s insular and continuous traditions is imminent. Klara seems to recognize the disruption to the circularity of traditional time through her increasing awareness of time as linear during those dark days of the war: “She listened to the slow beat of the pendulum clock, the stupid progression of time” (163). The stability of tradition precludes nostalgic longing (Chase and Shaw 2), but with the supplanting of Shoneval’s traditional ways by the introjection of linear temporality, by what is really an epistemological paradigm that sees each passing moment as an irrecoverable loss, Klara begins to see the past receding, and longs for a remembered time of stability.

The mixture of communal and personal histories in the text’s embedded narrative is constructed from two distinct points in the future, and by those who recognize some logical structure in the narrative of the community’s past. Lowenthal contends: “The past we reconstruct is more coherent than the past was when it happened […] To make history intelligible, the historian must reveal a retrospectively immanent structure in past events” (234). The war, then, marks the split between the secondary and primary pasts, a
disjunction only emphasized by the anomie of Shoneval in the 1930s; besides neglecting the town’s past, its residents have a new preoccupation with turning a profit (224). By linking disparate events into a narrative whole, that is the arrival of Gstir with the departure of Eamon, Klara and the present-day narrator construct a framework for the past that explicates Shoneval’s present ruin. The past as she reconstructs it is all that has meaning for Klara in her solitary present: “Her own connections continually slipped downstream, against the current, toward the swiftly disappearing past. What, beyond the most cursory, practical knowledge of fashion, had the present to do with her?” (169).

Klara is a respected but peripheral member of the depression-era community; she has “roots deep in the town’s pioneer past and therefore commanded the respect such things still engendered at this time in these communities, though, beyond that, being the end of [her] line in a society mostly tribal, [she has] no real social life” (221-222). With few prospects for her life or love in the present, the town’s past is the only defining aspect in Klara’s life, and yet her need for these historical narratives is really a sublimated desire for a present identity; at one point she conveys this fear to her grandfather: “‘I seem to be disappearing, even when I am present in a room!’” (167). Shoneval’s secondary past, a past that is part truth, part myth, a past in which Catholics and Orangemen can overcome their differences through innocent, good-humoured misunderstandings, provides solace for a life that holds little hope for personal distinction or even happiness. Her journey to Vimy Ridge, however, allows Klara to overcome her dependence on the past, and much like Shoneval’s cathedral symbolizes the establishment of a once-cohesive rural community, Urquhart suggests a parallel function
for the Vimy monument; it is a symbol of a nascent and mournful, but also unified, national community.

From Distance to Detail: Transcending Nostalgia’s Frame

Klara’s ability to structure the past through a narrative frame finds a spatial correlative in Tilman’s landscape carving. He is “a genius of distant views, a kind of miniaturist when it came to detail but concerned with phenomena so far away their specificities dissolved into texture when looked upon by an unpractised eye” (97). Within his work’s frame rests an image of landscape, an illusion of unified texture comprising disparate details: a spatial structure possible only from a distance. As Tilman physically approaches the distant landscape, it necessarily dissolves into its composite detail, a situation not unlike the dissolution of Mariposa as the Mariposa Express pulls into the station in *Sunshine Sketches*’ final lines; distance is needed to maintain the illusion. Tilman fabricates spatial coherence from spatial disorder only through the distance between his vantage point and his subject; this results in a type of spatial longing. If Klara arranges an intelligible history from isolated past events, Tilman constructs a type of narrative of the land; both are possible only at a remove from their subjects across which detail simply becomes texture.

The consolidating influence of temporal/spatial distance on perspective is a recurring theme in Urquhart’s text, and in certain cases constitutes a privileged mode of viewing. For instance, while Gstir acknowledges the ugliness of detail, the tree stumps, mud, and precarious buildings, on first entering Shoneval’s valley, he is roused by their combined effect: the area’s landscape. This mode of perception glosses faults and imperfections in favour of a unified panorama in both time and space: “He beheld all that
was there in front of him, and all that he believed would be there in the future” (14). Eamon, on the other hand, surveys a distant Shoneval after he literally and figuratively departs from his safe, grounded past, and enters an intoxicating but dangerous modernity. His modern, distant vantage point fragments Shoneval into its composite parts, and he refuses to gloss over the town’s imperfections. Eamon’s gaze constitutes a degraded retrospect, since, while on the cusp of his doomed future, he sees only the faults of his ancestral past.

Gstir and Eamon provide the introduction and climax for Klara’s narrative of Shoneval’s past, and the continual reiteration of this narrative is her trauma’s symptom and solace. Upon first hearing the news of Eamon’s disappearance, she gives up her carving, the family craft, in a gesture suggesting that the endless detail of a three-dimensional human figure parallels the frameless detail of the present, a time increasingly irrelevant to her. The sensual details of carving require propinquity as opposed to distance, but after the loss of Eamon, Klara requires the consolation afforded by distance, and the illusion of “wholeness” it facilitates. Tilman shares a similar aversion to sensuous detail. As a boy, he recoils from “the facial expressions and gestures in his grandfather’s carving as if embarrassed by them” (98). Although Klara and Tilman employ different media, both incorporate distance between artist and subject that signifies a lack of integration with the family, the community, and the present. Klara’s desire for personal and communal memories comes at the expense of physical and emotional proximity in her here and now. Tilman’s landscape carving is a sublimated expression of his desire to escape into the alluring distance. Klara’s temporal nostalgia finds a companion in her brother’s spatial nostalgia.
According to Neta Gordon, Urquhart distrusts a rendered distance between artist and subject, a point she formulates by examining two of Urquhart’s novels in relation to metafictional texts that “foreground narrative reconstruction” (63), and that always threaten to dissolve into “mere fodder for endless undertakings in skepticism” (61). In metafictional texts about the Great War, particularly Timothy Findley’s *The Wars*, Gordon argues that the artist is given priority over the witness in the attempt to avoid “complicity” with any political agenda. This self-conscious writing both signals authorial hesitancy and invites readerly skepticism regarding the stability of the historical record [...] In highlighting the control he or she has over historical material, however, the postmodern writer will simultaneously announce that such an exercise of control is essentially meaningless because of the pains taken to make the procedure highly visible and therefore unfixed. (61)

I suggest that Urquhart utilizes “experiential distance” (60) in temporal and spatial forms not to undermine her “historical material,” but to allow her characters to recognize and/or project an underlying, remedial structure across that distance. This recognition, however, also signifies a character’s unfulfilled longing, and suggests that, while retrospective distance offers a temporary refuge, a truly therapeutic movement will be one that bridges the temporal/spatial distance between artist and subject, a movement that both Klara and Tilman eventually undertake.

Accompanied by her recently returned brother, himself a veteran of the battle at Vimy, Klara embarks on her first journey outside of Shoneval, and only Tilman’s knowledge of the road makes this journey possible. By traveling with her brother “into the world that had so often lured him away” (261), Klara hopes to transcend her melancholic stasis of perpetual mourning. If Klara continues to live her spartan, solitary
life in Shoneval, “it would be not only as if Eamon had never put his foot on the grass that surrounded Shoneval, had never gone off to the war believing that he was stepping into harmless ether, but also as if his skin had never touched hers, as if her own passion had never existed” (262). Klara’s memories are fading, and if we assent to Branach-Kallas’ statement that in Urquhart’s fiction “memory is constitutive of identity” (*Whirpool* 65), the failure of Klara’s memory erodes her identity in the present; indeed, memory is all that remains relevant for Klara at this point, and she risks becoming a phantom drifting through Shoneval’s streets, connected only to a past that is increasingly uncertain, unreal. This pilgrimage offers her a way to solidify her memory of Eamon, and in so doing, transcend her nostalgic melancholy to reaffirm a distinct and distinguishing present identity.

Klara and Tilman arrive at Vimy in the autumn of 1934 during the height of the monument’s construction. The monument’s designer, Walter Allward, closely watches all aspects of construction, ensuring that no worker carves anything outside his original designs. Despite his surveillance, and after a twenty-year interim, Klara resumes her carving by secretly chiseling Eamon’s face onto the figure of the torchbearer. Allward has designed the faces to be allegorical, as opposed to manifestations of individual memory, and says to Klara: “‘You must understand. He was meant to be everyone, all of them […] You’ve changed that’” (338). By inscribing her memory into three-dimensional space, Klara’s increasingly distant memory of Eamon is now an object unbounded by a frame and cast in stone for perpetuity. Klara’s carving recalls Urquhart’s thoughts regarding the inscriptions on the landscape as evidence of the past; the inscriptions made by chisel and hammer become confirmations of Klara’s personal past, and by extension,
reconfirm Klara’s existence in the present. Consequentially, Klara’s carving signals her readiness to turn her gaze away from the nostalgic distance and reengage with the untotalizable, frameless detail of her present surroundings; her movement from the distant, framed past to present detail is here depicted as therapeutic.

A similar transcendence of the nostalgic frame occurs for Tilman while at Vimy. Notoriously hesitant to engage in any type of intimacy, Tilman falls in love with Recouvrir, a French chef in nearby Arras. Tilman overcomes his desire for distance through Recouvrir, a name Gordon translates as “to recover” and “to cover again”: “Tilman was amazed to find beauty in his friend’s enormous body […] amazed too by the map of scars that made Recouvrir’s skin appear to have been ceremonially patterned […] The white marks left by the entrance and the exit of hundreds of bits of shrapnel covered his arms and chest” (329). Tilman, “having avoided proximity of any kind” (330), now delights in the close details of intimacy as opposed to the satisfying texture of distance, suggesting he has undergone an equally healing movement towards present detail.

The embedded narrative of Shoneval is Klara’s distant, consolatory past, and her description of Shoneval’s cathedral becomes a symbol of the community’s past unification; this object finds its double in the image of the Vimy monument in the main narrative. Both are the physical manifestations of a response to loss, whether it is the loss of a homeland, of tradition, or of loved ones, and thus both become symbols of new

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57 In “Escaping the Frame: Circumscribing the Narrative in The Whirlpool,” Laura Hancu argues that in Urquhart’s first novel, social constructs such as marriage “create a false sense of order and operat[e] on the principle of exclusion” (45). Transcending the “frame” of these circumscriptions is a positive movement, as it allows Urquhart’s female characters to achieve “empowerment” (45). Therefore, the frame of these “social boundaries” are considered inhibiting, stifling, yet in the context of The Stone Carvers, the frame of narrative provides temporary psychological well-being, a comforting construct providing temporary psychological shelter.
unifications. Unlike Klara and the nuns’ oral memory, the Vimy monument is a form of
textual history, since the name of each missing soldier is carved onto its surface. Textual
history attempts to assemble a knowable, solid record, in contrast to the fluid,
embellished collective past that operates within Klara’s narrative. Klara’s longing for
Shoneval’s collective past signals its deterioration from its former unity as imagined in
the text’s primary past, but the Vimy monument refers to the virtual evisceration of that
continuity. Cubitt explains by paraphrasing Halbwachs: “Memory is ‘a current of
continuous thought’, persisting so long as the group which sustains it persists […] history
is an intellectual system premised on discontinuity […] it] produces narratives of change
that emphasize […] discontinuities in human experience, dividing the past into periods as
well as distancing it from the present” (43). The Vimy monument is not a manifestation
of memory, but a memorial to what has been lost as a result of the war’s disruption. By
solidifying her memory through carving, Klara acknowledges and accepts the disruption
to Shoneval’s group consciousness that Eamon’s departure and disappearance portend.
Yet by also engaging in a form of textual history, Klara’s memory becomes a memorial, a
type of recall that only confirms that the “current of continuous thought” defining
traditional group consciousness has terminated; a textual history, as opposed to collective
memory, is now the only viable method of recall in the fragmented modern era, a method
that compensates for a perceived discontinuity by attempting to solidify the past.58

58 Lowenthal suggests that a sense of discontinuity is one of the marks of a “literate”
society: “People in so-called traditional societies confidently assert that things are (and
should be) the way they always have been, for oral transmission accumulates actual
alterations unconsciously, continually readjusting the past to fit the present. Literate
societies less easily sustain such fiction, for written – and especially printed – records
reveal a past unlike the present: the archives show traditions eroded by time and
corrupted by novelty, by no means faithfully adhered to. Any literate societies none the
Yet the loss of tradition does not go uncompensated. Staines suggests that *The Stone Carvers* marks the end of a “sectarian” exploration of Canada’s past, and this statement particularly resonates in Urquhart’s depiction of the coalescence of ethnic or “tribal” identities (Bavarian, Italian, English, Alsatian etc…) into a nascent national identity. This new identity is possible only through the disruption to the continuity of collective memory within traditional groups; if the war is this disruption, then the Vimy monument at once memorializes the loss, but symbolizes, much like the church in the wilderness, the forging of new links among formerly enclosed ethnic communities. Urquhart depicts, a little too seamlessly considering the unprecedented loss of life, Canada’s consolidation through the discontinuity of collective memories, a nation defined by common loss. Like many of Leacock’s critics, Urquhart locates the sites of national origins perhaps not exclusively to small-town Ontario, but in enclosed, organic communities of which the ideal of small-town Ontario is one example. For the twenty-first century narrator, the Vimy monument becomes an emblem of the modern nation as consolation, a political-cultural identity substituting for collective “tribal” identities lost to the ravages of a far-reaching technological and economic modernity.

This symbolic status is made explicit through the realizations of Giorgio Vigamonti. Giorgio, Klara’s redemptive lover at Vimy and also a carver, searches for the identity of Klara’s unknown past lover by scanning the rolls of the hometowns of those whose names will be carved onto the monument: “By the time he came to the final name, every crossroad, every city, every rural township, each Indian reserve, and almost all the concession roads in Canada had been present in his mind” (369). Every community in less cling to supposedly timeless values and unbroken lineages that link them with antiquity” (*The Past* 41).
Canada has lost one of its own, and when Klara eventually carves Eamon’s name onto the monument in one final textual memorial, she integrates Shoneval into a modern patchwork defined not by collective memory, but by a collectively felt absence. Had it not been for Eamon stepping out of the past and into the modern world, Shoneval would have remained isolated from this emergent, although abstract, collective.

In the context of Urquhart’s thoughts on the First World War, she reiterates but revises what Branach-Kallas refers to as “the master narratives of the past.” *The Stone Carvers* suggests that Canada was not forged through the national self-expression of valour on the battlefields of Vimy. Instead, Canada’s entrance into the post-war modern era comes as the result of a massive and multivalent loss, of husbands, sons, and lovers, but also of the continuity of tradition and collective memory, dissolved by the same technological modernity that makes possible such wholesale slaughter. Absence and remembrance constitute the nascent national fabric, of which Shoneval is now a part. The wedding of Klara and Giorgio makes the new cohesion explicit. Giorgio is from a Hamilton Italian society as insular as Shoneval, and their union signals that what were once hermetic communities have now opened their boundaries. The war has disrupted previously continuous lines of collective memory and identity, and it is up to the survivors to begin new chains of inheritance.

Urquhart’s vision of urban modernity does not parrot the conventional cityscape that honks and roars in Leacock’s final chapter. Urquhart may see the rural sphere as a palimpsest of the past and repository for ethnic traditions, but so is her cityscape. The influence of modernity dissolves the continuity of tradition, but in so doing, establishes new emotive interchanges between previously segregated societies in both the rural and
urban centres; these sentimental links also extend out from the nascent nation through a modern universal mourning, as reflected in Tilman’s relationship with Recouvrir. Paradoxically, all of this presents a much more hopeful vision of the urban present than does Leacock’s text. While both situate the vibrant and organic small town in the past, Leacock’s club men cannot recover from the primary loss of Mariposa, and the text concludes with their “talking of the little Town in the Sunshine that once we knew” (145). As no suitable “community of sentiment” (Suttles) or “affective community” (Dasgupta “Modernization” 167) replaces Mariposa, the club men’s final thoughts are melancholic in the Freudian sense of the term; their discourse continually reemphasizes what has been lost. Urquhart suggests that something is gained from the dissolution of the enclosed community for which Shoneval is a model; a modern nation is one distanced from ethnic and religious exclusivity. Small-town Ontario is not irrevocably lost to the past; it may no longer function as a separate and self-sufficient entity, but it has become part of a much larger political-cultural body whose independence has been assured through the collective suffering of its constituents. Canada is a community of mourners, and only through loss does the nation become whole; like Shoneval’s cathedral, the Vimy monument symbolizes the beginning of a national narrative for which the ending has not yet been written.

**Addendum: Map of Glass**

Apart from a few instances of narrative prolepsis in *The Stone Carvers*, the text rarely alludes to the expansive gap between the present narrator and the primary past. Yet just as the temporal-spatial distance between urban present and rural past in *Sketches* helps stylize Mariposa as an idyllic townscape of the past, so depression-era Shoneval
accommodates anachronistically modern, even cosmopolitan, social perspectives.\textsuperscript{59} Klara, a devout Catholic in early twentieth-century rural Ontario, unhesitatingly accepts her brother’s homosexuality, and while she is sexually active outside the permitting boundaries of wedlock, tension with her religious identification is absent; this, of course, can be attributed to the prerogative of the individual, but the total absence of religious tension is conspicuous. More importantly, the temporal gap affects the way Urquhart revises the hegemonic historical narrative of Vimy Ridge; national self-consciousness did not necessarily emerge on the battlefield, but rather during those subsequent mournful years when the country gradually came to comprehend the collectivizing nature of the massive loss, which \textit{The Stone Carvers} also suggests resulted in a deceptively harmonious ethnic diversity. This national narrative, much like the tale of Shoneval’s origins, is still a malleable collective past that has been “organized” around a few “symbolic references,” and provides only a “vague” and “impressionistic” (Cubitt) understanding: vagueness that allows for easy explication of the present. No such clear dichotomous relationship between past and present exists in Urquhart’s subsequent text, \textit{Map of Glass}. This text is set largely in the present long after the traditional pasts of \textit{The Stone Carvers} have faded away; glimpses of this past are suggested through the physical remnants that imbue the landscape. One woman, Sylvia Bradley, comes to depend psychologically on the visions of the past she derives from these remnants, yet the consoling images of “purity, peace, and stability” offered by this holistic past are ultimately revealed as the product of unsubstantiated projections of rural difference.

\textsuperscript{59} Perhaps a reflection of the “dehistoricized” nature of historical representation that Wyile identifies as part of contemporary speculative historical fictions (xiii).
As mentioned earlier, memory significantly impacts identity in Urquhart’s work; place also has an important role, something Branach-Kallas characterizes as a “complex” relationship between “place” and identity (*Whirlpool* 15). For Sylvia, place is valued for its temporal depth revealed through its marks of longevity. This appearance of depth has a determining influence not simply on her identity, but also on her psychological equilibrium in what sometimes appears as an obsessive relationship with the physical sense of place. However, the nature of Sylvia’s reliance on these traces of the rural past, traces that constitute the landscape’s “embedded physicalized memory” (Wyile “Confessions” 81), suggests that these inscriptions constitute not so much a collective memory that informs identity in the present, as they do an unstable text that accommodates innumerable interpretations. Through Sylvia, Urquhart proposes that modern rural landscapes offer not a stable set of signifiers, but an unstructured syntax, an inscrutable palimpsest through which a number of interpretations of the past can only be imaginatively construed. Reading the rural landscape, then, does not reveal a stable past, one comprising the “peace, innocence, and simple virtue” (Williams 1) for which Urquhart’s characters often long, but, as the text’s title suggests, is a subjective process that reveals only the self; landscape becomes a looking-glass that reflects back the unacknowledged desires of the gazer.

Sylvia has resided in a small town in rural Prince Edward County for her entire life and has developed a particularly knowledgeable relationship with the local past, what she refers to as a sense of “emplacement,” or, in other words, an emotive attachment to the physical and temporal texture of the land. This sense of “emplacement” often draws Sylvia’s attention to signifiers of the local past: “She loved the trees, their reliability, the
fact that they had always been there on the boundaries of fields or along the edges of roads. She loved certain boulders for the same reason. And there were cairns left behind as a visual reminder of the past” (37). The practical function of the cairns has been forgotten, and they are now part of a patina of ‘pastness,’ an aesthetic rural landscape to which Sylvia is really expressing an attraction; the cairns were not left as a “reminder of the past,” and Sylvia’s interpretation of the landscape effectively imposes her own misreading on to it. Particularly revealing of her monologic relationship with the rural past is how she regards features of the landscape as objects that “had always been there.” This assumption of permanence displays a type of solipsistic historical consciousness. These rural artifacts constitute a façade of permanence allowing Sylvia to imagine a connection to a long past, but is a psychological equilibrium easily upset by her trip away from her rural home to Toronto.

Sylvia’s rural life initially seems one of solitude, peace, and simplicity, and, at the outset, Sylvia appears a tranquil figure reluctant to depart for the city even for a few days: “The word city had hissed in her mind all week long, first as an idea, then as a possibility, and, finally, now as a certain destination” (33). She expands this initial contrast between her valued rural life and her dread of urban space during her trip to Belleville’s train station, a contrast protracted by Sylvia’s sense of spatial and temporal “emplacement”:

The road that was taking her out of the County was lined by the homes of some of the earliest settlers in the province […] much of this old architecture was sad, neglected; some of the properties were completely abandoned. A few houses in the County had been restored by city people seeking charm, however, and always seemed to her to be unnaturally fresh and clean, as if the past had been scrubbed out of their interiors, then thrown carelessly out the door like a bucketful of soiled water. (36-37)
This urban migration occurs, Kevin Walsh explains, when urban dwellers perceive rural areas as “providing a sense of security because they are not considered to be subjected to the same extreme processes of change that occur in urban localities” (154). The urban retreat to the county, Sylvia feels, conceals rural authenticity by aestheticizing the physical inscriptions of the past. While Sylvia laments the urban retreat, she is affected by a similar impulse, a similar attraction to the connotations of the rural sphere; like those critiqued urban migrants, she too feels that this rural space still contains fragments of the “old values […] peace, and stability” (New Land Sliding 156) that distinguish the rural from the urban space, yet sees her own connection to them as more authentic. At this point in the text, Urquhart does little to question this associative binary.

The text’s rural past – urban present dichotomy fully materializes in Sylvia’s responses during her trip to Toronto. Sylvia’s reluctance to travel appears at first to be a manifestation of her fear of unfamiliar and incomprehensible urban space. For instance, she displays an antipathy to certain modern fixtures, such as fluorescent lights, that abound in the city: “She had always believed she could hear the sound of artificial light and, as a result, had only once ventured into a department store, where the dissonant, rasping sound of the light had proved to be too much for her” (45). Sylvia’s “emplacement” in her rural small town appears to account for her aversion to all things urban, or at least modern. When Sylvia says to herself while standing on a busy street corner in Toronto, “I am now in the world” (41), her sentiments simply reiterate the ancient conflict between the modern urban experience and the illusory shelter from modernity that rural life provides. “Where was she before, if not in the world?” one might respond to Sylvia’s assertion.
On further reflection, however, Sylvia’s connection to the rural past consists largely of an attraction to surface aesthetics. As the text progresses, she emerges as a virtual embodiment of Laurajane Smith’s “Authorized Heritage Discourse,” the reverential rhetoric advocating for the conservation of the “material” remnants of the past; this rhetoric seeks to maintain continuity between the modern era and the past through artifacts. Sylvia uses her familiarity with the physical makeup of the country to construct a near-idyllic vision of the local past:

She knew the histories of the old settlers as well as she knew her own body. Better, in some ways. She knew the three-pronged ladders leaning against trees in autumn orchards, the arrival at barn doors of wagons filled with hay, the winter sleighs, the suppers held on draped tables outdoors in summer, the feuds over boundary lines, politics, family property, the arrival of the first motor car, the first telephone, the departure of young men for wars, the funeral processions departing from front parlours. She knew these things as well, as if they bore some weighty significance in her own life lived behind the brick walls of a house situated in the town. (37)

These “histories” are primarily composed of imagistic fragments that provide, at best, only a glimpse into a past life. As Northrop Frye contends, a “pastoral social ideal” is often associated “with some earlier social condition – pioneer life, the small town, the habitant rooted to his land” (“Conclusion” 238-239). Sylvia constructs from disparate physical remnants and scenes from the local “long past” a collage-like version of, if not a pastoral ideal, at least an esteemed period of rural life. Yet she imagines her attitude to be about reverence and preservation, as opposed to what Leo Marx calls a “sentimental pastoral” characterized by “[a]n inchoate longing for a more ‘natural’ environment [. . . and] the contemptuous attitude [. . .] toward urban life” (5). Sylvia’s longing is directed not merely towards an idealized rural “way of life,” but towards the ontological comprehensibility she finds therein. Her knowledge of the county’s history, she feels, is a
reflection of a particularly acute historical consciousness, yet her understanding of the past seems to arise from her relation to its inanimate material remnants. Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw draw attention to the pitfalls of an understanding of the past derived from its artifacts: “our dialogue with them is one-sided; the deep sense of connection with the past one might feel can be simply a unilateral projection of our present anxieties and fantasies” (4). And as the text progresses, Sylvia increasingly acknowledges that this comprehensive knowledge of the local past is, in fact, a reflection of the desires of her own troubled psyche.

Like all of Urquhart’s texts, Map contains a frame narrative set in the present, yet unlike the others this frame narrative constitutes the majority of the text. An extended section, the book’s middle third, takes place in the “long past,” and despite initial appearances, the author of this embedded narrative is Sylvia. She travels to Toronto to seek out Jerome McNaughton, a young artist who discovered the body of Sylvia’s lover, Andrew Woodman, encased in ice the previous spring. Andrew, who had deep family roots in the county, was a historical geographer who treated landscape as a type of “Braille.” Sylvia is compelled to talk about Andrew, to reveal the intricate and intimate details of their affair, but she has also traveled to Toronto to provide Jerome with Andrew’s notebooks that ostensibly contain Andrew’s family history in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Ontario. The content of these notebooks is the middle third, or “long past” of the novel, and it traces the rise and fall of the Woodmans at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River and along the shores of Lake Ontario. The text’s conclusion reveals that the “long past” contained within the notebooks has been penned not by Andrew, but by Sylvia. The conclusion also discloses that their relationship is only a
figment of her imagination, a product of her unnamed “condition” alluded to in
flashbacks. Various reviews, the only critical pieces available on Urquhart’s most recent
text, identify Sylvia’s condition as autism,⁶⁰ briefly defined as “complete self-absorption
and a reduced ability to respond to or communicate with the outside world” (*Canadian
Oxford Dictionary*). The revelations of the notebook’s authorship cast Sylvia as a
troubled artist figure, yet they also raise questions regarding the impetus behind Sylvia’s
relationship to her county’s landscape and the past she imagines therein. These
revelations suggest that the process of her *anamnesis*, as opposed to its product, is the
real subject of interest.

Anne Compton’s look at the elements of Frygean romance in Urquhart’s first
three novels presents an intriguing summary of the relationship between landscape and
character:

> The landscape makes excessive (even absolute) claims upon the
> lives of those living it and, then, reabsorbs into itself the stories of
> those lives. As a repository of those stories, it becomes mythhoard,
> a wordpool. The well-being of those living that landscape in the
> present depends upon the telling of those stories. There is an
> ecologic dimension to Urquhart’s fiction. Passing on the story is
> crucial to the balance of relations between human organism and
> environment. (119)

Sylvia is compelled to “pass on” both her personal story and the story of her county’s
past to Jerome, yet her motivation emerges not from the landscape, but from herself. To
treat the “relations between human organism and environment” as a “balance” is to see
the organism as distinct from the environment, even though Urquhart conceives of rural
landscapes as reflections of their inhabiting societies; these physical impressions shape
landscape, a process that composes a type of textual history for future generations.

⁶⁰ See Siân Stott for *The Telegraph*. 

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Urquhart understands landscape as intricately bound to its inhabiting “organisms.”

However, *Map*, like *The Stone Carvers*, is set in what constitutes a fragmented present, one in which the longed-for organic relationship between past and present sought by Sylvia has dissolved. Missing from Sylvia’s understanding of her local history is temporal-cultural contiguity between the present and past, suggesting that Sylvia’s interpretations of the landscape’s past is not limited by any exegetical precept. The “repository” of stories contained within the landscape’s inscribed memory, therefore, is a babel that requires not merely an interpreter, but also an artist figure without whom the text of the landscape remains unintelligible.

Both Klara and Sylvia depend on their connections to the past to maintain psychological equilibrium in the present, but whereas Klara’s reliance on stories provides only temporary consolation, Sylvia’s desire for solidity can only result in a perpetual melancholic longing. Klara’s self-imposed seclusion culminates in her perpetual nostalgic attachment to Shoneval’s pre-war socio-cultural apex. Sylvia’s longing, however, reflects a particularly modern melancholy in which her perpetual desire for something permanent, something that transcends the continual flux of modern experience, results in an obsessive fixation on remnants of the past, remnants that allow one to construct a retreating mirage of stability. Lowenthal explains how the past garners this image: “The past is appreciated because it is over; what happened in it has ended. Termination gives it a sense of completion, of stability, of permanence lacking in the ongoing present” (*The Past* 62). While her lifelong propinquity to the static remnants of the local past, the trees, fields, cairns, and barns, allows her to feel that a connection to her imagined past is possible, even probable, Sylvia’s desire for a full and unambiguous union with its
“solidity” will always be deferred because the historicity of the landscape is silent, except for the voice provided to it by Sylvia herself. She alludes to her own anxiety regarding the possible flux of this self-composed narrative of the county’s past: “Was it Andrew’s reconstruction that had filled in the gaps, or had his memory already grown so thin that imaginary events began to appear on the page? It had been impossible for Sylvia to find the solidity she sought” (74). Sylvia remains aware of the instability of historical interpretation, instability she continually attempts to overcome, but something she ultimately acknowledges.

The concluding image of Sylvia’s embedded narrative reveals that she is conscious of her monologic relationship with the past. She may claim that the embedded narrative emerges from her intimate knowledge of her county’s landscape, yet its true source lies in a mind incapable of knowing anything else, as she reveals to Jerome directly:

*All the while I have been talking to you I have been listening for the sound of Andrew’s voice, because they are his stories, really, these things he told me. But now I have to admit that I have been listening in the way I listened to a stethoscope that belonged to my father […] I loved the little silver bell at the end of the double hose, a bell I could place against my chest in order to listen to the drum, to the pounding music of my own complicated, fascinating heart.* (369)

Sylvia’s narrative has revealed nothing more than the inner workings of her own anomalous psychology. If, as Branach-Kallas argues, Urquhart’s earlier works display a conservative nostalgia for a pre-modern past, here she both develops and complicates that theme, since Sylvia’s pre-modern rural past is an endlessly fading product of her own imagination. Sylvia’s construction of the rural past is not filtered through individual memory, and thus there is no continuity, no discernible line connecting the past she
imagines and the present she inhabits; rather, in Sylvia’s narrative, the associative values contained by Ontario’s rural landscape are part of a vague and distant construct that emerges from an intense identification with place. This identification, however, is much like recognizing one’s self in a looking glass.

The final revelation of Sylvia’s authorship of the embedded narrative, something that she attributes to Andrew, unsettles an otherwise straightforward story about a family’s “long past” and the related romance in the present. Urquhart’s construction of an elaborate historical narrative, as well as an intricate attachment to that past in the frame narrative, only to fully undermine both in the denouement by drawing attention to their fictionality, might suggest a creeping reservation regarding her historical material. More importantly, her presentation of Sylvia’s relationship to Andrew as only a construction of her troubled psyche, and her attribution of the historical narrative to a woman living with autism suggests an underlying tension which adds a new element of doubt to Urquhart’s historical fiction: not doubt regarding hegemonic historical narratives, such as that posited by historiographic metafiction, but rather doubt surrounding our ability to know and write about the quotidian past. This reservation finds fuller expression in the concealing sand dunes, one of the embedded narrative’s most fecund pieces of landscape imagery, which present an intractable challenge to the landscape as historical text. The ultimate triumph of the dunes is a fundamental image of time’s shroud thrown over the distant past, a shroud that can only be repelled through regular and insistent maintenance.

The embedded narrative of the “long past” contains a description of the Ballagh Oisin hotel run by Andrew’s great grandfather, Branwell. Due to an oversight in the farming practices in the area, as well as the destabilization of the fragile dune ecology,
the dunes begin to engulf the hotel itself, relentlessly creeping through the hotel’s cracks to blend in with the objects in the house. To the historical geographer, the encroaching desert obscures the past, turning the landscape into a featureless patina, and obfuscating its inscribed historical record. While on one level, the dunes symbolize the ruin that results from ignoring time-honoured, balanced agricultural practices, they also symbolize the inevitable decay that occurs to all human landscapes that remain unmaintained; the fields fill in, the rail fences rot, and even the stone cairns collapse. By defying the imperative of temporal decay, maintenance attempts to preserve the legibility of the human landscape, without which all traces of activity will be veiled. Branwell has a similar realization after his failure to repel the dunes: “Maintenance […] is so central to human life, it’s a wonder the very enormity of it didn’t cause hopeless exhaustion in those who thought about it” (289). Maintenance is exactly what is required to clarify the landscape-as-text for the historical geographer, to keep the past legible; but this is essentially impossible in the onslaught of the dunes, the literal ‘sands of time’ that inevitably obscure the history of all human endeavour. Much as maintenance defies the dunes, Sylvia’s continual process of fictionalizing the landscape attempts to animate and solidify the embedded memory through narrative.

Here develops a paradox in Urquhart’s text, as it suggests that the only human landscape that gives the impression of permanence is that which is maintained, yet maintenance is the continual reassertion of the present moment onto that landscape, and not simply, or necessarily, the preservation of a pristine past. Herein lies the difference between the type of maintenance performed by Uncle Craig from Munro’s Lives and the type Sylvia requires: Craig’s actively defers to the order established by his forebears;
Sylvia, on the other hand, requires aged but still legible remnants within the landscape in order to construct her consolatory past. As collective memory no longer animates the landscape, the physical inscriptions become the morphemes from which imagined pasts are assembled, and which subsequently allow them to become “other” than the present. Sylvia can imagine the past as a stable precursor to the fluctuating, degraded present only because of the conspicuous, legible, “stable” signifiers within the landscape. The same fixation explains her stated attraction to old pictures. “‘These are safe’” Sylvia says, “‘because everything that was going to happen to them, in them, has already happened. There will be no more changes’” (88). She is drawn to their static silence, their voicelessness masked as fixed meaning. Yet the vacant silence of old pictures defines their very malleability, what Susan Sontag describes as their tendency to “change according to the context in which [they are] seen” (106). The landscape’s inscribed past, much like old pictures, is composed of empty signifiers that accrue meaning only through the projecting gaze of a subject in the present; the past does not speak to the present, but rather the past is spoken by the present.\footnote{As Steinwand says, nostalgia relies on distance, either temporal or spatial. Sylvia’s engagement with the landscape suggests that a third type of distance is involved: that of sentience. The inanimate objects of the past contain no qualities other than those provided to it by a thinking subject.}

The image of the sand dunes becomes a symbol of Sylvia’s anxiety about the lack of fixity in both the collective memory “embedded” in the landscape and individual memory: “‘Memories are fixed, aren’t they?’” Sylvia asks Jerome. “‘They might diminish, they might fade, but they don’t change, become something else’” (75). When Jerome expresses his doubt, Sylvia only intensifies her insistence on the veritable access memory provides to the past: “Perhaps it [memory] only becomes stronger, purer” (76).
While the conclusion of the book suggests that memory, both individual and collective, is anything but fixed, it continually attempts to link the self with a past whose “old values [...] and stability” (New Land Sliding 156) can only be imagined in the present.

Sylvia’s overarching concern for “stability” in her longing for the past is hardly a concern for Leacock’s club men, whose memories of a happier small-town past quite consciously move between the humourously and sentimentally nostalgic. What remains for Leacock’s club men is an incomplete existence, one that, while materially complete, is melancholic, existentially lacking. Sylvia Bradley’s knowledge of the local past lacks the benefit of memory, yet her fictionalization of the landscape seeks knowledge of not simply an accurate past, but an unambiguous one, one within which she can find both surety and safety. Yet more than any other protagonist studied above, Sylvia rests at a greater remove from the object of her longing; the past that she constructs is like that of Leacock’s club men in that it is a manifestation of present malaise, yet Sylvia’s is not an aesthetic redesign of actual memories, but a wholly original narrative compiled through interpretation of the silent landscape.

Urquhart’s earlier work suggests that the effects of a homogenizing modernity threaten place-bound collective memories, and it is during this contemporary period in which collective memory has all but faded from the landscape that Urquhart’s subsequent text opens. In the absence of a heuristic limit, the potential signification of a rural past is thrown open. While it is beyond my mandate to guess at Urquhart’s intentions in portraying the rural landscape as an interpretable text, by doing so she is only emphasizing the discontinuity between the past and the present, since all that remains within the landscape are manifestations of textual history as opposed to collective
memory. The rural past of Ontario is silent, and this inarticulacy allows Sylvia not only to imagine it as a time of holistic stability and comprehensibility, but its disconnected and incoherent textual signifiers allow her to construct the past as whatever she needs it to be.
Conclusion

Reflecting on Nostalgia’s Restoration

Through the examination of selected representations of small-town Ontario, this dissertation has suggested how this figure can occupy a polarized role as the spatial and value-based complement to an urban space and experience. By focusing on the interaction between the process and product of anamnesis of recalling narrators, this dissertation has examined how distance - temporal, spatial, and cultural - gives a purposive dimension to small-town memories. This distance is, as Jonathan Steinwand states, central to the functioning of nostalgia because it allows a recalling subject to shape his or her past, to see it as a “more aesthetically complete and satisfying recollection of what is longed for” (9). As this dissertation has identified, distance is not only present in, but necessary to, those fictional small towns as they provide a complementing contrast to a degraded urban sphere as a result of their association with “old values, family, purity, peace, stability” (New Land Sliding 156). The axiomatic view of small-town Ontario as a cultural antecedent to the current urban reality, as a “home place” or image of a better past, is a nostalgic assumption: a manifestation of narrators who remember small-town experience from a distant urban time and space, largely as a consolatory measure to address a vague sense of anomie or dislocation. However, it is clear that not all texts studied above can be called nostalgic, and, as I briefly outline below, not all nostalgia is the same.

The process of memorial aestheticization is most pronounced in Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town and in the works of Jane Urquhart. The train journey in the final chapter of Sunshine Sketches reveals the effects of distance on the club men’s mnemonic
processes. Mariposa is not simply a longed-for vision of an idyllic past, but also a solace for the metaphysical ache resulting from the strained nature of urban life; the town is a projection of the urban sphere, and never claims to be anything else but that. The text, however, contains internal complexities that complicate the ostensibly simple nostalgic longing of the narrator and his associates. The influence of the urban sphere within its own wish image is decidedly ambivalent, as its modernizing and dispersive pressure works as an entropic force against Mariposa as an organic community; only through the influence of Josh Smith is that urban influence countered and Mariposa again settles into its previous “equilibrium” (MacDonald “Small-Town 64). With the presence of Smith, Mariposa becomes a product resting within an influential urban-hinterland dichotomy; each polarity struggles for fiscal and aesthetic control of the town.

Chapter Five examines the effects of temporal distance on Urquhart’s melancholic protagonists, who suffer from a modern anomic caused by the dissolution of their rural cultural ideal by the effects of a homogenizing modernity. In The Stone Carvers, those modern effects have dispelled the traditions of Klara Becker’s hometown of Shoneval; what was once a culturally unified community, a cradle for traditions extending back to the old country, has, as a result of the First World War, merely become part of the modern nation. The text’s pre-modern past is largely reconstructed through Klara’s nostalgic memories, which become her sole solace during the cultural and physical isolation she imposes on herself in subsequent decades. Urquhart’s next text, Map of Glass, opens on a contemporary Ontario landscape in which physical inscriptions of a rural past are all that remain. For Sylvia Bradley at least, these inscriptions function as a type of physical memory embedded into the landscape itself, yet Sylvia’s use of these
inscriptions ultimately produces fictionalizations composed to address her own psychological need. The historical stability that Sylvia longs for, stability that she attempts to locate within the static landscape of the rural past, is only a projection of the self onto an inanimate, silent rural sphere; the landscape’s physicalized memory is composed of disconnected artifacts that allow Sylvia to bestow both voice and coherence on the rural past.

While Leacock and Urquhart bookend this study, and while so far I have mainly discussed their similarities, their texts posit very different assumptions about the present significance of the rural past. The distance between the nostalgic projections of Leacock’s and Urquhart’s characters might best be explained by Svetlana Boym’s different types of nostalgia. “Reflective nostalgia,” says Boym, “dwells in algia [pain], in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance” (41), and it is through this type of longing that Leacock’s remembering subjects shape Mariposa. Boym develops reflective nostalgia’s characteristics:

[it is] more concerned with historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude. Reflection suggests new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis. The focus here is not on recovery of what is perceived to be an absolute truth but on the meditation on history and passage of time […] these kind of nostalgics […] take sensual delight in the texture of time not measurable by clocks and calendars […] Reflective nostalgia can be ironic and humorous. (49)

Leacock’s narrator, while at times melancholic, also delights in the flexibility temporal distance bestows on memories. He leads his fellow club men in remembering “correct” versions of Mariposa, versions that never claim to recapture the “truth” of an original, but are relayed by a narrator who quite consciously acknowledges the enhancing effect of temporal-spatial distance. The narrative voice is both “ironic and humorous,” in part
because the Mariposa reflected in his narration can only exist in memory. The whimsical, concluding train journey is itself a “meditation on history and passage of time,” for it reveals the irrevocable effects of time passing without encouraging the club men to attempt a further recovery of the past, to overcome those differences between now and then. The final chapter retroactively casts the previous eleven chapters as products of memory, certainly, but memories that provide some compensatory pleasure for their central, absent signified. Not only does *Sunshine Sketches* end by affirming the “irrevocability” of temporal change, but it also proposes that a type of consolation can emerge from the very suppleness of memory itself.

Boym’s restorative nostalgia is a far more conservative impulse, as it puts emphasis on *nostos* [home] and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps [...Restorative nostalgics] do not think of themselves as nostalgic; they believe that their project is about truth. This kind of nostalgia characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths and, occasionally, through swapping conspiracy theories. Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past (41).

This dissertation is not prepared to suggest that Urquhart’s fiction is thoroughly and unambiguously “restorative” in its nostalgic longing, but, and as Boym points out, these categories of nostalgia reflect “tendencies” rather than “types” (41), and the unambiguous cultural value Urquhart continually relegates to the past reflects a restorative tendency. Where Leacock’s narrator recognizes the effects of distance on memory with little concern regarding the “truth” of his past, Urquhart’s characters lament what has been lost, and seek to solidify the remembered past through its memorialization. The impulse in Urquhart’s texts is not simply to remember, but to use those memories as the impetus
to restore, to carry the past into the present. However, by revealing Sylvia’s active fictionalizations of the past, Urquhart herself may be recognizing the sheer folly of the assumption of total historical awareness.

Leacock’s characters build no memorials to their lost past and, as such, they make no attempt at transposing the rural associative values into their urban reality; the possibility of consolation in Leacock’s text rests in the process of memory itself, in its ironic twists and in its jovial melancholy. Furthermore, the loss of Mariposa has been effected by the individual movement of the club men from small town to city; they have, by choice, turned their backs on Mariposa, a disregard that results in their perpetual severance from the town itself. On the other hand, the initial loss in Urquhart’s texts is consistently the result of external modernizing forces, not personal choice. In order to “shore their ruins” against further disintegration, Urquhart’s characters endeavour to concretize the imagined value of the past for the benefit of the present. Through her stone carving, Klara attempts to solidify her personal memories within the Vimy memorial, to place them beyond the degradation of temporal flux; while her carved figure is a manifestation of personal memory, her carving also pays homage to the passing of Shoneval’s pre-modern past, and, through its inclusion in the Vimy monument, Shoneval enters into the allegorical structure of Canada represented by the monument itself.

Urquhart’s revision suggests that a nascent national identity formed not on the battlefields of Europe, but through the sense of collective loss of heterogeneous cultural identities that finds recompense in the formation of the modern nation: Canada thus becomes a memorial itself, a memorial that is inscribed with only the “memory” of more organic communities.
Because of Urquhart’s repeated concern over the ephemeral nature of memory and her characters’ attempts to find a stable cultural value in the past, we must reiterate what Boym sees as the problematic associations of restorative nostalgia: “This kind of nostalgia characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths” (41). David Harvey also identifies a recrudescence of cultural identities that, he suggests, is the result of individuals within a world that is increasingly “placeless”:

The more global our interrelations become [...] and the more spatial barriers disintegrate, so more rather than less of the world’s population clings to place and neighborhood or to nation, region, ethnic grouping, or religious belief as specific marks of identity [...] there is still an insistent urge to look for roots in a world where image streams accelerate and become more and more placeless [...] Who are we and to what space/place do we belong? (Harvey “Reflections” 427)

The search for identity rooted in place is, of course, an active concern for Leacock, but the temporal-spatial location of Mariposa is vague, more a concept than a locale, and it remains as such at the text’s conclusion. This search is far more intense in Urquhart’s writing, as her characters participate in a drama through which the loss, lamentation, and subsequent search for an identity rooted to the past of specific place becomes the recurrent plot. Together, the two texts by Urquhart examined in this dissertation contain anxious interrogations of the “roots” of identity precipitated by the cultural flux and disorientation of an urban or cosmopolitan modernity. Urquhart’s fiction harnesses the various memorial processes in order to restore an originary ideal that the small-town and rural Ontario of the past represent for her characters (not to mention Urquhart herself, as is evident in her interviews). Where Leacock’s reflective nostalgia harnesses distance to provide an alternative form of consolation through the process of memory, Urquhart’s
restorative nostalgia disavows distance, even while it remains dependent on that distance for its longed-for holistic rural past.\textsuperscript{62}

Chapters Two and Five concern characters who locate similar associative values in the rural past. While Chapters Three and Four explore texts that contain similar structures of memory, their narrators resist the aestheticizing effects of distance on their memories of small-town Ontario, and, therefore, ultimately deny the associative values of a rural type. The narrator of \textit{Fifth Business}, Dunstan Ramsay, initially claims that his version of the small town will transcend the archetypal small-town representation found in \textit{Sunshine Sketches}. Dunstan is aware of “small-town fashions” or conventional modes of small-town representation, but despite his claim to the contrary, he periodically slips into a conventional mode of representation reliant on a Mariposan type: the parochial, innocent counterpart to a cosmopolitan sphere. This representational slippage occurs due to his felt cultural distance from Deptford upon his return from the war. Only by reasserting his common identity with the town can Dunstan see accurately; Deptford no longer remains a constrictive community enclosed by the moral dictates of its pioneer forebears, nor has it become merely an echo of Mariposa. It remains a village, but is now implicated in a much larger community defined by a trans-national modernity; post-war Deptford is guided by the secularized political identities that issue from the imperial and cultural centre.

Deptford’s temporary representation as a countervailing complement to the urban sphere is only a transitory identity, a conventional one that Dunstan utilizes when the

\textsuperscript{62} Again, the ambiguity of the ending of \textit{Map of Glass} complicates this conclusion, as, through the image of the sand dunes, Urquhart’s narrator symbolically alludes to time’s continual shroud thrown over the physical signs of the past.
changes to the town oppose his expectations upon his return. Because this transitory identity dissolves when he can no longer maintain a cultural distance between himself and the town, the book suggests, as does *Sunshine Sketches*, that the small-town idyll as represented by Mariposa is possible only for a culture that remains irrevocably separated from its imagined past. Where Leacock’s narrator finds his sole consolatory pleasure in that distance, Dunstan Ramsay ultimately denies a nostalgic mode altogether, and his final vision of Deptford maintains that a rural-urban divide cannot exist within modernity’s collapsing effects on space and distance.

*Lives of Girls and Women*, like Davies’ text, similarly destabilizes a rural-urban value dichotomy. Munro’s text contains a structure of memory in which narrator Del Jordan looks back to her childhood in small-town Ontario. Yet unlike other texts examined here, the apparent distance between Del’s past and present self is illusory, and Del’s narration is a synthesis of her past and present (Thacker “Narrative Dialectics” 58); her childhood experiences are relayed through the understanding of an adult. This dialectical artistic method is an amalgam of Del’s influences from her childhood and adolescence, as it combines the overarching concern for historical detail inherited from her Uncle Craig with the transcendence of temporal order and hierarchy she intuits in the relations between the members of the French family. These very same historical consciousnesses that influence Del’s narrative method have defined the landscape of Wawanash County, and Del’s narrative method reflects a synthesis of place and the artist.

Perhaps more significant to this discussion are the underlying assumptions regarding the manifold meaning that rural and urban place can have within Munro’s text. Jubilee transcends the discourse which suggests that the small town exists in
contradistinction with an urban sphere, as either an accurate reflection or an active fictionalization of a common past. Del’s narrative remains distinctly personal, and her portrayal of the inhabitants of Wawanash County traces their shaping of the landscape, but also their formation of its solitary artist figure. Del herself is a reflection of the complexity of the small town, and her narration asserts that a full understanding of community could never incorporate enclosing rural conventions; indeed, her compulsive list-making signals Del’s hopeful intimations towards verisimilitude in her writing, revealing her “heartbreaking hope of accuracy” (253). Just as Mariposa dissolves before the eyes of the club men on the cusp of reentering Mariposa, Del’s own transcendence of the divide between past and present results in a continual deferral of Jubilee’s absolute meaning, a deferral reflected in her growing lists. Where nostalgic knowledge of place is content to mold a distant wish image according to the precepts of longing, Lives illustrates that a full understanding of place, whether past or present, either urban or rural, must consist of knowledge of “every last thing […] every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion” (253); absolute knowledge is, therefore, unattainable.

This study remains distinctly aware that these five texts are only a small sample of those that could be studied. These five were selected in part because they all contain a structure of memory that places a narrator in the text’s present recalling a small town in the text’s past. They are also significant texts by significant authors, and offer a view of small-town Ontario from a range of different eras and gender perspectives. Other texts that could have been looked at include: The Imperialist by Sara Jeannette Duncan; The Kissing Man by George Elliott; The Elizabeth Stories by Isabel Huggan; Clara Callan by
Richard Wright; *The Island Walkers* by John Bemrose; and, *Keeper ’N Me* by Richard Wagamese.

W.J. Keith’s chronological study of small-town Ontario fiction discusses *The Imperialist* prior to *Sunshine Sketches*. Published in 1904, Duncan’s novel depicts Elgin, Brantford’s fictional stand-in, during an optimistic and prosperous time for the small manufacturing city. I use “city” to describe Elgin because the size of the place precludes its inclusion in this study; as a place of “eleven churches” and “seven factories” it is too large to carry a sense of “cohesion” and “compactness” that Keith states is central to the small town’s definition. Even though Keith places Elgin before Mariposa in his study, in my consideration these locales are different structural types. Elgin is a small city that is growing even larger, and its inhabitants anticipate even greater material prosperity and political clout in the years to come. More important for the purposes of this study, however, the novel contains a very limited structure of memory patterned on a rural-urban dichotomy. Of course the irony of the narration may stem from Duncan’s own affectionate reappraisal of her upbringing in Brantford. But Elgin, as it is described, constitutes the text’s present; that is, the text’s deictics do not construct another place and time from which the narrator remembers Elgin. It is a nascent urban place, one at the forefront of its modern age as it is already thoroughly engaged in the modernizing forces of industry. It looks with pride upon its technological accoutrements and is confident of its values; it requires no earlier or better rural precursor to assuage a sense of anomie as, indeed, its gaze remains firmly fixed on the hopeful future.

In his 1986 exploration of “401 country” in *God’s Big Acre*, Elliott writes: “401 country […] is where anonymous city people come from. It is where they go back to, to
recover lost identities” (ix). Whatever nostalgic image Elliott had formed of rural Ontario later in his life seems missing from *The Kissing Man*, published in 1962. This is a strange, remarkable, utterly idiosyncratic collection of short stories ostensibly set in Strathroy, Ontario, where Elliott himself spent time during the Second World War. Denis Duffy has commented on the “sense of another dimension of existence” (55) in this work, a dimension of myth and ritual. Elliott’s collection, while set in small-town Ontario, is unlike other texts studied in this dissertation because it attempts to link its small-town characters of the early twentieth century to a timeless realm. For instance, the final story “The Way Back” concerns the absence of a grinder man at the birth of a baby, whose family is subsequently ostracized for its neglect of this custom. What exactly is the importance of the grinder man? Elliott never elucidates his practical significance nor does he critique his characters’ valuation of him; the grinder man is rather a symbol of the continuity of tradition. His presence at births is ‘as it has always been done,’ a folk belief that links the present with the past of myth, perhaps superstition. The setting of Elliott’s work is secondary to larger themes, themes that bear a stark resemblance to those explored by the modern primitivists. Significantly, the epigraph is taken from T.S. Eliot’s *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*: “But when I speak of the family, I have in mind a bond which embraces […] a piety towards the dead, however obscure, and a solicitude for the unborn, however remote.” This epigraph immediately places the book within a lineage that is less concerned with exploring the echoes of the past of place than it is in examining the mythic echoes of a fluid, “universal” heritage that carries on within the unconscious of the collective. Elliott’s work is not so much an exploration of small-town
Ontario as it is a belated work of modern primitivism that explores the rhythms of ritual that exist, according to those who ascribe to such theories, within all cultural forms.

Thus, the title of this final story can be seen to refer to “the way back” into the cultural fold; the child who has been ostracized by the community ensures the presence of the grinder man at the birth of his own baby, thus facilitating his and his family’s return into the ‘tribe.’ Elliott’s portrayal is not that of a critic or skeptic, but, indeed, he creates a sense of the presence of this continuity, a continuity that has more to do with what is common to all of civilization (Elliott’s implication) as opposed to the small-town Ontario of the distant or near past; the small town here is not an image of a better past, but is part of a temporal-cultural continuum whose origins have been lost to the mists of time.

Where this dissertation is concerned largely with the urban influence on the representation of the small-town past, Elliott’s text inserts his town into a universalizing tradition of folklore and myth, the presence of which is often just out of sight below the day-to-day particulars of life. Very little has been written on this text, most likely because it is very difficult to place into a context of small-town literature, as small-town texts are often grouped for the continuities that exist between them. Like other texts, Elliott’s explores the pettiness, parochialism, and goodness of the small-town setting, but these, he implies, are the dictates of an immemorial lineage, not the associative values of the rural sphere as they are reconceived from a separate time and space.

*The Elizabeth Stories* is a collection of short stories set in Garten, a town in which Mennonite farmers make up a sizable portion of the population, a detail that leads me to see Elmira as Garten’s real-world model (Elmira was also where Huggan was raised). This book, indeed, could have made it into this dissertation if it were not so similar to
Munro’s, in that Elizabeth Kessler, the titular protagonist, narrates her own journey from early childhood to young adulthood, with her escape from Garten only a probability at the end of the book. There are some inconsistencies in the narrative tone in this collection that are difficult to resolve. For instance, Elizabeth’s portrayal of her parents often seems petulant, even spiteful, and this characterization is seldom qualified by the adult narrative voice (that could provide some perspective on her earlier rancour). More difficult to resolve, however, is that while at times the tone of the book casts Garten as a parochial town that displays an affinity to Mariposa, it also includes scenes of sexual abuse and assault that seem to belong in another book; does Elizabeth view Garten as a parochial, harmless town, or is her view of Garten more in line with the tradition that Davies suggests produces “microcosms of Sodom and Gomorrah” (Feast 14-15)? Huggan seems to alternate between the traditions identified by Davies without resolving that tension.

Wright’s Clara Callan is set in the village of Whitfield in an agricultural area north-east of Toronto. The novel is largely epistolary, told through a series of letters between Clara, who has remained in Whitfield, and her sister Nora, who has left for New York City to be a radio actress. This chain of letters is broken only by those from a friend of Nora’s, Evelyn Dowling, and by entries into Clara’s diary. The novel constructs a rural-urban dichotomy through the contrast of Nora and Clara’s experiences, one in the big city, one in the small town. Although Clara is surrounded by a type of insular moralism in Whitfield, the absence of the same restriction in New York could be explained simply by the anonymity of people’s lives there; you can’t judge those you don’t know. Of particular interest, however, is Nora’s radio serial, “The House on Chestnut Street,” a sunny, feel-good drama set in Meadowvale, a place designed to
represent any American small town. This program is produced and performed by those deep in the heart of Manhattan who broadcast the most obvious stereotypes of bucolic small-town life, a vision that, as writer Evelyn predicts, proves exceedingly popular. The reader is offered glimpses into the world of Meadowvale, and it is a world in which plot complications are resolved through daily denouements catalyzed by small-town good will and common sense. This urban fictionalization of the small-town world provides a ready contrast to the complexity, melancholy, and final hard-won happiness of Clara’s real small-town life in Whitfield. What differs in this novel from the others studied is that, as it is an epistolary novel, it lacks a central reminiscing narrator, one whose “process of perception” affects the reconstruction through memory of a small town.

*The Island Walkers* depicts a labour struggle between the management and a fledgling union within the confines of small-town Ontario. The central setting here is Attawan in the early 1960s, a town inspired by the atypical topography of Paris, Ontario: its rivers, hills, and valleys. For decades, the Bannerman textile mill has been the town’s main employer, and because this factory is owned and operated by townsfolk, the mill, and the town by extension, constitute an organic human community; previous attempts at unionization fail, and the union itself has been considered a rabble of usurpers by most in the town. Yet after the mill has been sold to a conglomerate from Montreal, the town’s sense of organic order is disrupted and the union drive experiences renewed momentum. This new order, however, erodes traditional power hierarchies within the town itself, a process mirrored in the dissolution of the paternal order within the novel’s central family, the Walkers. The nostalgia here is not necessarily for a pre-modern past, but for an
industrial past that offers a more traditional alternative to the iniquity of an impersonal modernity.

The narrative contains a brief introductory frame set in present-day Attawan. Here the narrator comments: “The traveler, coming across this place, might be forgiven for imagining that life is better here” (1). Perhaps that better life cannot be found in the text’s present, but the narrator implies that a kinder way of industrial life, one rooted in a compact community has, over time, been dismantled by the influence of a globalizing economic system. The novel also risks reiterating a species of essentialist localism whereby the history of the town and the spirit of the surrounding landscape reside within the locals themselves; a seemingly primal irreconcilability exists between the locals and the new management class that has moved into Attawan. The Island Walkers portrays the anti-traditionalist vagaries of modern peripatetic capital, certainly, and this modern economic system distinctly clashes with the essentialist qualities of the townsfolk: regardless of their place within a modern system of production, they remain rooted to, and defined by, place.63

Wagamese’s Keeper’N Me offers a far different take on the rural-urban dichotomy discussed in this dissertation. An Ojibway child, taken from his parents and culture at a very young age, ultimately lands in Toronto and, through his surrogate family, adopts an urban African-American identity. However, upon arriving back on his home reserve, a process of cultural rediscovery occurs through his relationship with his

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63 In an interesting reversal, Johnsonville (Brantford’s fictional stand-in and a nod to poet Pauline Johnson’s place of birth) is the regional city, and it functions as a crutch for those who fail in the small town and must migrate to the city to find work. This type of narrative usually involves the small-town figure who fails in the city and must return home to the small town.
genetic family, but also, and more importantly, through his powerful relation to the land. During one solitary trip to his family’s traditional trapping area, Garnet Raven reflects on his formation in the city: “I’d been city-raised mostly. My way of seeing and knowing was city. I’d learned a lot from my family since I’d been back but as this was the first time I’d ever really been in the boonies it was strange that I knew how to read the country like I was doing” (171-172). Garnet’s trip reawakens memories from his early childhood that have lain dormant these past twenty years.

Despite being a relatively recent arrival back to the reserve, his experiences on the land elicit a redefinition of the meaning of “home.” Garnet states: “the word ‘home’ began to mean more to me than just four walls and a door. Meant everything around me and in me” (179). Although this process of cultural rediscovery occurs beyond the city “in the boonies,” Garnet discovers a home place that transcends space and time. His physical journey may stimulate his memory of place, a process that successfully reacquaints him with his object of longing, his object of loss. But where the largely Euro-Canadian protagonists in Leacock’s, Urquhart’s, and, to a certain extent, Davies’ texts look for their home place in a memory of a small-town past, Garnet realizes his is located in neither time nor space; neither is it found in an imagined or remembered ideal of community. He has transcended nostalgic distance as his cultural past is now something he carries within himself.

Robert Kroetsch has called the small town the “ruling paradigm” of Canadian literature, and remarks that “[t]here seems to be little literature in Canada that tells of the small-town person going to the city” (51). More recently, Herb Wyile has stated that the small-town narrative in Canadian literature is “ubiquitous,” and has called for an
examination of its regional variants. One of the features that I have discussed in this study of small-town Ontario is that, contrary to Kroetsch’s suggestion, these narratives are often already narrated from an urban space; that is, the journey to which Kroetsch alludes has been made prior to the beginning of the narrative, and the small town is largely a product of retrospect. In the selected texts studied above, the imagined experiential contrast between the rural and urban spheres is the result of the temporal, spatial, and cultural distance between the small-town past and the urban present. While the conclusion has discussed how that distance manifests different assumptions about the cultural value recoverable through memory, what this dissertation has attempted to demonstrate is that this contrast between a rural past and urban present is so often the product of recalling subjects who imaginatively reconstruct a small-town experience as the alternative to their urban present. Where this contrast breaks down, however, is in those narratives in which the recalling subject cannot separate him or herself from a small-town or rural past. Distance - whether temporal, spatial, or cultural - helps construct the idea of rural difference, and it is this distance that is the foundation of nostalgia. To understand small-town Ontario as a home place, to read its literary representation as a vision of a kinder past or cultural idyll, one must understand the impetus behind such representations; so often what is read or understood as a better rural past is, on further investigation, nothing more than a wish image projected onto a place that is distant enough to maintain that illusion.
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